

# 5.

# Natural & Historic Resources

**T**his chapter outlines policies and actions to protect and preserve the natural, historic and scenic resources that Irasburg residents value, in keeping with the town’s planning principles of respect for the environment, sound economics and regard for community values. In a 2016 community survey, residents gave priority to protecting historic structures (77 percent), promoting local agriculture (73 percent) and protecting the environment/ridgelines/steep slopes (69 percent). Irasburg’s strong connections to the town’s natural and historic resources shape its physical, economic and cultural identity. As Irasburg develops, this plan charts a path to conserving forests, agricultural land, wildlife habitat, hills and ridgelines, water sources, historic buildings, and scenic views to maintain the town’s essential character for future generations.

## Natural and Fragile Areas

The northeasternmost portion of Irasburg forms part of the Willoughby Falls Wildlife Management Area. The 610 acres of the WMA, including the 122 acres in Irasburg, are owned by the State of Vermont and managed by the Department of Forests, Parks, and Recreation. Meandering floodplain, wetlands, and beaver habitat characterize this area. It provides valuable habitat for muskrat, mink, otter, raccoon,

bobcat, coyote, fisher, red fox, weasel, bear, moose, catamount and white-tailed deer. Its primary attraction is the steelhead fishery. Each April, when trout season opens, anglers and wildlife lovers line the banks of Willoughby Falls in neighboring Orleans to watch migratory trout leaping up the falls.

Vermont’s Department of Fish and Wildlife manages a strip of riparian land adjacent to the Black River. This area allows the river to flood and flow in its natural state without damaging property or other investments.

Locally, the oxbow formed by the Black River just west of the village center is an area frequented by wildlife year round. It offers seasonal recreation activities and is a source of beauty and contemplation for residents. It is adjacent to a property conserved through an easement, offering long-term protection of this natural area.

### *In this Chapter:*

- *Natural and Fragile Areas*
- *Mountains, Hills and Ridgelines*
- *Working Landscape*
- *Wildlife*
- *Flood Hazard Areas*
- *Earth Extraction*
- *Historic Structures and Sites*
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Gazebo located in the historic Irasburg Common

There are two areas of threatened or endangered and rare species in Irasburg. A group of threatened or endangered species is found just west of Route 14 and east of the Back Coventry Road and a rare species area is identified southwest of the same area. A significant natural community is found just at the end of Gage Road, between Routes 14 and 58. All of these areas have different levels of state and federal protections because of their intrinsic natural value. This plan encourages property owners to treat these areas respectfully to preserve their viability.

### **Mountains, Hills and Ridgelines**

Because of their unique ecosystems, their sources of clean water, their defining role in the identity of the town, and the potential for significant visual and environmental impacts by development, the mountain, ridgelines and hilltops are considered intrinsic to the character of Irasburg and should be protected from future development. The area's distinctive topography makes maintaining the integrity of Irasburg's ridgelines especially important. The core of the town, including the central Common, is virtually enclosed on all sides by ridgelines.

Lowell Mountain, elevation 2,400 feet, is detached from the range of Lowell Mountains and lies almost entirely in the Town of Irasburg. Allen Hill, elevation 1,600 feet, was named for Ira Allen. The view from Burton Hill, elevation 1,500 feet, commands Kidder Hill, the Black River Valley, and Jay Peak. From Butternut Hill, elevation 1,400 feet, located north of Allen Hill, the view extends

north to Owl's Head in Quebec. Kidder Hill, elevation 1,800 feet, just west of Irasburg and north of Lowell Mountain, dominates the view from the Common.

All of these ridgelines are highly visible from the lower elevations and from other ridgelines, leaving the town particularly vulnerable to adverse impacts of ridgeline development. The ridgelines themselves afford access to a multitude of spectacular views, with three-quarters of the town seeing ridgelines from any one point. This asset is at the core of the community's identity and is critical to its long-term economic health and sustainability. Irasburg's ridgelines therefore must be treated as a whole, rather than as a series of viewsheds. Much of Lowell Mountain has been conserved. This plan

encourages other ridgeline property owners to consider their holdings as candidates for conservation, for example through the Vermont Land Trust or through current-use programs.

