

Ashuwillticook Rail Trail Vegetation Management Plan (VMP):

Lanesborough, Cheshire, Adams



Revised November 5, 2025



MASSACHUSETTS DEPARTMENT OF
CONSERVATION AND RECREATION

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1. Introduction

This Vegetation Management Plan (VMP) for the Ashuwillticook Rail Trail is designed to establish a vegetation control program along facilities considered rights-of-way (ROW) in compliance with the Rights-of-Way Management Regulations (333 CMR 11.00) as administered by the Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources (MDAR). ROWs according to CMR 333 11.02 include any *“roadway, or thoroughfare on which public passage is made, and any corridor of land over which facilities such as railroads, powerlines, pipelines, conduits, channels or communication lines or bicycle paths are located.”* This Vegetation Management Plan will seek to implement a set of standards to achieve vegetation management in the safest and most environmentally conscious manner possible.

The Ashuwillticook Rail Trail currently spans 14.05 miles, traversing north to south through the municipalities of Adams, Cheshire, Lanesborough, and into Pittsfield, Massachusetts. DCR manages approximately 12 miles of the trail, extending from Berkshire Connector Road, in Lanesborough, through Cheshire, to a DCR property north of Cook Street in Adams (Appendix A).

While DCR manages this portion of the trail, the Massachusetts Department of Transportation owns most of the corridor, except for a 1.5-mile segment in Adams, which is owned by DCR. The City of Pittsfield maintains the section of trail in Pittsfield from Berkshire Connector Rd south to Merrill Rd., and the Town of Adams maintains the small section of trail from DCR boundary to Lime St. in Adams. This vegetative management plan pertains to the section of trail maintained by DCR.

The trail features a 10-foot-wide paved path with 3-4-foot-wide shoulders. Rail trails, by their nature, require ongoing vegetation management to maintain accessibility, safety, and infrastructure integrity. DCR does not currently propose using herbicides for purposes of vegetation management along the Trail. Therefore, this VMP is limited to non-chemical vegetation management practices and does not require review and approval by MDAR.

DCR acknowledges that if herbicides are considered in the future for maintaining the trail ROW, a 5-year VMP and Yearly Operational Plans (YOP) must be submitted to MDAR prior to application.

2. Trail Description

The Ashuwillticook Rail Trail occupies the former route of the Pittsfield and North Adams Railroad. This wheelchair accessible trail accommodates various modes of active transportation, including biking, walking, rollerblading, and jogging. Parking lots, restrooms and picnic areas are available at various points along the way.

The Trail winds through the scenic Hoosac River Valley between Mount Greylock and the Hoosac Mountains. The name "Ashuwillticook" originates from the Native American term for the south branch of the Hoosic River, translating to "at the in-between pleasant river," or more commonly, "the pleasant river in between the hills." Along its path, it is bordered by the Cheshire Reservoir, the Hoosic River, and various wetland habitats. The reservoir and the river are part of a large drainage area called the Hoosic Watershed Basin. This area is rich in flora and fauna indigenous to wetland, river and lake communities.

Figures depicting the location of the Trail and nearby resource areas are provided in Appendix A.

3. Goals and Objectives

This VMP is intended to establish criteria for DCR and its selected vegetation management contractor(s) to control vegetation along the Ashuwillticook Rail Trail in compliance with applicable regulations. Vegetation maintenance is necessary along public ROWs, including bicycle trails, to manage vegetation that may pose a public nuisance, threaten public safety, or cause damage to structures and infrastructure. The removal of hazard trees, in addition to benefiting public safety, limits the possibility of dead/dying trees uprooting and leading to erosion and sedimentation. The primary goal of this VMP is to provide the public with safe and unobstructed use of the Trail and its associated facilities (i.e., picnic areas, restrooms, parking areas, scenic views, and park office) with means and methods that avoid the use of herbicides.

To achieve the goal of providing the public with safe unobstructed use of the Trail and associated facilities, DCR's objectives are to:

- Manage target vegetation through non-chemical means
- Manage target vegetation while safeguarding sensitive areas and the environment
- Avoid incidental disturbances to sensitive areas, soil, and non-target vegetation

This VMP serves as technical guidance for individuals involved in ROW vegetation management along the Trail.

4. Identification of Target Vegetation

Target vegetation includes manicured lawn grasses, hazard trees, shrubs and other woody vegetation, and other herbs and forbs which encroach upon the maintained trail corridor and facilities footprints or otherwise pose a threat to public safety and unobstructed use of the Trail and its facilities.

4.1 - Manicured lawn grasses

Manicured lawn grasses are those within the existing trail and facilities footprint.

