

**TOWN OF SEARSMONT**  
**COMPREHENSIVE PLAN**  
**INVENTORY AND ANALYSIS**



**ADOPTED APRIL 6, 2013**

HISTORY .....	2
POPULATION .....	12
HOUSING.....	17
FARMS AND FORESTS .....	25
WATER RESOURCES .....	29
CRITICAL NATURAL RESOURCES .....	40
ECONOMY .....	54
RECREATIONAL RESOURCES.....	61
TRANSPORTATION.....	65
FISCAL CAPACITY .....	82
LAND USE.....	87
Appendix A – Maps .....	95

## HISTORY

Ben Ames Williams called it Fraternity Village, native Abenaki people called it Quantabacook, and we know our community today as Searsmont<sup>1</sup>. Located in south-central Waldo County on the banks of the St. George River, Searsmont lies at the junction of several well marked Native American trails. The town spreads over approximately 40 square miles and is traversed by the east and west branches of the St. George River and State Highway Route 3. Searsmont is ten miles southwest of Belfast, 31 miles east of Augusta and bounded by Morrill, Montville, Liberty, Hope, Belmont, Appleton, and Lincolnville.

The Georges River, now called the St. George River, figured prominently in the settlement of Searsmont by both Native Americans and settlers of European descent. Little is known of Paleo-Indian history in this area. The Wawenocks or Walinakiak, a local tribe of the Abenaki people, resided on the banks of the Saint George River at European contact in 1605. They cultivated products including pumpkins, maize and beans, and took advantage of the abundant fish, shellfish and game. The Wawenocks called the river “joiges” meaning “delightful,” but early white settlers called it the St. Georges.

The Wawenock Indians were one of four related tribes of the Abenaki, who inhabited central and southeastern Maine. *Walinakiak* means "People of the bays". Numbering about 10,000 people in 1500, the Wawenock tribe was decimated by a series of epidemics during the latter 16th century and through the 17th century, falling to about 1,000 people by the end of the American Revolution.

European settlers found their way to Searsmont by traveling up the Georges River using the trails of the native people and hunters who, according to the earliest records, were here as early as 1764. The Indians complained to the English, and the settlers temporarily withdrew. However, white settlers continued to exploit Indian lands and rights, resulting in the settlement of the Plantation of Greene, part of which became Searsmont. Once the native people retreated further north, Northwest Searsmont was settled by families of mostly Scottish and Irish descent around 1780. The area was called Roughingham Village and set off from Searsmont by surveys taken in 1803 and 1807.

The first permanent settlement by families of European descent in the Searsmont village area was made in 1804, and the township was surveyed in 1809. Searsmont was named after David Sears of Boston, a proprietor of many lands in the area. Among the earliest settlers of the town were

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<sup>1</sup> The information in this History Section came from Dorothy Albin's *History of Searsmont*, Pearse's *History of Searsmont*, the Searsmont Historical Society, and Wikipedia.com.

Joseph and Sally Muzzy of Spencer, Massachusetts. They ascended the Georges River and found their way to Searsmont by way of spotted trees.

The Jedidiah Prescott family, also of Massachusetts and among the earliest settlers, settled in Searsmont in 1803. Noah, Jedidiah's son, was elected as the first selectmen to the first board of selectmen in 1814. Noah's younger brother, Josiah, was a local physician and member of the state legislature. Other early settlers who were instrumental in shaping the town include the names of Matthews, Hazeltine, Whittier, Walcott, Hemmenway, Lothrop, Morrow, Marriner, McFarland, and Hamilton.

The town was incorporated in 1814 when Maine was still part of Massachusetts. The first town meeting was held on March 21, 1814. The year 1838 brought construction of a Town House that was used until 1865, when it burned along with the earliest records of the town.

### **The St. George River and Other Significant Water Bodies**

The St. George River furnished not only access for settlement but also power and economic resources. The river is rich in prehistoric archaeological sites. The oldest sites are located at the headwaters in Searsmont and date back seven to nine thousand years. Habitations, campsites, and tools have been found. Though these sites are suspected to be highly significant, the necessary archaeological survey work has not yet been done.

Stephen Cox, a Maine State Archives archaeologist, led a crew in a prehistoric archaeological dig in 1994 at a Searsmont site near Route 173 (Woodsmen's Mill Road) and the South Montville town line. Many artifacts and tools of the Paleo-Indians from 12,000 years ago were found and are said to be some of the largest deposits found to date in Maine. The Maine Historic Preservation Commission (MHPC) later confirmed the location of this prehistoric archaeological site during power and gas pipe line surveys and deems it highly significant. MHPC suggests that "sandy glacial outwash soils and valley of St. George River need survey, as well as Quantabacook Lake shore." MHPC provided Searsmont with a map of archaeological resource potential for the town as of 2010 (Appendix A).

### **Georges River Canal**

Construction of the Georges River Canal began in 1792 using the idea conceived by Charles Barrett, Esquire of Ipswich, New Hampshire. It ran from the tidal waters of Warren through Union, Appleton, and Searsmont, connecting the sources of inland products with seaports and allowing the market of early settlers' products. The canal opened "a water communication from the ocean to the best wooded and most fertile tract of country lying between the waters of the Penobscot and the Kennebec Rivers."

The usual canal practice of using horses or mules on a towpath was not used on the Georges River. Rather, boats were poled by men across shallow water and sailed across the ponds. Locks made of sod and wood were located at strategic points. However, the canal was never a financial success. Various portions were built and rebuilt from 1793 through 1848 by various owners, including General Henry Knox, and the last boat was poled down the canal in 1850. The Georges River Canal is one of the oldest canal systems in the United States and is believed to be the first operating canal in the country.

Evidence of the canal is visible and is accessible off the Ghent Road. The Robbins family has agreed to allow public access along a section of the canal and river as part of the Georges Highland Path project of the Georges River Land Trust. A walking trail is maintained and open for access except during the fall hunting season. Interpretive kiosks along the trail help visitors understand the history of the site. The Canal Path traces a mile and a quarter of the St. George River south from Ghent Road. It is the Georges River Land Trust's first interpretive section of the Georges Highland Path. Features of the trail include information on the historic St. George River canal built in the 1840s, visual displays of the canal design and operation, and a self-tour that discusses the sustainable forestry practices of Robbins Lumber.

The Georges River Canal was placed on both the State and National Registers of Historical Places. Listing on the National Register provides protection when federal funds are used for a project that would affect an historic property.

The Georges Valley Railroad obtained a charter in 1870 and planned to run along the banks of the river from Warren to Belfast, through Searsmont. Tracks were laid, but the rail was never completed beyond Union.

Quantabacook Pond, three miles in length and averaging more than one mile in width, was a favorite hunting and fishing ground of the Tarrentines and the Wawenocks as suggested by the many stone implements that have been found around its shores. Some of these implements appear to be from the Stone Age. In 1764 the lake was recorded as a hunter's and trapper's paradise. At the foot of the pond was "the most beautiful tract of hard wood that may be seen in this part of America," an early account states. In addition, Witcher Swamp provided the scene for many fearsome tales, including those written by Ben Ames Williams.

### **Early Post-European Settlement Culture**

Religious meetings were held in Searsmont before 1814, some at Deacon Hamilton's house, but no churches were built until 1845. At this time, both the Methodist Episcopal Church and the First Baptist Church were built. The Methodist Church was renovated in 1879 and still exists. Its tower housed a clock that was presented to the town by David Sears, Jr. The church steeple was replaced in 1975 during which time the original clock face and parts of the original winding device were

found, giving hope to restoration of the clock. The church no longer has the winding device in its possession but does have the clock face. The Searsmont Historical Society now has the face on loan and has it on display in the Heritage Center of the Searsmont Community Building. In 1845, Sears presented a bell and had it placed in the tower of the Baptist Church. Fire destroyed the church in 1888.

Over one hundred Searsmont men fought in the Civil War, a dozen in the War of 1812, a few in the Revolutionary War, and 29 in the Aroostook War. Searsmont displays a soldiers' monument in remembrance to those who served in the Armed Forces of our country. A Veterans Board listing veterans who fought in the twentieth century wars exists and is currently disassembled and in need of repair and updating.

On April 14, 1814, the town voted to raise \$300 for the support of schools, and \$1,500 to build school houses. A free High School was established on March 5, 1894 as a two-year school and eventually became a four-year school. By 1907, seven school houses were in use. In 1937, the town voted to discontinue the high school and instead pay tuition to Belfast, Appleton, and Liberty as selected by the students. School houses decreased in number due to lack of repair and students until the last, on the Meadow in North Searsmont, was discontinued in 1957. The town voted in 1963 to join School Administrative District Number 34 (now RSU 20) and built a new elementary school, Ames Elementary School on the New England Road in 1964.

### **Lumber / Forestry**

Searsmont was known for its white pine timber and water resources, out of which its economy grew and which gave rise to numerous mills through the years. Searsmont and Montville provided “an inexhaustible supply of the first-quality of fine lumber,” which was either hauled to Belfast or sent down river. Products included boards, shingles, staves, and oars, some of which were even sent to the West Indies. There are stories of a huge pine spar measuring 83 feet 3 inches in height, 21 feet in circumference, and seven feet in diameter being hauled into town by 14 yoke of oxen from the southwestern part of Searsmont. It was intended to be the mast of a ship built in Damariscotta.

The first lumber mills were built before 1800 in North Searsmont, then called Davistown. Samuel Thompson's mill was built on Thompson Ridge Road on Bartlett Stream in 1798. The second mill was built by Humphrey Hook and Jonathan Bagley in 1798 at the lower end of Ruffingham Meadow. These were followed by Thomas Whittier's in the village in 1812, Joshua Hemmenway's on the east branch of the Georges River in 1816, Whittier and Gilmore's in 1817, and Woodman's Mill that same year. Other mills of the 1800's included Bartlett's, Hazeltine and Lothrop's, Baker and Arnold's, Cram's, the Ripley Mill, Harry Hazeltine's and the Dyer Mills at Ghent on the Georges River. The early 1900's brought five other mills into operation.

Today, Searsmont continues its lumbering heritage with Robbins Lumber, located off the Ghent Road, and the Robbins Lumber North Searsmont Plant. The original Dyer Mill was purchased by O.E. Robbins in 1881, and the Robbins family has continued to expand and operate the mill to the present day. Robbins Lumber continues to employ many workers from this and surrounding towns and utilizes state-of-the-art technology making it one of the most modern lumber finishing plants and integrated woods operations in the state. Robbins forestry management practices have also won state recognition and numerous awards.

The Sprowl Brothers Mill in the village was built in 1941 and was continuously expanded for many years. It was the first mill in Searsmont to institute innovative technology and later produced boat stock for boat builders from Canada to Massachusetts. This stock was used to build the “Dirigo,” a Friendship sloop owned by Ernest Sprowl. Most recently the mill produced wooden roof and floor trusses as well as wall panels. When the economic downturn hit in 2008, the mill was unable to survive and closed in early 2010.

Pearse’s Mill was built in 1954 on Anderson Stream for custom sawing. It served farmers and wood lot owners from fifty miles around the site. The mill closed in 1995.

### **Agriculture**

In 1900, Searsmont’s economy changed with the decline in the population, the number of lumber mills, industrial activity, and with incurred Civil War costs. At this time, farming became Searsmont’s leading industry. The dairy farm of Alfred K. Paul was one of the most notable. Paul’s farm comprised of more than 1,000 acres and introduced blood stock to the area, stimulating dairy farmers’ and cattle raisers’ interests. One of the finest orchards in the state, owned by L.C. Bateman, was located in North Searsmont. Orchard farmers grew apples extensively and some raised strawberries, blueberries, potatoes, squash, corn, string beans, and dried beans, which were often canned in nearby towns. When the population declined to approximately 600 in 1960 from 1693 in 1850, farms decreased and lumber once again became the economic backbone of the town.

### **Retail / Lodging**

In the late 1800’s, Searsmont had so many businesses and shops that it was considered a shopping center for surrounding towns. Other Searsmont industry included tanneries, carriage shops, blacksmith shops, a harness shop, a lime and brick kiln, a machine shop, and manufacturers of plows, butter boxes, hearses, coffins, bedsteads, wooden pumps, barrels and cheese.

The first general store is thought to have been located in North Searsmont at the foot of Ruffingham Hill. This was followed by two other stores in the village, including one owned by Nathaniel Jackson and another by Elisha Bean. Bean’s store was the town house built in 1838 and destroyed by fire in 1888. V.A. Simmons occupied a new building that was constructed on this site. Dirigo Hall, as it was called, housed a general store on the first floor, a dance hall on the

second, and fraternal organizations held meetings on the third floor. During its prime an “order team” made morning rounds to homes in the area to take orders. The same team made deliveries in the afternoon. Dirigo Hall was torn down during the Searsmont Community Betterment Days in the mid to late 1960’s. This site is now the location of the town well and is known as the Fraternity Village green.

The present Fraternity Village Store was named after the author Ben Ames Williams’ many stories set in Searsmont, which he called Fraternity Village. This building was constructed about the same time as the Methodist Church (1845) and has had many owners. Jake and Wendy Jacobson presently own the store.

Four hotels operated in Searsmont in the 19th century to accommodate people traveling the old stage route from Belfast to Wiscasset over Appleton Ridge. The Hazeltine House, later known as the Dyer House, was the first in 1824, followed by Ansel Hook’s Inn in North Searsmont in 1827, George Shepard’s 1830, and the Nevan-Ness (or McFarland House) in 1885. P.R. Nevans built the Nevan-Ness (or McFarland House), which was the largest hotel in Searsmont accommodating thirty guests and was located at the corner of Routes 131 and 173 across from the town well/village green. Randlett Ness succeeded Nevans as proprietor, and eventually the hotel became known as the McFarland House when owned by Mary McFarland. None of these buildings exist today.

### **Cemeteries**

The oldest town cemetery is Riverside Cemetery, located east of the Fraternity Village Store on the banks of the Anderson Stream. This cemetery was used for burial during the 1700’s and 1800’s, during which time some of the early settlers along with a lone Indian were buried. Other cemeteries were laid out as the town expanded.