Mountainous areas have a key role in Irasburg's ecosystem: the trees provide clean air, soil stability, and water retention; unfragmented blocks of land provide for wildlife habitat and wildlife crossings; undeveloped forests, ridgelines and mountains provide an environment for low-intensity recreation; town headwaters that supply much of the drinking water have their sources here; and

the economic opportunity afforded Irasburg residents is invaluable. They make an irreplaceable contribution to Irasburg's natural and working landscape. As the climate warms, they will play a key role in Irasburg's resilience as a community. Property values and the town's economic future depend on preserving its identity as an iconic Vermont village.

*Property values and the town's economic future depend on preserving Irasburg's identity as an iconic Vermont village.*

Irasburg's mountains and ridgelines are steep. Most of the ridges that surround the town have a 20 percent or greater slope. Steep slopes are susceptible to erosion. The presence of headwaters on many of the mountains, especially Kidder Hill, increases the likelihood of erosion. Downstream impacts are not just the washing away of the hillside but increased sedimentation that ends up in rivers draining to Lake Memphremagog. Without trees and other vegetation to hold the soil in place, the risk of flooding increases. Potential impacts to groundwater, and thus the wells that provide Irasburg residents with drinking water, are grave. Parts of the existing road network along the Kidder Hill Ridge rank as having a moderate to high risk of erosion, based on data from the Vermont Natural Resources Atlas.

### ***Significant Views***

Significant views surround Irasburg both of and from every ridgeline. Specifically, significant views are:

- Lowell Mountain
- Allen Hill
- Burton Hill
- Kidder Hill
- Butternut Hill
- Round Hill

These ridgelines should be protected for the aesthetic characteristics Irasburg residents cherish and that provide the community with its distinctive identity. These areas are largely undeveloped and should stay that way. As discussed elsewhere in this Plan, appropriate uses for ridgelines include forestry operations, primitive hunting camps, and low-intensity recreation. This plan strongly encourages the preservation and protection from development of these significant, undisturbed and characteristic views. (See the "Aesthetics" section of Chapter 2, Land Use.)

### ***Scenic Roads***

There are six road sections that offer iconic views of Irasburg's scenery. Future development should

preserve and protect the views from these six roads. Protections include limiting developments that obstruct or degrade the views.

- Airport Road offers a 360-degree panorama of Irasburg, Brownington, Coventry, Newport and Canada.
- Burton Hill Road provides views of Lowell Mountain, Jay Peak, Kidder Ridge, Irasburg village and valley, and Mt. Washington.
- Kidder Ridge Road gives viewers a 180-degree view of Irasburg, Barton, Newport and Brownington. From some locations, Mt. Washington is visible on cloudless days.
- From Houston Road on Lowell Mountain, the panorama of Montgomery, Jay Peak and Newport Center is stunning.
- Alexander Lane provides vistas on all of Lowell Mountain as well as Newport, Derby, Holland and Irasburg, with views out to West Charleston.
- Back Coventry Road, which includes a covered bridge, offers a fine display from Tree Corners to Lowell Mountain and Kidder Ridge.

### ***Working Landscape***

Originally founded as an agricultural community, Irasburg is fortunate to retain agricultural and forest-products industries. Its abundant natural resources, historic settlement patterns and rural nature make it ideal for these operations. Irasburg's agrarian heritage continues to flourish in the rolling fields of today, creating a classic Northeast Kingdom visual landscape, surrounded by working forestland.

The landscape is at work in a variety of ways: its beauty contributes to tourism, its ecological function is critical, it provides recreational opportunities for visitors and residents alike, it is the source of inspiration for creative endeavors

such as photography and literature<sup>1</sup>, and it provides income and a way of life for citizens in the agricultural and forestry industries.

### **Agriculture**

Much of Irasburg's agricultural land lies on the valley floor, with scattered hilltop farms. Trends from the 2012 Agricultural Census indicate farms are becoming smaller in size, with more diversity in production. According to the 2016 Northeast Kingdom Food System Plan, contrary to statewide agricultural trends, agriculture (which includes maple sugaring) in Orleans County is a growing economic sector. However, in recent times, declining milk prices have resulted in great uncertainty for the future of dairy farming in Vermont, and for farmers in Irasburg.

