

Section G NATURAL SCENIC RESOURCES

See separate Map Atlas for map references

G.1 Introduction

Natural resources, although valued primarily for the physical sustenance they provide humans and wildlife, possess intrinsic beauty that stirs the mind and renews the soul.

Guilford is well-known for its scenic character which affords beauty and well-being, a sense of place and history, a source of recreation, and opportunity for tourism as well as added value to properties. Policy A from Guilford's *2002 Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD)* stresses the importance of protecting Guilford's scenic features:

...in order to preserve the Town's unique character... The Plan continues ...As stated in the recently developed *Plan for Open Space and Municipal Land Needs (2001)*, Guilford's open space goals are to preserve resources along scenic corridors, preserve the "gateways" to Guilford, foster conservation and preservation of the important natural habitats and scenic resources of Guilford, protect cultural features and shoreline views...

Land use analysis figures in the Guilford Planning and Zoning Commission Planning Committee's *Growth Management Plan (2004)* indicate the Town is 46 percent developed, 27 percent committed open space, and 27 percent vacant land. As vacant land and committed open space blend visually, the Town appears to be 54 percent "green."

G.2 Types of Natural Scenic Resources

This section analyzes the Town's natural scenic amenity and illustrates the dynamic relationship between its scenic assets and its natural resources. Scenic geological features, views from scenic roads, scenic rivers and 14 other natural scenic resources are depicted on *Map G-1*. Guilford's natural scenic resources include: scenic areas and scenic views, scenic roads, mature trees, stone walls, ridgelines and hillsides, coastline and marshes, lakes and streams, and pastoral landscapes. The emphasis of this section is the resources' appearance rather than their functional value addressed in other sections. In regard to tourism and quality of life in Guilford, the value of scenic features should not be perceived individually but rather, in the context of the whole Town.

Scenic Resources Catalogued in Other Documents

Guilford's natural beauty has inspired recognition of the Town's scenic areas in plans of the Guilford Preservation Alliance (GPA) (1995) and the Town's Land Acquisition Committee (2001), both maps of which are available at Town Hall, and South Central Connecticut Regional Water Authority (SCCRWA) (1996). Some areas listed in these documents are noted for their scenic qualities. However, the basis behind all three lists differs in intent from this NRIA list. And, in contrast to the latter scenic areas, the scenic views and areas presented here are notable for their natural features exclusive of man-made structures. (See *Appendices G-1* and *G-2*, which compare these lists.)

The SCCRWA *Land Use Plan* (1996) identifies these scenic features for preservation on SCCRWA land in Guilford:

- Scenic ridges on East and West Sugarloaf Hills
- Scenic waterfall (near Cook's Lane; in fall, winter, and spring)
- Sandstone cliffs and caves (east side of Menunketuc Reservoir)
- Scenic ridges on Totoket Mountain (afford views and vantage points)

Recognizing the sensitivity of ridgeline views to alteration, the SCCRWA Plan says that "proposals to construct towers or other structures on Authority owned portions of the ridge will be critically evaluated for visual impact and weighed against public need."

Scenic Views and Scenic Areas

Since beauty is in the eye of the beholder, any categorization of a scenic area or view is necessarily subjective. To clarify meaning this section uses these definitions:

Scenic area: an area that *most* people would agree has natural intrinsic beauty and character

Scenic view: the sight obtained from a vantage point (See below.) The subject of the view may be a discrete feature, an area, or a panoramic landscape

Vantage point: the public place from which a scenic view can be observed. These include public roads and right-of-ways, trails, lakes, ridges and bluffs, beaches, coastal waters and off-shore

A preliminary list of Guilford's public vantage points and corresponding scenic views follows. Areas that are both a public vantage point and a scenic area, as defined above, are indicated. Although not all are listed, Guilford's water resources are recognized as scenic areas.