### **Historic Sites and Structures**

Searsmont has many historic sites and buildings. Hardscrabble Farm, located on Route 131, is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The title of the land can be traced back to 1620. Ben Ames Williams used Hardscrabble Farm as his writing base of more than 20 years. Mr. Williams’ daughter, Ann, and her husband, Fred Wardwell, currently own and reside at the farm. Moody Farm at Bickford’s Corner, built in 1829, was also named to the National Register in 2002.

MHPC had located three historic archaeological sites as of October 2001 while testing along the gas pipeline corridor. These sites are the Joseph Jewett Homestead/Farmstead, the E. Lukas Homestead, and the J. Jewett Sawmill. All three date back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Except for this testing, no professional survey has been conducted to date. MHPC suggests that future work could focus on sites related to the earliest Euro-American settlements in town beginning in the early 1800’s.

The old Keating Farm, also known as Woodbine Cottage and located on Pond Road, was built in 1798 at the outlet of Quantabacook Lake. Here, a mud dam was built, and an area between the dam and the village was flooded for a cranberry bog. This project was unsuccessful as the dam was destroyed by a washout. The dam at the outlet was replaced in the mid to late 1960's.

The village school house remained in use as a community building until 1963 when it was condemned by the state and the brick building was torn down. A frame structure replaced it and has since been renovated and expanded. It was used as a community building until spring of 2002, when it was sold after completion of a new community building on a different site.

Three other old school houses still stand today. The North Searsmont school house was recently a nursery school, the Cram family lives in the Ghent school house, and the Muzzy Ridge school house on the Lawry Road was renovated in recent years.

The old town well is located on the Fraternity Village green, formerly the site Simmon's store and later Fred Miller's store. It accommodated summer residents who lacked drinking water in their cottages until it was closed for public consumption.

Riverside Cottage and Stable was located on the Riverside landing in North Searsmont. It was a sportsman's lodge used on weekends for hunting, fishing, and playing cards. Though it no longer exists, it was at the site of the present public boat landing at the north end of Quantabacook Lake.

The Lakeside Cottage, known as Chenery Cottage, is located on Quantabacook Lake and belonged to Governor William George Crosby in the 1800's. It has been passed by inheritance for over 150 years. Samuel Thompson House, constructed in 1792, is one of the oldest houses in Searsmont. Humphrey Hook House, built in 1798, is another very old house, located in North Searsmont. Hazeltine Mansion was built in 1821 on the site now called Veterans Memorial Park. It had crystal chandeliers, a circular staircase, and wallpaper. It became a public house in 1824. In the 1940's and 1950's, it served as the town office and as a place to hold town meetings. This building was torn down during the Searsmont Community Betterment Days.

### **Other Items of Historic Interest**

Shooting Matches used to be held during Thanksgiving week at Belmont Corner, in Searsmont, and at the "Spa" (Hayford Hill). The last match took place on Christmas of 1828 when a large lot of turkeys, chickens, and geese were targets, presumably for dinner.

The practice of selling indigents at auctions to the lowest bidder took place for many years. Indigents were disposed of like slaves, the purchase price reflecting the ability of the poor soul to labor. Labor in 1814 was paid at the rate of 12 1/2 cents per hour.

Due to swarms of crows which threatened corn crops, a bounty of 25 cents per head was placed on crows for several years.

A meteoric stone fell and buried in a field owned by Reverend John Bean in southeast Searsmont on May 21, 1871. The American Journal of Science includes a record made by Charles Upham Shepard, Professor of Natural History at Amherst College, after his examination of a fragment of the meteor. The stone is housed at the American Museum of Natural History in New York and was the first piece in the museum's meteorite collection.

Searsmont was awarded a Distinguished Achievement Award at the 1970 National Congress for Beautification, held in Washington, D.C. The award was presented to Louise Robbins and Arthur Albin by First Lady Mrs. Pat Nixon. Between 1965 and 1970, the period known as the Searsmont Community Betterment Days, old buildings were razed, parks were built, a dam was constructed at the foot of Quantabacook Lake, a sanitary landfill was opened, a well house was placed on the Fraternity Village Green, a shelter and screening fence was placed at Veterans Memorial Park, a soldiers' monument stone with a plaque was created, and landscaping and children's programs were sponsored. This period represented a rebirth for the town.

Many artists and writers have practiced their craft in Searsmont. The list from the past includes: Ben Ames Williams, writer of *Hardscrabble Farm*; Willard Metcalf of Gallup Farm; Hartwell Leon Woodcock of Woodbine Cottage; Willard Leroy, painter; Belle Lowell, painter; Bartlett Whiting, writer; and Alice Goudy, writer of children's books. Ms. Goudy was nominated for one of the prestigious Newbury Awards.

### ***A Note from Searsmont's Centennial Celebration***

From the *Lewiston Evening Journal*, August 11, 1914:

“Searsmont is one of the few towns in Maine where the changed economic conditions of the country have made but little inroads. The same blood that was there a century ago is here today. The men and women who hewed their homes from the wilderness were of virile stock, staunch and brave, industrious and God fearing, and these stern virtues were the heritage of their children... It is a town where sturdy virtues mark the character of the people, and where a patriotic love of home is taught around every hearth.”

### **Searsmont Historical Society**

The Searsmont Historical Society formed in November of 1993 out of an interest of residents who want to preserve various aspects of Searsmont's history. The organization has collected old agricultural machinery and tools, art, photos, records, and various other old objects and artifacts. Many of the items are on display at the Heritage Center at the Searsmont Community Building and also in the newly constructed (2010) Historical Barn behind the Community Building. The Society is active in the community, working closely with the library and giving historical tours of different

areas of the town. In 1994, society members photographed all residences of the town. Members have provided demonstrations in classrooms at the Ames Elementary School due in part to a grant from the Maine Community Foundation. In addition, the Society is collecting oral history through personal accounts from elders who have lived their entire lives in Searsmont.

The Society is a tax-exempt, non-profit organization and relies on grants, donation, and dues for funding. The organization has an interest in surveying, authenticating dates, and preserving old buildings but presently is limited in human and financial resources to do so.

### **Regional Issues**

The St. George River and Georges River Canal is shared by several townships, including Warren Union, Appleton, and Searsmont. Searsmont should continue to work with the Georges River Land Trust and other regional historic preservation organizations to protect important pieces of our history.

### **Public Opinion**

Results of the 2001 comprehensive plan update survey suggest the importance of various critical properties of historical value in Searsmont. Respondents included old houses (6), the old well house on the Fraternity Village green, mill sites, old trees, and cemeteries and abutting properties (3) as historically important items.

### **Conclusions**

The survey results and the 1993 formation of the Searsmont Historical Society indicate that townspeople are interested in and actively working on preservation of and education about local history. With this community interest, Searsmont is likely to see a continuation of outreach for support of historic preservation. The identified historic and archaeological sites and structures could be negatively impacted by future growth and development unless protected permanently.

Currently, the Searsmont Land Use Ordinance requires consideration of significant historic and archaeological resources only if a proposed use or development is located within the shoreland zone, is part of a subdivision or mobile home park, or if it is part of a project that requires site plan review (i.e., commercial, multi-family, industrial, public/semi public). Searsmont's current Land Use Ordinance does not provide any protection to historic and archeological resources for construction of single or two family homes, farming or forestry, or home occupations unless located within shoreland zones.

Shoreland zoning protects archaeological sites within shoreland zones via Section 904.20, which states that "Any proposed land use activity involving structural development or soil disturbance on or adjacent to sites listed on, or eligible to be listed on the National Register of Historic Places, as determined by the permitting authority shall be submitted by the applicant to the Maine Historic

Preservation Commission for review and comment, at least twenty (20) days prior to action being taken by the permitting authority. The permitting authority shall consider comments received from the Commission prior to rendering a decision on the application.”

Provisions for subdivisions and mobile home parks include protection for historic features within these types of projects in Section 1006.2, Retention of Open Spaces and Natural or Historic Features as follows:

- F. “The Board may require that the development plans include a landscape plan that will show the preservation of any existing trees larger than 24 inches diameter breast height, the replacement of trees and vegetation, graded contours, streams and the preservation of scenic historic or environmentally significant areas...”
- G. “If the proposed subdivision contains any identified historical or archeological sites, or any areas identified in the comprehensive plan or by the Maine Critical Areas Program as rare and irreplaceable natural areas, these areas shall be included in the open space, and suitably protected by appropriate covenants and management plans.”

The site plan review process offers protection for historic buildings when a development project requires this review under Section 1102.5 General Review Standards:

B.1. Preserve and Enhance the Landscape -

“...Environmentally sensitive areas such as significant wildlife habitat, wetlands, steep slopes, flood plains, historic buildings, existing archaeological sites and unique natural features will be maintained and preserved to the maximum extent as deemed by the Board...”

# POPULATION

## Population Growth

Overall Maine’s population growth has been one of the slowest in the nation, with an increase of only 4 % between 2000 and 2010. While some areas of the state have experienced considerable population loss, others within southern and coastal areas have seen increases in population. Waldo County (in which Searsmont is located) experienced a population increase of 6.5% between 2000 and 2010. Neighboring Knox and Lincoln Counties experienced population increases of 0.3% and 2.4% respectively. The economic renaissance of Belfast, primarily as a result of the MBNA expansion, had a ripple effect on the regional economy which brought more people into the area. Searsmont’s rural character and proximity to Belfast, Camden, and Augusta resulted in faster growth rate (15.7%) than statewide (4%).

The 2010 U.S. Census found 1,392 people living in the Town of Searsmont, up from 1,174 (15.7 %) in 2000. Table 1 presents population data for the community over time.

<b>Table P-1. Population Growth Over Time</b>									
	<b>Historic Population Levels</b>						<b>Projections</b>		
<b>Year</b>	<b>1850</b>	<b>1934</b>	<b>1970</b>	<b>1980</b>	<b>1990</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2023</b>
<b>Searsmont</b>	1,700	500	624	782	938	1,174	1,392	1,508	1,567
<b>Population Growth Comparison (Percent Increase)</b>									
<b>Searsmont</b>		-71%	25%	25%	20%	25%	15%	11%	4%
<b>Waldo Co.</b>				26%	16%	10%	6.5%	-6% (SPO)	
<b>Maine</b>				13%	9%	4%	4% (2010 US Census)	-3.5% (SPO)	
<b>Sources:</b> Historic Population Levels: U.S. Census data Projections: Searsmont - based 1980, 1990 and 2000 growth rates; County and State – based on State Planning Office projections (November 1999 and September 2009).									

Population projections for Searsmont are based on the population growth that occurred between 2000 and 2009. By the year 2018, Searsmont is projected to have a population of 1,508, an increase of 153 people over the 2009 State Planning Office estimates.

Population growth over the past several decades was greater in Searsmont than at county and state levels, which is characteristic of coastal and second tier coastal communities in mid-coast

Maine. This trend is likely to continue over the next decade, although growth is likely to slow.

According to annual Searsmont town reports, between 2000 (February 1) and 2011 (January 31), Searsmont recorded 160 births and 108 deaths, a net gain of 52. This indicates that most of the population growth has been from immigration of new residents from other places.

### **Race and Sex**

Approximately 98.6% of Searsmont's residents are white, and 49.5% are males and 50.5% are females.

### **Age Distribution**

Approximately 75% of Searsmont's population is 18 years of age or older. Nearly 63% of the population of Searsmont is of working age, within the age 20 and 64 category (Table 2). While 31% of the population is in the age 20 to 44 category, the greatest proportional increase between the years 2000 and 2010 was in the age 45 to 64 category. In both 2000 and 2010, the under age 20 category was 26% of the total population. Figures also indicate that the number of individuals in the age 65 and over category remained proportionally unchanged.

The aging of Maine's population is a long-time trend that is expected to continue. The number of elderly people continues to increase as a result of the aging of the baby boom generation and the in-migration of retirees. Conversely, the number of births continues to be low. In 2008, Maine ranked tenth for the number of births per state in the nation (Kaiser Family Foundation). Census data indicates that Maine had 24,526 fewer people under the age of 20 in 2010 than in 2000. During the past decade, Maine experienced a slight decline (1.3%) in the number of young adults in the 20 to 34-age category as a result of out-migration. Experts suggest these young people leave to relocate in more metropolitan areas in search of more attractive education and job opportunities and greater cultural and social environments.

The median age for Searsmont increased from 37.5 in 2000 to 41 in 2010. The 2010 median age in Searsmont is lower than that of Waldo County (44.1) and the state (42.7). Searsmont also has a lower percentage of persons over the age of 65 than at the county (16%) and state levels (16%).

### **School Population**

Searsmont's school population decreased from 239 in 2000 to 238 in 2010. Elementary students totaled 111 in 2010, a decrease of 29% since 2000 (143). Secondary students totaled 127 in 2010, an increase of 24% since 2000 (96). The disproportionate increase in secondary students is most likely the result of families with teenagers moving to Searsmont in the last decade.

Age Categories	2010		2000		1990	
	Number	Percent of Total	Number	Percent of Total	Number	Percent of Total
<b>Under 5</b>	71	5	72	6	48	5
<b>5 to 19</b>	294	21	240	20	221	24
<b>20 to 44</b>	428	31	427	36	367	39
<b>45 to 64</b>	444	32	309	26	179	19
<b>65 and Over</b>	155	11	126	11	123	13
<b>Totals</b>	<b>1,392</b>	100	<b>1,174</b>	100	<b>938</b>	100

**Source:** U.S. Census, 1990, 2000, 2010

### Seasonal Population

Searsmont has a number of seasonal residents, most of who own or rent cottages on Quantabacook Lake or Levenseller Pond during the summer months. Some other seasonal residents own hunting cabins scattered throughout town. The seasonal population has remained fairly constant over the past few decades. New seasonal dwellings have been constructed to replace those converted for year-round use. Given the relatively small size of Searsmont's lakes, and the current level of development on these lakes, it is unlikely that the proportion of seasonal resident will increase significantly over the next decade.

### Household Characteristics

The average household size in Searsmont decreased from 2.46 in 2000 to 2.41 in 2010, while the number of households increased by 99 units during the same time period (Table 3). These changes occurred while the population increased by 19%. Additionally, the number of households with individuals living alone increased by 36% over the ten-year period. These trends mirror state and national trends, and have major implications for future housing needs.

