

## Including Community Values



### Determining the Ecological Context

- Step 1. Locate priorities at the landscape scale.
- Step 2. Locate priorities at the species and community scale.
- Step 3. Identify the components.



### Including Community Values

- Step 4. Identify areas of high public value.
- Step 5. Compare ecological and community values.

### Developing and Choosing Options

- Step 6. Evaluate status and determine options.
- Step 7. Evaluate options and choose strategies.

**F**or many communities, the biggest challenge to protecting natural resources is finding consensus among citizens. As mentioned in the introduction to this guide, most Vermonters support the protection of the state's wildlife and other natural resources; discrepancies are more often about the methods for achieving this vision rather than the vision itself. If measures to protect our natural heritage are to be successful, it is therefore crucial to involve the community throughout the planning process, listening to and understanding the values and concerns of citizens while also ensuring that the community understands the resources and implementation measures discussed.

In natural resources planning, disagreement about methods sometimes stems from a feeling that citizens

must choose between supporting natural resources or other values, such as economic development, transportation, or maintaining a working landscape. As you begin your natural resources planning process, it is important to emphasize that much of the time, this is not actually a choice that needs to be made. Protection of important ecological resources can often be done while supporting other values, and sometimes conservation can even enhance these other values. When addressed together, wildlife habitat, working forests, recreation, and scenic beauty can be complimentary values occurring within the same geographic area. Keeping in mind the information you collected in Steps 1 through 3, the goal of this section is to provide you with ideas for incorporating the values and goals of citizens into your natural resources

## Keeping the Community Involved

In your planning, we suggest involving your community and, in particular, any landowners who might be impacted by the information you are collecting as much as possible throughout the process. As you learn about local natural resources, make the information easily available and encourage residents to join in your meetings. Ask for residents' opinions frequently and be sure to integrate their feedback into your work.

planning efforts. Then you can design strategies that reflect both the ecological realities of the landscape and your community's values.

Community involvement, which usually includes education, is an essential piece of this. Natural resources planning efforts are less likely to be successful if a community does not fully understand where the ecological risks and benefits are and, more importantly, why it matters to them and the place they call home. However, public participation needs to be about more than just education; equally important is a process by which citizens can share ideas, needs, and opinions with one another and provide input into planning efforts. While the best tools for instigating communication may vary from one community to the next, you might consider:

- ▶ Surveys
- ▶ Interviews
- ▶ Coffee talks
- ▶ Suggestion boards in public places
- ▶ [Community values mapping](#) (described below)
- ▶ Conversations, however formal or informal (including online forums)

You'll need to decide on the best strategy or strategies for your community. Remember that some

individuals may be more directly impacted by your decisions than others. Engagement with the entire community is important; we recommend specifically directing outreach to landowners affected by any proposed conservation or regulatory changes.

In some cases, there may even be opportunities for community involvement in natural resource inventories or other data collection efforts, and there are success stories of this throughout the state. For example, the Salisbury Conservation Commission developed a volunteer program to map wildlife road crossings. In some cases, citizens can join established volunteer efforts to learn more about their local landscape, such as [Vermont's Vernal Pool Mapping Project](#).<sup>2</sup>

Whatever the technique, think creatively about ways to involve your community prior to asking for their vote on a [regulatory](#) implementation measure. As you involve them, also learn about their values, remembering that participation is about engagement. What does your community care about? Ecological conservation efforts generally work only when they are supported alongside diverse community values. No matter what your goals may be for your area's natural resources, it is worth spending the effort to get to know your community.



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## Combining Science and Community Involvement

The *Community Heart and Soul Guide*, by the Orton Family Foundation, outlines an approach to planning that includes the community in the entire process. Their approach is designed for use in small or rural communities and may work well in many Vermont towns. When combined with real, scientific data in your planning process, this approach can be a powerful tool for natural resources planning. The guide is available as a free download at [www.orton.org/heart-soul](http://www.orton.org/heart-soul).

The Vermont Agency of Natural Resources offers an educational course that blends the approach of *Community Heart and Soul* with sound science. Learn more about the course, entitled *Caring for Natural Resources—Taking Action in Your Community*, through Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department's [Community Wildlife Program](#).

