

Natural Habitats in Amenia

This is a very simplified introduction to habitats in Amenia and is based on work done in 1988 by Hudsonia in Dover Plains, which is very similar to Amenia in terms of topography and natural settings. A complete biodiversity survey of Amenia should be undertaken in the near future so that the Town has a baseline of its unique and important natural areas and the life within those areas.

Natural habitats in the context of an area that has been settled by Europeans since at least 1703 are determined largely by topography, stream drainage, bedrock type, bedrock structure, soils, micro-climates, and, of significant importance, land use history and human population centers.

There is very little land, if any, in Amenia that has escaped human influence. The landscape and natural features that define the Town today have been, and continue to be, in a constant state of change. The forests that cover much of Amenia were denuded during the iron mining period and early periods of agriculture replaced forest with fields. Fields have been replaced by forest as agriculture has diminished in recent years. Streams change their courses altering and enlarging flood plains and valleys carrying away soil in the process. Plant communities that appear stable and unchanging prove to be just temporary associations subject to fire, disease, and alien species. The only constant in the natural community is change.

Erik Kiviat of Hudsonia defined several significant habitats in the Harlem Valley in his 1988 study of the Town of Dover. The following discussion mostly derives from that study.

The two main natural areas in Amenia, defined by the topography, are mountain habitats and valley habitats.

Mountain Habitats consist of the following areas:

- Acidic bogs and swamps
- Intermittent woodland pools
- Ponds and lakes
- High-gradient streams and ravines
- Cliff, ledge, talus, slab, and crest
- Old growth forest
- Extensive forest

Valley Habitats consist of the following areas:

- Marble hills
- Fens
- Cattail marsh
- Potential Bog and Blanding's turtle habitat
- Intermittent pools
- Ponds and lakes
- Low-gradient streams and extensive floodplains
- Sand plains
- Forest
- Farmland

A discussion of all these areas is beyond the scope of this presentation. However, because of their importance, the following habitats will be discussed.

Forested Lands

According to the Town's Master Plan, about 9,000 acres of Amenia is covered with forest consisting of a mix of hardwood and coniferous species. Most of this forest is second or third growth and covers the highland and steep slope sections of Town including East Mountain, Bog Hollow, Rattlesnake Mountain, and the entire system of ridges that border the western edge of Town including Tower Hill, Deep Hollow, Butts Hollow, Turkey Hollow, and Cascade road. Because of the steep slopes that exist in all of these areas, development is sparse and scattered.

This extensive tract of forest although fragmented by roads, a railroad, farmland, and towns is a vital part of the watershed area within the Town and should be protected against both over development and over logging. It also is an irreplaceable scenic resource, prime recreation land, as well as valuable wildlife habitat.

Adopting a series of local laws that would regulate logging, protect watersheds, protect ridgelines, and preserve wildlife areas should protect forested lands. The Master Plan has specific recommendations for the protection of Amenia's forested lands.

The Master Plan has a very complete discussion and description of significant areas within Amenia and very detailed recommendations for protecting this resource. Policy makers and planners should consult it.



Fig. 1. Showing the effect of building on ridgeline.