	2000	2010	Percent Change
Total Population	1,174	1,392	19%
Total Households	478	577	21%
Average Household Size	2.46	2.41	-2%
Households with Individuals under 18 Years	157	185	18%
Householders Living Alone	114	155	36%

**Source:** U.S. Census

### **Income and Poverty Levels**

Income and poverty data for 2009 from the State Planning Office's Maine Economics and Demographics Program and 2009 Bureau of Economic Analysis can be used to compare Searsmont to the county and state (Table 4). Based on the data, Searsmont's income levels were generally higher than countywide levels but lower than statewide levels. The percentage of households living below the poverty level was higher in Searsmont than at the county and state levels. State Planning Office data indicated that 12.79% of the Maine households had incomes below the poverty level. The estimates for Waldo County were higher, with 15.05% of households living below the poverty level.

**Table P-4. Income and Poverty Levels Comparison: 2009**

	<b>Searsmont</b>	<b>Waldo Co.</b>	<b>Maine</b>
<b>Per Capita Personal Income</b>	Not available	\$31,241 <sup>1</sup>	\$36,547 <sup>1</sup>
<b>Median Household Income</b>	\$45,625 <sup>2</sup>	\$41,697 <sup>2</sup>	\$46,541 <sup>2</sup>
<b>Percent Households below Poverty Level</b>	15.58% (74 households)	15.05% (2,338 households)	12.79% (69,374 households)
<b>Source:</b> <sup>1</sup> Bureau of Economic Analysis, U.S. Dept. of Commerce 2009; <sup>2</sup> State Planning Office, Maine Economics and Demographics			

### **Public Opinion**

The 2001 comprehensive plan update survey results indicate that residents are mixed in their perception of the population growth rate. According to the survey, about half of Searsmont residents think the growth rate is too fast (48.6%). This compares to 41.6% of residents who feel the growth rate is acceptable and approximately 10% who have no opinion about the growth rate. Only one respondent indicated that the growth rate is too slow.

The 2001 comprehensive plan update survey results indicate that residents' perception of the population growth rate varies. According to the survey, about half of Searsmont residents think the growth rate is too fast (48.6%). This compares to 41.6% of residents who feel the growth rate is acceptable and approximately 10% who have no opinion about the growth rate. Only one respondent indicated that the growth rate is too slow.

The 2012 community forum keypad polling results indicate that the majority of participating residents think the rate of population growth in Searsmont is acceptable. According to the tally, 75% (24 people) of participating residents think the growth rate is just right, while 25% (8 people) think Searsmont's population is growing too fast. No one indicated that the town's population growth is too slow.

## **Conclusions**

The population of Searsmont is expected to grow at a rate of 11% in the next decade, a slower rate than the previous decade (15%). People will likely continue to move to Searsmont as a result of the town's rural character and proximity to Belfast, Camden, and Augusta. The seasonal population is not anticipated to increase dramatically.

While Searsmont's population will tend to be older than in the past, the in-migration of working age families will likely result in more school age children. Household sizes will continue to decline as a result of an aging population and more people living alone or as single parents. As a bedroom community to Belfast and Camden, Searsmont's income levels will likely increase relative to areas of central, northern, and downeast Maine.

## HOUSING

The 2010 Census identified a total of 741 housing units in Searsmont in 2010, an increase of 20% since the 2000 Census. Approximately 78% were occupied year-round units in both census years. The relative percentage of seasonal, recreational, or occasional use units remained unchanged from 2000 to 2010 (17%).

Between 2000 and 2010, the percentage of occupied rental units within the town decreased from 15.5% to 14.7% of occupied units. Of the total occupied units in 2010, 85.3% were owner-occupied and 14.7% were renter-occupied, compared with 84.5% and 15.56% in 2000, respectively. The average household size in 2010 was 2.41 persons.

<b>Table H-1. Housing Tenure, Occupancy Status and Vacancy Rates</b>				
	<b>Searsmont</b>		<b>2010 Comparison Percent of Total</b>	
	<b>2000</b>	<b>2010</b>		
<b>Total Housing Units</b>	617	741	<b>Searsmont</b>	<b>Waldo County</b>
<b>Occupied Year-round Units</b>	478	577	78%	76%
<b>Seasonal, Recreational or Occasional Use Units</b>	107	127	17%	17%
<b>Other Vacant Units</b>	32	37	5%	7%
<b>Owner Occupied Units</b>	406	492	85.3%	78.5%
<b>Renter Occupied Units</b>	72	85	14.7%	21.5%
<b>Percent of Total</b>				
<b>Homeowner Vacancy Rate</b>	2.4%	1.6%	1.6%	2.4%
<b>Rental Vacancy Rate</b>	2.6%	4.4%	4.4%	9.3%
<b>Source: U.S. Census, 2000 and 2010</b>				

The 2010 Census homeowner and rental vacancy rates at 1.6% and 4.4%, respectively, suggest that the housing market is fairly tight. The homeowner vacancy rate of 2.4% for Waldo County is slightly higher, and the rental vacancy rate (9.3%) is substantially higher.

### Housing Types

Most of the residences in Searsmont are single-family homes, with a high proportion of manufactured homes. There is one apartment complex on Muzzy Ridge Road. There are three mobile home parks. Seasonal residences are located on Quantabacook Lake and Levenseller Pond.

Searsmont’s land use ordinance permit approvals indicate that from 2000 through 2010, 135 new housing units were added to the housing stock. One unit was destroyed by the State to allow construction of a new bridge, for a net increase of 134 (Table 6). Fewer mobile homes (29) were added to the housing stock than single family homes (106). A comparison of Census data from the 2000 and 2010 shows that 20 seasonal units were added during this time period.

<b>Housing Type</b>	<b>2000 (Units)</b>	<b>Percent of Total</b>	<b>2010 (Units)</b>	<b>Percent of Total</b>	<b>Number Change 2000-2010</b>	<b>Percent Change 2000-2010</b>
<b>Single Family- Detached</b>	469	76%	575	76%	106	23%
<b>2-4 Unit Structures</b>	6	1%	6	1%	0	0%
<b>Multi-family (4+ units)</b>	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
<b>Manufactured Housing</b>	145	23%	174	23%	29	20%
<b>Total Units</b>	620	100%	755	100%	135	22%
<b>Sources:</b> 2000 and 2010 figures were calculated using Searsmont Municipal Valuation Returns for the years 1990 through 2000 and 2000 through 2010, respectively. These figures are off by several units as compared to the Census data, but are very useful for determining trends.						

An analysis of building permits issued between 2000 through 2010 indicates that approximately 21% of new dwellings are mobile homes. This is an indication that affordable housing is as available in Searsmont as anywhere in the region because of the availability of mobile homes as an affordable housing choice for lower income households.

### **Housing Conditions**

One general indicator of the condition of the community’s housing stock is the age of the housing. Older housing generally requires more upkeep and maintenance, and is usually not as energy efficient. According to 2009 American Community Survey data, nearly 19% of Searsmont’s housing stock was built prior to 1940; this compares to nearly 28% statewide and 28% countywide. Approximately 65% of Searsmont’s renters live in housing built prior to 1940 as compared to 14% of homeowners. According to Town of Searsmont figures, at the end of 2010, 200 dwellings are over 50 years old.

Other indicators of housing conditions include lack of plumbing facilities and lack of a complete kitchen. According to the 2009 American Community Survey data, 4.5% of Searsmont’s housing units lacked complete plumbing facilities, and nearly 4% lacked complete kitchen facilities.

Mobile homes built prior to 1976 do not necessarily meet federal construction standards and can be unsafe. Searsmont’s Land Use Ordinance contains minimum health and safety standards for older mobile homes that are to be located on individual lots within mobile home parks. These standards include requirements for fire detection equipment, and minimum dimensions and other criteria for door and window construction to allow emergency egress.

**Housing Affordability**

The state’s goal is to assure a supply of housing that is affordable to very low, low, and moderate-income households. The following information provides an overview of housing affordability in the Searsmont. The State defines affordable housing as follows:

An owner-occupied unit is “affordable” to a household if its price results in monthly housing costs (mortgage principal and interest, insurance, real estate taxes, and basic utility costs) that do not exceed 28% to 33% of the household’s gross monthly income. A renter occupied unit is “affordable” to a household if the unit’s monthly housing costs (including rent and basic utility costs) do not exceed 30% of the household’s gross monthly income.

For the purpose of examining housing affordability the Maine State Housing Authority has determined that 36% of the homeowner households in Searsmont earn less than 80% of the area median income (\$48,393 for homeowners in Searsmont) (Table 7). Further, 61% of renter households in the Belfast Labor Market Area (BLMA) earn less than 80% of the area median income (\$25,991 for renters in the BLMA).

<b>Table H-3. Household Income Levels: 2009 Estimates for Searsmont</b>				
<b>Household Category</b>	<b>Income Categories</b>			<b>Total Number of Households</b>
	<b>30% AMI or Less</b>	<b>&gt;30% to 50% AMI</b>	<b>&gt;50% to 80% AMI</b>	
	<b>Number / Percent of Total Households</b>			
<b>All Households</b>				
<b>Owners HH</b>	40 / 8%	47 / 10%	88 / 18%	486
<b>BLMA Renter HH</b>	652 / 25%	417 / 16%	513 / 20%	2,592
<b>Source:</b> Maine State Housing Authority, Claritas Corporation, 2000; 2009 AMI=Household Area Median Income; BLMA=Belfast Labor Market Area				

## Owner Housing Needs

The average price of housing in Searsmont was \$140,000 in 2009 and \$83,300 in 2000 (Table H-4), indicating that housing is affordable to those in Searsmont earning at or above the median income level. In 2000, the average for Searsmont was less than that for the Belfast Labor Market Area. However, in 2009, the median home price was the same in Searsmont as in the Belfast Labor Market Area LMA (\$140,000). Between 2000 and 2009, the cost of housing in the Belfast Labor Market Area increased much more (49%) than the median household income (29%) at both the town and regional level, which suggests that incomes are not increasing proportionately with housing costs.

**Table H-4. Affordability Analysis for Searsmont and the Belfast Labor Market Area\***

Area	Year	Affordability Index	Median Home Price	Median Income	Income Needed to Afford Median Home Price	Home Price Affordable to Median Income	Households Unable to Afford Median Home Price
<b>Belfast LMA</b>	2000	0.94	\$94,000	\$32,532	\$34,591	\$88,405	6,692 / 64.6%
	2005	0.74	\$152,000	\$37,837	\$51,378	\$111,940	7,522 / 64.4%
	2006	0.80	\$144,000	\$39,089	\$49,167	\$114,960	7,146 / 60.8%
	2007	0.77	\$153,000	\$40,108	\$52,007	\$117,994	7,434 / 62.0%
	2008	0.80	\$150,000	\$40,911	\$50,992	\$120,346	7,167 / 60.2%
	2009	0.89	\$140,000	\$42,083	\$47,289	\$124,588	6,459 / 55.1%
<b>Searsmont</b>	2000	NA	\$89,300	\$36,708	\$29,469	\$111,236	NA
	2009	1.02	\$140,000	\$48,393	\$47,316	\$143,186	284 / 49.3%

**\*Notes:** Belfast Labor Market includes Belfast, Belmont, Brooks, Freedom, Islesboro, Jackson, Knox, Liberty, Monroe, Montville, Morrill, Northport, Searsmont, Searsport, Stockton Springs, Swanville, Thorndike, Unity and Waldo. NA=Not available.  
**Source:** Maine State Housing Authority – [www.mainehousing.org](http://www.mainehousing.org) and U.S. Census

Further data shows that 284 (49%) of homeowner households in Searsmont in 2009 are unable to afford to purchase a house at the average cost of \$140,000 (Table H-5). Some moderate-income homeowner households might also have difficulty, depending on housing availability.

<b>Table H-5. Housing Affordability for Searsmont Homeowner Households</b>		
<b>Homeowner Household Income Category</b>	<b>Number of Home Owner Households (Estimate)</b>	<b>Affordable Home Purchase Price</b>
<b>30% or less AMI (\$14,518 and below)</b>	40	Maximum of \$42,956
<b>&gt;30% to 50% AMI (\$14,518 to \$24,197)</b>	47	\$42,956 to \$71,594
<b>&gt;50% to 80% AMI (\$24,197 to \$38,714)</b>	88	\$71,594 to \$114,548
<b>Notes:</b> Calculation is based on a household spending no more than 28% of income on housing costs, including mortgage principal and interest, insurance, real estate taxes, and basic utility costs. AMI=Homeowner Household Area Median Income		
<b>Source:</b> Utilizes Maine State Housing Authority analysis		

### Rental Housing Needs

According to Maine State Housing Authority data, renter households in the Belfast Labor Market Area earning the 2009 renter median income (\$25,991) could afford \$650 or less per month rent for a 2-bedroom apartment (assumes no more than 30% of gross income is spent for rent, including utilities). A renter household median income of \$31,684 was needed to afford the average 2-bedroom apartment rent (\$792/month). Approximately 58% of renter households in the Belfast Labor Market Area were unable to afford the average 2-bedroom apartment rent. Renter households earning incomes less than the area median income would have a difficult time finding decent, affordable rental housing in the region. (Tables H-6 and H-7).

<b>Table H-6. Housing Affordability for Belfast Labor Market Area Renter Households</b>		
<b>Renter Household Income Category</b>	<b>Number of Home Owner Households (Estimate)</b>	<b>Affordable Monthly Rent</b>
<b>30% AMI or less (\$7,797 and below)</b>	<b>652</b>	<b>\$195</b>
<b>&gt;30% to 50% AMI (\$7,798 to \$12,996)</b>	<b>417</b>	<b>\$195 to \$325</b>
<b>&gt;50% to 80% AMI (\$12,997 to \$20,793)</b>	<b>513</b>	<b>\$325 to \$520</b>
<b>Notes:</b> Calculation is based on a household spending no more than 30% of income on rent.		
<b>Source:</b> Utilizes Maine State Housing Authority analysis; AMI=Renter Household Area Median Income		

***Subsidized Housing***

The Maine State Housing Authority does not list any subsidized housing in Searsmont. Within the Belfast Housing Market area there are 185 subsidized elderly apartments and 365 family subsidized apartments. However, the Authority has identified a need for an additional 377 elderly subsidized units and 347 family subsidized units within the Belfast Housing Market Area.