Today, Irasburg citizens operate at least 14 active farms for beekeeping, livestock (beef, buffalo, elk, goats), hay and dairy. Maple sugaring provides significant primary and secondary income for residents.

Beyond the crops and livestock they grow, farmers in Irasburg carry on a tradition of conserving and stewarding the land to produce food. Farms serve a secondary purpose for recreation and natural resource management. As agriculture continues to diversify, as new markets emerge and farmers struggle with farm viability, it is important to encourage new opportunities for farming enterprises, along with local markets for sale of goods. Climate change will bring new agricultural opportunities as well as challenges.

Agricultural soils are a vital resource for all farmers. Changes to Vermont's Required Agricultural Practices are intended to maintain and improve

soil and water quality. New development projects should avoid impacts to agricultural soils of state and federal significance, including those designated as soils of statewide significance, prime agricultural soils (a Vermont classification), and primary agricultural soils (a federal classification). The best use of agricultural soils is for agriculture, so energy generation projects and other development should

avoid short- and long-term impacts to these soils. Barns, silos, and existing impervious surfaces should be used for energy-generation infrastructure before undeveloped land is used.

*Farmers in Irasburg carry on a tradition of conserving and stewarding the land to produce food.*

### **Forests**

As in the case of agriculture, the components of a forest or woodlot serve multiple functions. Residents of Irasburg, which is 31 percent forested, use the forests for firewood, timber, wood chips, and other timber operations. Forests are home to wildlife; they foster biological diversity and serve a critical function in maintaining air and water quality. Upland forests provide flood control and water retention capacity.

Vermont's 21st-century forests face significant challenges: aging landowners, increasing rates of development (new buildings and roads), rising land prices, climate change and invasive pests. The average age of an Irasburg resident is 43 (American Community Survey 2012 – 2016). As the population ages and land costs increase, subdividing or selling land becomes an attractive option for many residents.

Yet the forests have great community value to citizens for their natural beauty, their role in promoting clean air and clean water, their habitat for wildlife, their value for tourism and recreational

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<sup>1</sup> Longtime Irasburg resident Howard

Mosher, one of Vermont's best-known and most beloved authors, died in January 2017. The inspiration for his books comes directly from the people and landscapes of Irasburg, or "Kingdom Common," as he called it in his fiction.

opportunities. Forested mountains, ridgelines and hilltops distinguish Irasburg's landscape and shape its culture. Ensuring the viability of the forest-products industry and the continued existence of forests and woodlots is important for Irasburg's future.

## **Wildlife**

Hunting and fishing are a way of life for many in Irasburg, not only as recreation but to put food on the table and to pass on age-old skills and a love of nature from generation to generation. These activities are cultural and economic drivers for residents and visitors. Wildlife requires certain conditions, including unfragmented forest blocks and clean rivers and streams, to survive and thrive. Planning to maintain or improve these conditions may be challenging, but it is far from impossible.

## **Habitat**

Irasburg's large blocks of unfragmented land provide ample opportunity for wildlife habitat and travel. Fragmentation occurs when human settlement segments large blocks of land into smaller and smaller areas. By creating gaps between blocks, fragmentation results in the direct loss of habitat. The smaller the habitat block, the smaller the number and diversity of species that can survive there.

Natural connections (or corridors) between habitats allow safe access within habitat range for many species. The western side of Irasburg in particular has abundant land identified as highly suitable for wildlife habitat, with wide swathes of suitable habitat. Irasburg has many high-use wildlife crossings. See map in Appendix A.

Bears require large areas of uninterrupted forestland for breeding and travel between seasonal habitats. The Vermont Department of

Fish and Wildlife has mapped one such bear crossing in Irasburg. Bear find protection from highway and residential development in areas rich with American beech stands, high elevations, or wetlands, such as the bear feeding area west of Round Hill. Black bear, fisher cat, moose and bobcat, all found in Irasburg, need migration corridors to travel between habitats, according to the season.