4.2 - Hazard Trees

Hazard trees will be identified by a certified arborist and will follow International Society of Arborist (ISA) guidelines for risk tree assessment. Hazard trees are trees which are dead, declining, or otherwise pose a risk to public safety or infrastructure as identified by a certified arborist. Trees within one and half times their height (tree lengths) which pose risk of failure (i.e., snapping, uprooting, or dropping limbs) from a point of interest may be deemed a risk and removed as to ensure public safety and maintain the integrity of infrastructure and prevent infrastructure failure.

Large trees located close to the trail and leaning away from the trail may not be a direct threat to public safety should they fail, but should they fail, they may compromise trail integrity and lead to trail failure during a storm event. An uprooted tree could cause the trail bed to wash out, indirectly impact public safety, and lead to erosion and sedimentation of wetland resource areas.

This proactive approach to hazard tree identification and removal is intended to ensure public safety and the integrity of the Trail for its users and the benefit of wetland and sensitive resource areas. Where practicable, snags (i.e., standing dead trees or portions of standing dead trees) will be left which do not pose a risk to public safety or infrastructure in order to retain their value to wildlife.

Hazard trees identified for removal will be clearly marked with flagging or paint by a DCR certified arborist for removal by staff or contractors. Prior to their removal the arborist will meet with the selected contractor(s) to review requirements of the VMP, site mapping, and the full scope of work. The meeting will include a thorough review of trees identified by the arborist for cutting. The arborist will remain on site to oversee the tree cutting and debris

removal activities to confirm that they are carried out in adherence with the VMP, safety protocols, and applicable regulatory requirements.

4.2.1 – Communication with municipalities regarding identification of Hazard Trees for removal

DCR's Arborist shall email the conservation agent of each town where hazard trees have been identified for removal a list of trees identified to be removed along the trail and will include the following:

- Tree species
- Diameter at Breast Height (DBH")
- Location (e.g., between Old State Rd to Nobody's Road)
- Risk agent (e.g., Emerald Ash Borer, Declining/Decayed, Dead)
- Notes (as applicable, e.g., 2 stems)

In the event a tree must be cleared from the trail that has fallen over the trail, DCR shall notify the conservation agent in the applicable town as soon as practicable, prior to or following removal of the tree from the rail trail. Timeliness of notification will depend on the severity of the situation and immediate need for removal to ensure public safety.

4.3 - Shrubs and other woody vegetation

Shrubs and other woody vegetation to be maintained are those which encroach upon the existing trail corridor and would if left would obstruct the Trail's use by the public.

4.4 - Other forbs and herbs

Other forbs and herbs which encroach upon the pre-existing Trail corridor and if left would obstruct the Trail's use by the public will be targeted for control.

5. Means and Methods

Vegetation management may include, but not be limited to, the following physical and mechanical control methods, but will not include the use of herbicides:

- Physical Control – pavement sweeping, pavement crack sealing, pavement resurfacing, reapplication of gravel, and mulching.
- Mechanical Control – mechanized cutting, hand cutting, mowing, weed whacking, and selective trimming and pruning.

5.1 - Manicured lawn grasses

Manicured lawn grasses will be regularly mowed within the existing trail corridor and facilities footprints to maintain existing lawn area. Mowing will be performed with ride on mowers with decks no greater than 6ft wide.

The landscaped areas located adjacent to the Trail and its associated facilities will be maintained using a combination of mechanized equipment, such as mowers and string trimmers, as well as physical methods, like placement of gravel and mulch.

Landscaped areas will not be modified or expanded beyond existing conditions without prior review and approval by DCR and any applicable regulatory bodies.

5.2 - Hazard Trees

Hazard trees selected for removal will be clearly marked with flagging or paint by a DCR Certified Arborist for removal by staff or contractors. Prior to their removal the arborist will meet with the selected contractor(s) to review requirements of the VMP, site mapping, and the full scope of work. The meeting will include a thorough review of trees identified by the arborist for cutting. The arborist will remain on site to oversee the tree cutting and debris removal activities to confirm that they are carried out in adherence with the VMP, safety protocols, and applicable regulatory requirements.

Hazard tree removal operations will utilize specialized equipment designed to minimize environmental impact and limit possible soil disturbance and damage to surrounding vegetation. Additionally, all tree-clearing equipment will be confined to the paved surfaces of the Trail or graveled parking areas, further reducing the potential for incidental disturbances to soil and vegetation. Following the removal of the identified trees, unwanted woody debris generated by the activity will be promptly cleared from the site, maintaining the cleanliness and safety of the Trail and its associated facilities. Woody debris retained for use along the trail will be used immediately or otherwise stockpiled on graveled or paved surfaces.

Where practicable, snags (i.e., standing dead trees or portions of standing dead trees) that do not pose a risk to public safety or infrastructure will be left as to retain wildlife value.