## Step 4: Identify Areas of High Community Value

Whatever your method for assessing your community's values, the next step is to compare your ecological priority maps with the values of your community. This will be easiest if you can capture the values of your community geographically, identifying where values are located on a map. Because there is no precise method for delineating the boundaries of a human value, these mapping efforts are not intended to be exact representations. By their very nature, they can show only rough estimates of human value. Even so, visualizing community values, however vaguely, can be an important filter when conducting natural resources planning efforts.

### Mapping Community Values

While you could try to place results of surveys, interviews, suggestion boards, or conversations onto a map, [community values mapping](#) is a tool that has been used by numerous towns across Vermont to geographically capture the places most valued by local citizens. While some alterations may be necessary to best match the needs of your community, the basic procedure is as follows:

First, organizers invite community members to a public forum and divide participants into small groups. Each group is given a map of the local area and a set of colored markers. Participants are then asked a single question: "What do you love about this place?"

Community members use markers to outline locations of personal value on the maps. Within each group, participants are asked to categorize and color-code the values they map. Categories could include, for example:

- ▶ Scenic areas
- ▶ Ecologically important areas
- ▶ Economically important areas
- ▶ Working lands (agriculture, forestry, and so on)
- ▶ Recreational places
- ▶ Hunting and fishing
- ▶ Historic and community resources
- ▶ Anything else—there is no limit to the possible values included!

At the end of the activity, organizers are left with a series of maps, marked up with a community's special places. These maps can then be digitized, one value group at a time. Once all

value groups are digitized, they can be overlaid onto a single map that allows for comparisons of locations representing many values and those representing few.

This map is helpful in identifying locations of diverse value to a community. Areas of substantial overlap tend to be places of common ground; people love them for many different reasons. For planning purposes, you may find these to be areas of consensus

## Using BioFinder in Step 4

While BioFinder is intended for mapping ecological resources, the program has tools that allow users to draw their own map layers, which you may want to use in Step 4.

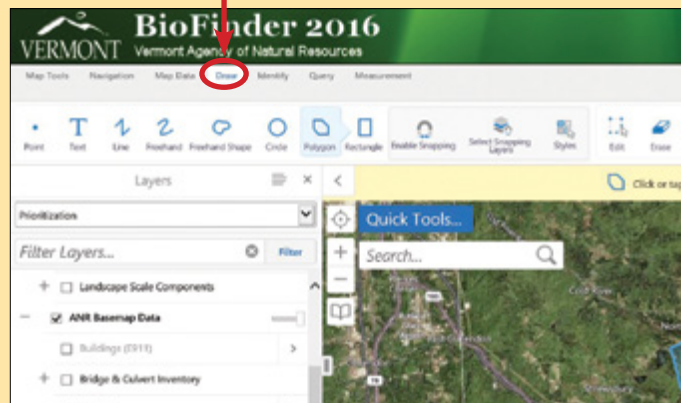
For example, if you document locations of community value on paper maps, you can use BioFinder to digitize your findings.

Open BioFinder and go to the default **Prioritization** theme. Zoom to your location of interest. Turn off all layers, or use just basemap data that will help you locate landmarks.

Open the toolbar by pressing the symbol in the top, right corner.



Select the **Draw** menu, and then choose a tool. Click on the screen to begin drawing.



If you need to edit or erase errors, find those tools on the toolbar. When you are finished drawing, click **Export Drawings** to save your work. You can import your file back into BioFinder, share it with other people, or import it into a desktop mapping application.

Please note that BioFinder's drawing tools are not intended to provide precise boundaries.



or opportunity; people are likely to support efforts that maintain the present-day integrity of the place.

It is worth keeping in mind that when using data from [community values mapping](#), or any data reflecting a community's stated values, the community doesn't necessarily have all the information needed to make informed decisions. For example, rare plants are unlikely to come up in community values mapping, even though biologists know how important they are for maintaining biological diversity. Even a citizen who specifically values biodiversity is unlikely to outline all local rare plant habitat during a community values mapping event.