<b>Table H-7. Rental Housing Costs – Belfast Labor Market Area</b>			
<b>Year</b>	<b>Bedrooms</b>	<b>Average Rent</b>	<b>Total Renter Households</b>
2005	0	\$542	2585
	1	\$630	
	2	\$762	
	3	\$712	
2006	0	\$505	2617
	1	\$656	
	2	\$764	
	3	\$802	
2007	0	\$561	2652
	1	\$646	
	2	\$740	
	3	\$867	
2008	0	\$569	2659
	1	\$695	
	2	\$791	
	3	\$971	
2009	0	\$498	2592
	1	\$675	
	2	\$792	
	3	\$1,004	

## **Public Opinion**

The 2001 comprehensive plan update survey results showed that approximately 18% of respondents indicated that there was not enough affordable housing in Searsmont; and nearly 22% of the respondents stated that there was not enough rental housing within the community. A number of respondents (49%, 54%) either had no opinion or were undecided regarding either of these questions. In response to a question about whether Searsmont's land use ordinances should encourage the development of affordable and /or rental housing; 40% of respondent indicated yes and 54% indicated no. However it should be noted that the term "affordable housing" was not defined in the survey and could be interpreted in several ways by respondents.

The 2012 community forum keypad polling results indicated mixed feelings among residents about the rate of housing growth in Searsmont during the past ten years. The tally showed that 59% (20 people) of participants think that the growth rate is just right, while 41% (14 people) think Searsmont's housing growth is too fast. No one indicated that the town's housing growth is too slow.

The 2012 Community Forum also polled residents about affordable housing and rental housing. When posed with the question about whether or not Searsmont has enough affordable housing; 52% (16 people) indicated yes, 29% (9 people) indicated no, and 19% (6 people) indicated "not sure". In response to a question about whether Searsmont has enough rental housing; 70% (21 people) answered yes, 20% (6 people) answered no, and 10% (3 people) answered "not sure".

Finally, when Community Forum participants were posed with a question about whether or not Searsmont should adopt the State's model building codes, 55% (17 people) replied yes, 32% (10 people) replied no, and 13% (4 people) replied "don't know".

## **Regional Coordination Issues**

According to the Maine State Housing Authority (MSHA) analysis of the Belfast Housing Market Area, affordable housing is a concern in the region. Incomes are not keeping up with the cost of housing, as numbers show that the cost of housing in the Belfast Labor Market Area increased much more (49%) than the median household income (29%) between 2000 and 2009. Housing in Searsmont is comparably affordable to the Belfast Labor Market Area (BLMA).

## **Conclusions**

Population projections suggest that Searsmont will experience an 11% increase in population over the next decade. Household size is expected to decrease as a result in the growth in the elderly population, growth in the rate of divorce, and growth in the number of young people living alone. As a result of the decrease in household size an even greater number of housing units will be

needed in the future. For the purposes of calculating housing needs over the next decade, we estimate that the average household size will decrease at a rate similar to the previous decade. Using this estimate of 2.36 as the average household size, it is projected that between 2010 and 2018 there will be a need for 62 new housing units, or approximately eight per year. This figure is calculated using the projected population for 2018 of 1,508 divided by the average household size of 2.36, for a total of 639 households projected for 2018. This compares to the current 2010 data of 577 households.

Further, assuming that current trends continue and that sewer and water will remain unfeasible in Searsmont in the coming decade, it is likely that most of the new housing will be single family with a high percentage of manufactured housing.

Housing in Searsmont appears to be affordable to households with moderate incomes. However, households earning less than 80% of the area median income may be having difficulty affording housing within Searsmont and the region. Elderly residents who are living on fixed incomes and young families seeking their first home are probably most impacted by the cost of housing in Searsmont. The substantial increase in the number of mobile homes suggests that this is the affordable housing choice for lower income households within Searsmont. Rental housing appears to be a less significant alternative in Searsmont.

The State Growth Management Act suggests that communities strive to make 10% of new residential housing within the range of affordability. Manufactured housing, including mobile homes, rentals and multifamily housing are generally considered the most affordable types of housing. Searsmont met the 10% goal by permitting 29 mobile homes (21% of total new residences) from 2000 through 2010.

Clearly, the affordable housing issue is a regional one that affects Searsmont. As the region's population increases and ages it will become increasingly important that Searsmont work with other communities within the region to meet the area's affordable housing need.

## FARMS AND FORESTS

### Farms

Searsmont's agricultural heritage is an important part of its rural character. Much of Searsmont was farmed through the early 1900's, and important farm soils are found in many part of town (see the Agricultural Resources Map in Appendix 1).

There is a resurging interest in agriculture in Waldo County and Maine as a whole. Consequently, commercial agricultural activity within Searsmont has been increasing moderately after many decades of decline. A farmers market operated during the summers of 2010 and 2011, but the participants opted not to continue the market in 2012. Several community supported agriculture (CSA) operations have recently been initiated by local farmers. Other farms include a dairy farm, numerous small herds of livestock, a number of hayfields, a few orchards, two greenhouse and nursery establishments, blueberry farming on several ridges, family vegetable gardens and Christmas tree farming. These agricultural activities are generally scattered throughout the rural areas of the town. The dairy farm is located on Thompson Ridge Road. Blueberries are raised on Levenseller Mountain and Muzzy Ridge. Christmas trees are raised extensively by Robbins Lumber on Route 131, Appleton Ridge, and Muzzy Ridge. The Bear Well Orchard is located on Higgins Road in North Searsmont. Hay fields and pasture land for livestock is usually associated with farmsteads along existing roads and is scattered throughout the community.

The amount of acreage enrolled in the Maine Farmland and Open Space tax programs is one measure of the extent of commercial agriculture in Searsmont. The Maine Farmland and Open Space tax programs allow farmland and open space to be assessed for property tax purposes based on current use rather than market value as long as the land is maintained as farmland or open space and meets certain criteria. There are currently 247 acres on three farms in Searsmont enrolled in the Maine Farmland tax program. The farmland acreage consists 35 acres of tillable land and 17 acres of pasture, with 195 acres designated as farm woodland. Most of the land used for commercial Christmas tree production is enrolled in the Tree Growth Tax Program.

### Forests

Originally the region was covered with a mature stand of the softwoods- pine, hemlock, cedar, and fir. Much of this primeval forest was cut more than a century ago to clear the land for agriculture, with the best and most accessible trees taken for timber. These practices changed the face of the landscape dramatically. More and more of the forest disappeared and most areas with suitable soils were used to support livestock or crops. The forests supported many mills with stock for manufacturing and cordwood for firing boilers and kilns. The livelihood of most of the

early residents depended directly on the forest, and although now most trees are less than one hundred years of age, the forest continues to define the landscape.

For the past five to seven decades, the size and extent of the forest has increased primarily due to a decline in the agricultural use of previously open fields. However, recent trends indicate that more and more open space in Searsmont is being developed rather than converting back to forestland.

Today, approximately 19,450 acres, or 76% of the town, is forested. Searsmont's forest resources are used as cordwood, pulp, and occasional sawlogs. While softwoods continue to dominate the landscape, hardwood stands consisting principally of maple, oak, birch, and poplar are very common. The principal tree species found in Searsmont are aspen, locust, sugar maple, black spruce, poplar, white spruce, balsam fir, northern white cedar, tamarack, eastern hemlock, red maple, willow, beech, paper birch, white ash, eastern white pine, red oak, and yellow birch.

The amount of land in the Tree Growth Program provides information about the extent of commercial forestry within the community, even though in some cases land is put into tree growth primarily to reduce property taxes. The Tree Growth Program allows for property tax assessment of forestland based on current use rather than market value as long as the land is managed for timber production and remains as a forest. Approximately 5,447 acres are registered in the Tree Growth Tax Program. This figure is up from 4,089 acres (33%) in 1993.

Landowner timber harvest reports compiled by the Maine Forest Service also provide information about the extent of commercial forestry. Overall, the number of timber harvests in Searsmont has more than tripled since 1991, from 10 to 35. Total harvest in acres has also shown a substantial increase, from 296 acres in 1991 to 1,130 acres in 2008.

More intense management is occurring to cultivate the growth of species suitable for construction lumber, specifically pine. Close to 25 million board feet of eastern white pine are sawn at the Robbins Mill each year. While approximately five percent of the logs sawn at the Robbins mill come directly from this area, some 5,500 acres in Searsmont are being intensely managed to promote the growth of pine.

Searsmont's forest resources have other important values to the community. Species diversity, wildlife habitat, air and water quality, and landscape aesthetics are all affected by the presence of healthy forests. People rely directly on forestlands as places for recreation, tourism, and building homes.

Development of rural land probably poses the greatest threat to Searsmont's forest resources. The division of large tracts of land into house lots makes forestland less valuable for commercial

forestry, and more likely to be further subdivided and utilized for development. Unsustainable forest practices, such as over harvesting and environmental degradation are other threats, although most of the forestland in Searsmont is well-managed.

**Table FF-1. Summary of Timber Harvest Information for the town of: Searsmont**

YEAR	Selection harvest, acres	Shelterwood harvest, acres	Clearcut harvest, acres	Total Harvest, acres	Change of land use, acres	Number of active Notifications
1991	216	60	20	296	0	10
1992	185	44	135	364	0	10
1993	155	85	167	407	0	12
1994	655	80	90	825	0	11
1995	652	12	40	704	20	13
1996	513	0	0	513	0	12
1997	704	143	39	886	4	16
1998	491	145	0	636	5	22
1999	623	82	8	713	9	41
2000	552	49	43	644	4	46
2001	777	66	24	867	0	33
2002	251	58	43	352	1	27
2003	311	61	0	372	5	23
2004	485	74	34	593	5	31
2005	435	95	0	530	0	29
2006	336	38	0	374	1	25
2007	527	141	11	679	1	30
2008	1028	102	0	1130	5	35
Total	8,896	1,335	654	10,885	60	426

Data compiled from Confidential Year End Landowner Reports to Maine Forest Service.

Department of Conservation - Maine Forest Service

***\* To protect confidential landowner information, data is reported only where three or more landowner reports reported harvesting in the town.***

## Public Opinion

During the 2012 Community Forum, farmland was identified as the resource most at risk. Participants cited the fact that there are few active farms, the challenges farmers face, and the subdivision of farmland as reasons why farmland is most at risk. Participants strongly supported (80%) provided extra tax breaks to farmers through the new voluntary municipal farm support

program. Over 80% of participants supported protecting important farm soils by adopting provisions in the Land Use Ordinance.

### **Regional Issues**

Recognition of the importance of our natural resource-based economy and heritage has been growing in Waldo County and Maine as a whole in recent years. Most experts believe that the best way to conserve our important resources is to help businesses that rely on those resources be successful. This is true for farmers and the forestry industry, and Searsmont should adopt municipal policies that support its farmers and wood products industries.

The main threat to Searsmont farmland is non-farm development on active or former farmland, or on prime farm soils. The division of large tracts of land into house lots makes farmland less valuable for commercial farm uses and more likely to be further subdivided and utilized for development. Maintaining a critical mass of farms in the region is also important to help local farms have access to markets and supplies. Municipal officials should reach out to local farmers to identify ways the town can support their farm operations.

## WATER RESOURCES

The St. George River defines much of the landscape through Searsmont village and beyond. Searsmont has thirteen lakes and ponds, including Lawry, Levenseller, and Quantabacook. There are many wetlands, the most significant being Maple Meadow, Ruffingham Meadow, and Witcher Swamp. Searsmont's significant water resources are displayed on a number of maps available at the Town Office. A list of maps is found in Appendix A.

### **Major Surface Water Watersheds**

Most of Searsmont is part of the St. George River watershed. A small section of town on the southeast slopes of Moody and Levenseller Mountains is part of the Megunticook Lake watershed, and another small section of the town bordering the Town of Belmont is part of the Tilden Pond and Ducktrap River watershed. Levenseller Pond is the only significant water body within Searsmont that drains into the Megunticook Lake watershed. Megunticook Lake is located within the Towns of Lincolnville and Camden. All other surface water bodies within Searsmont are part of the St. George River watershed, including Quantabacook Lake, Lawry Pond and Ruffingham Meadow.

### **St. George River Watershed**

The St. George River, which flows through Searsmont village, is one of the town's most prominent natural features. The river enters Searsmont at the western corner from South Montville, flows through the village, and continues south to Appleton. The section of the watershed between South Montville and Fraternity Village has extensive wetland areas; the largest is Witcher Swamp along Stearns Brook, a tributary to the river.

The St. George River has been assigned a Class AA rating (as defined in the State's Natural Resource Protection Act) for the entire 10-mile length within Searsmont. All tributaries to the river in Searsmont, including Anderson Brook, Stearns Brook, Jam Brook and Dead River are Class A.

*Note: The State has four classes of freshwater rivers, and one class of lakes and ponds. A close comparison of the standards will show that there is actually not much difference between the uses or the qualities of the various classes. All attain the minimum fishable-swimmable standards established in the federal Clean Water Act. Most support the same set of designated uses with modest variations in their description. The classification system should be viewed as a hierarchy of risk, more than one of use or quality, the risk being the possibility of a breakdown of the ecosystem and loss of use due to either natural or human-caused events. Ecosystems that are more natural in their structure and function can be expected to be more resilient to a new stress and to show more rapid recovery. Classes AA (rivers and streams) and GPA (lakes and ponds) involve little risk since activities such as waste discharge and impoundment are prohibited. The*

*expectation to achieve natural conditions is high and degradation is unlikely. Class A waters allow impoundments and very restricted discharges, so the risk of degradation, while quite small, does increase since there is some small human intervention in the maintenance of the ecosystem. Class B rivers and streams have fewer restrictions on activities but still maintain high water quality criteria. Finally, Class C has the least restrictions on use and the lowest (but not low) water quality criteria. Class C waters are still good quality, but the margin for error before significant degradation might occur in these waters in the event of an additional stress being introduced (such as a spill or a drought) is the least.*

The National Parks Services has listed 17 miles of the St. George River, including the entire stretch within Searsmont, on its Nationwide Rivers Inventory (NRI). The NRI is a preliminary list of rivers having “outstandingly remarkable features.” It recommends the river for study under the National Wild and Scenic Rivers Act. The St. George River from Searsmont Village to Route 105 in Appleton is usually the first white water canoe race each season and annually draws many participants and onlookers from around the state.

