

**2005 Massachusetts Envirothon  
Current Issue Problem**

## **Protecting Cultural Landscapes**

### **Introduction**

In order to respond to this problem, your team will need to do some investigation. You will need to get out and observe places in your community, talk to a variety of people about community history, and develop your own critical perspective on what aspects of your community's landscape need to be protected.

Earlier this year your team received a handout of "Questions & Resources for Team Preparation" (see <http://maenvirothon.org/website-html/currentissue2005.pdf>). This includes some strategies to help you with your community investigation, beginning on page 10. Envirothon has also provided your team with a copy of the booklet *Reading the Land*, which includes steps for communities to take to protect cultural landscapes. If you have questions about the presentation, contact Will Snyder (413/545-3876 or [wsnyder@umext.umass.edu](mailto:wsnyder@umext.umass.edu)).

### **The Problem**

Rapid change is everywhere in the Massachusetts landscape. New houses and shopping areas spring up in a farm field or woodlot. A traditional view is changed by a new tower on the horizon. Old houses make way for a widened road or new parking facilities. A once-vibrant neighborhood streetscape is neglected. A mill dam and factory are abandoned.

Of course, change is a fact of life. The landscape of every community reveals the different ways people have used the land and its resources through generations. But in history-rich Massachusetts, many people have become concerned about the loss of community character. In response to this concern, Massachusetts state government, through the Department of Conservation and Recreation, has initiated the Heritage Landscape Inventory program " . . . to lay the groundwork at the local level for an integrated planning approach to preservation of the overall cultural landscape: the historic, scenic, and environmental qualities that define each community and region." (*Reading the Land*, pages 3-4)

Your team has been asked to serve as consultants to your town on the issue of protecting cultural landscapes. You are to report your findings to the decision-making body that represents your community (your town meeting or city council). You have been asked to connect your work, wherever possible, to landscape protection efforts that are already underway in your community. Whether or not your community has participated in the Heritage Landscape Inventory (described at <http://www.mass.gov/dem/programs/histland/histland.htm> and in *Reading the Land*) you have been asked to use the strategies developed by that program.

Your presentation is a two part opportunity. First, you have a chance to introduce a wider group of citizens to the idea of cultural landscapes as an important heritage to be protected, and to raise their awareness of significant landscapes within their community. Second, you have an opportunity to provide the community with your judgment about where *specifically* they should put their protection priorities, and why. You should aim to persuade the widest group of citizens possible, to make your pitch in a way that makes sense in terms of efforts already underway, and to encourage the whole community to think together about conservation and preservation planning for the future.

### **Some Tips for Your Presentation**

You will be presenting to a panel of five judges. You will have 15 minutes for your presentation, followed by a 10 minute question period.

Show the judges how you know what you know. Tell them who you talked to, where you visited, what your information sources were and how you evaluated them.

Be creative! Give your audience a memorable "sense of place" experience of your community. (but remember that creativity is only one part of your score)

Use maps, including historical maps, to introduce your judges to your community and its landscapes.

The idea of a "landscape" and "cultural landscapes" may be new to some people. Be sure to take time to explain what you mean by these terms. Use examples.

## **In Your Presentation, You Should:**

### **Introduce your community's cultural landscapes**

- \* What are your community's significant natural features? significant cultural features? What are the places that give *you* your sense of place? What places are important to others in your community?
- \* How has your community's relationship to the land and natural resources changed over time? What history can be read in the landscape? Where did development occur and why? How have water, forest, wildlife, and soil resources changed?
- \* Describe how you learned about the landscapes in your community through field study and through talking with people. What are the threats to landscapes? Does the public understand and appreciate your community's landscape heritage?
- \* What landscape protection efforts are already underway in your community? Has there been a general reconnaissance survey? Are there specific protection efforts?

### **Focus on the specific landscape protection issue you have identified as a priority**

- \* Describe the landscape: its natural features, history, built features. What are the threats that make it a priority for protection?
- \* Why is this landscape significant? How does the issue involve your community's natural resources? How does it involve your community's history? How does it affect the quality of life in your community?
- \* Describe any research that is still needed.

### **Present your plan for cultural landscape protection**

- \* What land protection tools are available? Which do you recommend, and why?
- \* What treatments and management strategies — including treatments for biotic systems — do you recommend?
- \* What are the economic costs and benefits of your recommendations?
- \* What is the specific next step that your community should take?
- \* How will you ensure broad public involvement?

## **Special Notes !!!**

**Community Awards:** If you do a thorough job in your Current Issue investigation, you will not only score well but you can qualify for Mass Envirothon's *Community Research Award*. And if you take what you learn and apply it in service to your community, you can qualify for Mass Envirothon's *Community Service Award*. See <http://maenvirothon.org/website-html/communityawards.pdf> for details.

**Roundtables:** At lunch time on the day of the Envirothon, ALL Envirothon teams are invited to share their Current Issue or other work informally with other teams and interested adults at a "roundtables" session. It's easy and fun: You can bring the display materials from your presentation and be prepared to start a good conversation about what you learned from your community explorations and/or service projects. You can also be more creative: Introduce us to your sense of place. Show off your research prowess. Inspire us with another project your team has been involved with. (Offering a roundtable is on the official "to do" lists for teams pursuing the Community Research and Community Service awards, but *everyone is invited to join in.*)