



Intrinsic Qualities and Stewardship



Intrinsic qualities are defined as inherent, essential, unique, or irreplaceable features representative or distinctly characteristic of an area. Intrinsic qualities create a sense of place that is unique.

The Durham Valley Scenic Byway has five intrinsic qualities that combine to give the area its distinct rural character—scenic, natural, agricultural, cultural and historic, and recreational. For each of the intrinsic qualities separate sections provide:

- A description of the resources
- An overview of issues and opportunities
- Recommended management actions
- Individual maps

Scenic Qualities

The scenic beauty of the Durham Valley is without parallel in the Catskill Region with the significance of this intrinsic quality having been well documented by the community in the 1970s when the Federal Power Commission had under consideration whether it would be appropriate to have a 345 kV

transmission line traverse the Durham Valley. In the course of the proceedings, the Town of Durham, Sierra Club, and the Association for the Preservation of the Durham Valley presented a number of experts and exhibits on the scenic and aesthetic attributes of the Durham Valley.

Judge William C. Levy and the full Federal Power Commission ruled that the transmission line should not be placed in the Durham Valley because of the adverse environmental effects. Judge Levy and the Federal Power Commission concluded:

“[T]he most scenic, aesthetic, historical, and cultural values in the impact area are found in the Durham Valley and along the Susquehanna Turnpike looking south to the northern rim of the Catskills.”

The Greene County Planning Board and the Sierra Club endorsed the position of the Town of Durham and the Association for the Preservation of the Durham Valley concerning the unique aspects of the Durham Valley. Some of the testimony before the Federal Power Commission is included here to specifically highlight the scenic qualities of the Durham Valley.

David Lowenthal, then Professor, Department of Geography, University College London and a former executive officer of the American Geographical Society in New York, described the special features of the Durham Valley:

“The area comprises – particularly in its central portions between West Durham and Hervey Street – a remarkably coherent, well integrated, and instantly visualizable set of landscapes, with the heights of the Catskills to the southwest as a framing background, and a series of gentle swales as local relief.”

These landscapes combined striking vistas with a high degree of local irregularity in the form of subtributary cuts, boulder piles, and twists and turns in the major stream courses. These features together convey a remarkable degree of small scale diversity.”

Professor Lowenthal was opposed to a transmission line through the Durham Valley, commenting that such an intrusion: *“would destroy for the present and future generations a unique heritage.”*

Narendra Juneja, then Assistant Professor in the University of Pennsylvania’s Department of Landscape Architecture and Regional Planning, testified on the special scenic character of the Durham Valley:

“The uniqueness of this natural scenic value is further complemented by the culture of the place to an extent which is remarkable for our times. Many a glorious scenic resource has been lost elsewhere by rapacious development. But Durham Valley is a cul-de-sac of serene delight, which has maintained a continuity of tradition since the 18th century.”



John Hightower, the former Executive Director of the New York State Council on the Arts, who traveled extensively throughout New York State to review places of particular historic, cultural, and scenic interest, stated:

“Among the many places I have visited in New York State, I would say the Durham Valley is one of the two or three most beautiful. The combination of the rolling hills with the extraordinary backdrop of the northern edge of the Catskills give the area a quality that is not duplicated elsewhere.”

The Durham Valley Scenic Byway provides a 21-mile corridor that accesses the northernmost escarpment of the Catskill Mountains stretching from the summit of nearby Mount Pisgah along Ginseng ridge past Windham High Peak. Unobstructed views stretch across the upper elevation pasture lands and hayfields to the forested areas along the Durham Valley’s streams and creeks. A spectacular “five state view” that extends over the Hudson River Valley to the Berkshires, Vermont, Connecticut, and New Hampshire and north to the Adirondacks is possible from portions of the Scenic Byway.

During development of the Corridor Management Plan, the scenic character was analyzed through viewshed mapping. Two figures, *Viewshed Analysis – Unforested* and *Viewshed Analysis – Forested*, illustrate the findings from this analysis.

The viewshed analysis documents those areas along the Scenic Byway that are most visible to a traveler by identifying the regions, at ground level, that are visible from a series of viewpoints along the Scenic Byway. The first phase of this analysis did not take vegetation into consideration, while the second phase of the analysis considered forested areas to be a 60-foot visibility barrier.

The analysis revealed that most of the foreground along the Scenic Byway is visible to the traveler.



Both man-made and natural elements are visible, and many contribute to the scenic character. The working landscapes, as well as abandoned fields, of the Durham Valley and diverse natural areas are some of the elements within the foreground that are significant. These foreground views accent the extensive panoramic views from the Scenic Byway across the plain that gently rolls north to Albany and east to the Hudson River Valley.

