

## **Protecting Public Water Supplies through Land Conservation**

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**Seaman's Church Institute, Newport**

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### **I. Introduction**

- a. Name
- b. ALT seeks to save many types of natural resources on Aquidneck Island so as to protect the Island's sustainability, livability and natural beauty long-term.
- c. We conserve important agricultural lands, wildlife habitats, scenic vistas, public recreation areas and water resource areas, the focus of tonight's presentation.

### **II. Conserved Lands/Watersheds Map**

- a. There are 7 watersheds on Aquidneck Island:
  1. Lawton Valley Reservoir Watershed
  2. St. Mary's Pond Watershed
  3. Sisson Pond Watershed
  4. Bailey's Brook Watershed (Easton's Ponds)
  5. Maidford River Watershed
  6. Nelson Pond Watershed
  7. Gardiner Pond Watershed
- b. Aquidneck Island also relies on 2 other watersheds in Tiverton and Little Compton:
  1. Nonquit Pond Watershed (largely in Tiverton)
  2. Watson Reservoir Watershed (largely in Little Compton)
- c. The map on the screen demonstrates how ALT focuses many of its conservation efforts within Aquidneck Island's 7 watersheds so as to permanently protect important reservoir buffer-lands and other water resources within those areas.
- d. Explain Map
  1. ALT's 3 Greenways
  2. 7 watersheds outlined in red
  3. Dark green ALT conserved properties
  4. ALT has conserved over 2,000 acres on the Island, about 1,050 of those acres were conserved within the Island's 7 watersheds.

### **III. Not all Conserved Lands Are Equal**

- a. There was a time, a time of innocence, when we thought our public water reservoir areas, parks and other public conservation areas were out of harm's way and would always be there for us.
- b. We have now come to realize that not all conserved lands are equal.
- c. Let me tell you a story about Miantonomi Memorial Park in Newport to help you understand that not all conserved lands are equal and that weakly protected properties are at risk (portion along Hillside Ave. developed).

- d. ALT's 3 Levels of Conserved Lands System:
  - 1. Land Conserved with a Perpetual Conservation Restriction
  - 2. Land Conserved with a Deed Restriction
  - 3. Land Conserved with Conservation Intent Alone
- e. The take home message from all of this is that good conservation, like good government, requires checks and balances. Conservation Easements and other strategies can provide checks and balances against the mounting development and financial pressures on our public water reservoir areas and other public conservation areas.

#### IV. Securing Water Reservoir Areas

- a. The end of this time of innocence that I earlier referred to could not have been more clearly heralded than when it was announced earlier this year that Providence was considering selling its water system, which includes reservoirs and buffer lands covering thousands and thousands of acres which serve the water needs of about two-third's of Rhode Island's residents, in order to pay down the debt in the City's pension system.
- b. You may also recall that in 2005 the State considered developing a portion of its Big River Water Resource Management Area into a State Police Headquarters.
- c. The take home message is that many of these critical water resource areas that we assume are conserved may be at risk because they are conserved at lower levels which lack adequate checks and balances such as perpetual Conservation Easements.
- d. Now let me tell you one great success story: 2006 ALT, City of Newport and Portsmouth placed a permanent ALT Conservation Easement on an area over 400 acres in size including Lawton Valley Reservoir, Sisson Pond and St. Mary's Pond and many of the associated buffer lands. This should be a model for other water reservoir areas, etc.
- e. So while there are threats to many important water resource areas, especially now during these challenging economic times, there are also great opportunities such as working together to permanently secure these lands with perpetual Conservation Easements.

#### V. Current ALT Water Resource Protection Project

- a. To keep the theme of hope going, I want to finish by making you aware of a current watershed project that ALT is working on.
- b. On November 24, 2008, ALT, the Town of Portsmouth and Green Valley Country Club signed a Purchase and Sale Contract whereby ALT and Portsmouth are to purchase a perpetual Conservation Easement on about 125 acres of Green Valley for \$2.56 million around the end of January 2009.
- c. Green Valley is located off Union Street and Middle Road in Portsmouth, but there are at least a few reasons why Newporters and Middletowners should also be excited about this project.
- d. First, let me explain this Green Valley conservation map.
- e. Water Resource Protection – Green Valley is so large that substantial parts of it fall within two watersheds: Lawton Valley Reservoir Watershed and St. Mary's Pond Watershed. Thus, this substantial open space area helps buffer two important drinking water reservoirs.

- f. Explain conceptual subdivision plan of Green Valley – imagine the runoff and water demands created by a 127 lot subdivision.
- g. Traffic – Per the *Trip Generation Handbook*, published by the Institute of Transportation Engineers, we know that a 127 lot subdivision on Green Valley would create over 1,200 additional vehicle trips per day on the already busy and dangerous roadways of Aquidneck Island. Think of all the harmful runoff those vehicles would discharge within the two subject watersheds as well.
- h. Other Environmental Benefits – There are of course many other environmental benefits associated with conserving Green Valley. For example, think of the carbon footprint created by a 127-lot subdivision

## VI. Scenic Photos of Water Resource Areas – Questions and Answers