When DCR contracts hazard tree removals to outside entities, DCR will require contractors to meet specific parameters to avoid and minimize potential disturbance to wetland and sensitive resource areas. These parameters will include, but may not be limited to the following; machinery may not leave paved Trail surface, equipment and machinery must be of adequate design to produce professional quality results, equipment must be maintained in good working condition and maintained as appropriate, care and common sense shall be exercised when moving vehicles and equipment, no mechanized equipment shall be permitted within sensitive areas, such as regulated resource areas without prior approval

from DCR and only when in compliance with municipal, state and, federal regulations.

Individual, one off, hazard trees may be removed by park operations staff in consultation with a DCR arborist.

Trees which have fallen, or portions of trees and tree debris that have fallen, within the maintained trail corridor will be removed from the trail corridor using physical and mechanical means (i.e., hand saws, chain saws, etc.) and may be left in natural areas outside of the trail corridors in small piles to provide structure and habitat for wildlife and decompose. Slash piles shall not be created in Priority Habitats of Rare Species or Bordering Vegetative Wetlands.

5.3 - Shrubs and other woody vegetation

Shrubs and other woody vegetation will be maintained with mechanical means (i.e., flail mowers, loppers and other similar handheld or powered equipment) as to maintain the existing trail corridor and allow for unobstructed use of the Trail by the public. Vegetative material will be brushed. Any slash, if not removed from site, may be left in small piles in natural areas as to provide wildlife habitat. Slash piles shall not be created in Priority Habitats of Rare Species or Bordering Vegetative Wetlands.

Brushing of trails via flail mower shall occur approximately every 1-3 years and is not part of regular recurring maintenance throughout the year. Flail mowers shall only be used to control shrubs and other woody vegetation and shall not be used on the ground as a means to control lawn or other ground cover. Other forbs and herbs may be coincidentally trimmed in the process but are not direct targets for control via flail mower.

5.4 - Other forbs and herbs

Other forbs and herbs while not directly targeted for management may be controlled coincidentally during the regular mowing of pre-existing manicured lawn and periodic brushing of shrubs and other woody vegetation via flail mower or other physical/mechanical means (e.g., string trimmers and loppers) to maintain the public's unobstructed use of the Trail.

6. Sensitive Areas

No herbicides will be used for vegetation management along the Trail or within sensitive areas identified by 333 CMR 11.02.

Vegetation management activities within regulated resource areas will be planned and conducted in accordance with the Massachusetts Wetland Protection Act (WPA, MGL Chapter 131, Section 40) and its regulations (310 CMR 10.00), and requirements set forth by applicable agencies from the municipalities of Cheshire, Lanesborough, and Adams.

Activities occurring in Estimated Habitats of Rare Wildlife Species and Priority Habitats of Rare Species will be carried out in accordance with Massachusetts Endangered Species Act regulations (321 CMR 10.00) and in consultation with Massachusetts Division of Wildlife's Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program. Section 6.1 below describes mitigation measures DCR will follow in order to avoid take of any state listed species.

6.1 - Work Occurring in Priority Habitats of Rare Species and Estimated Habitats of Rare Wildlife Species and

Portions of the Trail occur within Priority Habitats of Rare Species and Estimated Habitats of Rare Wildlife Species. In consultation with NHESP, it has been determined that protected vegetation does not occur within the maintained trail corridor and would not be impacted by vegetation maintenance as described in this VMP as no vegetation maintenance outside of the already maintained trail corridor, aside from Hazard Tree Removals as needed, will occur. To mitigate any impacts to state listed vegetation, no slash piles shall be created in Priority Habitats of Rare Species or Bordering Vegetated Wetlands. Slash, if not removed from site, may be left in small piles in natural areas outside of Priority Habitats of Rares Species and Bordering Vegetated Wetlands as to provide wildlife habitat.

State listed wildlife species could be impacted within Estimated Habitats for Rare Wildlife Species if heavy machinery is used off trail or mowers with decks greater than 6ft are used. No heavy machinery is proposed to be used off trail and no mowers with decks greater than 6ft are proposed to be used; however, should heavy machinery or mowers with decks greater than 6ft be used at some point in the future the following mitigation measures would be taken in addition to notifying the applicable Conservation Commission(s) and NHESP and obtaining any necessary permissions for work occurring in areas under the jurisdiction of 310 CMR 10.00 or 321 CMR 10.00.

6.1.1 - Turtle Protection Plan

State-listed turtle species may occur in Estimated Habitats for Rare Wildlife Species coincident with the Trail. As such, time of year restrictions and turtle sweeps will be implemented to ensure no take of state-listed turtle species.

6.1.2 - Time of Year Restriction and Turtle Sweeps

State-listed turtle species may be present in Estimated Habitats for Rare Wildlife Species where vegetation may need to be controlled from March 15 through October 31.