Sedimentation caused by soil disturbance is the greatest potential impact from development on the town’s rivers, streams, and brooks. Approximately half of the watershed area of the town flows to the St. George River without being intercepted by a pond or lake. This provides an opportunity for storm water run-off to carry large volumes of silt to the river, thereby reducing river water quality. In the past septic system discharges into the river were a significant problem, but most of these have been brought into compliance with state regulations as the properties were renovated or sold.

The Georges River Land Trust is a mid-coast organization that works with landowners and local governments within the river's watershed to promote planning and conservation of the St. George River watershed's resources. The Land Trust’s primary functions are to educate the public and to encourage the use of conservation easements as a way for landowners to protect land from inappropriate future development while still retaining ownership of the land. The Land Trust also owns land, which is another means to preserve land in perpetuity. The Land Trust works within the 225 square mile boundary of the St. George River watershed, which includes all or part of 20 towns from Liberty to St. George. Currently, towns, land trusts and statewide organizations protect one percent of the watershed. It is the Georges River Land Trust's goal to work towards protecting the watershed and safeguard the natural habitats and recreational values for future generations. Currently, the Land Trust has 44 properties totaling more than 1900 acres under permanent protection. The Land Trust is principally interested in protecting the river corridor, hilltops, productive agricultural lands, and places with significant resource value.

The Land Trust owns two preserves within Searsmont along the St. George River (137 acres) and has an easement on a 62-acre organic farm. The Gibson Preserve (124 acres) is managed for high

quality wildlife habitat. The public can access the property off Route 173, 2.5 miles from the Route 131 junction, for hiking, cross-country skiing, and snowshoeing, (day use only) on the three miles of trails within this preserve. The Porter Preserve (13) added acreage to the protected land in the Wilderness Loop, a conservation focus area of the land trust. It is located slightly upriver from the Gibson Preserve and is managed to protect wildlife habitat and maintain natural communities. The preserve is open to the public for day use, with access off Route 173, 3.8 miles from the Route 131 junction. A short trail leads to the banks of the St. George River and hunting is permitted with written permission. The farm continues to be managed by the owners, and the Land Trust monitors the easement annually.

The St. George River in Searsmont is designated as an “outstanding river segment”, which affords the river special protection under the Maine Natural Resources Protection Act and the Maine Site Location of Development (Subdivision) Law. One of the provisions governing subdivisions requires that when lots have frontage on an outstanding river segment, principle structures within the subdivision must have combined lot shore frontage and setbacks from the river of 500 feet.

The shoreland zoning provisions within the Searsmont’s Land Use Ordinance regulate land use within 250 feet of the high water mark of the St. George. Areas along the St. George River are zoned as Limited Residential, which allows low density residential and recreation development.

### **Lakes and Ponds**

Searsmont has 13 lakes and ponds (Table WR-1). With the exception of Quantabacook Lake and Lawry Pond, the Town’s largest water bodies, there is limited published information available on the water quality and characteristics of these water bodies. All the lakes and ponds in Searsmont that are ten acres or greater in size are classified as “great ponds”. Great ponds receive special regulatory consideration under Maine statutes, such as through the Mandatory Shoreland Zoning Act and the Natural Resources Protection Act.

Quantabacook Lake is Searsmont’s largest lake occupying approximately 693 acres. The Maine Department of Environmental Protection (MDEP) and volunteer monitors have collected water quality data on the lake since 1981. The lake has average water quality, and the potential for nuisance alga blooms is low. Recent dissolved oxygen profiles show moderate dissolved oxygen depletion in deep areas of the lake. The potential for phosphorus to leave the bottom sediments and become available to algae is low. The flushing rate (time required for lake water to be renewed each year) is 4.53 flushes per year. The average rate for Maine lakes is 1-1.5 flushes per year.

Lawry Pond is a relatively shallow water body that occupies 83 acres. Water quality data has been collected since 1991. Water quality is considered to be below average, and the potential for

nuisance alga blooms is moderate. Recent dissolved oxygen profiles show low dissolved oxygen depletion in deep areas of the lake. The potential for phosphorus to leave the bottom sediments and become available to alga is low. The lake's flushing rate is 7.3 flushes per year. The Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife manage Lawry Pond as a warm water fishery.

Levenseller Pond is a small, shallow pond occupying approximately 34 acres. Published water quality data is only available for the year 1984. However, the MDEP has classified the pond's water quality as "moderate/stable", indicating that average water quality is not declining under present phosphorus loading.

There is a fair amount of shorefront development along the shores of Levenseller Pond and Quantabacook Lake. Quantabacook has nearly 80 camps/homes along its shores. There are approximately 15 camps and homes along the shores of Levenseller Pond in Searsmont. Development within the watershed of these waterbodies is varied. Levenseller has a very small, but sparsely-developed watershed that extends into the Town of Lincolnville. The Quantabacook Lake watershed is much larger, with at least half of it located within Morrill. While much of the watershed is wetlands and forest, the portions along Route 3 and Route 131 have scattered homes and a few commercial and industrial uses.

There is less shorefront development associated with Lawry Pond. There are approximately seven developed shorefront properties, one of which has many individual seasonal camps. The Lawry Pond watershed is sparsely developed, with only a few homes.

Little Pond, Ruffingham Meadow and several other unnamed ponds are also listed in Table WR-1. Very limited information is available on these water bodies, however they have been conservatively assigned a "moderate/sensitive" status.

**Table WR-1. General Characteristics of Lakes and Ponds Located in Searsmont**

Name (MIDAS #)	Depth (max/mean) (feet)	Area (acres)	Water Quality*
Lawry Pond (4834)	17/10	83	moderate/sensitive
Levenseller Pond (4836)	10/6	34	moderate/stable
Little Pond (4882)	NA	41	moderate/sensitive
Quantabacook Lake (4832)	51/21	693	moderate/sensitive
Ruffingham Meadow (4833)	NA	51	moderate/stable
Unnamed (7521)	NA	11	moderate/sensitive
Unnamed (7523)	NA	2	moderate/sensitive
Unnamed (7525)	NA	2	moderate/sensitive
Unnamed (7527)	NA	1	
Unnamed (7529)	NA	5	
Unnamed (7531)	NA	12	
Unnamed (7533)	NA	1	
Unnamed (7541)	NA	2	

\*Note: Lakes classified “**moderate/stable**” are less clear than “good” or “outstanding” lakes, but do not have summer algal blooms. Algal levels are moderate as are phosphorus concentrations. Despite their relatively high nutrient and algal levels, these lakes do not appear to be at a high risk for developing algal blooms because of high water color, consistently high

The most serious threat to Maine lakes is phosphorus pollution. Development in the form of roads, buildings, lawns, farms, timber harvesting and other human activities that may eliminate vegetation and natural depressions, allows rainwater to flow more quickly and directly into lakes. Increased runoff can carry excessive amounts of phosphorus into lakes (up to 10 times as much as normal). Since phosphorus, a natural element found within the soil, is concentrated in fertilizers, detergents, manure and sewage, the addition of these materials can greatly increase phosphorus loading on lake ecosystems. The negative impacts from phosphorus overloading can be loss of fisheries, cloudy green waters with unpleasant odors that lose their appeal for swimming and boating, and a resultant reduction in property values. Restoration of polluted lakes is extremely expensive (\$250,000 for an average lake), and some lakes may never recover. When considering lake protection strategies, activities within the entire watershed of the lake should be considered as potential threats, since development even some distance away can contribute to a lake’s decline.

The MDEP has developed a methodology for evaluating the impact of development on lake water quality in terms of phosphorus pollution. Table WR-2 contains the assumptions and the figures used to determine each lake’s per acre phosphorus allocation (P). The per acre

phosphorus allocation can then be used by developers using the DEP methodology to determine what phosphorus control measures will be required to maintain water quality over the long term.

Table WR-2 lists the major lake watersheds within Searsmont, including those where the lake or pond is located in an adjacent town. With the exception of Sennebec Pond (Appleton), all the lakes listed have been assigned a medium level of protection, which should be adequate for long-term protection of the lake. High levels of protection are generally assigned to public water supplies or cold-water fisheries.

There are a number of streams and brooks associated with the town's lakes and ponds. Most notable are Bartlett Stream, Doliff Pond Outlet, and Wilson Brook that flow into Quantabacook Lake, and Maple Brook that flows into Lawry Pond. Searsmont's Shoreland Zoning Ordinance provisions are applicable to areas within 250 feet of Bartlett Stream, and 100 feet of Doliff Pond outlet and Maple Brook. East Searsmont Cemetery Brook, Brierley Stream, and Dump Brook are also zoned as Stream Protection (100 feet on both sides).

### **Groundwater Resources**

The primary water supply for Searsmont residents is groundwater through individual dug or drilled wells. A very small community water supply serves some residents in the village. There are also several public water supply wells, such as the wells serving the Ames School, Robbins Lumber, the restaurant on Route 3, and several campgrounds.

The Maine Geological Survey (MGS) has mapped ground water resources within Searsmont. The MGS Ground Water Resource Maps indicate high bedrock elevations in the northwest and southeast ends of town with a valley running north and south associated with the Quantabacook Lake/St. George River depression. Bedrock groundwater flow is toward the center of town from the northwest and the southeast. Most of the bedrock wells in Searsmont are between 100 feet and 300 feet deep. Yield in most areas is less than 10 gallons per minute. However, there are a few areas with 10 to 20 gallons per minute yields.

Significant aquifers within the town are shown on a map in Appendix A. All are identified as having moderate to good potential for groundwater yields, generally greater than 10 gallons per minute to a properly constructed well. One of the larger sand and gravel aquifers is on Thompson Ridge and is shared with Montville. Another relatively large aquifer is associated with Witcher Swamp, the Dead River and the St. George River; a small portion of this aquifer is located in Appleton. There are three other smaller sand and gravel aquifers, one associated with Wilson Brook, another east of the New England Road, and one between the St. George River and Route 131.

**Table WR-2. Per Acre Phosphorus Allocations for Selected Lakes with Watersheds Located in Searsmont**

Lake/Pond	Lake Location	DDA	ANAD	AAD	GF	D	F	WQC	LOP	C	P
Doliff Pond	Morrill	143	10	133	0.2	27	0.92	mod-sensitive	m	1.00	0.0345
Lawry Pond	Searsmont	2,263	200	2,063	0.2	413	16.71	mod-sensitive	m	1.00	0.0404
Levenseller Pond	Searsmont	219	40	179	0.25	45	2.09	mod-stable	m	1.25	0.0583
Little Pond	Searsmont	158	70	88	0.2	18	2.13	mod-sensitive	m	1.00	0.1210
Quantabacook Lake	Searsmont	6,807	700	6,107	0.25	1,527	61.62	mod-sensitive	m	1.00	0.0403
Ruffingham Meadow Pond	Searsmont	1,798	400	1,398	0.2	280	10.82	mod-stable	m	1.25	0.0483
Sennebec Pond	Appleton	14,161	1,500	12,661	0.2	2,532	126.61	mod-sensitive	h	0.75	0.0375
Tilden Pond	Belmont	217	25	192	0.2	38	2.02	mod-stable	m	1.25	0.0657
Unnamed Pond, flows to wetland of Quantabacook	Searsmont	128	12	116	0.2	23	1.12	mod-sensitive	m	1.00	0.0482

**Table Key:**

DDA - Direct land drainage area in town in acres

ANAD - Area not available for development in acres (roughly estimated)

AAD - Area available for development in acres (DDA - ANAD)

GF - Growth Factor; a value of .20 is assigned to lakes subject to specific development pressures, and a value of .25 is assigned to lakes near growth areas.

D - Area likely to be developed in acres (GF x AAD)

F - lbs. phosphorus allocated to town's share of watershed per ppb (parts per billion) in lake

WQC - Water quality category

LOP - Level of Protection (h = high (coldwater fishery); m = medium)

C - Acceptable increase in lake's phosphorus concentration in ppb

P - lbs. per acre per year phosphorus allocation (FC/D)

**Source:** Jeff Dennis, Division of Watershed Management, Maine Department of Environmental Protection

Bedrock aquifers provide and will continue to provide most of the drinking water for individuals within Searsmont. Most wells yield 10 gallons per minute (GPM) or less. For the foreseeable future, town residents will rely on individual wells or the public well in the Village District run by the Searsmont Aqua Association.

Public water supplies, as defined by state statute, located within Searsmont are listed in Table 24.

A public water system is defined as one that serves 25 or more people for 60 or more days per year. Federal and state regulations require that owners of public water supplies take steps to protect these water supplies. The state has identified the wellhead protection area (i.e., the surface and subsurface area surrounding the well where contaminants are reasonably likely to move toward and reach the well) for each of the systems identified in the table. New land uses involving hazardous chemicals should be kept out of the wellhead protection area. Junkyards, automobile repair shops, dry cleaners, print shops and similar uses are uses that could pose a threat. State law requires that septic systems be located at least 300 feet from a public water supply well, and underground fuel storage tanks must be at least 1,000 feet away.

RSU 20 Ames Elementary School	Non-transient	Drilled Well 154'
Camp Searsmont	Transient	Drilled Well 136'
MDOT Rest Area – Searsmont -CLOSED	Transient	Drilled Well 130'
Robbins Lumber - Mill Well	Non-transient	WL #1, Mill Well, 400', 20 GPM
Olde Mill Diner (Route 3)	Transient	Unknown
<p><b>*Notes:</b> Based on federal and state regulations, a public water system is one, which serves 25 or more people for 60 or more days per year. There are three types of public water systems and for each there is a different set of requirements. These system types are: <b>Community Water Systems</b>, which serve people in their place of residence; <b>Non-Transient, Non-Community Water Systems</b> such as schools or office buildings; and <b>Transient Water Systems</b>, which serve a constantly changing, transient population. <b>Source:</b> Maine Department of Human Services</p>		

There may be other public wells within the community that also warrant special protection. The Village District well operated by the Searsmont Aqua Association, which serves approximately eight households, should be considered for special protection.

