

**Quinebaug and Shetucket  
Rivers Valley  
National Heritage Corridor**  
In the State of Connecticut

*Vision to Reality: A Management Plan*

August, 1997

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**Quinebaug and Shetucket Rivers Valley National Heritage Corridor  
Advisory Council**

August, 1997

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**of the**

**Quinebaug and Shetucket Rivers Valley National Heritage Corridor  
Advisory Council (Public Act 95-180)**

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The major contributor to this plan has been Joseph E. Hickey, Jr., DEP State Parks Planner. He has long been a part of the grassroots efforts to gain federal designation for the Quinebaug and Shetucket Rivers Valley. In *Initial Cultural Heritage and Corridor Management Plan* (January 1996), Mr. Hickey assembled, with the assistance of regional planners, a significant body of documentation and recommendations for Quinebaug-Shetucket

Heritage Corridor, Inc. It has been a substantial foundation for the work of the Advisory Council.



## **I. Introduction**

### **A. What is the Quinebaug and Shetucket Rivers Valley National Heritage Corridor?**

The Quinebaug and Shetucket Rivers Valley National Heritage Corridor is a 25-town area of eastern Connecticut. The Corridor is located between the Massachusetts border to the north and Norwich to the south, the Rhode Island border to the east and Coventry to the west. It was designated as a “national heritage corridor” in 1994 when the U.S. Congress passed and the President signed Public Act 103-449. The Heritage Corridor/Areas program is an innovative approach to encourage grassroots efforts to preserve and restore significant historic and natural assets, to foster compatible economic development and redevelopment, tourism development and historic, recreational and environmental enhancement. Recognizing the limited availability of federal monies, the primary role of the federal government is to provide technical assistance and limited interpretation. Although “national heritage corridors” have status within the National Park Service, the federal government does not own or manage the designated area.

The official name of the designated national heritage area is the Quinebaug and Shetucket Rivers Valley National Heritage Corridor, referred to as “the Corridor” in the rest of this document. Public Act 103-449, hereafter noted as “the federal enabling legislation,” was passed by the 103d Congress as “an act to establish the Quinebaug and Shetucket Rivers Valley

National Heritage Corridor in the State of Connecticut.” Subsequently, the Connecticut General Assembly passed Public Act No. 95-170, hereafter referred to as the “state enabling legislation,” to establish the Advisory Council to prepare a management plan for the Corridor.

### **B. Why does this area of Connecticut merit such designation?**

The history of eastern Connecticut is a microcosm of the history of the nation, from the Native Americans and European settlement through its frontier days, the industrial revolution, and the many changes the 20<sup>th</sup> century has brought. When compared with many other areas of the country, much of both the built and natural historic landscape is still intact. There is also great potential for outdoor recreation, on waterways and greenways or trails, and other activities for visitors and residents, alike. The Corridor has been called “the Last Green Valley” in the sprawling megalopolis between Boston and Washington, D.C., essentially, the northeast’s “central park.”

### **C. How did the designation occur?**

In 1988, Congressman Sam Gedge (2d district) had found that Connecticut ranked last among 50 states in the amount of federally protected park and open space lands within its borders and lags far behind other northeastern states in the amount of land set aside for public recreation. That year a grassroots committee from the Quinebaug Rivers Association, Inc. worked for designation with Connecticut’s federal delegation, and the State of Connecticut. The National Park

Service provided technical assistance in studying the 25- town area's potential for designation as a heritage corridor, and funds/technical assistance for a number of projects to raise the awareness of the natural, historic and cultural assets of the area: the annual Walking Weekend – guided walks of historic sites and natural beauty; greenways mapping project which delineated the possibilities in each town for walking or multi-use trails and wildlife corridors; a state-wide conference on greenway development; an inventory of historic sites; publication of three brochures – guide to waterways, the greenways vision and a driving tour of historic textile industry sites. Many local, regional and state agencies, businesses and private citizens expressed an overwhelming desire to work cooperatively to preserve and enhance the region's resources and accomplish better planning for the future. In 1991, the Heritage Corridor Committee, now a committee of the Northeast Connecticut Council of Governments, presents draft legislation to Congressman Gedjenson who begins the lengthy process of congressional approval of the corridor designation. The grassroots effort culminated in Public Act 103-449, federal enabling legislation, being introduced and passed by Congress in 1994, and signed by President Clinton. The Quinebaug and Shetucket Rivers Valley National Heritage Corridor become only one of four with such designation in the country.

#### **D. What is Quinebaug-Shetucket Heritage Corridor, Inc.?**

The original grassroots committee that worked for Heritage Corridor designation incorporated in 1995 as a nonprofit organization. In March of 1996, Governor Rowland designated the Quinebaug-Shetucket Heritage Corridor, Inc. (QSHC, Inc.)

as the “suitable administering organization” to manage projects and funds from the federal legislation. The Quinebaug-Shetucket Heritage Corridor, Inc. has no regulatory authority. Its mission is to assist in the development and implementation of integrated cultural, historical, and recreational land resource management programs that will retain, enhance, and interpret the significant features of the Corridor. QSHC, Inc. will be the administrative body for implementation of the Management Plan.