Hazard tree removals, to the extent practicable, shall occur between November 1 to March 14 to limit impacts to state-listed turtle species.

Regular maintenance of vegetation, such as mowing and brushing, will need to occur regularly throughout the growing season to maintain the public's unobstructed use of the Trail. Take will be mitigated during the active season from March 15 through October 31 by utilizing mowers with decks 6ft or less and other hand held equipment such as string trimmers to control ground vegetation.

Turtle sweeps will be completed every day if maintenance is conducted where heavy machinery must be operated off of the existing rail trail or mowers with decks larger than 6ft are used between March 15 and October 31; however it is not anticipated that heavy machinery or mowers with decks greater than 6 feet will be used off of the existing trail, or currently maintained corridor, and none are proposed to be used by this VMP

DCR will send individual names and qualifications of persons conducting turtle sweeps to NHESP for approval.

6.1.3 - Turtle Sweeps

Anytime vegetation management is necessary where heavy machinery or mowers with greater than 6ft deck is needed from March 15 to October 31 turtle sweeps will be conducted:

- Prior to mobilizing and staging equipment
- Prior to relocating equipment on site
- Prior to vegetation management operations

6.1.4 - Turtle Relocation

Turtles observed in the work area shall be relocated to a safe location. Every effort shall be made to not relocate turtles more than 200-feet away from the area where it was located unless it is necessary for the turtle's safety. Every effort shall be made not to disturb mating turtles.

Each turtle shall be photographed (plastron, carapace, and lateral view. GPS coordinates shall be collected for the location of observation and location of relocation. General habitat and behavioral data shall also be collected.

If a turtle is injured during the project, the turtle will be collected. DCR will reach out to NHESP to determine next steps.

6.1.5 - Reporting

All turtle observations shall be reported to NHESP via the Heritage Hub within 30 days of project completion.

7. Identification and Qualifications of Individuals

Facilitating the VMP

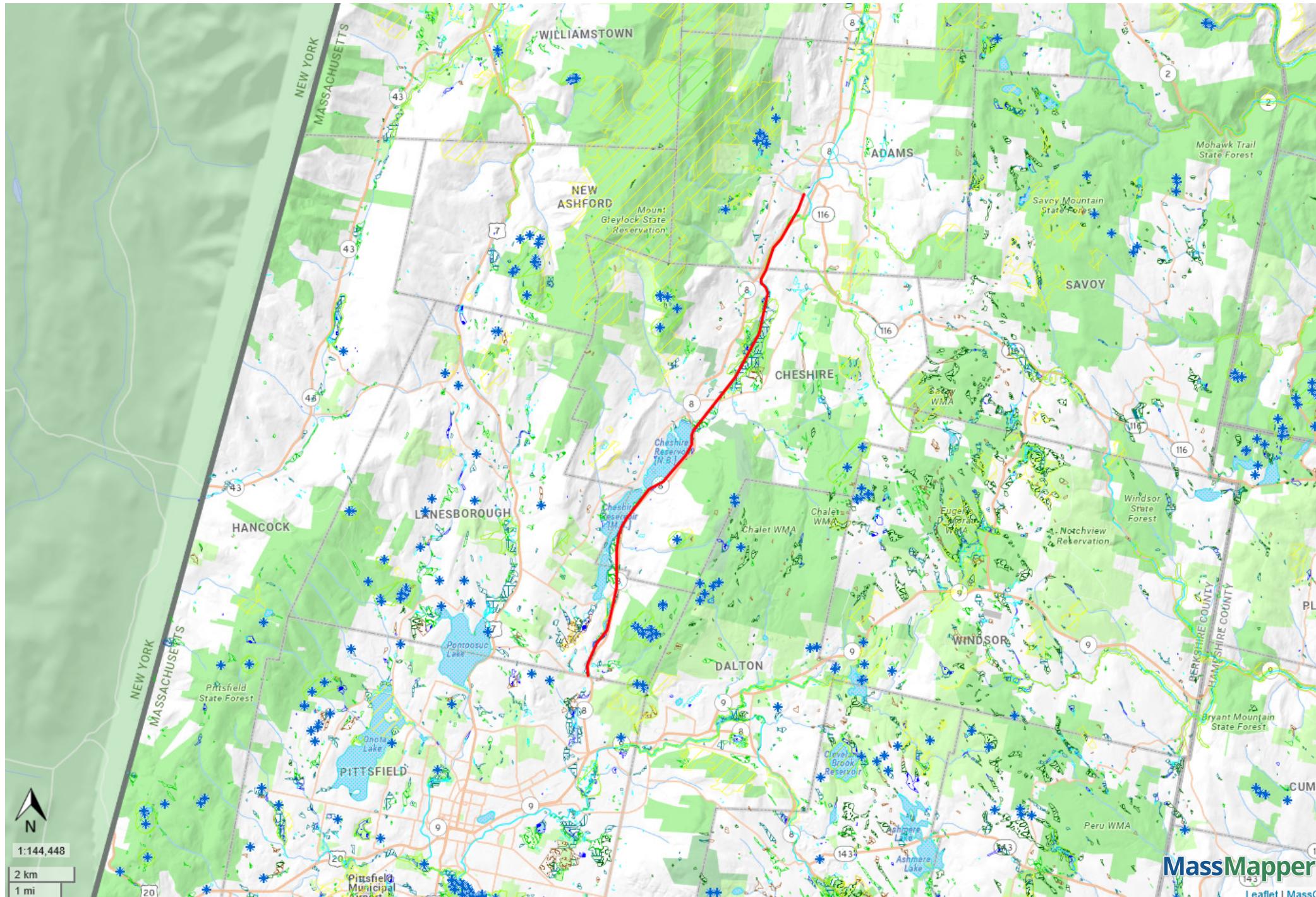
The following persons and their qualifications within DCR from Park Operations, Forestry, and Ecology are responsible for facilitating this VMP.