Deer herds require protected habitat to endure severe winter weather and heavy snowfall. Deer wintering areas provide two important features to white-tailed deer survival: shelter and food. Wintering areas, while a small fraction of a yearly range, can be used by generations of deer over several decades if appropriate habitat conditions are maintained. Without this habitat, the deer

population would virtually die off. Mapped deer areas in Irasburg are largely found in the northern corner of the town, but this does not mean deer are only found in this location. Common features of deer ranges include edges between fields and forests, wetlands, and broadleaf and coniferous forests.

*Deer herds require protected habitat to endure severe winter weather and heavy snowfall.*

Animals of all sizes need other protections to support their populations. Noise and sound can force re-routing of migratory routes for birds and game. Noise has a significant impact on many birds. Animal sensitivity to certain noises and frequencies has been linked to birth defects, breeding complications, physiological effects, and other disturbances to wildlife and livestock. Noise is also a barrier to the movement of many reptiles, amphibians, and mammals. Development that adversely affects birds and other animals through sound are strongly discouraged.

## Air Quality

Vermont's air quality has historically been very good. Air quality is most often adversely affected by emissions from residential, industrial and transportation uses. In addition to managing the health of fields and forests for air quality, the Housing, Utilities and Facilities, Energy and Transportation chapters of this Plan identify opportunities for maintaining air quality through efficiency and conservation and through the development of community- and residential-scale renewable energy sources.

## Water Resources

### Water Quality

Irasburg is included in the St. Francis Watershed, encompassing Lake Memphremagog. Irasburg's rivers and streams flow into the Black River and Barton River, which meet before draining into Lake Memphremagog. Vermont's Agency of Natural Resources (ANR) defines a watershed, which includes large river basins, as a distinct land area that drains into a particular waterbody from channelized flow or surface runoff. This means that the water quality in Irasburg influences the quality of water in Lake Memphremagog, an international body of water.

In 2015, the Vermont Legislature passed Vermont's Clean Water Act to maintain and improve the quality of all waters in the state. Looking at water quality through a watershed or basin-level lens means all communities in the state are responsible for their part in water quality.

Much of the impact to water quality in Vermont is caused by "non-point sources," or water runoff from pavement, agricultural fields, gravel roads, logging or mining operations. Point sources include contamination from underground storage tanks or failed septic systems, where the "point" of contamination is traced to a source.

To reduce the impact of non-point source pollution, farmers use the Required Agricultural Practices. Forestry operations follow a set of Best Management Practices. Town roads follow guidelines from the Vermont Agency of Transportation and the Better Back Roads manual. Other types of industries or activities follow other guidelines and BMPs. These guides are all useful for reducing the runoff of pollution into waterways. Avoiding development in floodplains and on ridgelines and maintaining vegetated riparian and stream banks also reduces the pollution of waterways.

*On a spring evening,  
the sound of spring  
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### Lakes, ponds, and streams

Irasburg has an abundance of water bodies, from ponds (Kidder Pond, Mud Pond, Potter Pond) to the Barton and Black Rivers; and many streams, including Lord's Creek, Brighton Brook, Ware Brook, Allen Brook,

and Lanphear Brook. Water bodies are important contributors to Irasburg's landscape and integral to supporting wildlife. The Black River is 26 miles long and originates at Eligo Lake in Craftsbury, flowing out to South Bay in Newport. It passes through three-quarters of Irasburg with numerous tributaries.

Near the center of Irasburg, off Route 58, the Black River makes a large oxbow, a haven for waterfowl, frogs, deer, moose, otter and all manner of water-dwelling wildlife. On a spring evening, the sound of spring peepers from the oxbow is deafening.

A portion of the eastern half of town is part of the Barton River Watershed. The Barton River is 22 miles long and passes through extensive wetlands. It originates at Crystal Lake in Barton and Shadow Lake in Glover and ends at South Bay.

The water quality in these rivers is generally very high, with exceptional fisheries. Many sections of both rivers in Irasburg are classified as "very

good” or “good” for macroinvertebrates (animals without a backbone). Some streams throughout both watersheds are stressed by erosion run-off and other factors. Care should be taken to protect water quality along all water bodies.