The analysis also revealed sections along the Scenic Byway that offer “priority” views – those that provide the most significant or characteristic views into the Durham Valley showcasing significant natural, historic, and agricultural resources. The “priority” views were identified through field reconnaissance with additional input from the Scenic Byway Coordinating Committee and the local community. These “priority” views are found along the following Scenic Byway segments:

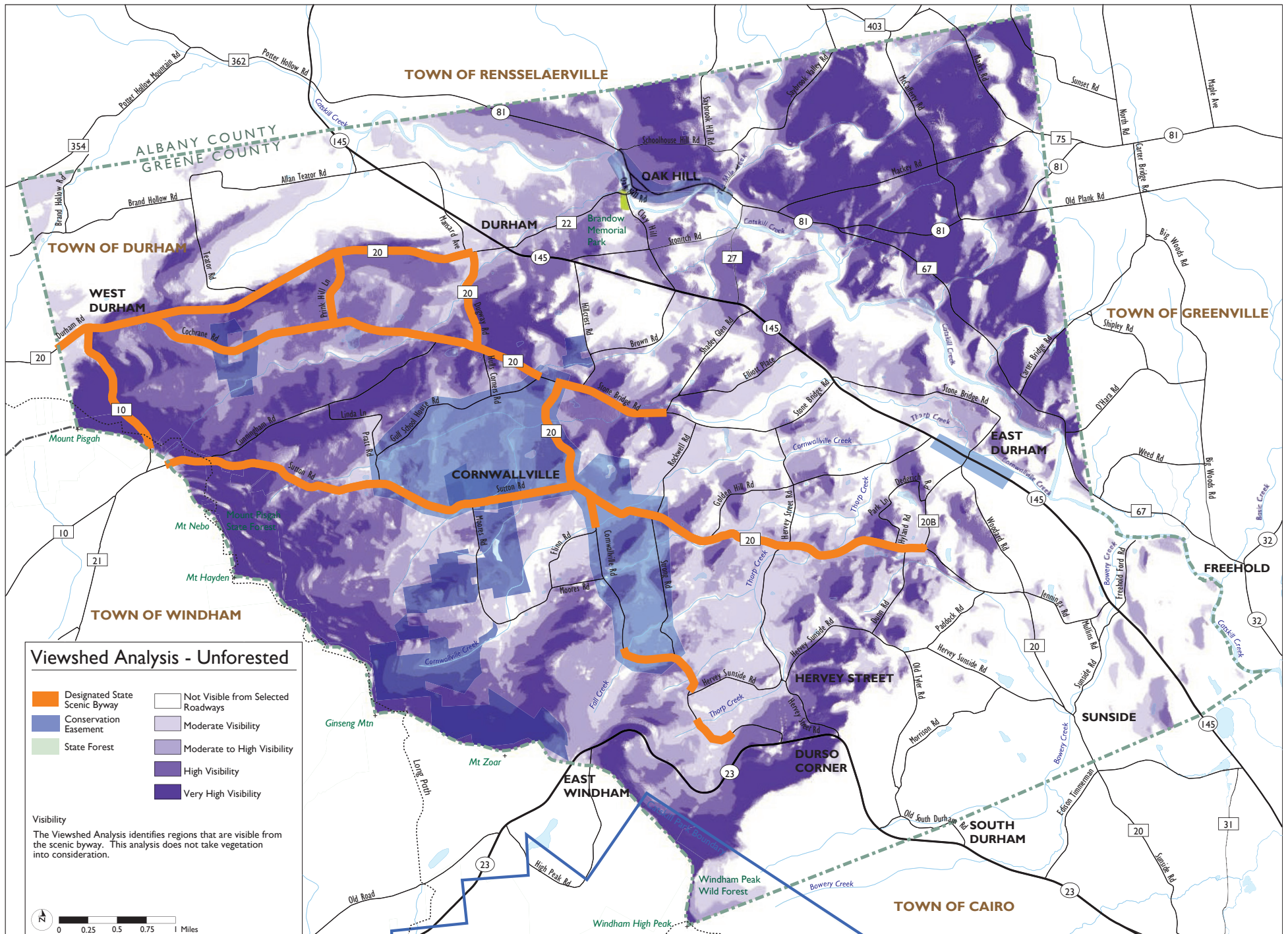
- County Route 20 – that portion of the Susquehanna Turnpike between County Route 10 and Dugway Road
- County Route 10 – from County Route 20 south to the Town of Durham line
- Cunningham Road – east to Sutton Road
- Sutton Road – east from Cunningham Road approximately 1.5 miles

The protection of the Durham Valley’s scenic character is critical to the Scenic Byway. Of particular importance is the protection of the significant views, including the foreground views, the viewshed, and those elements that contribute to these views. The scenic character is important to the Town of Durham’s tourism and recreational base, and is also highly valued by residents as it provides a sense of place and contributes to the community’s quality of life.