#### **E. What is the Quinebaug and Shetucket Rivers Valley National Heritage Corridor Advisory Council?**

Federal enabling legislation, Public Act 103-449, specified that “the Governor of the State of Connecticut is encouraged to develop a cultural Heritage and Corridor Management Plan.” Pursuant to that, the General Assembly enacted Public Act 95-180, establishing the Quinebaug and Shetucket Rivers National Heritage Corridor Advisory Council to prepare the Cultural Heritage and Corridor Management Plan described in section 105 of the federal enabling legislation. The Advisory Council was named and convened in January of 1997. The Council's composition is outlined by state enabling legislation and includes local officials, regional planning agencies, tourism districts, the State Departments of Environmental Protection, Economic and Community Development, the Connecticut Historical Commission, and residents. Although the Advisory Council will be dissolved at the end of its work, some of its members will become ex-officio members of the QSHC Inc., the designated administrative body.



## **F. What is the purpose of the Management Plan?**

The Management Plan is the Advisory Council's vision for the future of the Quinebaug and Shetucket Rivers Valley National Heritage Corridor, reflecting the many private and public interests. It addresses key components outlined in the federal designation, and considers existing federal, state and local plans. The purpose of the Management Plan is to coordinate those individual plans and interests to present a comprehensive vision that can be implemented through existing and future resources and projects.

## **II. "The Last Green Valley" – A Brief History**

The region's history and significance begins with Native Americans. It was largely a frontier zone between tribes, the Pequots and their Mohegan cousins found to the south in the Norwich area and the Nipmucs at the northern end of the Corridor, notably in Woodstock. European settlement began in 1659 in Norwich, following a mutually advantageous alliance with the neighboring Mohegan tribe. By the early 1700s the entire region became settled by people from Massachusetts and by overflow from older Connecticut towns. Thus, it became an important frontier zone in Southern New England.

As the eighteenth century progressed, the significance of this frontier zone character increased. Its inhabitants were freer to escape the strict social controls of the older Puritan settlements

and were also more exposed to the more liberal and religiously separatist influences of the adjacent Rhode Island Colony.

Thus, is played a key role in the evolution of Puritan into Yankee and became a center of fiscal, religious, and finally political radicalism opposing the Connecticut Colony's ruling class and the established church. Indeed Connecticut was the only American Colony where the frontier could seize control of the colonial government, in 1769.

The spirit of radicalism was seem in Connecticut's leading role in the American Revolution, with Lebanon's John Trumbull the only Colonial Governor supporting the Revolution and Lebanon's William Williams and Scotland's Samuel Huntington signers of the Declaration of Independence. The region also produced notable military leaders including Israel Putnam and Benedict Arnold and heroes such as Nathan Hale. In addition, Connecticut became known as the "Provisions State," thanks to the logistical skill of Governor Trumbull in supplying the Colonial Army with food and equipment.

Independence brought political freedom, but economic necessity forced two major changes in the traditional agricultural economy: out migration to new areas such as the Western Reserve in Ohio and the beginnings of the Industrial Revolution. Industrialization started on a small scale, with water powered textile structures on lesser streams and as a spillover from the adjoining Blackstone Valley. However, the latter half of the nineteenth century saw the construction of the great mills that characterize the valley. Staffed by many

immigrants from Europe and Canada, these factories were the region's prime economic engine.

However, the twentieth century brought steady declines of the textile industry in Eastern Connecticut, leaving many formerly busy mills empty or only marginally used. Thus, the region entered a long period of economic recession and the need to develop a more diversified economy, a condition that brings us to the present day.

### III. The Natural Setting

[From the National Park Service's *A Study of the Quinebaug-Shetucket Region of Connecticut*, 1993, pp. 26-31.]

Geologically, the Quinebaug and Shetucket Rivers Valley National Heritage Corridor consists of the southern edge of the eastern upland of New England, showing the effects of glaciation in its landscape mix of rock outcrop, wetland, and pockets of rich soil. Geological upheaval and glacial actions have left northeastern Connecticut with distinctive hills, broken only by the broad troughs of the Quinebaug and Shetucket River valleys. The region's river systems are its primary natural assets. Their vitality and green corridors support human, plant and wildlife communities, provide opportunities for study and recreation, and reflect the overall health of the environment. The rolling hills indicative of the terrain in the Corridor, punctuated by gentle valleys, contribute to the pleasant rural nature of the place. It has long been considered a

picturesque area, particularly during the height of autumn color.

Most of the forested areas are reclaimed from previously cleared farmland and are composed of oak, hickory, hemlock and white pine. Blueberry and mountain laurel inhabit the areas at the edges of the woodlands and wildflowers such as wood lily, lady's slipper, sweet fern and partridge berry cover the forest floor. There are, however, old growth forests and rare biological habitats associated with pine barrens and Atlantic white cedar and black spruce. Open agricultural lands still remain, with field flowers like Joe-Pye weed, dock and goldenrod.

The area retains a degree of wildness that provides a great variety of animal habitats within a small geographic area. Commonly seen mammals include the white-tailed deer, eastern coyote, red fox, otter, beaver, porcupine, rabbit and opossum. Less commonly seen and considered a rare mammal is the southern bog lemming, which has been recorded in the region's white cedar swamps. Scotland Dam along the Shetucket is a reported site for wintering bald eagles, and fisher cats have been captured from other states and released in northeastern Connecticut to establish a wild population. New England is home or traveling station to well over 400 species of birds, many of which are seen in the Corridor. The Corridor has a rural nature and state holdings that have kept extensive tracts of habitat intact, and has the potential for supporting higher populations of rare field and forest birds. The Quinebaug and Shetucket Rivers are among the state's five important large trout streams.