### **Wetlands**

Wetlands are defined as areas that are inundated by surface or groundwater often enough to support plants and animals that depend on saturated or seasonally saturated soil conditions for growth and reproduction. These areas are commonly known as ponds, bogs, fens, marshes, wet meadows, shrub swamps, and wooded swamps. To be classified as a wetland under Vermont law, an area must have wetland soils and wetland plants, in addition to at least seasonal water.

Wetlands serve important ecological functions, including flood and erosion control and providing habitat for fish and wildlife. They aid in the maintenance of water supplies by trapping nutrients and sediments and recharging groundwater, and they provide recreational and educational opportunities.

Wetlands were once considered wastelands and were often drained and filled. As a result, nearly half of Vermont’s original wetland resources have been lost, and hundreds of acres are lost annually. There are 1,217 acres of mapped wetlands in Irasburg, including high elevation wetlands that provide important wildlife habitat and ecosystem functionality. Wetlands in Irasburg should be protected from development or degradation.

### **Water Habitat and Aquatic Organisms**

Some of Vermont’s most celebrated fishing areas are in the Memphremagog watershed. Rainbow trout, brown trout and steelhead are popular fish in both rivers, but undersized or damaged culverts can often block their passage. Irasburg is in a priority area for improving aquatic organism

passage. Stream crossings where aquatic organism passage is critical also affect amphibians, reptiles and other wildlife that rely on streams for habitat, movement, or sustenance.

Lord’s Creek is a high priority area for vegetative plantings and voluntary river corridor easements. This area is highly susceptible to erosion, which threatens infrastructure and property and increases the amount of sediment carried to Lake Memphremagog. Improving the aquatic habitat and water quality will help maintain fish stocks and prevent water degradation.

Water bodies and wetlands provide vital habitat for fowl and other animals. Mud Pond on the eastern side of Burton Hill is home to a bald eagle nesting area. Herons are commonly found in wetlands around the Lowell Mountain area. Beavers, otter and other animals that rely on lakes and ponds are common in Irasburg. All contribute to a diverse and active ecosystem.

*Some of Vermont’s most celebrated fishing areas are in the Memphremagog watershed.*

### **Groundwater protection area**

Irasburg Fire District #1, the municipality that owns and operates Irasburg’s village water system, has a source protection plan approved in 2009 and updated for 2016. It provides for a groundwater protection area near the center of Irasburg in the area surrounding Well #1

and Well #2, the sources of water for village water customers.

### **Water Recreation**

Irasburg’s waterbodies provide ample opportunities for recreation. The Barton River is popular for boating, with a put-in at the River Road Bridge and the take-out at the South Bay VFWD boat launch. Fishing is popular along the Barton and Black Rivers and along local brooks and creeks. Local swimming holes are popular in the summer for all ages. These areas should be protected for future use. The flat land along the Black River near Route 5 is prime fiddlehead foraging territory.

Other popular water-based recreation activities occur year-round, such as canoeing, river floats, fishing and kayaking in the summer to ice fishing and ice skating in the winter.

The 1992 report *Whitewater Rivers of Vermont: Their Biology, Geography, and Recreational Use* identified a whitewater stretch of the Black River north of Irasburg, below the Route 14 crossing. There are about 20 – 30 miles of flatwater or whitewater paddling. This area, which flows through forest and some farmland, is rated as Class III waves and ledges and Class III – IV waterfall, which is a “difficult” classification on a scale of I – VI.

### **Flood Hazard Areas and Flood Resiliency**

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) identifies flood hazard areas as those areas along streams and rivers that are inundated on a recurring basis. FEMA maps flood hazard areas according to a “100-year flood event” frequency, which is a one percent chance of flooding during any given 100 years. Irasburg has not elected to adopt flood hazard regulations; therefore it does not have officially mapped floodplains.

However, the Floodplain Map identifies unofficial flood hazard boundary areas. Development should be limited in flood-prone areas to prevent damage to property and reduce risk of loss of life while allowing floodplains to function as they should. Preventive measures, such as avoiding development in flood-prone areas, enlarging and maintaining culverts to allow floodwaters to pass, and providing adequate floodwater control along roads can reduce risks.