The primary sources of ground water contamination in Maine are malfunctioning septic systems, leaking underground fuel storage tanks, salt leachate from sand/salt stockpiles and leachate from landfill refuse. Spills associated with junkyards and other commercial and industrial uses, and certain agricultural activities can also pose as threats. Three known closed dumps have been monitored and shown no evidence of run-off problems.

Searsmont’s Land Use Ordinance contains a number of provisions that provide consideration and protection to ground water resources within the community. Developers of subdivisions, mobile home parks, and commercial, industrial, institutional and multifamily developments are required

to show that there is adequate water supply for their developments and that the developments will not negatively impact water quality or quantity. The ordinance also includes a requirement for a hydrogeologic assessment when a major subdivision is located over a sand and gravel aquifer identified by the MGS, or where the subdivision has an average density of less than 100,000 square feet per dwelling unit. An assessment of ground water impacts is also required for mobile home park development. The site plan review portion of the ordinance contains provisions require that projects with common on-site water supplies or sewage treatment disposal systems with a capacity of 2,000 gal per day demonstrate that the projects will not impact groundwater at the property line.

### **Water Resource Protection and Pertinent Federal and State Laws –**

There are a number of federal and state laws that protect the water resources of Searsmont. Enforcement of these laws is sporadic, primarily due to low resource agency staffing levels relative to the vast areas to be monitored. In practice, compliance with most federal environmental regulations is left to individual landowners. There is generally more enforcement of state and local environmental laws by municipalities through the Code Enforcement Officer position.

Some of the most significant state laws affecting water resources include:

Maine Natural Resource Protection Act (NRPA) – regulates activities in, on, over or adjacent to natural resources such as lakes, wetlands, streams, rivers, fragile mountain areas, and sand dune systems. Standards focus on the possible impacts to the resources and to existing uses.

Maine Erosion and Sedimentation Control Law – requires basic controls and stabilization when a project involves filling, displacing, or exposing earthen material. No permit is required, but the law sets minimum across-the-board standards that help prevent harm to surface waters.

Maine Storm Water Management – regulates activities creating impervious or disturbed areas (of size and location) because of their potential impacts to water quality. In effect, this law extends storm water standards to smaller-than Site Law –sized projects. It requires quantity standards for storm water to be met in some areas, and both quantity and quality standards to be met in others.

Maine Site Location of Development Law – regulates developments that may have a substantial impact on the environment (i.e., large subdivisions and/or structures, 20 acre plus developments, and metallic mineral mining operations. Standards address a range of environmental impacts.

Maine Minimum Lot Size Law – regulates subsurface waste disposal through requirements for minimum lot size and minimum frontage on a water body. The minimum lot size requirement for a single-family residence is 20,000 square feet; the shoreland frontage requirement is 100 feet. The requirements for multi-family and other uses are based on the amount of sewage generated.

Maine Mandatory Shoreland Zoning Act - applies to the “Shoreland zone”, which, by law, includes all land within 250 feet of the normal high-water line of any natural pond over 10 acres,

any river that drains at least 25 square miles, freshwater wetlands over 10 acres, and within 75 feet of streams.

### **Regional Issues**

Many of the important water resources located within Searsmont are shared with other communities. The St. George River flows through many communities upstream and downstream of Searsmont. There are also several lake watersheds that are shared with neighboring towns. A major portion of the Quantabacook Lake watershed is located in Morrill and Belmont. Only a small part of the Levenseller Pond watershed is in Lincolnville.

Portions of the following watersheds are located within Searsmont: Doliff Pond in Morrill; Sennebec Pond in Appleton; and Tilden Pond in Belmont. Watershed protection for these lakes and ponds should be coordinated between the towns.

Several of Searsmont's significant sand and gravel aquifers are shared with neighboring communities. Searsmont's two largest aquifers are shared, one with Montville and the other with Appleton.

Protection and management of the shoreland zones including river corridors needs to be coordinated between these communities. Shoreland zoning should be consistent with adjacent towns. Floodplain development and its impact on downstream flooding can also be an issue. Lastly, the designation of growth and rural areas along town boundaries should be consistent with those in the neighboring town. Preservation and management of open space, including expanses of wildlife habitat and forest resources, are regional concerns.

### **Public Opinion**

In the 2001 comprehensive plan update survey, when asked what they liked best about living in Searsmont, people wrote more often than any other response either "rural landscape" or "natural beauty." When asked about the critical natural resources, "lakes, rivers, streams, and wetlands" were listed by most of those who chose to respond, and the St. George River was mentioned so often it is clear this water body is a great source of town pride. Indeed, it is the open space, forests, and views of Searsmont that contribute to the "rural landscape" that townspeople referred to so often as their major reason for living in the town and the major element of the town they wanted protected. Some of the specific responses to questions about natural resources are as follows:

In response to a request to list critical properties within the town, the following were listed by more than just a few: Quantabacook Lake, Bartlett Stream, Wilson Brook, Jam Black Brook, St. George River, Levenseller Pond, Lawry Pond, and Witcher Swamp.

At the 2012 Community Forum, attendees were polled about Water Resources, among other subjects. When asked: “Should Searsmont adopt more restrictive shoreland zoning provisions than required by the State and currently in place?” 17% replied “yes”, 63% replied “no”, and 20% were unsure. 90% of those polled were satisfied with public access to water bodies, while 10% did not use water access points.

### **Conclusions**

Searsmont is fortunate to have an abundance of surface water and ground water resources. There is considerable public support for preservation of open space, and protection of natural resources especially water resources. Searsmont’s existing Land Use Ordinance provides a framework to expand upon to provide additional protection and management of water resources. The Land Use Ordinance should be reviewed to determine whether the provisions to protect water resources are adequate, especially concerning the level of protection provided for public water supplies, significant sand and gravel aquifers, lakes and ponds.

## **CRITICAL NATURAL RESOURCES**

A great variety of natural resources are found in Searsmont. Most of the town is comprised of coniferous and mixed hardwood forest areas, interspersed with overgrown fields, abandoned orchards, active farmlands, and sizable ponds and wetland areas. There are many wetlands, the most significant being Maple Meadow, Ruffingham Meadow, and Witcher Swamp. There are some higher elevations with excellent views – notably Levenseller Mountain and Appleton Ridge. The extensive forests, water bodies and other rural areas of the community provide excellent fish and wildlife habitat. The important and valuable natural resources of the community must be taken into consideration when planning for the future of the community. Searsmont’s significant natural resources are displayed on a number of maps available at the Town Office. A list of maps is found in Appendix A.

### **Topography**

The topography of Searsmont consists of a stunning rural landscape highlighted by several mountains and ridges, rolling hills, numerous water bodies, streams and brooks and the winding St. George River. Elevations range from 200 to as high as 1,048 feet on Levenseller Mountain. Moody Mountain (828 feet), and Appleton Ridge (554 feet) are other noteworthy high elevations that provide excellent views of the landscape, and are scenic when viewed from lower elevations. There is a minimal amount of development on the higher elevations. Slopes in these areas generally exceed 20 percent as displayed on topographic maps of the area. Other areas of the community consist of rolling terrain.

### **Shorelands and Floodplains**

Shorelands are environmentally important areas because of their relationship to water quality, value as critical wildlife habitat and travel corridors, and function as floodplains. Development and/or the removal of vegetation on shorelands can increase runoff and sedimentation, as well as the amount of nitrogen and phosphorus entering the water that can lead to algae blooms. Steep slopes with highly erodible soils are particularly susceptible to erosion. Searsmont’s shoreland zoning provisions are designed to provide protection to shorelands.

Floodplains serve to accommodate high water levels of water bodies, often associated with late winter and spring snow melt and rainwater runoff. Flooding can cause serious destruction to structures and other property; secondly, activities that increase paved or impervious surfaces and/or that change the watercourse on floodplains increase the quantity and rate of runoff that can intensify flooding impacts downstream.

The 100-year floodplains within Searsmont have been identified by the Federal Emergency

Management Agency (FEMA) for administration of the Federal Flood Insurance Program. A 100-year flood is a flood that has 1 chance in 100 of being equaled or exceeded in any 1-year period. One hundred year floodplains are associated with many of the ponds, streams, brooks and wetlands within Searsmont, however only those associated with Quantabacook Lake and, Lawry and Levenseller ponds appear to be in areas where there is existing development or future development likely.

Searsmont's Land Use Ordinance includes floodplain management regulations that discourage development within the floodplain, and include construction standards to minimize flood damage within the 100-year floodplain. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) requires that towns adopt an ordinance with minimum standards in order to participate in the National Flood Insurance Program. The Town of Searsmont is now a participating community in the National Flood Insurance Program and agrees to comply with the requirements of the National Flood Insurance Act of 1968. The Town adopted an ordinance establishing a Flood Hazard Development Permit system and review procedure for development activities in the designated flood hazard areas of the town, as designated by FEMA and depicted on the Flood Insurance Rate Map - Town of Searsmont, Maine, Waldo County (1985).

## **Wetlands**

Searsmont has a number of freshwater wetlands that are important resources. Wetlands:

- Protect water quality;
- Control flooding and erosion;
- Provide a natural habitat for waterfowl, wildlife and unique plant life;
- Encourage nutrient recycling; and,
- Serve as fish sanctuaries and nursery grounds.

These areas are vital to preserving the water quality and quantity of surface and groundwater resources.

The National Wetlands Inventory (NWI) identifies and maps the major wetlands in town. The NWI wetlands are indicated by functional character on a maps in Appendix A. Many of Searsmont's wetlands are associated with lakes and streams. The major wetlands are Witcher Swamp, Maple Meadow, Fox Bog, Ruffingham Meadow and Whitney Bog. Maine regulates freshwater wetlands under the Natural Resources Protection Act (NRPA). As of 1995 changes in state law made it consistent with federal wetlands regulations and created a one-stop permitting process. All freshwater wetlands are regulated, even those not shown on the NWI maps, and the level of review is based on the size of the alteration in the wetland.

Searsmont's shoreland zoning provisions pertain to areas within 250 feet of the normal high water mark of non-forested wetlands ten acres or more in size, and wetlands associated with

great ponds and most streams. Searsmont's shoreland zoning has been updated in recent years and has been approved by the Maine DEP.

The invasive wetland plant Purple Loosestrife (*Lythrum salicaria*) has invaded the wetland complex associated with the St. George River / Anderson Stream confluence. This aggressive species may change the vegetative structure of the ecosystem permanently if not controlled.

Control measures include:

- Spraying with MDEP approved herbicide;
- Releasing *Galerucella* spp. beetles in coordination with the Maine Department of Agriculture and the USDA; and,
- Manual removal of flower heads and plants.

### **Rare and Unique Natural Resources**

The Beginning with Habitat Program (BwH) provides the most comprehensive source of information available on important natural features such as lands that support rare and endangered plants and animals, rare natural communities, and outstanding examples of representative natural communities. BwH is currently conducting natural resource assessments and landscape analysis to identify ecologically significant sites in various regions of the state. Following the landscape analysis, landowners of potential habitat are contacted to request permission for BwH staff to survey their property to verify the location and status of the feature. If an important ecological site is verified, BwH will suggest management options to the landowner.

Rare Botanical Features for Searsmont identified by BwH are displayed in the Table CR-1. None of these features receives resource protection unless they are in a location associated with another protected resource. (None have state or federal legal status). Specific locations of these features can be found on the High Value Plant and Animal map provided by Beginning with Habitat and the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife (Appendix A).

<b>Table CR-1. Rare or Exemplary Natural Communities</b>						
<b>Name</b>	<b>State Rarity Rank</b>	<b>Global Rarity Rank</b>	<b>Associated Rare Plants</b>	<b>Associated Rare Animals</b>	<b>Habitat Description</b>	<b>Occurrence</b>
Black Spruce Bog	S4 <sup>1</sup>	G3 <sup>2</sup> G5 <sup>3</sup>	northern comandra  swamp birch	olive-sided flycatcher  rusty blackbird	black spruce trees over heath shrubs, graminoids, and peat mosses  often found around edges of or sometimes filling kettlehole ponds  labrador tea and tree- seeded sedge are characteristic species	Witcher Swamp  Stearns Brook
Unpatterned Fen Ecosystem	S4 <sup>1</sup>	GNR <sup>4</sup>	none	none	peatlands fed by water- carrying nutrients from adjacent uplands  vegetation composed largely of sedges, grasses, low shrubs, and sphagnum;  vegetation more diverse than in bogs	Dead River headwater  Quantabacook Lake east shoreline  Whitney Bog
Notes: <sup>1</sup> S4 = apparently secure in Maine <sup>2</sup> G3 = globally rare (on the order of 20-100 occurrences) <sup>3</sup> G5 = demonstrably secure globally <sup>4</sup> GNR = globally no rank						
Source: Beginning with Habitat Program						

Rare, threatened, or endangered wildlife have also been identified by BwH in Searsmont (Table CR-2). The least bittern is listed as state endangered under the Maine Endangered Species Act. The Brook Floater (mussel) and Yellow Lampmussel are listed as state threatened under the Maine Endangered Species Act. The Bald Eagle has been removed from both the Federal list and the Maine list of endangered and threatened species due to its population recovery. The bird is still protected by the Migratory Bird Treaty Act and the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act.