## IV. Vision Statement and Goal

### A. Vision Statement:

**The Quinebaug and Shetucket Rivers Valley National Heritage Corridor will preserve its natural, historic and cultural assets while its residents enjoy a quality of life based on a strong, healthy economy compatible with its assets. This will be accomplished through local, regional and state cooperation, and partnerships with businesses, organizations and residents. Town government will play the pivotal role, as land use decisions will remain, as they historically have been, at the local level.**

### B. Administration

**Goal:** Quinebaug-Shetucket Heritage Corridor, Inc. (QSHC), the nonprofit that evolved from the original grassroots efforts is best suited to act as the permanent administrative body for the Corridor and should be so recognized and designated. QSHC should amend its bylaws to include the following representation on its board as ex-officio, nonvoting members:

CT Department of Environmental Protection  
CT Department of Economic and Community  
Development  
CT Department of Agriculture  
CT Historical Commission  
Windham Regional Planning Agency or its successor

Southeastern CT Council of Governments  
Northeastern CT Council of Governments  
Chamber of Commerce representative

### C. Land Use

**Vision:** Land use measures will protect key landscape elements that make the region unique and attractive.

#### Goals:

1. Protect traditional New England villages, often labeled “hill towns” or “colonial villages.”
2. Protect and enhance historic industrial villages.
3. Redevelop and promote “downtown” business areas.
4. Encourage adaptive reuses of historic industrial structures, which sustain economic viability.
5. Promote presentation of other historically significant structures and sites.
6. Protect and enhance river corridors through redevelopment of urban/village areas and protection in forest/farm areas.
7. Protect scenic highway corridors and promote the establishment/design of scenic roads by towns.
8. Encourage new subdivision roads to be consistent in proportion and layout with existing town roads.
9. Encourage forest land and farmland retention.
10. Reduce the visual impact of earth removal operations, especially along scenic highway and river corridors.
11. Limit strip commercial development with its negative visual landscape impact and economic impact on existing urban and village centers.

12. Minimize the visual impact of salvage operations.
13. Minimize the visual impact of solid waste operations.

#### **D. Economic Development**

**Vision:** Economic vitality will build both on the region's past and future possibilities.

##### **Goals:**

1. Improve the image (especially self-image) of the region through a positive, self-help approach.
2. Improve the visual appearance of communities through "Main Street" and other available programs
3. Develop public-private partnerships on a regional and local basis.
4. Seek reuse, as feasible, of old industrial structures with their dominating visual and psychological impact within communities.
5. Develop well-planned industrial parks, involving inter-town cooperation where appropriate.
6. Use enterprise zones to foster economic growth.
7. Develop sustainable agricultural and forest products economy.

#### **E. Tourism**

**Vision:** Tourism will be cultivated as a fundamental part of the Corridor's future economic development.

##### **Goals:**

1. Enhance the region's tourism potential, capitalizing on its proximity to population centers and largely unspoiled countryside.
2. Develop and improve tourism attractions and events consistent with the character of the Corridor.
3. Develop linkages between attractions within the region and especially with major attractions in neighboring regions.
4. Develop support facilities to service visitors.
5. Develop a unified signage program, accompanied by visitor information centers.
6. Participate in the region's tourism implementation plans.
7. Support the development of agri-tourism.
8. Support the promotion of fine arts, crafts and performing arts as tourist attractions.
9. Enhance and improve state and local park systems.
10. Develop, improve and protect trail-based recreational opportunities and linkages. A special emphasis should be placed on former rail bed trails, the Blue Blaze Trails and other trails that provide inter-town linkages.

#### **F. Agriculture**

**Vision:** Agriculture will be preserved because of its economic importance, as well as its symbolic and aesthetic significance in forming the rural landscape.

##### **Goals:**

1. Protect remaining traditional farming enterprises in the Corridor.

2. Develop specialized land-based agricultural activities, such as truck farms, nursery and turf farming, greenhouses, and other specialized operations.
3. Support the continuation of PA 490 that reduces property tax burden on farms, forests and open spaces.
4. Support the state's farmland preservation program.
5. Encourage creative agricultural land use through open space preservation plans, transfer of development rights programs, and other models.
6. Develop cooperative marketing possibilities and local markets for agricultural products.
7. Support education in agricultural technology, equipment and business management.
8. Promote regional agricultural events to develop awareness of the role of farms in the Corridor, such as fairs, farm markets, and farm tours.
9. Encourage cooperative town planning that acknowledges shared agricultural resources.

### **G. Recreation**

**Vision:** Outdoor recreational opportunities will be promoted, improved and expanded.

#### **Goals:**

1. Pursue active land acquisition programs, emphasizing key inholding in existing management areas and access to streams and water bodies.
2. Develop and improve recreational facilities with regional and local partners.

3. Encourage the State of Connecticut to maintain, improve, expand and develop state parks and forests.
4. Complete Connecticut's "Clean Water Program" to improve the recreational suitability of the region's streams.
5. Develop, improve and protect trail-based recreational opportunities and linkages. A special emphasis should be placed on the former rail bed trails, the Blue Blaze Trails, and other trails that provide inter-town linkages.
6. Promote awareness of recreational opportunities.
7. Encourage river access.
8. Encourage sound stewardship of land through education.
9. Encourage cooperative town planning that acknowledges shared recreational resources.

### **H. Historic and Cultural Resources**

**Vision:** Historic and cultural assets will be preserved and promoted.

#### **Goals:**

1. Develop staffed visitor centers at gateways to the National Heritage Corridor.
2. Recognize that natural history is the fundamental "history" to interpret.
3. Provide assistance to local museums and historic houses to expand and improve their role in the Corridor's interpretive program
4. Produce a unified graphic system to develop a corridor image and link corridor attractions.
5. Develop driving tours on scenic corridor highways

6. Encourage scholarly research by the Corridor's higher education institutions to portray and interpret the corridor's historic significance.
7. Encourage the development of school curricula about the history of the Corridor.
8. Encourage sound stewardship of historic and cultural assets through education.
9. Encourage cooperative town planning that acknowledges shared historic and cultural resources.