Developing or filling in wetlands should also be avoided. Wetlands act as sponges, soaking up excess water. Altering wetlands increases the potential for flooding along rivers and streams. Upland forests

provide important flood resiliency protections. Development, clearing, and overharvesting of upland forests are strongly discouraged.

Most flooding in Vermont is due to “fluvial erosion,” which happens when a river meanders out of its channel. The Vermont Agency of Natural Resources (ANR) developed a river corridor protection area that expands protection of flood-prone areas to include these meanders along most streams and rivers. Mapped river corridor areas were done at a coarse, high level so there may be inconsistencies with on-ground conditions. As a result, some areas may be represented as overly susceptible to erosion while others may be under-represented. Irasburg will adopt the State maps but encourages ANR to continue refining these maps to improve accuracy.

Development in river corridor areas should be limited to protect infrastructure investments, property, and ecosystem health. At this time, Irasburg has not chosen to adopt river corridor regulations.

*Development should be limited in flood-prone areas to prevent damage to property and reduce risk of loss of life.*

Irassburg can achieve flood resilience even without land use regulations. For example, public buildings and historic structures should use appropriate techniques to mitigate the risks of flooding, such as elevation and dry floodproofing. Fortunately most of them are located on high ground. Roads, bridges,

and culverts should be built according to best practices and guidelines for resilience. Floodplains, land adjacent to streams, and river corridors should not be developed. Appropriate uses for these areas include recreation, agriculture and open space. While they are not required to do so, property owners are encouraged to follow similar practices.

## **Non-native Invasive Species**

Flora and fauna not native to a particular ecosystem can wreak havoc, often spreading uncontrollably. These invasive species, brought here either intentionally or unintentionally, often lack predators or natural constraints that limit their ability to spread. They often compete with native species and can result in reducing genetic diversity among native species. In Irasburg, Japanese knotweed, purple loosestrife, goutweed, and honeysuckle have all taken root along the Black River and in many other areas throughout Irasburg. They proliferate vigorously, and to say that they are difficult to eradicate is an understatement.

Other invasive species to be aware of include the Asian Longhorn Beetle and the Emerald Ash Borer, recently found in Orleans County. These insects attack trees. There is no predator for the ash borer so it has the potential to threaten ash, a species found abundantly in Irasburg. This insect is often spread through firewood. Given the summer seasonal population at Irasburg campgrounds, bringing firewood into Irasburg from outside should be prevented.

## **Earth Extraction**

Earth extraction activities, such as mining, gravel or sand pits, are necessary for economic growth and development in Irasburg. Gravel and sand deposits are remnants from glacial melting. They play an important role in groundwater infiltration; too much disturbance of these areas can lead to problems with water runoff or contamination of water resources. Accessing these deposits often requires permitting through the State Act 250 process, although the Town's pits do not if they are under 10 acres. Many private businesses and farms operate small-scale extraction operations. While necessary to Irasburg, these activities may

have the potential for negative consequences. Large extraction operations are required to follow the Act 250 process to minimize unintended consequences, such as sediment runoff, aesthetic issues, noise impacts from large equipment, or damage to roads from truck traffic. They must conduct a Visual Impact Assessment as outlined on pages 18 and 19.

Projects permitted through Act 250 are required to develop reclamation or rehabilitation plans once work is completed. For those projects that pre-date permitting, or those that do not undergo permitting, operators are strongly encouraged to develop reclamation or rehabilitation plans for the site once operations cease.

Solar arrays and recreation are often appropriate uses for these sites when operations cease.

## **Historic Structures and Sites**

Irasburg's long and eventful history is evident in the character of the built environment today. Resourcefulness and respect for the past are cultural values many residents hold in high regard, as exemplified in the care and concern the town and its residents have taken to protect and preserve historic buildings. In the 2016 Community Survey, protecting historic resources ranked as a high priority for 77 percent of respondents, and the presence of historic structures was cited by 89 percent of respondents to explain why they live in Irasburg.

