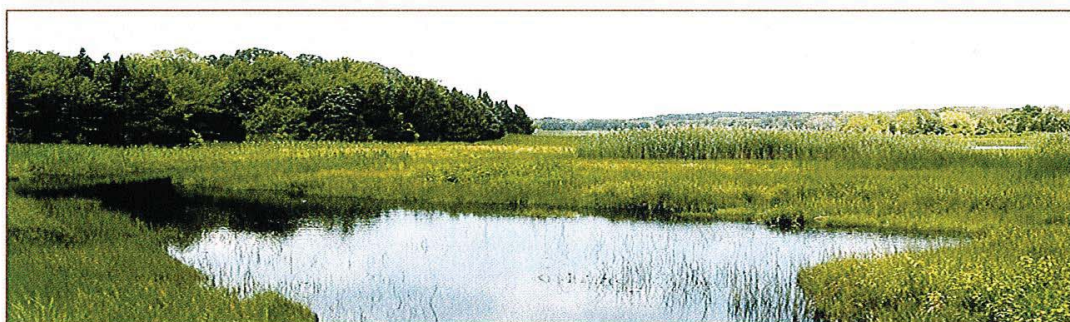
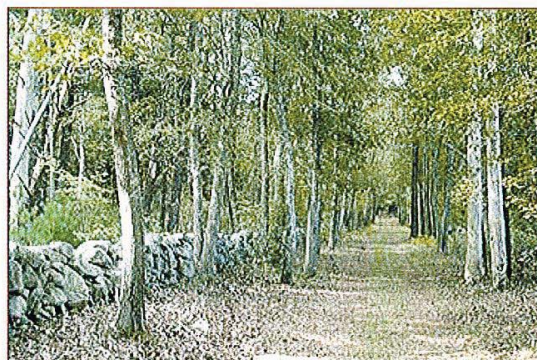
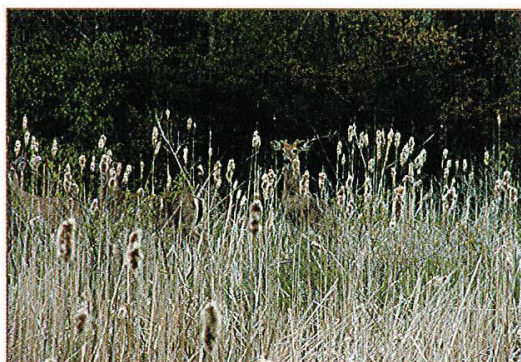


REGIONAL OPEN SPACE PLAN

BERKLEY, FALL RIVER, FREETOWN AND LAKEVILLE

2007/2008



Southeastern Regional Planning and Economic Development District

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the path used by King Philip during his escape across the Taunton River from armies of European settlers during the King Philip Wars in the 1600s. Today, Peace Haven is largely wooded and offers rich habitat to a variety of wildlife.

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The Southeastern Massachusetts Bio-reserve in Fall River and Freetown includes over 14,000 acres of undisturbed forestland that offer superb opportunities for hunting and hiking. It includes the Freetown/Fall River State Forest and a significant amount of the city's watershed land. In addition to the Copicut Woods property of the Trustees of Reservations. The Bio-reserve borders Fall River's two sources of drinking water supply, the North Watuppa Pond and Copicut Reservoir.

... and our links to others.

Amongst ROSA's broader goals is to acquire, protect, or preserve, for conservation purposes, parcels of land that would link the Bio-reserve to the Assonet Cedar Swamp (and other lands in Lakeville), and extend the Copicut Greenway (that presently runs from the Taunton River through the Bio-reserve) eastward, all the way to the Plymouth-Carver-Wareham area.

This is not a new concept, but one that has been building in momentum since 1999. In 1999, The Greater Fall River Land Conservancy (a private, non-profit organization founded to preserve and protect the natural heritage of Fall River and surrounding areas for the benefit and enjoyment of the public) proposed the idea of a major greenbelt, extending from East Fall River, along south coastal Massachusetts, to the Myles Standish State Forest in Carver and Plymouth. The Bio-reserve and the state forest are the anchor properties in this concept, which would ultimately involve thirteen communities.