## I. Natural Resources

**Vision:** Natural resources will be protected and restored for future generations.

### Goals:

1. Protect and retain river corridors, farm and forest land.
2. Encourage sound stewardship of forest land through existing educational programs.
3. Encourage appropriate conservation/protection strategies for endangered, threatened or locally significant species and habitats.
4. Complete ongoing water pollution abatement programs.
5. Encourage nonpoint source pollution abatement through programs like NEMO/Uconn Cooperative Extension Program.
6. Promote the reintroduction of endangered and threatened species, such as fish that migrate from salt to fresh water.
7. Promote natural resource and recreation based tourism.
8. Encourage cooperative town planning that acknowledges shared natural resources.

9. Encourage establishment of multipurpose greenways, unfragmented wildlife corridors, trails, and sound management of forests.
10. Promote understanding of the value of our natural resources.
11. Support the continuation of PA 490 that reduces property tax burden on farms, forests and open spaces.

## V. Detailed Strategies

### A. Land Use

Although the Corridor includes the entire area of twenty-five towns, the land use vision is to protect those key landscape features that make the region unique or attractive to residents and tourists alike, and to minimize those elements that have a visually or environmentally degrading impact. Thus, emphasis necessarily must be placed on landscape that is significant, identifiable and amenable to be protected, enhanced, or controlled through available programs and management techniques. Key examples include:

#### 1. Traditional New England Villages

Often labeled "Hill Towns" or Colonial Villages." With their white churches and old homes often clustered around a green, these villages within towns are popularly perceived as a key symbol of the New England landscape. Appropriate protection tools include historic districts, development control in areas

abutting them, and zoning and/or acquisition.<sup>1</sup> Examples meriting such action include the following villages:

N. Woodstock	Norwichtown
E. Woodstock	Scotland
W. Woodstock	Hampton
Woodstock	Chaplin
Pomfret	Windham Center
Brooklyn	Lebanon
Canterbury	Mansfield Center
Thompson Hill	Putnam Heights
Sterling Hill	Westford

## 2. Industrial Villages

Popularly called “mill villages,” and usually grouped around an old mill that was the economic reason d’etre of the community, these villages often had a well laid-out development plan with similar architecture to provide a further unifying influence. In addition to historic district establishment, a number of other actions may be necessary including rehabilitation, as seen at lower and upper Quebec villages in East Brooklyn and at “Three Rows” in North Grosvenordale; financing programs to encourage improvement of individual properties; selective landscaping and beautification; zoning controls to exclude incompatible uses or structures; and design

recommendations to maintain village character. Protection of visual integrity through controls on development at the periphery of villages should be encouraged through zoning and/or selective acquisition of rights to land as with traditional New England villages above. Examples of planned industrial communities include:

Willimantic  
Taftville (Norwich)  
N. Grosvenordale (Thompson)  
Greenville (Norwich)  
Lower Quebec Village (E. Brooklyn)  
Rogers (Killingly)  
Wauregan (Plainfield)  
Yantic (Norwich)  
Almyville (Plainfield)  
Baltic (Sprague)  
Sterling  
Attawaugan (Killingly)  
Eagleville (Mansfield)

Also, other mill villages with a less structured yet an attractive physical layout can be seen at South Coventry, Mansfield Hollow, South Windham, East Killingly, Mansfield Depot, Gurleyville, and the Falls neighborhood in Norwich.



### 3. Downtown Business Areas

These areas have served historically as the region's urban centers. Stabilization and revitalization are the main objectives, following the National Trust for Historic Preservation's "Main Street" Program. Financing programs to encourage individual improvements, coupled with beautification and infrastructure improvements, including parking, encouragement of preservation and new construction appropriate to context of setting, and zoning to discourage urban sprawl should be utilized. Examples include:

Norwich	Central Village
Willimantic	Moosup
Putnam	Jewett City
Danielson	Plainfield Village

### 4. Historic Industrial Structures

The old factories found along the region's rivers are historically, architecturally and often scenically significant. Usually the centerpiece of the mill villages discussed in #2 above, these structures have often fallen into disuse or are only marginally used as for storage. With their multistory character, these old mills are often considered unsuitable facilities for modern industrial operations. There is a critical need to find adaptive reuse options that can cause them to be effectively recycled when economically feasible, rather than lost to

decay or fire. Several success stories involve the Falls Mill (Housing) in Norwich and the North Grosvenordale Mill (industrial/mixed uses), with the planned industrial redevelopment of the former American Thread complex in Willimantic another positive indicator. Many other mill structures need similar attention including the magnificent and largely vacant Ponemah Mills in Taftville, the deteriorated Baltic Mill in Sprague, Rhodes Mill in Putnam, and the rather derelict Greenville industrial complex in Norwich. Tools to utilize could include the financial advantages offered by the recently expanded enterprise corridor zone designation of eight Corridor communities, and existing zones in Norwich and Willimantic. Active marketing could be employed to solicit new uses such as housing, restaurants, inns, antique stores, art and craft complexes, entertainment centers, etc.