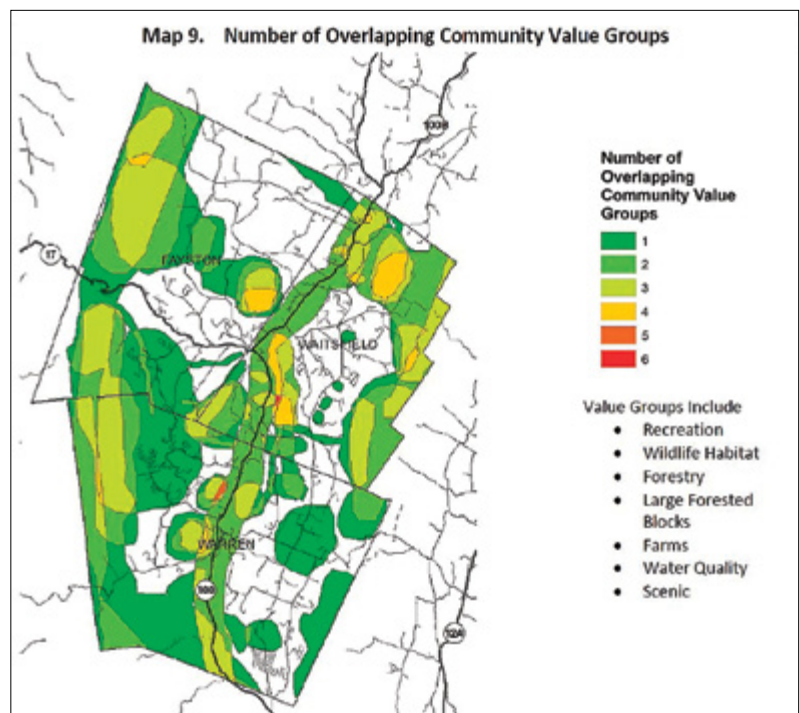
Before finalizing your priority maps, you may therefore want to consider areas in which science could further inform the community about issues that aren't already at the forefront. These maps can be useful for planning efforts, but they are just as important in determining a community's level of knowledge of their own ecological landscape. Similarly, the values of a community may change after educational efforts take place or simply as demographics change over time.

At its core, however, this activity is about capturing a community's story. Before deciding on actions aimed at protecting particular places, values mapping captures both the "where?" and the "why?" Where are our community's special places? Why do we care about them? Why would we miss these places if they were to disappear? These questions provide the justification for what you end up doing.

If you would like to map your community's values but don't think a public forum will be successful in your town, there is room for flexibility in the approach. For example, you could mail out a survey with a simple, attached map and ask citizens to send responses by mail. Be creative! Whatever the data collection method, mapping the values of your community can be a useful tool when it comes time to evaluate strategies, since you will have a much more secure vision of what is special to your community.

### Collect Other Map Information to Represent Community Values

The method above is a technique for geographically capturing a community's values and goals, but you can also use a less direct method by identifying topics of value



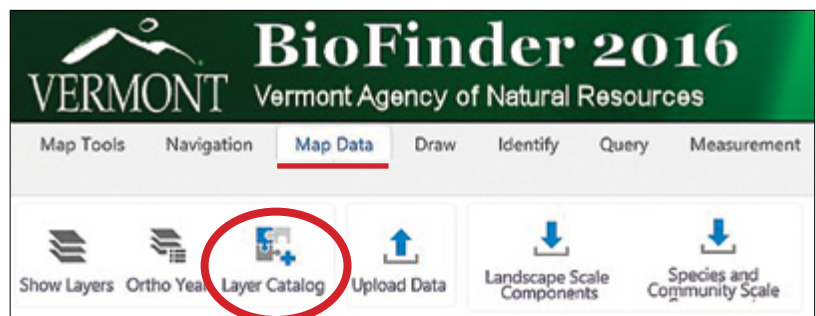
*This map, from a Community Values Mapping session in the Mad River Valley, shows the number of community values groups identified in each location across the region.*

to citizens and then, where possible, finding maps that represent the values.

### Using Existing Map Data

The [Natural Resources Atlas](#) contains numerous map layers that represent topics of interest to communities. You can also import these maps into BioFinder, using the [Layer Catalogue](#) tool. For example, you might look at:

- ▶ Trails
- ▶ Water quality data
- ▶ Flood hazard areas
- ▶ Agricultural soils
- ▶ Drinking and groundwater information
- ▶ Waste management information
- ▶ Erosion hazard data



This is only a small sample of the many layers that your community could examine, but these maps can be terrific filters to aid in putting community goals and values on a map using existing data.

### Other Considerations

You may also want to consider mapping the following—or other values—although you won't likely find existing, state-level map data available.