This "super regional" concept was revived in a study conducted by the Harvard University Graduate School of Design in 2000 (Creating a Rural Resource Reserve: Conserving the Green Heart of Southeastern Massachusetts) The "Green Heart" study, as it came to be known, offered some ideas which have been embraced in the ROSA work. From the Executive Summary of the "Green Heart" study comes the following:

INTRODUCTION

Planning Process and Participation

The Regional Open Space Alliance (ROSA) Regional Open Space Plan supplement was developed by a committee comprised of appointed municipal representatives working with the regional planning agency (SRPEDD), with technical assistance from several local, regional, and global environmental organizations. ROSA Committee meetings were held monthly at either the Lakeville Public Library or at the SRPEDD offices in Taunton. All meetings were held between April of 2007 and June of 2008. Additional special meetings/field trips were held as requested in order to view particular areas and landscapes/waterscapes or to discuss special topics related to the open space plan.

Initial work centered on reviewing the most recent municipal Conservation, Recreation, and Open Space Plans for the four communities (Berkley, Fall River, Freetown, and Lakeville) to seek any regionally oriented actions previously recommended or undertaken. Fall River's plan is currently state-certified until 2009 (through the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs' Division of Conservation Services). Berkley has just completed a final draft of an update to their previous plan, and Freetown has almost completed a final draft of their initial plan. Lakeville has begun an update of their previous plan. Regionally oriented items were then extracted from the municipal plans and planning processes and reviewed by ROSA's municipal representatives for accuracy, relevance, and to see if particular items had been or were scheduled to be addressed. ROSA Committee members used this information in conjunction with new ideas and initiatives to create a new regional open space action plan for the four communities.

Each of the initial monthly meetings was organized around a topic or topics relevant to the format of a traditional Open Space Plan (per the Division of Conservation Service's *Open Space Planner's Handbook*, rev. 2001, 2008). Committee members were responsible for both informing and gathering relevant information from the appropriate parties within their respective municipalities. SRPEDD conducted/facilitated the monthly meetings, recorded the sessions in writing (including working versions of documents and maps), provided access to GIS data and maps, and provided direct technical assistance to the municipalities between monthly ROSA Committee meetings.

The planning process also provided the ROSA Committee members access to federal, state, and local organizations and individuals to offer suggestions and guidance. Some of these individuals attended the regular monthly working meetings throughout the process in order to provide input and explain the relevance of their work in the ROSA area.

All of the above-mentioned activities were part of a "planning with" (rather than "planning at") approach used by SRPEDD. This approach allowed the Committee to build a plan from the ground up, with local references, initiatives, and points of identification for mutual support and buy-in. The result of the ROSA process was a Committee generated plan, the desire to implement the recommendations of the plan, and the desire to continue working together as part of a permanent Regional Open Space Committee.

How the Regional Open Space Plan Fits in with the Municipal Conservation, Recreation and Open Space Plan.....

The goal of the Regional Open Space Plan is to compliment the actions prescribed in the local Conservation, Open Space, and Recreation Plan and to encourage the four communities to work cooperatively in identifying regional issues and implementing regional planning initiatives. This approach makes sense in that many of the local open space action items involve linear features such as trails or greenways that follow river or stream corridors that cross municipal boundaries. This is also often true of potential land purchases as well, where deeded bounds may cross municipal lines.

As there is no precedent for a formal regional plan of this nature within the Taunton River Watershed, it provides a unique opportunity of being able to guide us in the creation of a collective vision for the future. The various actions set forth in this regional plan may or may not become reality, but the first steps in developing a means, format, and a regional will to plan for the future have been "put on the table" by your ROSA Committee.

In Berkley, Fall River, Freetown, and Lakeville, the regional plan will be included in the local Conservation, Recreation, and Open Space Plan as an appendix.