- Rebecca Barnes, DCR Park Operations, Field Operations Team Leader
- Eric Reynolds, DCR Forestry, Tree Crew Supervisor
Massachusetts Certified Arborist, International Society of Arboriculture - Tree Risk Assessment Qualification
- Megan Shave PhD, DCR Ecology, Senior Inland Ecologist
- Casey R. Duggan, DCR Forestry, Forest Stewardship Coordinator
B.S. Environmental Science, Westfield State University

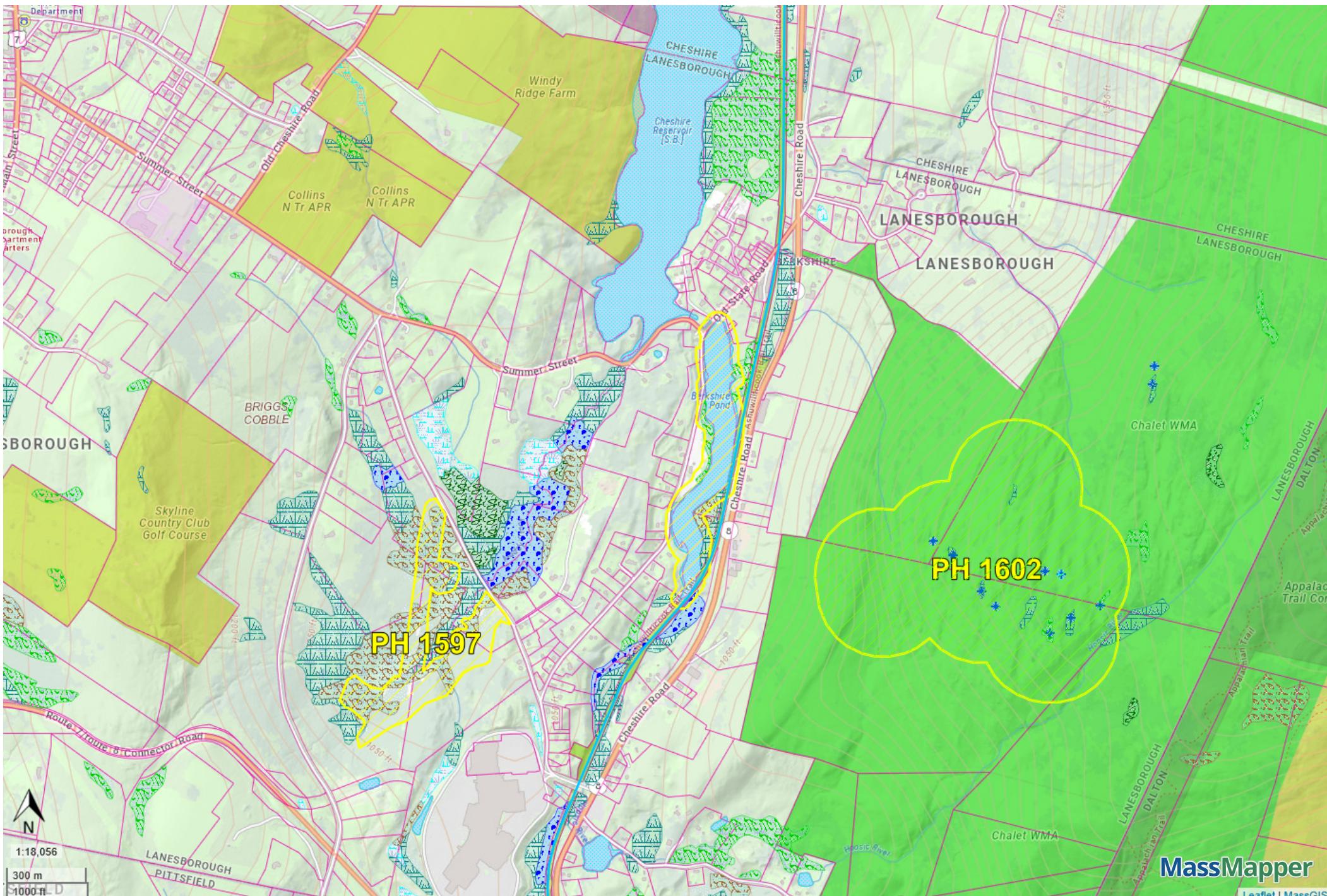
Successors to these persons shall have similar credentials and experience necessary for the continued facilitation of this VMP.