### 5. Other Historic Assets

The Quinebaug and Shetucket Rivers Valley National Heritage Corridor with its long and active History is fortunate in possessing a large number of historically significant surviving sites and groupings of structures. Within the region are presently ninety-eight designated National Register of Historic Places, twenty-six of which are entire districts, four of which are National Historic Landmarks. These include the homes of William William's in Lebanon and Samuel Huntington in Scotland, signers of the Declaration of Independence,

and the home and “War Office” of Revolutionary War fame of Governor Jonathan Trumbull in Lebanon. In addition, there are some ten historic districts and historic properties established under state statute. Also seen are six of the oldest remaining pre-1800 churches in New England: the Churches of Christ in Hampton, Westminster, and Abington; the Unitarian and Old Trinity Episcopal Churches in Brooklyn; and the Sterling Hill Baptist Church in Sterling.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, a regional inventory supported by a National Park Service grant developed a list of 405 sites of historic note.

Although some of these sites have already been protected, many are not. Acquisition and/or active management as museums or historic monuments will be fiscally limited to a minority of key sites. Other techniques must be utilized, such as incorporation into each town’s plan of development so that zoning and establishment of historic districts or landmarks can provide some degree of protection. In other areas, revolving funds have been established to preserve historic buildings. Solicitation of donations or dedication by voluntary action of landowners can be useful with sites without structures, while adaptive reuse, perhaps combined with façade easements, is a suggested approach with important structures.

## 6. River Corridors

### *a. Village/City Segments*

The goal in developed areas primarily is to upgrade the visual character of the river edge and to provide public access where feasible or appropriate, the result being to improve the community’s visual image. Acquisition and development will be needed to accomplish this goal in many cases, although privately funded property improvements also should be encouraged. Ongoing efforts in Willimantic, Norwich, North Grosvenordale, and Danielson are examples of what can be accomplished, as are Putnam’s riverside parks developed through urban renewal following the 1955 flood. In addition to the planned extension of the riverfront parts enumerated above, other opportunities should be explored. One such proposal is the Mill Brook project in South Coventry. Other possibilities include Almyville, Sterling, Baltic and the former Dawley Lumberyard site in Norwich.

### *b. Natural segments (those reaches of rivers outside developed areas and characterized by forested or agricultural land)*

Regulation can include existing inland wetland controls that protect floodplain areas, perhaps also including provision of a buffer belt. Sample buffer guidelines could include adjoining area with a +15% slope, maintenance of a 50 foot vegetated belt where presently existing, no septic fields within

100 feet of inland wetland, a minimum 100 foot river frontage for new lots, etc. Selective acquisition to protect scenic areas or where public access is deemed appropriate also should be utilized. Primary emphasis must be placed on the two major streams in the region, the Quinebaug and Shetucket rivers. In addition, a large number of attractive secondary streams also deserve attention, including the Willimantic, Fenton, Natchaug, Mt. Hope, French, Five Mile, Yantic, Pachaug, and Moosup Rivers plus the two Little rivers and some major brooks such as Bigelow Brook.

### 7. Scenic Highway Corridors

A critical preservation objective will be to maintain the scenic character of key highway corridors. To date several road segments in the region have been designated as state scenic highways, notably Route 169 north of Newent (also a National Scenic Byway) and much of Route 49. Other roads such as Route 97 and Route 14 in particular also deserve consideration. However, the scenic road designation provides protection only to the DOT-owned right-of-way, leaving abutting corridor lands vulnerable to visually degrading impacts. Because of this vulnerability and susceptibility to roadside strip development, corridor management plans will be needed at least on selected roads with scenic significance. Such a plan should emerge from the ongoing DOT-sponsored Scenic Byway Study that has selected Route 169 as one of two

state scenic highways for which a pilot corridor management plan has been prepared. Towns should also be encouraged to designate town scenic roads to maintain dirt pavements, stone walls and large trees. These roads become recreational assets for walkers and bikers.

While recognizing the necessity not to threaten landowners' equity in their property, special emphasis should be given to maintaining the open, pastoral views seen from these roads. Methods to achieve this can include cluster development, creative land development placing home sites within the wooded portions of property, and large lot zoning. Also focusing of the state's Farmland Preservation Program (PDR) on properties along selected highways is recommended.

### **B. Economic Development**

There is need for economic regeneration. With the departure of the textile industry that had been the backbone of the regional economy, the Corridor region fell into a prolonged recession. The need for jobs and personal income must receive equal attention with the needs for maintaining the special character of the Corridor. The challenge will be to achieve a balance between economic growth and preservation – specifically, to foster economic activity consonant with, and indeed, enhancing the region's rich heritage and natural resources.

An economic development strategy for the region must build both upon its past and its possible future. As an old industrial region, the Quinebaug-Shetucket area contains many of the problems as well as the assets of an area with a history. Evidence of abandonment and deterioration can be seen, as well as the social problems typical of regions with historically high unemployment rates and relatively low levels of income. The result is a problem of image, both in terms of outside impression of the region and of local perception of itself.

The issue then is to improve the image and especially the self-image, as was recognized as a necessary precursor to the regeneration of Lowell, Massachusetts. Residents need to be proud of their home area and nonresidents must begin to recognize the value and potential that the region possesses. To achieve this change in perception, a positive, self-help approach must replace a passive or status quo attitude at the community level. Tomorrow can be better than yesterday, as the dramatic physical transformation of once-depressed North Grosvenordale demonstrates.

Visual appearance is not the sole criterion to consider, but it is a very important one. Improving the face presented by a community can restore pride in residents and increase the area's appeal to visitors and potential investors alike. Therefore, "Main Street" and available grant-in-aid programs to foster community stabilization and renewal should be pursued aggressively.