SECTION II

Creating a Regional Vision

Prior to their involvement in the Regional Open Space Alliance, Berkley, Fall River, Freetown, and Lakeville had worked together, both formally and informally, and in various configurations, on a number of regional issues, including:

- Regional support for federal designation of the Taunton River as Wild and Scenic;
- The creation of the Bio-reserve;
- The Harvard "Conserving the Green Heart of Southeastern Massachusetts" study;
- The Taunton River Watershed Action Plan;
- The Taunton Heritage River Program;
- Drinking water supply studies/issues in the City of Fall River, and the Towns of Freetown and Lakeville;
- Riverways Program Stream Team assessments;
- Save the Bay Natural Resources Assessments;
- The Taunton River Stewardship Council/Wild and Scenic River Study Committee;
- The Assawompset Ponds Watershed Management Plan

The development of a list of regional goals and objectives is representative of a shared regional vision. While past Community Action Statements, Open Space Plans, and other local planning and conservation documents have contained elements of regional planning, the ROSA plan is something different. This plan, by virtue of its process, has been constructed as a true regional open space-planning document with prescribed regional actions.

SECTION III

REGIONAL FOCUS AREAS

A. Regional Focus Summary

The "Regional Focus Areas Map" was developed by the ROSA delegates with technical assistance from SRPEDD, and with data from numerous local, state, and federal sources. The Massachusetts Audubon Society, Green Futures, the Greater Fall River Land Conservancy, and The Wildlands Trust of Southeastern Massachusetts also contributed to the final map. ROSA members worked individually and collectively to develop a draft map over a period of two scheduled working meetings. After careful consideration and discussion of the

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mapped areas and their respective attributes, a final version of the map was produced in a GIS format by SRPEDD.

The importance of mapping these regional focus areas is not only to highlight the unique environments, landscapes, and ecological attributes the ROSA area, but also to illustrate the common concerns over the retention, integrity, and function of our shared natural and cultural resources. These types of maps can also provide an entry point from which to develop cooperative conservation planning strategies.

B. Regional Focus Map Areas

The "Regional Focus Areas Map" is organized by color code and according to shared interests in regionally significant cultural, historic, archaeological, and ecological landscapes and resources. Each focus area on the map may contain potential sites for acquisition, preservation, special designation, further study, etc.. This is not a land acquisition map.

The following is a listing of the four principal focus areas and some of the important features contained within each one:

a.) **Blue – Taunton River Greenway Focus Area, including:**

1. Taunton River Greenway
2. Village Historic Area
3. Water Resources Protection Area
4. Agricultural landscapes
5. Peace Haven
6. Town Common
7. Assonet Neck
8. Quequechan Greenway
9. Mount Hope Bay Coastal Corridor
10. Poquasset Cedar Swamp (connection into RI)