Issues and Opportunities - Scenic

In addition to driving growth and development, the Durham Valley’s scenic beauty draws tourists and recreationists who collectively bring important economic benefits to the entire community. Scenic character is also noted by residents as being an important reason for living in the Town of Durham.

- The connection between scenic beauty, rural character, and sustainable long-term economic viability has to some degree been recognized by the broader community.
- All of the Durham Valley’s intrinsic qualities contribute to its scenic character, which in turn contributes to the Town of Durham’s economic well-being. The Town of Durham’s growth and plans for new development should be carefully evaluated and designed to minimize impacts on natural, agricultural, and historic resources.
- Because the Scenic Byway Coordinating Committee does not specifically manage or own the resources that contribute to this character, the role of the Scenic Byway Coordinating Committee is to provide support, advocacy, and assistance in securing funding, and to generally assist with the identification and protection of significant resources.





Management Actions - Scenic

Promote the importance of the preservation of the intrinsic qualities that are visible from the Scenic Byway and that create its scenic character. Protect the priority views along the Scenic Byway and throughout the Scenic Byway Corridor. Refer to the *Viewshed Analysis and Wayfinding figures*.

- a. Continue to promote the viewshed analysis as a valuable tool to the Town of Durham, Greene County, state and federal agencies, and private landowners. Encourage its broad distribution and use in land protection and land use planning.
- b. Assist private property owners and efforts of local, state, and national conservation organizations as they identify the most significant lands for their conservation value and pursue appropriate long-term arrangements to ensure their protection.
- c. Advocate the protection of the foreground views through land use regulations and incentives.
- d. Advocate the implementation of regulations that protect against development along ridgelines.

Natural Qualities

The Durham Valley's natural resources were inventoried and mapped to identify the extent of forested lands, riparian areas, potential wetlands, and other important natural resources that contribute to the character of the Scenic Byway. A number of sources were consulted in the inventory preparation, including the Department of Environmental Conservation, Greene County Soil and Water Conservation District, and the Catskill Center for Conservation and Development. This section provides a summary description of those natural resources (i.e., geology, streams and wetlands, forest lands, and wildlife) that characterize the Scenic Byway Corridor.

Geology

The Durham Valley was part of a shallow sea that filled with clay and silt washing off the high mountains to the east 360 to 400 million years ago. Layers of sandstone were uplifted high above sea level. The Catskill Mountains are primarily the products of stream erosion with the waterways eroding deep valleys into the ancient plateau.

The majority of the surficial geology of the Durham Valley was determined during the last 1.6 million years. Four ice ages inundated this area, most recently the Wisconsin advance. The Wisconsin glaciers finished retreating from the Durham Valley only about 14,000 years ago. The majority of the Durham Valley is composed of glacial till – material that is unstratified, unsorted, and is made up of a wide range of sizes. Glacial till generally acts as an aquifer, holding large amounts of ground water. The surrounding sandstone and conglomerate mountaintops were scoured and scraped by glaciers moving around and over their summits, leaving virtually no loose material.



Streams and Wetlands

Catskill Creek, one of 65 tributaries to the Hudson River entering the Hudson River Estuary south of the Troy Dam, is the Durham Valley's principal



waterway. The coldwater creek with whitewater areas (relatively uncommon in the Hudson Valley region) descends about 600 feet over a course of about 11 miles through the Durham Valley. Several important tributaries to Catskill Creek traverse the Scenic Byway Corridor. These include Thorp Creek, Cornwallville Creek, Fall Creek, Bowery Creek, Tenmile Creek, Durham Creek, and Squirmer Valley Creek. These streams were an important stimulus to the Durham Valley's early settlement in the 18th century and formed the basis of a history of timber harvesting, milling, and industry.

About 1,160 acres of wetlands have been identified in the Durham Valley. Hydric soils, along with hydrophytic vegetation and wetland hydrology, are used to define wetlands. Those over 12.4 acres are regulated by the Department of Environmental Conservation. The Hydric Soil figure shows that wetlands are fairly evenly distributed along streams throughout the Durham Valley.

In total, the Durham Valley contributes 33,000 acres and a little more than 100 miles of classified stream to the Hudson River watershed. These headwater streams form the interface between wetlands, ground water, and the land surface; are vital to the area's aquatic biodiversity and ecological function; and play a critical role in maintaining the health and condition of the downstream Hudson River Estuary.