<b>Name</b>	<b>State Status</b>	<b>State Rarity Rank</b>	<b>Global Rarity Rank</b>	<b>Habitat Description</b>	<b>Occurrence</b>
Bald Eagle	SC <sup>1</sup>	none	none	estuaries, large lakes, reservoirs, rivers, seacoasts	Sheep Island (Quantabacook Lake)
Brook Floater	T <sup>2</sup>	S3 <sup>3</sup>	G3 <sup>5</sup>	flowing-water (but not in very fast or slow water); coarse sand and gravel substrates	St. George River
Creeper	SC <sup>1</sup>	SNR <sup>4</sup>	none	streams and rivers; lake outlets; sand and fine gravel substrates	Dead River headwater
Yellow Lampmussel	T <sup>2</sup>	S2 <sup>6</sup> S3 <sup>3</sup>	G3 <sup>5</sup> G4 <sup>7</sup>	estuaries, large lakes, reservoirs, rivers, seacoasts	St. George River Quantabacook Lake
Least Bittern	E <sup>8</sup>	none	none	medium to large rivers; lakes, ponds, impounded river sections; silt, sand, gravel, and cobble substrates	Ruffingham Meadow Wildlife Management Area

Notes: <sup>1</sup>SC = special concern: rare in Maine, based on available information, but not sufficiently rare to be threatened or endangered  
<sup>2</sup>T = threatened: rare and, with further decline, could become endangered; or federally listed as threatened  
<sup>3</sup>S3 = rare in Maine (on the order of 20-100 occurrences)  
<sup>4</sup>SNR = no rank in Maine  
<sup>5</sup>G3 = globally rare (on the order of 20-100 occurrences)  
<sup>6</sup>S2 = imperiled in Maine because of rarity (6-20 occurrences of few remaining individuals or acres) or because of other factors making it vulnerable to further decline  
<sup>7</sup>G4 = apparently secure globally  
<sup>8</sup>E = endangered

Source: Beginning with Habitat Program

Searsmont’s 1993 Comprehensive Plan listed several other natural areas that were identified through the Maine Critical Areas Program, which is now defunct. At the time these areas were considered of statewide importance. With the exception of the mussel habitat in the St. George River, these sites are no longer listed with the state.

- 1) Searsmont Heronry. This is a colonial bird nesting area in Ruffingham Game Management Area.
- 2) Witcher Swamp. A 1,000-acre swamp.
- 3) Levenseller Mountain Scenic Vista. There are two peaks, both above 1,000 feet. The northeasterly peak has views to the north and east toward Belfast harbor. The southwesterly peak has views to the north, west, and southwest toward the Camden Hills.
- 4) The Ghent Bridge over the St. George River is the site of a rare fauna, *Alasmidonta Varicosa*, the Swollen wedge mussel.
- 5) St. George Rapids. This is listed as a 1.5-mile stretch of Class II white water south of the Ghent Bridge. In fact, since the demolition of the dam just above the bridge, the drop at the dam is runnable and the white water extends above the dam so that the whole run in the spring is more nearly 2 miles of continuous rapids.

However, Witcher Swamp (with Appleton Bog and Pettingill Stream are part of BwH Focus Areas, "landscape areas that contain exceptionally rich concentrations of at-risk species and natural communities and high quality common natural communities, significant wildlife habitats, and their intersection with large blocks of undeveloped habitat." The areas are non-regulatory and are "intended as a planning tool for landowners, conservation entities, and towns."

Ruffingham Meadow Game Management Area, of which 250 acres are in Searsmont, is a State owned preserve under the management of the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife (MDIFW). MDIFW has no plans to acquire additional adjoining area. Witcher Swamp receives protection through shoreland zoning; the 250-foot zones are either Resource Protection or Limited Residential. There is no protection for the Levenseller Mountain Scenic Vista (2 peaks) through either state or local laws. State and federal laws strictly limit activities within the St. George River waterway; however the town's shoreland provisions also are responsible for providing protection by governing activities in shorelands. The 250-foot shoreland areas of the St. George River are zoned Limited Residential.

### **Wildlife and Fisheries**

The coniferous and mixed hardwood forest areas, overgrown fields and abandoned orchards, and sizable ponds and wetland areas that comprise most of the area of Searsmont provide excellent habitat for the community's fisheries and wildlife resources. The habitats most critical to maintaining wildlife populations are wetlands, riparian areas (shorelands), and deer wintering areas. Riparian or shoreland areas usually possess the richest soils and plant communities and are usually found to support the highest wildlife populations. Riparian areas are often transitional zones between one habitat and another and serve as travel corridors for wildlife. Wetlands provide important habitat for a number of wildlife species including most species of waterfowl (wood duck, black duck, etc.), reptiles and amphibians, aquatic furbearers (muskrat, beaver, mink, etc.) and big game (deer and moose). Some wetlands are of higher value than

others, but all wetlands add diversity to the habitat and, consequently, diversity to the wildlife population.

***Fisheries-*** The MDIFW characterizes the fishing on the upper St. George as above average for the area. Many people fish the headwaters in Searsmont in the early spring for brown trout. The MDIFW maintains angler reporting boxes at most access points along the river from Woodsman Mills to the Appleton town line. From St. George Lake to Warren is open fishing all year around. The State has stocked the river with brown trout since 1983 and at present the population is maintained more by stocking than by natural reproduction. According to the Georges River Land Trust Inventory, that stretch of the river has some excellent reproductive habitat.

Lawry Pond, Levenseller Pond, Quantabacook Lake, and Ruffingham Meadow all have populations of various warm water species. The Ruffingham Meadow Management Plan also notes that Thompson and Bartlett Brooks both have populations of brook trout. Jam Black Brook is a natural wild fish hatchery for trout.

In addition, Beginning with Habitat maps indicate Atlantic salmon rearing and spawning habitat along the St. George River.

***Deer Wintering Areas-***Deer wintering areas are sheltered areas with food sources where deer yard up when the snow is deep. They usually consist of predominately older to mature softwood stands (at least 35 feet in height with tree crown closure of at least 50 percent) to provide cover and protection from the weather, with nearby deciduous stands and wetlands. They are crucial to winter survival of deer. Some activities, such as those that involve total removal of timber, are not compatible with deer wintering areas.

The MDIFW uses infrared photography and winter site visits to determine deeryard locations. The boundaries of deeryards shift and use varies. While there are many smaller suitable areas of Searsmont that have no official recognition as deer wintering areas, some larger areas that have been identified by MDIFW are listed in Table CR-4. These areas have been rated as “indeterminate” because they have not been rated as of this date. Deer yards rated as of moderate or high value are considered “significant wildlife habitat” for purposes of regulation through the Maine Natural Resource Protection Act.

<b>Table CR-4. Deer Wintering Areas</b>		
<b>Location</b>	<b>MDIFW Map Number</b>	<b>Rating</b>
Ruffingham Meadow	020499	Indeterminate
Northeast of Hillcrest Cemetery	020160	Indeterminate
Witcher Swamp	020158	Indeterminate
Little Pond Area	020159	Indeterminate
East of Quantabacook Lake	020664	Indeterminate
Southwest of Levenseller Pond	020162	Indeterminate

Sources: Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, prepared 10/91, updated 8/01; 2010 Beginning with Habitat High Value Plant and Animal Habitats map

**Waterfowl and Wading Bird Habitat-**Many of the wetland areas in Searsmont are significant for waterfowl (Table CR-5). The MDIFW rates Ruffingham Meadow and Bartlett Stream Marsh as “high value”. Three other areas, Lawry Pond, Little Pond/Wilson Brook, and the east side of Quantabacook Lake, are rated as “moderate value”. The Ruffingham Management Plan calls for water level stabilization to increase waterfowl production. Species supported there include black duck, ring-necked duck, blue and green winged teal, wood duck, hooded merganser, American golden eye, and Canada geese. The MDIFW maintains nesting boxes at Ruffingham Meadow and along the St. George River to supplement natural cavities for cavity nesting waterfowl species. Two dozen other protected wildlife/wetlands habitats are identified throughout the town. MDIFW also indicated that Ruffingham Meadow contains least bittern (endangered) habitat. High and moderate value wetlands are considered “significant wildlife habitat” and are afforded protection through the Natural Resources Protection Act. Also, the Shoreland Zoning Act requires that the 250-foot shoreland areas around high and moderate value wetlands be zoned as resource protection.

**Table CR-5. Waterfowl and Wading Bird Habitat Including Nesting and Feeding Areas**

<b>Location</b>	<b>MDIFW Map Number</b>	<b>Rating</b>
Pettengill Stream	030511	Indeterminate
North of Searsmont	030512	Indeterminate
East of Slab City	030513	Indeterminate
Lawry Pond	050514	Moderate
Bartlett Stream Marsh	050515	High
Doliff Pond	050516	Indeterminate
Little Pond/Wilson Brook	050518	Moderate
Between Quantabacook Lake and Little Pond	050519	Indeterminate
West of Slab City	050520	Moderate
Muzzy Ridge Road	050521	Indeterminate
Northwest of Searsmont	050522	Indeterminate
Between Searsmont and Muzzy Ridge	050524	Indeterminate
Ruffingham Meadow	030525	High
Witcher Swamp, North	030527	Indeterminate
Witcher Swamp, South	030528	Indeterminate
Cedar Swamp and Dead River	030489	Indeterminate
East Side of Quantabacook Lake	030430	Moderate
Thompson Brook	030532	Indeterminate
North of Route 173	030535	Indeterminate
South of Ghent	030537	Indeterminate
Southwest of Lassell Cemetery	030538	Indeterminate
West of Knights Corner	030539	Indeterminate
East along Moody Mountain Road	030540	Indeterminate
North of Upper Black Brook	030541	Indeterminate
East of Bickfords Corner	030542	Indeterminate
Sources: Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, prepared 10/91, updated 8/01; 2010 Beginning with Habitat High Value Plant and Animal Habitats map		

**Other Species-** Moose have large ranges but some areas of Searsmont consistently show signs of moose, especially the large undeveloped areas. Beaver, muskrat, and otter signs are evident on virtually all of the town’s wetland areas and beaver lodges and dams are numerous in the more significant wetlands. Loons are commonly seen and heard on all the ponds in the town, and residents report that loons are still nesting on both Lawry and Levenseller Ponds. In recent years, numerous coyotes are heard and seen in much of the area.

Osprey and bald eagles have also been seen in Searsmont. A bald eagle nest on Sheep Island in Quantabacook Lake has recently been identified. The MDIFW notes “there are bald eagle

sightings (primarily spring and summer) and nest rumors at Ruffingham Meadow Wildlife Management Area and also along the St. George River adjacent to North Appleton. Suitable nesting habitat currently appears to exist at both sites.”According to the MDIFW the St. George River is known to contain rare freshwater mussels. In Searsmont, the brook floater and yellow lampmussel occur in the river. The yellow lampmussel also occurs in Quantabacook Lake. Both the yellowlamp mussel and the brook floater are listed as threatened species and receive protection under the Maine Endangered Species Act. Lastly, the MDIFW has an unconfirmed reporting (1988) of spotted turtles, a threatened species, in Levenseller Pond on the Searsmont/Lincolntown line. Further research is required to verify this sighting

### **Scenic Resources**

Searsmont’s rolling topography, numerous water bodies, and rural landscape make for many scenic views and vistas. Perhaps, the most important scenic views and vistas are those that are visible to the general public because they can be enjoyed from a public way, public recreation area or other publicly accessible location. For example, the Georges River Land Trust has installed signage identifying the Georges River Scenic Byway along Route 131 within the watershed of the George’s River in an effort to raise public awareness about the scenic character of the watershed.

There is considerable public interest in preservation of scenic resources within the community, as indicated by the responses in the 2001 comprehensive plan update survey. Candidates for scenic vistas included Appleton Ridge/Ridge Road, Clark’s Hill/Moody Mountain, Levenseller Mountain, Muzzy Ridge Road, Lawry Road, Moody Mountain Road, and Magog Road. Levenseller Mountain, Moody Mountain, and Appleton Ridge were the most noteworthy high elevations. In response to a request to list critical properties, the following were listed by more than just a few respondents: Quantabacook Lake; Bartlett Stream; Wilson Brook; Jam Black Brook; St. George River; Levenseller Pond; Lawry Pond; and Witcher Swamp. Other roads and sites included: Appleton Ridge, Muzzy Ridge Road, Moody Mountain, Levenseller Mountain, Magog Road and Ruffingham Meadow. In addition, response at the 2012 community forum indicated considerable interest in adopting provisions in the Land Use Ordinance relating to development on ridgelines and high, scenic elevations.

Proposals for and construction of communications towers (wireless telecommunication facilities) have contributed to the public’s concern about scenic resources. Following expression of this concern, the Land Use Ordinance was amended to include specific provisions addressing construction of wireless telecommunication facilities and classifies such projects as major developments subject to Site Plan Review by the Planning Board. The ordinance includes requirements to avoid or minimize impacts to the town's scenic resources. The Planning Board must now consider a list of factors to determine the potential unreasonable adverse impact of the

proposed development. In addition, a visual impact study, conducted by a qualified professional, must be submitted to the Town before a construction permit is issued.

The following criteria were deemed important to identifying high priority scenic resources:

1. Accessibility –must be visible to the general public from a public way, public recreation area or other publicly accessible location;
2. Uniqueness –unique or rare features are important; and
3. Distance of View or View shed – relates to size of view, view of only a few feet is less important than a view of several miles.

Using these criteria the following locations were identified as high priorities for protection by the previous comprehensive plan update committee (2003).

1. Views from Appleton Ridge;
2. Views from Moody Mountain;
3. Views of Levenseller Mountain;
4. Views from Route 131 bridge in Searsmont Village District; and,
5. Northerly views from the bridge on Route 173 near Searsmont Village.

The most noteworthy scenic resource identified was the top of Levenseller Mountain. Levenseller consists of two peaks over 1,000 feet. The northeasterly peak has views to the north and east toward Belfast harbor. The southwesterly peak has views to the north, west, and southwest toward the Camden Hills. However, there is no public access to these scenic vistas.

In addition, Searsmont residents approved a one year moratorium on the building of wind turbines that are higher than 75 feet tall or over 10 kilowatts at 2011 Annual Town Meeting to allow the Planning Board time to research and develop a Wind Turbine Ordinance.

### **Natural Resource Protection**

**Open Space Taxation** – There are currently 797 acres enrolled in the Open Space tax program. Although not permanently protected, these lands are less likely to be developed.

**Pertinent Federal and State Laws** -There are a number of federal and state laws that protect the natural resources of Searsmont. Enforcement of these laws is sporadic, primarily due to resource agency staffing levels relative to the vast areas to be monitored. In practice, compliance with most federal environmental regulations is left to individual landowners. There is generally more enforcement of state and local environmental by municipalities through the Code Enforcement Officer position.

Some of the most significant state laws affecting natural resources include:

Maine Natural Resource Protection Act (NRPA) – regulates activities in, on, over or adjacent to natural resources such as lakes, wetlands, streams, rivers, fragile mountain areas, and sand dune systems. Standards focus on the possible impacts to the resources and to existing uses.