b.) **Orange – Assawompset Ponds Complex Focus Area, including:**

1. Assawompset Ponds Area
2. Nemasket River
3. Rocky Woods

c.) **Brown - Bio-reserve Regional Focus Area, including:**

1. Forge Pond Area
2. Assonet Cedar Swamp
3. Bio-reserve
4. Rocky Woods

5. Fall Brook into Long Pond
6. North and South Watuppa
7. Upper Westport River Watershed

d.) **Green - Assonet River Greenway Focus Area, including:**

1. Assonet River Corridor
2. Assonet Bay
3. Fall Brook into Long Pond
4. Joshua's Mountain

SECTION IV

Some of the Special Places within Our Focus Areas

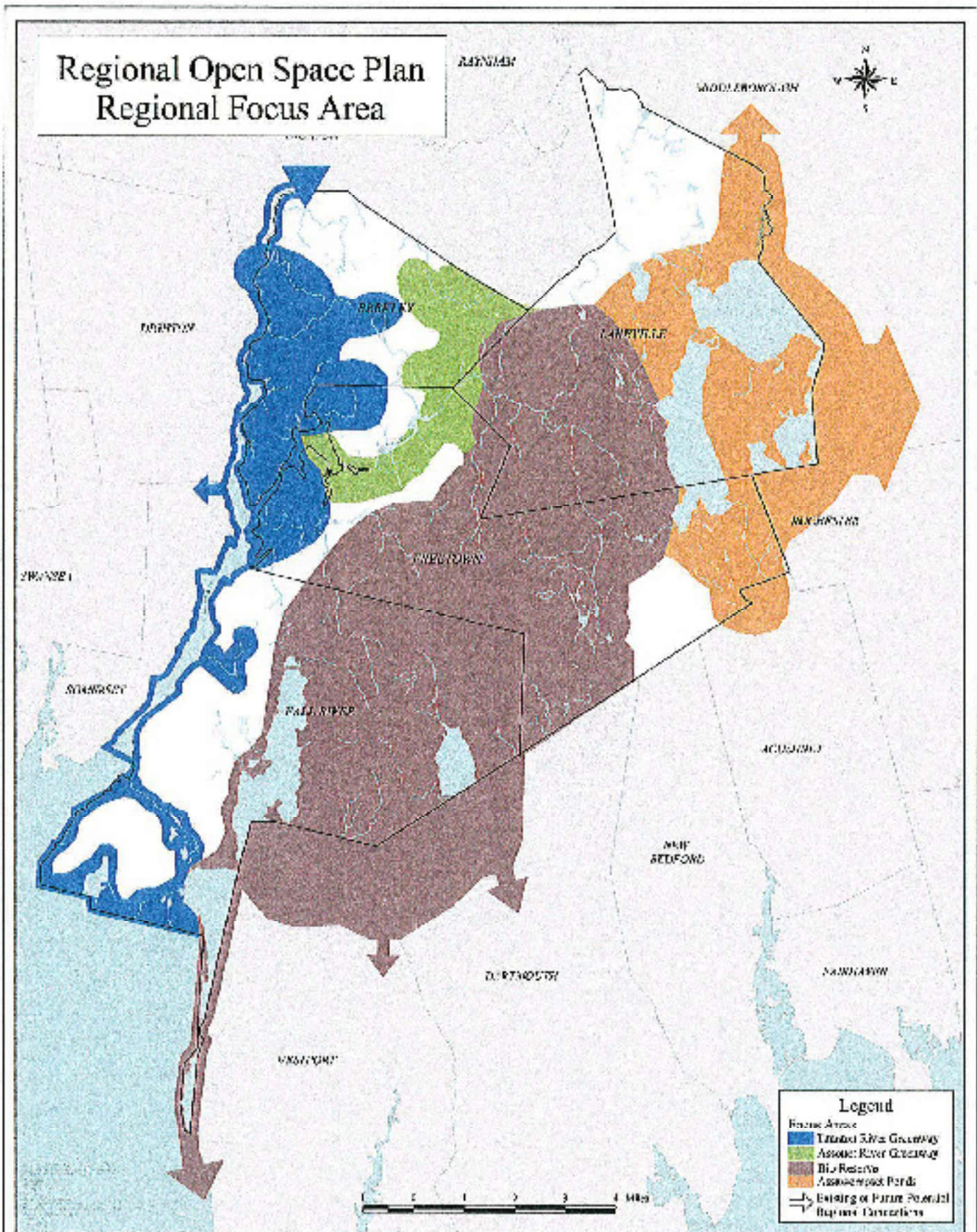
A look at our neighborhood

Many special places in Berkley, Fall River, Freetown and Lakeville exemplify the outstanding regional resource values that this plan seeks to protect and preserve. A few of those special places are described below.

The Assawompset Pond Complex, shared by Freetown, Lakeville, Middleborough, and Rochester is the largest natural freshwater complex in Massachusetts, providing water supply for six communities. Assawompset Pond is the source of the Nemasket River, the largest alewife run in the Commonwealth. Since the 1990s the Ponds have been home to nesting eagles and are also designated as an Important Birding Area of Massachusetts by the Massachusetts Audubon Society.