| PUBLIC VANTAGE POINT | SCENIC VIEW |
|---|---|
| Bluff Head* | Panoramic views of North Guilford, Broomstick Ledges, Hartford, and Long Island Sound |
| Bridge on Clapboard Hill Road | East River Marshes Estuary |
| Great Hill Road | Fields looking west and east and northwest near Cook's Lane |
| Westwoods* | Woodlands and marshes |
| East Woods off Podunk Road | Woodlands |
| Guilford Town Marina | Grass Island, marshes, Long Island Sound and Faulkner's Island |
| Route 77 North | Bluff Head, Broomstick Ledges, and ridges to the west |
| Route 77 and Lake Drive | Lake Quonnipaug and ridges to the north and west |
| Route 77, North of Route 80 | West River valley floodplain, and fields and woods |
| Chaffinch Island* | West River inlet, Guilford coast & Long Island Sound |
| Indian Cove*, Sachem's Head*, Mulberry Point* | Town beaches, coast and the Sound |
| Joshua Cove*, Vineyard Point* | Town beaches, coast and Long Island Sound |
| Route 146 at Shell Beach Road | Leetes' Island, and tidal flats |
| Route 146 at Lost Lake | Great Harbor marshes and Westwoods |
| Olmstead's Outlook*, River Street | West River marshes |
| Chittenden Park* | Marshes |

| PUBLIC VANTAGE POINT | SCENIC VIEW |
|----------------------|---|
| Scenic View Road | fields, Lake Quonnipaug and Quonnipaug Mountain |
| Long Island Sound* | Guilford coast, coves and ridgetops |
| West Street | Totoket Mountain |
| Overlook Road | Totoket Mountain |
| Hemlock Avenue | Ravine on south side of Hemlock Avenue |
| North Madison Road | Guilford Lakes |

* a public vantage point which is also a scenic area or view in its own right

Scenic Roads

Guilford has many scenic roadways that lend a distinctively rural character to the Town. Many still follow the routes of the first roads built several hundred years ago on cow paths or carriage routes between villages. A number of Town roads have remained unpaved. Some roads are canopied, with mature trees that arch over the roadway, untouched by utility company trimming.

Dozens of roads in Guilford meet one or more of the statutory criteria for protection as municipal scenic roads: roads that are unpaved, lined with mature trees or stone walls, crossing brooks or streams, possessing scenic views, or less than 20 feet wide. Examples of such roads in Guilford include Clapboard Hill Road, Moose Hill Road, County Road, West Street, Elm Street, Beaver Head Road, and Great Hill Road. (See *Appendix G-3* for an example of how such roads may be assessed for their scenic characteristics.)

Route 77 and Route 146, two of Guilford’s four state highways, are officially designated as Scenic Roads by the State of Connecticut. The view from the roadway is the scenic asset. Alterations within these designated scenic corridors are subject to review by the Guilford/Branford Scenic Roads Advisory Committee.

Mature Trees

It is easy to take Guilford’s lovely tree-lined roadways for granted. The Town is blessed with many mature trees along our thoroughfares. Seventeen Guilford trees are recognized in “Connecticut Notable Trees,” a state-wide catalogue of the largest trees by species, published by the CT Botanical Society, Connecticut College Arboretum, and the CT Urban Forest Council. (See *Appendix G-4* for further detail.) Many of them are the largest examples of their type in the state, however most of them are not species native to the area. An inventory of outstanding native specimens within Town has not yet been completed for Guilford but such studies have been undertaken in several Connecticut communities.¹

Stone walls

Stone walls are uniquely characteristic of New England as a result of glaciation and are a hallmark feature of our landscape. Whether lining roads or criss-crossing the woods as remnants of former agricultural use, they are scenic features worthy of preservation. Many are located within Town rights-of-way, and as such are maintained by the Public Works Department. Although not yet inventoried for the NRA, stone walls can be identified on USGS topographical maps and on aerial photos.

Ridgelines

These landforms are visually prominent due to their elevation and expansive size. They anchor the landscape. The traprock ridges of Totoket and Pistapaug Mountains are protected by statute² and through the Metacomet Ridge Conservation Compact Agreement. (See *Appendix I-3* and accompanying map.) Ridgelines or ridgetops, including traprock ridges and prominent hillsides, likely will be mapped in future editions of the NRA.

Pastoral landscapes

Agricultural land use is inherently scenic (pastoral scenes are a favorite genre in the art world) and adds diversity to the visual landscape. (See *Section E. 8, Agriculture* and *Map E-1 for location*.)

Waterbodies and Coastal Areas

Throughout time humans have found water and views of water restful and rejuvenating. Although not all are individually depicted as scenic resources on *Map G-1*, all Guilford's abundant streams, ponds, and lakes add to the scenic experience. Coastal areas, including Faulkner's Island, are treasured scenic amenities. (See *Section B* and *Map B-1*.)