- ▶ Farms
- ▶ Working forests
- ▶ Historic areas
- ▶ Views or scenic areas

*Once you have collected information about the values of your community members, create a map that allows you visualize where these special places are located. While you may not be able to draw exact boundary lines for many values, capturing even a rough picture of the geographic distribution of values can be a powerful prioritization tool.*

## Step 5: Compare Ecological and Community Values

At this point, you have two prioritization maps: one features ecological priorities, and the other highlights the values of your community. It's time to put these together to create a single map.

A skilled cartographer can use a professional mapping program—or BioFinder or the Natural Resources Atlas—to do this digitally. However, you can

create a rough approximation by drawing on a paper map of your town. Such a map can still help you decide where to place your efforts, even if you can't use it for some implementation measures.

Start by outlining the areas of consensus, including those locations that came out as priorities on both ecological and community values maps. When later choosing implementation strategies in Steps 6 and 7, these may be the first places to focus your conservation efforts, because everyone agrees: these places are special. In these locations, protection of the area's present ecological values will likely also protect community values.

You can think of these areas of overlap as representing locations with potential allies—user groups that value a place for a particular reason. These reasons may be diverse: mountain biking, hunting, bird watching, walking, for scenic values, for economic potential through forestry, and so on. Users may support conservation efforts, so long as the strategies used maintain ecological function and these other values.

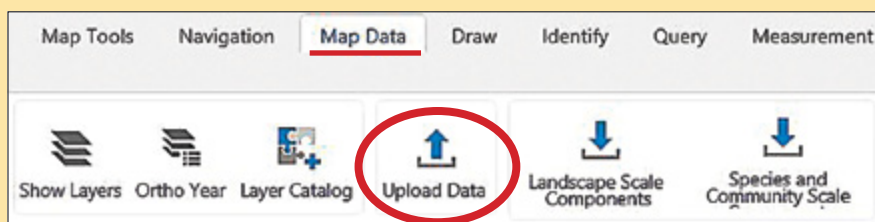
As you identify areas of overlap between your maps, think about the community values represented. Are the community values and ecological priorities compatible with one another? If so, consider involving user groups in the conservation planning process.

In some cases, overlapping values could also represent potential conflict. For example, a forest used by hunters and mountain bikers at the same time might be dangerous. Any action steps involving these lands may need to involve additional discussion or even conflict resolution, which could be as easy as awareness or a slight change in land management.

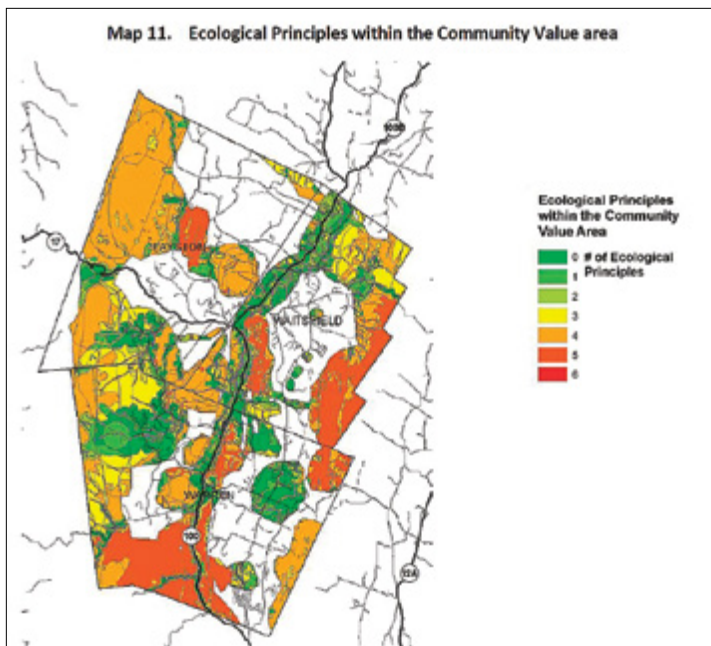
Next, outline any areas that are of high community value that don't appear on ecological priority maps. For these, identify the ecological components present just as we did in Step 3 and consider whether these components contribute to the place's special value to citizens. For example, if a popular bike trail is next to the water, protecting the quality of that water may enhance the resource for community enjoyment. Even if you decide to protect these community priorities

### Using BioFinder in Step 5

If you were able to digitize your maps of community values in Step 4, you can simply import them into BioFinder to compare. To import, go to the **Map Data** toolbar, and select **Upload Data**.