Public-private partnerships at the local and regional level will be needed to provide the economy with the jobs and income

needed by residents. Retaining existing companies is a first step, especially desirable in view of the continuing hemorrhage of defense related employment in southeastern Connecticut.

Related to community image and appearance as discussed above, a major initiative must be to find a reuse for the region's many old mills. Because these industrial structures usually are located within communities where they dominate their surroundings visually, it is essential that they be transformed from symbols of decay and lost glory to become vibrant centers of activity. The private sector industrial redevelopment of the North Grosvenordale mill and the reuse for housing of the Falls Mill in Norwich demonstrate what can be done. Public investment as seen with the Windham Mills project also may be appropriate in selected cases. A strategy for others may involve up-front public seed money investment to induce private sector investment. Such partnership efforts may be the best approach to obtain the greatest return from limited public money.

The enterprise corridors/zones also can be an advantage in pursuing economic growth compatible with maintaining the towns' special character. Indeed the tax advantages available to companies locating within enterprise corridors/zones may encourage the reuse of the old industrial structures already discussed.

### 1. Tourism

In particular, tourism must be considered an important element in the region's economic development strategy.

Tourism has been recognized as one of the six growth sectors in Connecticut's economy. However, evaluation of the region's tourism strengths and weaknesses is needed to determine an appropriate tourism development strategy. Location is a major asset, with Greater Hartford, central Massachusetts and all of Rhode Island lying within a 50-mile radius. A 125-mile radius includes all of southern New England and the Hudson Valley, including New York City and Albany. Thus, the Quinebaug-Shetucket's potential market area includes a number of major population centers that lie in comfortable range for day and weekend trips. Another asset is the largely unspoiled countryside of fields and forests, with many scenic and historic points of interest. These will be of particular interest to city dwellers that will seek out area retaining regional character and charm.

The lack of a "major attraction" within the region has been its main attraction, appealing to those looking for "a change of place and place (slogan of the Northeast Connecticut Visitors District). However, more can be done to generate substantial visitation and resultant economic impact. Priority must be given to strengthening existing attractions, such as the Air Line Trail with linkages to other trail systems, and the development of interesting and consonant attractions. It is important to develop linkages between attractions, to attain a critical mass to attract visitors. These linkages should be both within the region but also with neighboring regions that have major attractions.

Particularly significant could be links with the Mystic area, the Foxwoods Casino and Mohegan Sun complexes, and Old Sturbridge Village.

Related to tourist attraction facility development must parallel development of support facilities to service visitors. Although the region possesses an increasing number of inns and bed and breakfasts in particular, there remains a relative lack of facilities for tourists. The present fiscal impact of tourism is limited. For example, the 1995 study prepared for the Connecticut Department of Economic and Community Development indicated that the region's twenty-five towns generated only 5.7% of Connecticut's \$4.3 billion travel and tourism industry in 1993.<sup>3</sup>

Development of a unified signage program also is vital to assist the visitor and to promote linkages among regional attractions. Visitor information centers should accompany signage as discussed under INTERPRETATION below.

### **C. Agriculture**

Preservation of the region's agricultural base should be a priority, both because of its economic importance but also because of its symbolic and aesthetic significance in forming the rural landscape. (At least eight Bicentennial Farms are found within the Corridor.)

This visual image has been heavily dependent upon dairying with its mix of cropped land and pasture. Unfortunately, dairying as an industry has been in decline in Connecticut, causing a rapid decrease in the number of farms. Although the remaining farms are larger and presumably more efficient, the future prospects are questionable when financially hard-pressed farmers face the lure of better paid, less demanding employment plus the opportunity to sell their land to developers.

The survival of agriculture may require a shift to more specialized land-based activities such as truck farms, pick-your-own farms, nursery and turf farming, specialized operations such as the mushroom farm in Franklin, and more intensive, less pastoral type of dairying. However, to minimize the visual impact on the landscape, several policy recommendations are offered. First, existing state law, PA 490, reducing property tax burden on farms should be maintained intact. Secondly, the state's farmland preservation program, PDR, should be continued and indeed focused on the Corridor in which more than forty farms have already been protected through purchase of development rights. In addition to the national significance of the region, further justification for such concentration includes the health and survival of a local agricultural economy and the opportunity presented by land values that are low by Connecticut standards. Lastly, as mentioned under Scenic Highway Corridor protection above, creative land development should be utilized as recommended in *Dealing with Change in the Connecticut River Valley*.<sup>4</sup>

The basic principles of this approach are to use the land efficiently while protecting the landowner's equity in the land, clearly a critical concern to the average farmer. As demonstrated both in the Connecticut Valley and Pennsylvania, this technique can preserve prime agricultural land by concentrating development in less sensitive areas within property, and by selecting unfragmented farm and forestland to conserve. The large unfragmented forest tracts within the Corridor contribute to the valuable local wood products industry. The encouragement of well-planned forest management provides incentive for landowners to continue their stewardship and often provides a useful supplemental income for farmers.

#### **D. Recreation**

The Quinebaug-Shetucket Region contains substantial acreage of permanent open space available for recreational activity. The ten state parks and seven state forest found within or bordering the area contain more than 50,000 acres. Popular facilities include Hopeville Pond, Mashamoquet Brook, and Mansfield Hollow State Parks, as well as the Natchaug, Nipmunk and Pachaug State Forests. There are also nearly 10,000 acres in state wildlife management areas, the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers 2,100 acre West Thompson Flood Control Area, some eighteen public boat launch sites, and a number of state owned water bodies. Other significant open space holdings include the approximately 6,000 acre Yale Forest owned by Yale University, and several thousand acres of Nature Conservancy and local land trust properties. Thus, more than 70,000 acres of land and water are available for

public recreation and for maintaining the scenic character of the region. The area also supports summer camps for scouts and other seasonal visitors.