Appendix A – Maps: Ashuwillticook Rail Trail; Priority Habitats of Rare Species, and Estimated Habitats of Rare Wildlife within Lanesboro, Chesire, and Adams

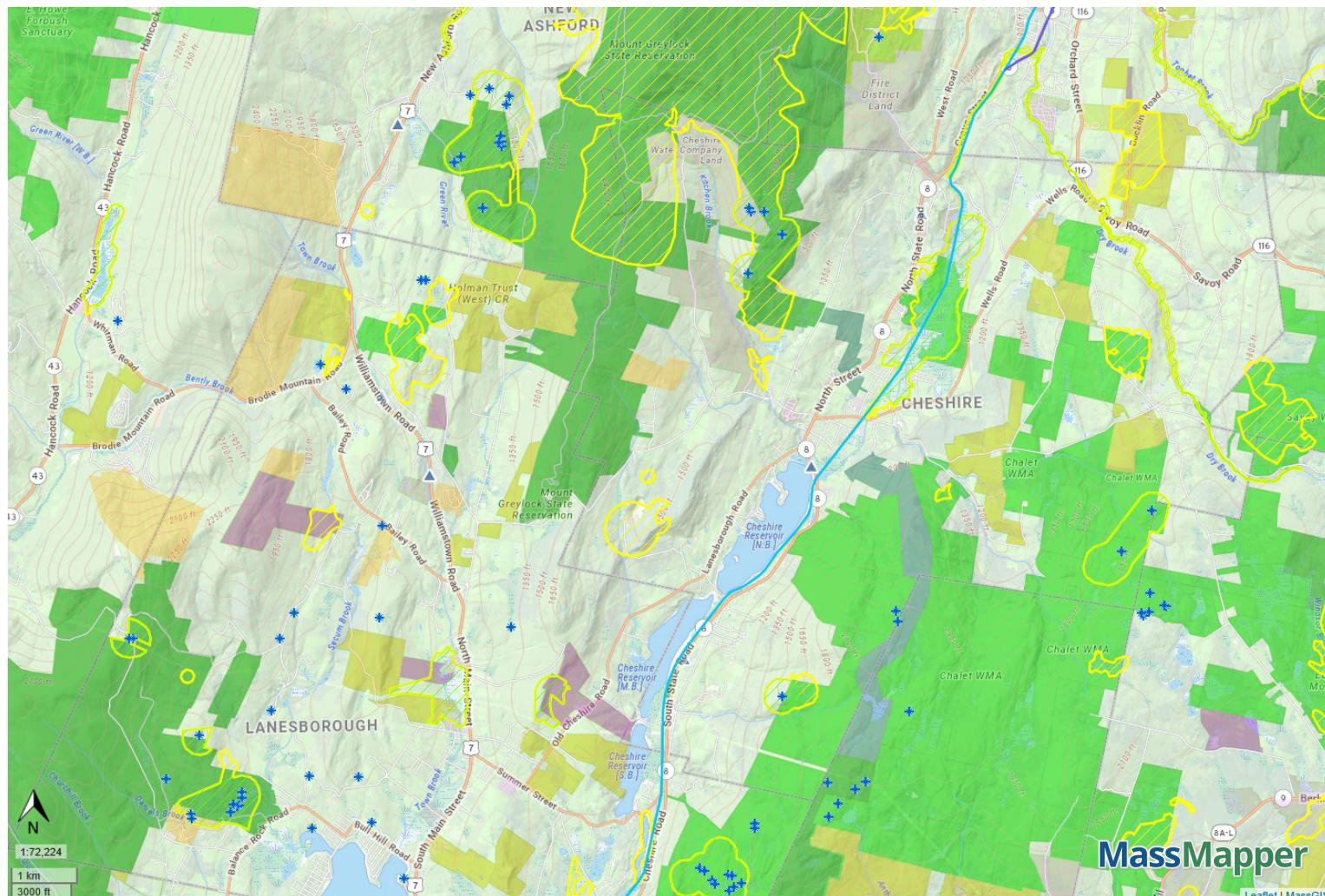
Ashuwillticook Rail Trail - Lanesborough, Chesire, Adams



