



the Catskill Region to protect important natural areas, agricultural lands, and open space.

- b. Provide and obtain updates on land conservation activities from the Durham Valley Land Trust, Open Space Institute, The Trust for Public Land, and American Farmland Trust.

Agricultural Qualities

Alan Gussow, an acknowledged expert on landscape analysis, visited the Durham Valley in 1973 and again in 1990. In his 1973 assessment of the Durham Valley, Gussow highlighted the significance of the agricultural heritage:

“...the preservation of this pastoral valley [Durham Valley] permits the public to experience themselves something of their cultural heritage. . . A pastoral valley such as we have here in Durham is an increasingly rare landscape example. School children seeing this Valley as it exists today will learn in ways that text books cannot convey what it was like to live and work with the land in times past. Yet, this is not a museum diorama. This is a living landscape which can never be recreated and which can still instill in the visitor an appreciation for his American heritage.” [Testimony before the Federal Power Commission in 1973]

Following his return visit in 1990, he wrote that the landscape of the Durham Valley reflected:

“...the harmonious ways in which the man-made elements – the farm buildings and related structures – blend with the present lively agricultural landscape of the area . . . [and] that we must recognize the need for the preservation of representative natural landscapes and I would regard the Durham Valley as an excellent example of the pastoral landscape at its best.”

The agricultural heritage of the Durham Valley dates to the mid 19th century. By 1845, over 27,000 acres (about 90 percent of the land area in the Town of Durham) were in agricultural production. Today, the rural working landscape of farmlands and grazing areas provides a distinct character for the Scenic Byway Corridor. Farming operations are valued by the community for their contributions to the Durham Valley’s scenic beauty, helping to attract tourists and contributing to the quality of life for residents. Agriculture is valued as a key economic sector with a direct positive impact on the community. Agricultural lands are also valued for their heritage, reflecting the history of settlement of the Durham Valley.

Large expanses of the Durham Valley are conducive to hay production and livestock grazing. Pastures and hay meadows interspersed with small areas of cropland make up large areas of agricultural lands within the Scenic Byway Corridor. Abundant water enhances the agricultural productivity, as well as

supports adjacent vegetation communities. The Durham Valley’s agricultural resources have been mapped using data from the Natural Resources Conservation Service. The *Agricultural Resources* figure illustrates areas by their potential levels of productivity and includes prime farmland, prime farmland if drained, and farmland of statewide importance.

Productive agricultural land accounts for less than 20 percent of the Durham Valley’s total land area, but contributes disproportionately to its heritage and scenic quality. These lands are generally located along the Scenic Byway in highly visible areas, making them significant contributors to the cultural heritage and the pastoral views along the Scenic Byway. However, the Durham Valley’s relatively small amount of agricultural land in current production, along with the region’s close proximity to New York City and its appeal due to its scenery, make these farmlands particularly vulnerable to development.

The Town of Durham’s Comprehensive Plan planning process clearly identified that residents feel the community’s very identity is threatened by the loss of the economic viability of agriculture and tourism, outside development pressures driven by growth in the Hudson Valley, and the expansion of second home developments.



Conflicts between development and agricultural lands exist in some areas. As part of a survey conducted by Durham Agriculture Community Partnership, 25 percent of the respondents (i.e., ranchers and farmers) noted that neighbors objected to agricultural activities. This finding generally centered around new residents who are not tolerant of the dust, noise, and smells of productive agricultural lands.

Local ranchers and farmers recognize the value of their lands to the economic viability of the Durham Valley, as well as for their development potential. Because of this, they formed the Durham Agriculture Community Partnership and have been working collaboratively with state and county agencies and regional experts. Together, they are identifying issues and proposing solutions to minimize conflicts, protect important agricultural lands for their open space value, and provide ranchers and farmers with viable economic options that allow them to continue sustainable production.

Issues and Opportunities - Agricultural

The Durham Valley's scenic beauty, temperate climate, and affordability make it an attractive place for development and growth.

- The Durham Valley is experiencing moderate growth, resulting in new development and patterns of development that may impact its scenic, natural, agricultural, and historic qualities. For example, new growth and smaller development patterns such as small lots located along major travel routes are already beginning to impact the significant scenic views adjacent to or visible from the Scenic Byway.
- According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the Town of Durham has grown by 3.7 percent since 2000 (contrasted with a Greene County rate of 2.2 percent and a New York State rate of 1.7 percent). The Town of Durham's population is currently about 2,690 based on the July 2007 estimate.

- Most new growth adds a financial strain on the Town of Durham and Greene County in providing public services. Most of this growth is scattered residential development, frequently on small lots with little or no clustering to preserve open space, which is changing the Durham Valley's rural and scenic character.
- Only one percent of the Town of Durham is public land. Almost all lands adjacent to the Scenic Byway are privately owned, much of which is productive agricultural land. Farming is valued for its historic role, contribution to the local economy, and function in maintaining the Durham Valley's authentic rural character, but it is also endangered by development. Farmlands may indeed be more financially valuable as development property than for farming income.

Management Actions - Agricultural

Promote the protection of important agricultural lands that contribute to the Scenic Byway Corridor by using tools that provide an economic benefit to the landowner.

- a. Identify agricultural resources that also hold important heritage value such as important historic structures, sites, or land uses.
- b. Actively participate in the Durham Agriculture Community Partnership to support its work in protecting important agricultural lands as working landscapes.
- c. Partner with land trust organizations to promote conservation tools (i.e., conservation easements and land acquisition) that protect significant private lands and provide a benefit to the owner. Assist with support letters, grant funding, and education of landowners concerning benefits and constraints of these approaches.
- d. Support the preservation of important lands through services such as grant writing, education, and collaboration.

Cultural and Historic Qualities

The Durham Valley is a unique landscape and its distinct natural setting provides the basis for its heritage. The history of the land from early occupation by indigenous people to milling, iron works, tanning, and agriculture, and onward to today's recreation and tourism has left a variety of cultural, historic, and archaeological resources. These vestiges of the past are the physical remnants that assist in telling the Durham Valley's story of evolution from early Native American habitation to today's diverse rural community with an economic base that includes ranching and farming, as well as tourism and recreation.

This section presents an overview of the cultural and historic qualities that characterize the Durham Valley. A brief history of the Durham Valley is followed by a description of historic preservation activities that have enriched the area since the 1980s and a summary of existing resources. The *Historic Resources* figure highlights a number of the unique attributes in the Durham Valley.



History

Evidence points to the presence of Paleo-Indians in the Catskill region approximately 10,000 years ago, after the glaciers had receded and the climate was beginning to warm. A flint quarry found on