As one of the less developed portions of Connecticut, this region offers great opportunity for additional land preservation to help meet the State's goal of 300,000 acres of permanent open space. Particular emphasis should be given to acquisition to complete existing management areas and especially the purchase of key inholdings to prevent management problems and potential conflicts. In addition, opportunities to acquire land along streams or on water bodies or on water bodies should be pursued, as water is the focal point around which many forms of outdoor recreation tend to cluster. Furthermore, consideration should be given to acquisition of new areas such as Bull Hill, along the Woodstock-Thompson border, where sizeable acreage of wild land remains undeveloped and likely to remain undeveloped.

A second priority will be to reopen, develop, maintain and, where needed, to improve recreational facilities to provide a quality experience for park visitors, especially if the state park system is to be a significant element in the regional tourism promotion strategy. Many state parks and recreation areas receive heavy use and need updated facilities, especially those offering swimming and camping opportunities. Thus, a state investment strategy should be to provide the capital monies needed to accomplish this goal.

A third priority should be to complete the ongoing water pollution abatement program. Connecticut's "Clean Water

Program" has produced dramatic results in the last twenty-five years, cleansing such once seriously polluted streams as the Willimantic, Shetucket, and Quinebaug Rivers. As a result, the Region's waters now are largely rated Class B, considered safe for swimming. The one remaining exception is the French River, which also has experienced remarkable improvement. Although the new Dudley-Webster sewer plant has made a major difference, an EPA study indicated that achievement of Class B will require removal of contaminated sediments in the Perryville and North Grosvenordale Mill Ponds plus some low flow augmentation from a Corp of Engineers impoundment in Massachusetts.<sup>5</sup> Additional nutrient removal at certain sewer plants may also be desirable to help control weed and/or algae problems in impoundments on major regional streams.

Finally, the growing popularity of trail-based recreation warrants additional attention in recreational planning in the region. The "Rail-Trail" movement presents a major opportunity, converting former rail rights-of-way to non-motorized multiple use recreation trails. The Air Line State Park Trail in particular is significant, extending from Willimantic to the Massachusetts border with a gap only in Putnam. Linking with a similar state owned stretch in Massachusetts, this interstate trail has been designated as the Southern New England Trunkline National Recreation Trail. Another interstate trail opportunity involves the Moosup River State Park Trail that links with the Trestle Trail in Rhode Island. Linkages with both have been proposed as part of the Charter Oak Greenway, Connecticut's segment of the Boston to Washington East Coast Greenway concept, and with

bikeway plans being developed by the regional planning organizations. The present network of hiking trails such as the statewide Blue Blaze Trails should be protected, expanded and linked to other trail systems.

### **E. Interpretation of Historic and Cultural Resources**

The rich and cultural inheritance of the Quinebaug and Shetucket rivers Valley National Heritage Corridor contains elements of interest to the casual visitor and serious scholar alike. Therefore, a multifaceted interpretive program should be developed to address the needs and tastes of likely visitors.

A key feature will be staffed “Gateway” facilities that can provide a range of services including printed materials, answers to questions and restrooms. Such centers should be located along the major access points to the Corridor: in the north, near I-395 close to the Massachusetts border; in the south, near I-395 in the Norwich area; and a western location in the Coventry or Willimantic area. Examples of possible locations include:

#### 1. Western Entrance

The Windham Textile and History Museum has been proposed as the visitor center component of the Windham State Heritage Park, perhaps operated under contract with DEP. Another potential site might be in the town of Coventry, where an established municipal information center already exists.

#### 2. Southern Entrance

With the aid of a state grant, Norwich plans to develop a downtown museum as part of its heritage park. If this project proceeds as expected, the museum could well fill this function at the Norwich entrance to the Corridor.

#### 3. Northern Entrance

Currently there are no strong candidate facilities that could play this role. A Mobil gas station operated under concession on I-395 provides some travel information rather unsatisfactorily and DOT should seek greater cooperation from the concessionaire to improve this service. Also, the National Historic Landmark Roseland Cottage on Route 169 in Woodstock may be useful seasonally, as could the Connecticut Historical Commission Prudence Crandall House further south on Route 169, also a National Historic Landmark.

In the future, an easterly route between the Corridor and Rhode Island might be promoted and an additional interpretive center be placed in that location. Other important facilities will include the various local museums and historic houses, often operated by town based historical societies. Fortunately, many communities have active historic organizations, as seen with the Association of Northeastern Connecticut Historic Societies (ANECHS) which already functions on a regional basis.



Within the constraints posed by limited public monies, matching grants-in-aid to such organizations should be considered to assist them to improve their facilities and exhibits and thus to play a more active role in the corridor's interpretive program.

As stated earlier, a unified graphic system is needed to link the scattered assets of the region and to develop a Corridor image. This signage will both help educate and direct the visitor and play a significant interpretive role.

Related to signage is a proposal to develop driving tours. Route 169 and Route 49 have already been designated as State Scenic Highways and Route 169, a National Scenic Byway, was recognized by Scenic America as one of the ten most scenic highways in America. Other Corridor roads including Routes 207,89,198, 14,171, and 97 offer additional opportunities for the traveler to enjoy scenic drives.

After discussing the region's historical significance, its environmental character should be considered, and the degree to which it has maintained its visual integrity and historic landscape from the megalopolitan sprawl engulfing the East Coast and from other incompatible developments and environmental degradations.