Ashuwillticook - Lanesborough



Ashuwillticook - Cheshire



Bicycle Trails

- Bicycle/Pedestrian Priority Roadway
- Bike Lane
- Separated Bike Lane
- Shared Use Path

NHESP Certified Vernal Pools



- NHESP Estimated Habitats of Rare Wildlife



- NHESP Priority Habitats of Rare Species



Property Tax Parcels

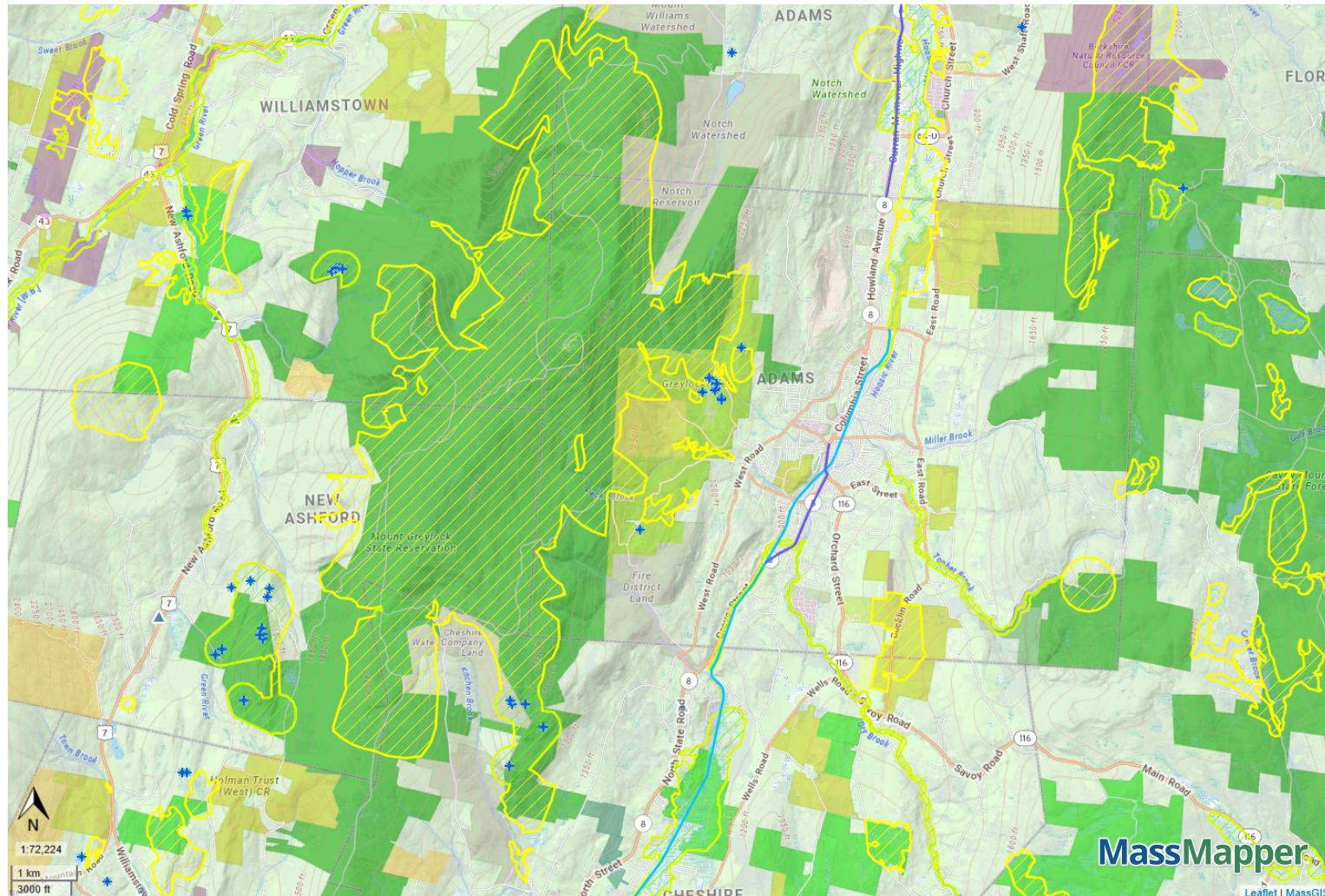
Openspace by Ownership Solid

- Federal
- DCR-State Parks_Recreation
- DCRS/DFG
- Department of Fish_Game
- DCR-Urban Parks_Recreation
- DCR-Water Supply Protection
- Department of Agricultural Resources
- Commonwealth of Massachusetts
- County
- Municipal
- Public Non-Profit
- Land Trust
- Conservation Organization
- Non-Profit
- Private
- Other
- Unknown