Irasburg presently has two buildings, the Town Hall and the Orne Covered Bridge, that are on the National Register of Historic Places. Properties that meet eligibility criteria, such as age, integrity, and significance, can be added to the Register through a listing process occurring at the state level. The benefits of being on the Register include financial incentives and tourism marketing. There is no regulation attached to the designation.

*In the 2016 Community Survey, protecting historic resources ranked as a high priority for 77 percent of respondents.*

Irasburg plans to apply for Vermont Village Center Designation, a designation that would provide eligibility for tax credits for preserving and improving historic structures in the Village Center. Tax credits can be used for façade improvements or structural improvements to bring historic buildings up to modern safety standards, giving them new and expanded use and life.

The history of Irasburg is told in the many buildings, monuments, and relics found across the community. Some of the more notable sites and structures are listed below. A room dedicated to Irasburg at the Old Stone House Museum in Brownington provides additional information about Irasburg's history.

#### **Gazebo**

A wooden bandstand, built in the 1870s, stands at the north end of the Common. It hosted band concerts of the Irasburg Cornet Band, organized before 1880 and continuing until World War I, as well many visiting bands.

#### **The Brick Block**

The brick block that now comprises Ray's Market and the Irasburg Post Office was built to replace several large buildings on the east side of the Common that burned in a great conflagration of 1886. Among the buildings that burned was the jailhouse, which had also housed the post office. The builders of the new brick block incorporated a few jail components into the new building. Shoppers at Ray's market cross a metal plate that was once a door to the jail. The rear of the store has two windows with iron gratings. Behind Ray's Market is a wooden building, formerly a print shop. It has fallen into disrepair but has potential as a space for community use.

*The history of Irasburg is told in the many buildings, monuments, and relics found across the community.*

#### **Cemeteries**

In 1828, Samuel and George Nye conveyed land to the town of Irasburg for burial purposes. More land has since been added to make the present large cemetery north of town. Many early settlers are buried here, including five Revolutionary War veterans. Jerusha Allen is buried here, along with many descendants of Ira and Jerusha. The cemetery contains a monument to Ira Allen, although he is buried in Philadelphia.

In 1915, Alex Sanville purchased land for St. John's Cemetery, on a knoll just north of the village. One lot is kept for a large white cross to stand above the gravestones. In some winters, a snowy owl perches on the St. John's Cemetery cross.

Many vantage points in Irasburg afford a two-cemetery view.

#### **Churches**

St. John Vianney Catholic Church was built as a Methodist church in 1836. In 1839, the Congregationalists built their meetinghouse on the southeast corner of the common, adding a second story to the original building in 1872. In 1930, the Methodists sold their church to the Catholic diocese and joined forces with the Congregationalists, moving into the building in that same year to form the United Church of Irasburg. For many years, they alternated between ministers of the two denominations each time the pulpit became vacant. The Catholics moved into the former Methodist Church in 1930. Currently, the Catholic Church holds no regular services.

#### **Leach Public Library**

Beside the Town Hall on the east side of the Common stands the small brick Leach Public Library of architectural and historic merit. It was built in 1926, a gift from Orrin A. Leach, who spent his boyhood in Irasburg and went on to make his

fortune in North Dakota in the wholesale grocery business. Mr. Leach donated \$1200 to the town of Irasburg for construction of the library, with the stipulation that the town would appropriate five percent of the cost, \$60, annually to operate the library.

### **Old Town Clerk's Office**

The small white building next to the United Church was an apothecary shop in 1850; later it served as a law office and the Town Clerk's Office.

### **Common**

The Irasburg Common was laid out in 1816, "five chains and fifty links wide, by seven chains and fifty links long." (A chain contains 66 feet, a link 7.92 inches, making the Common 363 by 495 feet.) Its corners were marked with cast iron balls, two of which remain.

### **Orne Bridge**

Originally built around 1879 or 1881, this Paddleford truss bridge is 86 feet long and spans the Black River on Back Coventry Road, connecting Irasburg with Coventry. The original bridge was built either by E.P. Colton or J.D. Colton, or both. It has fourteen trusses, the same number as the number of counties in Vermont (Vermont was the 14th state admitted to the Union). In 1997, the bridge was lost due to arson. In 2000, it was rebuilt using sturdier timber and fireproof chemicals. The bridge is on the National Historic Register.