Rocky Woods in Freetown and Lakeville exemplifies an undisturbed cultural landscape believed to have been important to human communities as long as 12,000 years ago. The steep ledges of Rocky Woods make this bedrock outcropping one of the largest in the entire Taunton River Basin, and provides an unusually large, unique floristic habitat. Unusual fern and wildflower species as well as a particularly diverse forest canopy characterized this area.

The Assonet Cedar Swamp contains one of the largest and highest quality Coastal Atlantic White Cedar Swamps in Massachusetts. It harbors several state-listed species and with limited accessibility provides a refuge to wildlife from human disturbance. The Swamp is the headwaters of the Assonet River. It is part of a 40,000-acre area that includes the Southeastern Massachusetts Bio-reserve in Fall River and Freetown (see below) designated by the Massachusetts Natural Heritage Program (NHESP) as "Bio-Map Core Habitat," defined as areas having the best potential of any in the state to support viable populations of threatened and endangered species.



Assonet Village in Freetown is rich with historical sites such as an iron forge and colonial-era buildings. The Village has been listed in the National Register of Historic Places, and is focused around the Assonet Four Corners area (which includes properties on the major roads radiating from it along North Main, Mill, Elm, South Main, and Water Streets). This well-preserved village, one of two



centers in Freetown, was the site of the shipbuilding, milling and manufacturing industries. It is also significant as the religious, commercial and civic center of the community. The location, at the furthest navigable point of the Assonet River, gave the area access to coastal shipping and commercial opportunities that allowed the community to flourish.

The **Town of Berkley** includes a number of farms along the Taunton River. Some of the richest alluvial soils in the Commonwealth are found in riverfront lands along the Taunton, so fertile that they drew early human inhabitants to settle along the river.

The evolution of the **Bridge Village District** in Berkley is directly connected to the town's shipping and shipbuilding industries. Berkley shipyards reportedly produced about 100 vessels in the 70-year period from 1790 to the 1860's, including large schooners, sloops, and brigs ranging from 35 to 500 tons in weight. By the turn of the 18th/19th century, large amounts of brick and iron products (nails, cast iron, hollowware, hardware, tools, etc.) manufactured in Taunton, Middleboro, and the Bridgewater area were being transported by ship from Berkley, down the Taunton River.

The free-flowing **Taunton River** provides outstanding opportunities for canoeing and kayaking in wilderness-like settings. Its gentle gradient and natural flow regime allows tidal influences to extend well beyond the reach of salt water, creating globally rare freshwater tidal marshes that provide irreplaceable habitat for birds. The shoreline also serves as a greenway corridor for wildlife migration. The river provides nurseries for winter flounder and tautog as well as shellfish beds. The Taunton River estuary is designated Essential Fish Habitat by the National Marine Fisheries Service for 14 species of fish and shellfish. Sailing and motorized boating are popular in the lower Taunton.

Peace Haven in Freetown is considered one of the richest archeological sites in southeastern Massachusetts, and is the site of 11,000 years of settlement by the Native Peoples (ending with the Pocassetts in the Colonial era). It also includes

the path used by King Philip during his escape across the Taunton River from armies of European settlers during the King Philip Wars in the 1600s. Today, Peace Haven is largely wooded and offers rich habitat to a variety of wildlife.

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"Without cooperation, the region flounders and important resources are squandered and lost. The answer to this situation lies in thinking beyond town boundaries and recognizing regional ties. Together, towns can work toward a shared vision on a regional scale: a vision composed of strong distinct towns and cities, protected water resources, working and natural landscapes, and biological diversity."

"Green Heart"

The new Brightman Street Bridge would also link this greenbelt to areas to the west. This will most likely occur through a series of proposed (Fall River, Somerset, and Warren, RI) and recently constructed or established (Swansea, East Bay Trail in Barrington and Bristol, RI) multi-modal trails. A new regional bicycling study group has been meeting at U-Mass Dartmouth. This group is breathing new life into old regional plans (some of which have been in the works for over twenty years), and could be a valuable partner in achieving this regional connections goal.