MassMapper

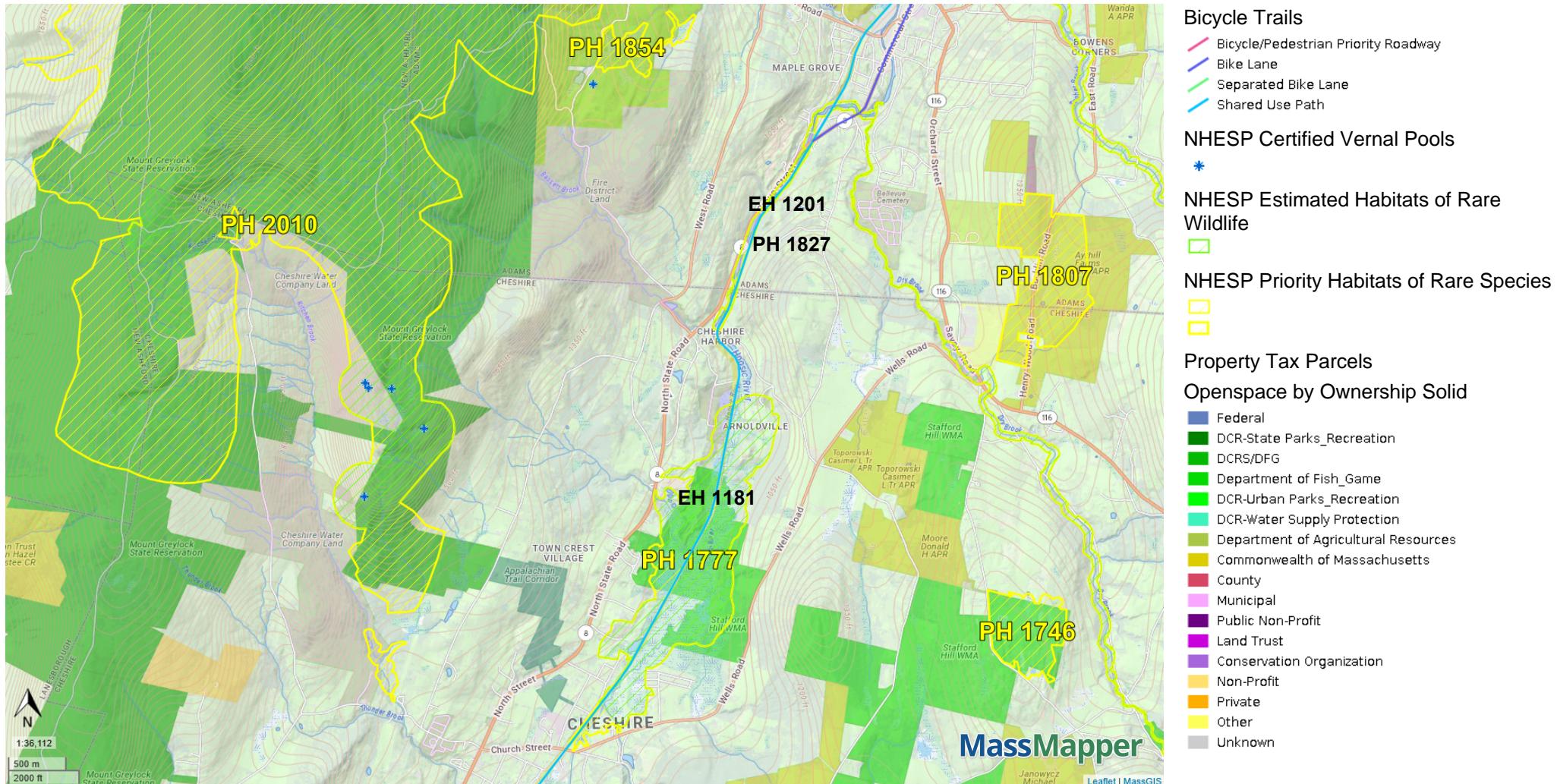
Note: Shared use path shown is the Ashuwillticook Rail Trail.

Ashuwillticook - Adams



Note: Shared use path shown is the Ashuwillticook Rail Trail.

Ashuwillticook - Estimated Habitat of Rare Wildlife Species



Note: Shared use path shown is the Ashuwillticook Rail Trail. EH1181 and PH1777 between Church Street and Harbor Road, Cheshire. EH1201 and PH1827 between Harbor Road and River Street, Cheshire into Adams.