Find your file, name it, and give it a symbol. Then turn on **Landscape Scale** and **Species and Community Scale** priorities—or upload whatever ecological priority maps your community has developed—and compare!



*On this map, community values identified within the Mad River Valley have been combined with ecological priorities. All colored areas were identified as having community values, and the map also maintains the region's ecological prioritization scheme. While the ecological prioritization method displayed is somewhat different than the one described in this guide, the method of combining community and ecological values can be the same.*

through methods not based on their underlying natural resources, it is beneficial to recognize the value of these places during the planning process.

Now look at those locations identified as having priority or highest priority ecological values but that did not appear on your [community values mapping](#) efforts. These locations fall into several categories, so they are worth carefully examining. When high values don't align, it may mean that your community will have tougher choices. Measures to protect ecologically important places may be a more difficult sell in the community.

However, you may decide that some of these ecological features are still worthy of the highest level of protection. Rare species, as mentioned earlier, rarely appear on community values maps, even in communities in which citizens place high value on the protection of rare species. In many cases, these resources are so small or specific that people don't even know they exist.

You may also decide that these are places to focus education or outreach efforts before making decisions about implementation measures. In the example above, it may be that the community is unaware of the ecological feature or its important ecological function,

and that education would increase the community's value of the resource.

It could also be that these locations simply aren't starting places for conservation strategies in your community, regardless of ecological importance. If this is your decision, however, remember that these locations have been highlighted as priorities in state and regional efforts to map the lands necessary to maintain ecological function. Loss of ecological function at the landscape scale doesn't occur in a vacuum; it can have direct effects on other places and ecological systems that a community does value. Also, the community may not realize how something they value (such as wildlife, clean water, or the local economy) is affected if another feature (like forest blocks) are impacted.

***When you complete Step 5, you should have a map that highlights the places of combined ecological and community value in your community. Like the other maps in this section, you may decide to break these locations into "highest priority" and "priority," or you can be creative and come up with another option that works for your community.***

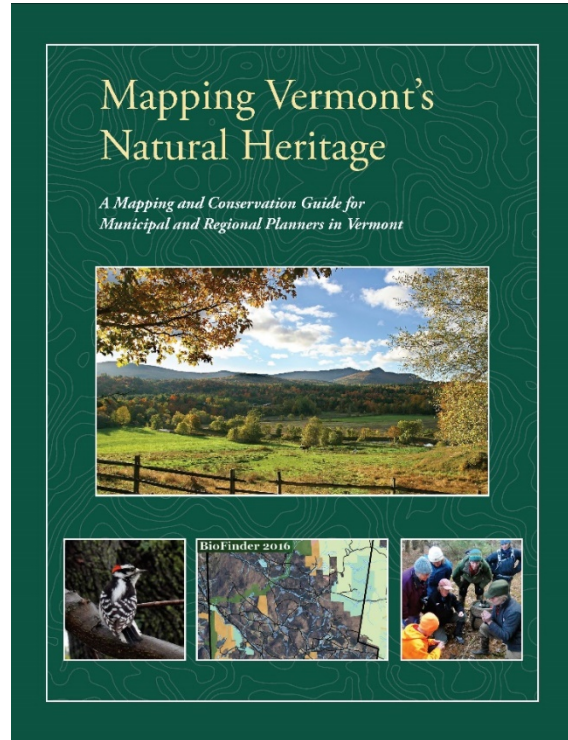
The town of Charlotte considers the following as **Areas of High Public Value**, combining ecologically important areas with locations representing other community values:

1. Land in active agricultural use.
2. Primary (prime & statewide) agricultural soils.
3. Steep slopes (equal to or in excess of 15%).
4. Flood hazard areas.
5. Surface waters, wetlands and associated setback and buffer areas.
6. Shoreland setback and buffer areas.
7. Special natural areas.
8. Wildlife habitat.
9. Water supply source protection areas (SPAs).
10. Historic districts, sites and structures
11. Scenic views and vistas.
12. Conserved land on adjacent parcels.



# Mapping Vermont's Natural Heritage

This is one chapter of a larger publication called *Mapping Vermont's Natural Heritage: A Mapping and Conservation Guide for Municipal and Regional Planners in Vermont*. Please visit <https://anr.vermont.gov/node/986> for additional information or to see the entire guide.



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