## **F. Natural Resources**

As a protection for natural resources as well as open space preservation, the continuation of PA 490 should be supported. Public land trusts should be encouraged as a method of

retaining and managing natural resources. In order to protect wildlife habitats and river corridors, a suggested goal would be the achievement of no net loss of wetlands through development planning, with minimum intrusion or appropriate mitigation when intrusion can not be avoided. Sensitive areas of threatened flora and fauna should be protected through zoning regulations that present intrusion into these habitats.

Education through interpretation is a worthwhile goal, and one in consonant with tourism. Possible methods could include exhibits, brochures, and cooperative programs with Connecticut's Museum of Natural History, located in the Corridor.

## **VI. The Next Step**

### **A. Implementation**

Implementation of the vision of the Management Plan is the responsibility of the administrative body, QSHC, Inc. Therefore, it is the recommendation of the advisory Council that QSHC, Inc. develop an implementation plan, incorporating the vision and goals from the Management Plan and based on draft National Park Service guidelines for National Heritage Areas. Such a plan will be completed by March 1, 1998. Additionally, QSHC, Inc. should encourage the incorporation of the visions and goals of the Management Plan into the plans of regional agencies, DOT, DEP, DECD, and other state and local agencies.

## 1. Concerns

Twenty-five years ago, the Eastern Connecticut Resource Conservation and Development Project names this region “The Last Green Valley” in Megalopolis and so it remains in large part. Its gentle valleys and wooded uplands are punctuated by villages and it remains to a substantial degree a rural area. Agriculture remains a major element in the local economy and land use pattern, and contributes to the maintenance of a pleasant pastoral landscape. Development and rising land costs endanger the Corridor’s essence. The following concerns were found to be significant by the Advisory Council and are to be considered in the development of an Implementation Plan.

### *a. Water Quality*

The region’s rivers and streams are a major natural asset. The region contains many smaller upland rivers and brooks that have retained their original purity, visual appeal and recreational value.

Thanks to a major water pollution control program, rivers such as the Quinebaug, Willimantic, Shetucket and Moosup, once fouled from industrial waste and untreated sewage, have nearly been restored to a condition allowing water contact recreation. Plans are underway to correct the relatively few

remaining problems as on the French River. Those plans should be completed and future water quality should be protected.

### *b. Suburban Sprawl*

Suburbanization has begun to impact the region, especially from the overflow of population spreading outward from the Greater Hartford, the Norwich-New London area, and increasingly also from the Worcester region and even Greater Boston. Population projections for the next thirty years show the majority of the Corridor towns experiencing substantial growth. Development on roadway frontage threatens the character of the Corridor. It is imperative that the region’s population decide the type of future it desires and take a comprehensive approach in facing development issues to achieve it.

### *c. Earth Removal Operations*

The importance of sand and gravel excavations to the regional economy is recognized. However, buffering together with reclamation can reduce their visual impact significantly. Suggested techniques could involve maintaining a 50 foot vegetated buffer belt along designated watercourses; excavating below the water table in floodplain areas to form ponds, not badlands; and reclamation of upland areas through grading

and replanting.<sup>6</sup> Also, zoning controls should be utilized to protect vistas along designated scenic highways as discussed above.

*d. Strip Commercial Development*

The proliferation of strip commercial development along highways has the double negative impact of being a visual blight on the landscape and undercutting the economic vitality of existing urban or village centers whose restored health is a goal discussed previously. Town plans and associated zoning controls should be utilized to concentrate business development into attractive nodes at appropriate locations and especially to reinforce the existing commercial centers in downtown areas. Specifically, new business should be encouraged to locate in older existing buildings, many of which possess architectural or historic significance.

*e. Salvage Operations*

Such businesses perform a necessary function in our economy and need suitable locations, often with highway or rail access. However, siting is important and buffering should be utilized to minimize their visual impact. Also, relocation of visually prominent operations should be

considered where it could have a significant economic renewal or visual impact.

*f. Solid Waste Operations*

A common facility in every community until recently, landfill operations are being replaced by regional resource recovery plants that substantially reduce the amount of water requiring land disposal. Because of their visual impact, new facilities should not be located along scenic road corridors or along scenic river corridors. Screening should be utilized to improve the appearance of existing landfills and screening and appropriate landscaping to restore former landfill sites.

**B. Amendment**

Although the language of the federal enabling legislation establishing the Corridor is broad, future circumstances and/or issues may necessitate amending the Management Plan based on that legislation. A majority vote of the governing board of QSHC, Inc. may amend the Management Plan.

**C. Public Involvement**

QSHC, Inc. will review the Management Plan from time to time, encouraging public involvement in that process.

## VIII. Appendices

### A. Endnotes

1. Arendt, Randall. "Open Space Zoning: "What it is and How it Works" *Planning Commissioners Journal*, pp. 4-8. July-August 1992.
2. Sinnott, Edmund. *Meeting House and Church in Early New England*. McGraw, 1963.
3. *The Economic Impact of the Connecticut Travel and Tourism Industry 1992-93*. Department of Economic Development, 1995.
4. Yaro, Robert et al. *Dealing With Change in the Connecticut River Valley*. Lincoln Institute of Land Policy, 1988.
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6. *Simultaneous Excavation and Rehabilitation of Sand and Gravel Sites*. National Sand and Gravel Association, 1965.

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## C. Additional Source Materials

### 1. Studies, Surveys and Inventories

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### 2. Maps

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### 3. Articles

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### 4. Brochures

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