G.3 Threats

The build-out prognosis in the *Growth Management Plan (2004)* indicates that, if we opt to maintain the current ratio of committed open space land to developed land (1 to 1.7), today's 8,100 acres of vacant land would be converted to about 5,100 acres of developed land and 3,000 acres of additional committed open space at build-out. This scenario represents a net loss of 17 percent of the existing "green" area. Although 17 percent may not sound like a big change, the visual impact would be notable.

Scenic views: Views and the span of the view, termed a viewshed, are particularly sensitive to land use changes that may impact the integrity of the viewing experience. Scenic views can easily become degraded or reduced in scope. To protect some scenic areas, the integrity of the scenic area and the view that area affords both have to be protected. Bluff Head, for example, is a scenic area as viewed from a distance and up close. The top of Bluff Head is a well-known vantage point from which the public enjoys a panoramic scenic view. As more rooftops and roads become visible, the less attractive its views will become. Its status as a treasured viewpoint may diminish and a public constituency may be lost. Several Connecticut communities have used scenic easements and open space (or conservation) design to maintain the integrity of views. (Also see *Ridgelines section*.)

Scenic roads: The visual integrity of viewsheds from scenic roads and highways can be compromised by insensitive development and associated utility lines.

Mature trees: Mature trees, once lost, cannot be replaced in a lifetime. Adequate tree maintenance by the Town is important to preserve the attractiveness and longevity of trees gracing our roads. And, although there are safeguards to prevent tree cutting by private parties within the Town right-of-way, there are no safeguards to protect even the most extraordinary tree specimens from insensitive development in other areas.

Stone walls: Loss of integrity of Guilford's stone walls over time due to deterioration by vine damage, relocation, and theft is a concern.

Ridgelines: Visual degradation of ridgelines has potentially far-reaching impacts. Potential location of telecommunications towers remains a concern for all ridgelines and other visually prominent areas.

Pastoral landscapes: As land in agricultural use is an integral piece of the Guilford landscape, its potential loss to development is a concern.

Waterbodies and coastal areas: The potential for loss of visual access to the coastal landscape and Long Island Sound as a result of new development is a concern.

G.4 Summary

Guilford's scenic resources are one of the Town's most compelling attractions. They are a major component of our quality of life and a significant factor in the economic value of land. The process of inventorying and mapping the Town's natural scenic resources revealed that the key to Guilford's signature beauty lies in the diversity and distribution of these scenic amenities. As build out continues, there is concern that without a program to protect them, the Town's natural scenic qualities will be eroded over time.

Resources

- Connecticut Department of Transportation Scenic Roads Advisory Committee. 1998. *Preserving Connecticut's scenic roads: A handbook for collaboration on corridor management planning*
- Connecticut's Notable Trees project website: <http://notabletrees.conncoll.edu/>
- Guilford Preservation Alliance. 1986 revised 1995. *Master Plan for Preservation and Scenic Conservation – Town of Guilford, Connecticut*
- O'Hare, E. 2004. *Scenic resource protection methodologies, including tools currently used in the Town of Guilford*. Guilford, CT. Available in Guilford Free Library
- Scenic America website: <http://www.scenic.org/>
- South Central Connecticut Regional Water Authority (SCCRWA). 1996. *Land Use Plan*
- Town of Guilford. December, 1996. *From the Mountains to the Sea: Routes 77 and 146 Corridor Management Plan*. Route 77 and 146 Scenic Road Advisory Committee and the Connecticut Department of Transportation
- Town of Guilford. 2002 *Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD)*
- Town of Guilford. 1999 revised 2001. *Plan for Open Space and Municipal Land Needs*. Land Acquisition Commission
- Town of Guilford. 2003. *Transportation Plan*
- Towns of North Stonington, Hebron, and Mansfield, CT zoning and subdivision regulations

Appendix

- G-1 Comparison of NRIAC's Natural Scenic Resources with LAC's Areas of Conservation Interest and GPA's Favorite Scenes and Places
- G-2 Natural Resource Elements Applied to GPA's Favorite Scenes and Places and Natural Resource Elements Applied to LAC's Areas of Conservation Interest
- G-3 Guilford's Town-owned Scenic Roads – an inventory sample
- G-4 Guilford's Notable Trees

Maps

- G-1 Natural Scenic Resources

Endnotes

- ¹ Biggest tree contests have been conducted in Newtown, Orange, Milford, and other Connecticut communities.
- ² CGS Sec. 8-2(c) authorizes municipalities to adopt regulatory provisions for development restrictions in ridgeline setback areas. Also see CGS Sec. 8-1aa. Ridgeline protection.