SECTION V

REGIONAL SETTING

A. Regional Context

The Regional Open Space Alliance (ROSA) undertaking encompasses the City of Fall River and the Towns of Berkley, Freetown and Lakeville with a total land area of one hundred fourteen square miles (114 sq miles). The Taunton River borders Berkley, Freetown and Fall River to the west, Taunton and Raynham border Berkley and Lakeville to the north, Middleboro and Rochester border Lakeville and Freetown to the east, and Acushnet, New Bedford, Dartmouth and Westport border Freetown and Fall River to the south.

Fall River comprises the urban core of the regional aspect, while Berkley, Freetown and Lakeville are rural in nature. Each of the communities has continued to retain their own specific charm and uniqueness. All of the communities combined are rich in historic, cultural, natural and biological resources. Early settlements in this area date back approximately 12,000 years ago. Settlers would have found this area rich in flora and fauna due to its connection to the river system and the natural resources available.

Shipbuilding, mills, foundries, iron-production, agriculture and forestry were the main sources of revenue during the colonial area. Freetown and Fall River were able to take the lead in industry due to harnessing power from Fall Brook, Assonet River and the Quequechan River.

There are numerous lakes/reservoirs within the regional area of interest, including North Wattuppa Reservoir (1,750 acres), South Wattuppa Pond (1,660 acres) and Copicut Reservoir in Fall River, Assawompset Pond (2,404 acres), Great Quittacas Pond (1,185 acres), Little Quittacas Pond (295 acres), Pocksha Pond (230 acres), Elders Pond (145 acres) in Lakeville, Long Pond (1,721 acres) in Lakeville and Freetown. Nearly all serve as a public water supply with the exception of South Wattuppa Pond, which is strictly recreational.

B. Regional Population Characteristics

According to the US Census data the communities within the ROSA area had uneven population growth rates from 1990 to 2000. While the city of Fall River and the town of Freetown experienced some out migration. The population of Berkely and Lakeville increase drastically of (35% and 26.2% respectfully). The estimated 2006 population indicated a potential increase in all the communities except Fall River, (which has continued to lose population). The Table below shows the trend in growth between 1990 and 2006.

Table 5.1 – Regional Population

<i>Population</i>	<i>1990</i>	<i>2000</i>	<i>% Change</i>	<i>2006*</i>
Berkley	4,237	5,749	35.7%	6,391
Fall River	92,703	91,938	-0.8%	91,474
Freetown	8,522	8,472	-0.6%	8,963
Lakeville	7,785	9,821	26.2%	10,641
Total	113,247	115,980	2.4%	117,469

* US Census estimated population

C. Regional Land Use and Development Patterns

There are two major factors in the pattern of development within the study area; proximity to waterways and proximity to major highways. The historical, pre-zoning development in Fall River coincided with the growth of water dependent industry and manufacturing. Growth of this type creates dense urban centers surrounded by more rural, chiefly agriculture in nature. The later, development of a major highway can increase rural population by increasing the "sprawl" effects

on surrounding rural areas. This trend is usually driven by the perception of higher quality of life.

According to the Massachusetts Geographic Information System (MassGIS) 1999-land use database overwhelmingly most of the land use is considered forestry by fifty-six percent (56.0%) and the least represented are spectator recreation (0.0%), water-based recreation (0.02%) and multi-family residential (0.3%). Not surprising agriculture is primarily predominating land use in the Towns of Freetown, Lakeville and Berkley, whereas the City of Fall River is predominately multi-family, high and medium density residential, commercial and industrial type uses.

Table 5.2- Regional Land Use Summary

Label	Acres	Percent	Land Use Code
Agriculture	2931.24	3.82%	1,2
Forest	45351.26	55.88%	3
Wetland	2063.97	2.55%	4,14
Open Space	5518.43	6.81%	6,7,8,9,17,21
Residential	12017.62	14.84%	10,11,12,13
Commercial	980.96	1.22%	15
Industrial	2392.12	2.95%	5,16,19
Transport	1470.81	1.82%	18
Water	8270.18	10.21%	20
Total	81006.60	100.00%	