### **Town Hall**

Following a fire in early February 1911 that destroyed homes, stores and the courthouse that had previously occupied the east side of the Common, citizens at a special town meeting voted to build a new town hall, forty by forty-eight feet.

"The glory of the place was its upper hall," wrote Marjorie Orcutt in *A History of Irasburg Vermont*, "seventeen feet high, lighted by twenty windows, with an arched paneled ceiling finished in hard pine, four-foot wainscoting and hardwood floors." The Town Hall's second floor is still "the glory of the place," and Irasburg citizens still meet there to exercise small-town democracy. Charles H. Andrus, a famous Vermont curtain painter, painted the stage curtains. His view of Willoughby Lake

has been familiar to many generations of Irasburg audiences. In 1994, the Town Hall was added to the National Register of Historic Places.

*"The glory of the place was its upper hall, seventeen feet high, lighted by twenty windows, with an arched paneled ceiling finished in hard pine, four-foot wainscoting and hardwood floors."  
~Marjorie Orcutt, "A History of Irasburg, Vermont"*

## Goal

Stewardship of Irasburg's forests, agricultural lands, wildlife habitat, hills and ridgelines, water sources, historic buildings and scenic views protects and preserves the town's essential character for future generations, in accord with the planning principles of respect for the environment, sound economics and regard for community values.

## Actions

- Strongly encourage development patterns, land uses and land management strategies, including the development of energy-generating facilities, that protect and preserve intact forest blocks and wildlife corridors; primary agricultural soils<sup>2</sup>; river corridors and wetlands; mountain, hills and ridgelines<sup>3</sup>; water sources; historic areas and scenic views.
- Support and encourage Current Use and Land Trust programs that conserve Irasburg's ridgelines, forests and agricultural lands.
- Avoid "energy sprawl" by following the standards for the siting, maximum height and maximum energy of energy facilities, as established in Chapter 7, "Energy."
- Identify suitable sites for residential- and commercial-scale energy installations to allow Irasburg to meet energy goals without the need for ridgeline wind turbines.
- Encourage silvicultural operations that follow best forest management practices as developed by the Agency of Natural Resources.
- Support increased access to locally produced agricultural products, through farmstands, farmers' markets and Farm-to-School and Farm-to-Plate programs.
- Encourage the removal of invasive species to prevent spreading. Prevent the transport of firewood into Irasburg from outside the town.
- Discourage development in flood-prone areas. Mitigate risks to buildings, historic structures, critical infrastructure and municipal investments subject to flooding. Construct road infrastructure to withstand floods and reduce water runoff.
- Protect the dark. Develop a village center lighting plan that avoids light pollution.
- Work closely with the Selectboard, NVDA, adjoining towns and elected state representatives to preserve natural and historic resources.

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2 And other soils designated as significant by the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources or the U.S. Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).

3 In fulfilling the purpose of articulating and advancing the vision of the citizens of Irasburg for the future of their town, this Plan can have no more important goal than protecting and preserving Irasburg's ridgelines. Indeed, it is this goal that impelled the development of this first Town Plan in a municipality that had hitherto functioned for 234 years without one. On October 1, 2015, the citizens of Irasburg voted 274 to 9—ninety-seven percent—not to allow the use of the town's ridgelines for development by industrial wind turbine projects. Also on October 1, 2015, the Irasburg Selectboard received a petition signed by 421 of Irasburg's 700 voters asking the Selectboard "To oppose the proposed Kidder Hill Community Wind project by all means possible; and to develop a town plan that protects all of Irasburg's ridgelines from industrial wind development."

Just as Act 250 has for five decades preserved and protected Vermont's iconic natural and working landscape from the blight of unchecked development, so this Plan protects and preserves Irasburg's ridgelines from future development and renewable energy siting that would alter and degrade their essential character. We single out energy siting because in Irasburg all other types of ridgeline development of over one acre would be subject to Act 250 regulation. Only energy siting is exempt.

Interesting Facts: Irasburg by the Numbers. etc.