Maine Erosion and Sedimentation Control Law – requires basic controls and stabilization when a project involves filling, displacing, or exposing earthen material. No permit is required, but the law sets minimum across-the-board standards that help prevent harm to surface waters.

Maine Storm Water Management – regulates activities creating impervious or disturbed areas (of size and location) because of their potential impacts to water quality. In effect, this law extends storm water standards to smaller-than Site Law –sized projects. It requires quantity standards for storm water to be met in some areas, and both quantity and quality standards to be met in others.

Maine Site Location of Development Law – regulates developments that may have a substantial impact on the environment (i.e., large subdivisions and/or structures, 20 acre plus developments, and metallic mineral mining operations. Standards address a range of environmental impacts.

Maine Minimum Lot Size Law – regulates subsurface waste disposal through requirements for minimum lot size and minimum frontage on a water body. The minimum lot size requirement for a single-family residence is 20,000 square feet; the shoreland frontage requirement is 100 feet. The requirements for multi-family and other uses are based on the amount of sewage generated. [NOTE: Searsmont’s provisions are different than the State minimums]

Maine Endangered Species Act – regulates conservation of endangered or threatened species and the ecosystems on which they depend.

### **Analysis of Searsmont’s Land Use Ordinance**

Searsmont’s Land Use Ordinance was originally adopted in 1995 and amendments have since been made annually. The ordinance provides substantial protection to various natural resources. It is a unified town-wide zoning ordinance that includes shoreland zoning, subdivision, mobile home park, and floodplain provisions. Natural resources located within shoreland areas generally receive considerable protection under the shoreland zoning provisions of the ordinance and those located outside areas protected through shoreland zoning receive less protection. Unique natural areas and environmentally significant areas are to be considered in reviews of subdivisions, mobile home parks, and projects requiring site plan review. The Land Use Ordinance defines a Resource Protection District, which defines 17 specific locations in Searsmont, including areas around the Saint George River, Quantabacook Lake, Lawry Pond, Little Pond, Doliff Pond, Hemingway Pond and Fox Bog, Whitney Bog, Witcher swamp, and Ruffingham Meadow State Game Management Area. In addition, a Stream Protection District is defined in the Searsmont Land Use Ordinance and includes eight streams, outlets, and brooks.

### **Regional Issues**

Many of the important natural resources located within Searsmont are shared with other

communities. Protection and management of the shoreland zones including river corridors needs to be coordinated among these communities. Shoreland zoning should be consistent with adjacent towns. Floodplain development and its impact on downstream flooding can also be an issue. Lastly, the designation of growth and rural areas along town boundaries should be consistent with those in the neighboring town. Preservation and management of open space, including expanses of wildlife habitat and forest resources, are regional concerns.

### **Public Opinion**

In the 2001 comprehensive plan update survey, when asked what they liked best about living in Searsmont, people wrote more often than any other response either “rural landscape” or “natural beauty.” When asked about the critical natural resources, “lakes, rivers, streams, and wetlands” were listed by most of those who chose to respond, and the St. George River was mentioned so often it is clear this water body is a great source of town pride. Indeed, it is the open space, forests, and views of Searsmont that contribute to the “rural landscape” that townspeople referred to so often as their major reason for living in the town and the major element of the town they wanted protected. Some of the specific responses to questions about natural resources are as follows:

A majority of survey respondents (73%) rated protection of farmland and open space as very desirable (15% somewhat desirable) for their vision of the town in the next 10 to 25 years.

An even greater proportion of respondents (82%) indicated that protection of natural resources, such as ponds, forests, wetlands and scenic views, was very important.

Regarding how best to protect natural resources, the order of preference, with the most preferred first, was as follows:

- Additional land use regulation
- Fund raising citizens group
- Voluntary efforts
- Real estate transfer tax
- Town fund to acquire properties

In response to a request to list critical properties within the town, the following were listed by more than just a few: Quantabacook Lake, Bartlett Stream, Wilson Brook, Jam Black Brook, St. George River, Levenseller Pond, Lawry Pond, and Witcher Swamp. Other roads and sites included: Appleton Ridge, Muzzy Ridge Road, Moody Mountain, Levenseller Mountain, Magog Road and Ruffingham Meadow.

During the 2012 community forum keypad polling event, participants were asked about the importance of protecting Searsmont’s natural resources. The results show that all participants value the protection of natural resources; 81% (25 people) indicated protection as extremely important and 19% (6 people) indicated very important. Some participating residents also

indicated that they think the town should spend more money to protect Searsmont's natural resources. The tally shows that 68% (21 people) of participants said yes to town funding for natural resource protection. Of the 68%, 48% (15 people) want to see the funding come from grant sources. In addition, 19% (6 people) indicated they are not interested in seeing town money spend on natural resource protection, while 13% (4 people) responded "not sure".

During the 2012 Community Forum, Searsmont residents were also polled about their awareness of publicly available land in town and whether or not they used this land. Thirty-eight percent (11 people) responded "yes, aware and use", 34% (10 people) responded "yes, aware but do not use", and 28% responded "no, not aware".

### **Conclusions**

Responses to the 2001 comprehensive plan update survey indicate that there is considerable support for preservation of open space and protection of natural resources. Existing federal, state and local regulations provide some level of protection, but there appear to be a number of gaps, particularly in preservation of open space. Searsmont's existing Land Use Ordinance provides a framework to expand upon to provide additional protection and management of natural resources. Searsmont's most significant natural resource is its predominantly rural character: its large undeveloped tracts of forest and open land.

Searsmont's Land Use Ordinance contains a number of provisions that provided various levels of protection to natural resources. In general, many of these provisions should be reviewed to determine whether they are adequate. There are also gaps, such as in the level of protection provided for public water supplies, significant sand and gravel aquifers, and lakes and ponds.

In addition, the Georges River Land Trust and the town have worked together successfully to protect land in Searsmont. This relationship should continue and be encouraged as the Land Trust continues to actively pursue protection of land in Searsmont.

## ECONOMY

Searsmont has traditionally relied on its natural resources to support local industry. The power and transportation supplied by the St. George River, along with the raw material supplied by the local forests, promoted the development of the lumber industry, which has operated continuously for nearly two hundred years. Although the number of sawmills in Searsmont has decreased over those years, the forest products industry still remains a backbone of the local economy.

Historically, agriculture was the other major economic activity in Searsmont. The town contained significant dairies, orchards, and berry and vegetable farms throughout the last century. However, unlike the lumber industry, farming has not survived as a major force in today's economy. As with much of Maine and New England, Searsmont's former farmland has largely been reclaimed by the forests.

### **Searsmont Business and Industry Today**

Even though Searsmont is far from economically independent, the town still retains a significant industrial and commercial element. These businesses, along with many self-employed individuals who live in Searsmont, provide a very important segment of the town's tax base. Though only approximately 2% of the town's total tax valuation in 2011 was associated with industrial/commercial property, more than 10% of the total taxes paid were from commercial and industrial property owners.

As in the past, natural resource based industries are significant within the town of Searsmont. Robbins Lumber Company is Searsmont's largest industry and one of Waldo County's largest employers. The processing of wood fiber and the fabrication of wood products provide more than 100 industrial jobs in Searsmont and forms the largest segment of the local tax base. Many residents continue to derive their livelihood from forest products operations, including harvesting, trucking, forest management and manufacturing.

Searsmont has a number of small business enterprises, which are listed in Table E-1. While not totally inclusive, particularly with regard to self-employed people and/or home occupations, it does present a fairly accurate picture of the character and extent of business and industrial activity within the community.

<b>Table E-1. Inventory of Searsmont Businesses and Industries (2011)</b>		
<b>Type of Business</b>	<b>Number of Businesses</b>	<b>Employee Estimate</b>
<b>Forestry Related</b>		
- Sawmill	1	118
- Logging/firewood	2	4
<b>Construction</b>		
- Excavation earth work	3	4
- Carpentry/painting/drywall/roofing	7	3
<b>Automotive and Machinery</b>		
- Auto/truck repair	2	3
- Machine shop	1	3
- Farm equipment repair	1	3
- Auto parts sales/auto salvage	2	2
<b>Retail Sales</b>		
- General Store	1	4
- Handicrafts	1	1
<b>Services</b>		
- Video Production	1	1
- Childcare	2	3
- Midwifery	1	1
- Dog Grooming	1	2
- Karate Instructor	1	1
- Gardening/Landscaping	2	2
- Computer Service and Repair	2	2
- Taxidermy/Trapping	2	2
<b>Agriculture</b>		
- Greenhouse	2	6
- Dairy Farm	1	1
- Market Garden/Farmer's Market	3	2
<b>Other</b>		
- Bakers	2	2
- Restaurant	1	5
- Horse riding and boarding	2	2
<b>Source: Miscellaneous Data</b>		

### **Recent Economic Trends**

During the 1990,s the town experienced the addition of a number of new businesses, including Crowe Rope, a flea market, and a greenhouse. The economic boom of the late 1990's was particularly beneficial to most local businesses. Robbins Lumber and Sprowl Building

Components both expanded their manufacturing capabilities. Fraternity Village General Store was renovated and expanded.

In recent years Crowe Rope closed in bankruptcy in September 2001, and Sprowl Building Components closed in 2010. The former Crowe Rope facility, an approximately 60,000 square foot industrial building houses the North Searsmont Industrial Center and is owned by Robbins Lumber. The former Sprowl complex in the village was recently sold to Robbins Lumber as well, and it is hoped that the site will be an active commercial and industrial center again in the near future.

### **Tax Increment Financing**

Searsmont has one Tax Increment Financing (TIF) district located at Robbins Lumber Company. The goal of the TIF program is to help local companies create or maintain jobs, and shields the town from increases in school and county taxes that would normally result from the increase in value from a large-scale commercial construction project. The TIF district in Searsmont encompasses a new sawmill at Robbins constructed in 2006. The Credit Enhancement TIF returned \$75,254.17 in tax payments to Robbins Lumber Company in 2012 and will continue to provide rebates through 2025. The value of the project that the town is shielded from in school and county assessments is over \$38,000,000.

### **Regional Economy**

Although Searsmont maintains a significant local element in its economy, the town's workforce is highly dependent on sources of employment located outside the town boundaries. According to the 2001 comprehensive plan update survey, more than 50% of Searsmont residents commute to sites outside the town for work, with many going to Belfast and Camden. Over 60% of Searsmont residents traveled more than 20 minutes to work in 2009, reflecting the national trend in increasing commute times. Greater travel time means a greater number of automobiles traveling the highways in Searsmont and other communities in the region.

The regional economy has changed dramatically since the 1993 Comprehensive Plan was developed. The City of Belfast has become a stronger regional economic center with significant commercial growth that has affected most areas of the region. The national company MBNA constructed large office complexes on Routes 1 and 3 in Belfast and contributed to the construction of a University of Maine campus on Route 3. MBNA has since left, but these buildings now house other large employers. In concert with this large-scale development, new restaurants and commercial establishments have been built, especially on Route 3.

The following information from the 2000 Census provides additional, but dated, information on where Searsmont residents travel to work and the town residency of Searsmont's work force.

<b>Table E-2. 2000 Commuting Patterns And Location Of Employment</b>		
<b>Searsmont Residents by Place of Employment</b>		
<b>Place of Employment</b>	<b>Searsmont Residents</b>	
	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent of Total</b>
Belfast	185	32.5
Searsmont	113	19.8
Rockland	49	8.6
Camden	36	6.3
Rockport	23	4.0
Augusta	21	3.7
Isleboro	15	2.6
Liberty	11	1.9
Total of All Others (< 10 residents each)	89	20.6
<b>Totals</b>	<b>428</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Place of Residence for Persons Employed in Searsmont</b>		
<b>Place of Residence</b>	<b>Persons Employed in Searsmont</b>	
	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent of Total</b>
Searsmont	113	27.4
Belfast	22	5.3
Belmont	20	4.9
Appleton	17	4.1
Liberty	16	3.9
Swanville	16	3.9
Waldo	16	3.9
Morrill	15	3.6
Searsport	13	3.2
Winterport	13	3.2
Brooks	12	2.9
Montville	10	2.4
Total of All Others (< 10 residents each)	129	31.3
<b>Totals</b>	<b>412</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Source: U.S. Census 2000</b>		

### **Searsmont Employment and Income Statistics**

The Maine Department of Labor reports Searsmont's labor force was an annual average of 718 people for the year 2010. On average 652 people were employed and 66 were unemployed.

Searsmont’s 2010 average unemployment rate was 9.2, slightly higher than the rate of 9.0 for Waldo County and significantly higher than the State rate of 7.9%. These numbers vary significantly from 2001, when there were more workers in Searsmont and much lower unemployment rates.

<b>Table E-3. Labor Force and Employment</b>				
	<b>Searsmont</b>		<b>Waldo County</b>	<b>Maine</b>
	<b>2001</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2010</b>
<b>Labor Force</b>	896	718	19,090	697,300
<b>Employed</b>	863	652	17,386	642,000
<b>Unemployed</b>	33	66	1,704	55,300
<b>Unemployment Rate (%)</b>	3.7	9.2	9.0	7.9
<b>Source:</b> Maine Department of Labor				

Searsmont residents had a variety of occupations in 2009 (Table E-4).

<b>Table E-4. Employed Persons By Occupation in Searsmont, Waldo County, and Maine - 2009</b>			
<b>Employment - Occupation, 2009</b>	<b>Searsmont</b>	<b>Waldo County</b>	<b>Maine</b>
Total	667	19,072	656,411
Management, professional, and related occupations	165	5,502	218,740
Service occupations	125	3,352	115,436
Sales and office occupations	137	4,408	162,634
Farming, fishing, and forestry occupations	11	301	10,385
Construction, extraction, and maintenance occupations	92	2,620	68,696
Production, transportation, and material moving occupations	137	2,889	80,520
<b>Source:</b> State Planning Office Data Package			
Note: These data are slightly different from Table 15 because they are from the previous year.			

### **Taxable Retail Sales**

The taxable consumer retail sales information in the following table provides information about Searsmont’s strength within the retail sales economy as compared to the region and state. In

2010, taxable consumer retail sales in Searsmont totaled \$2,215,100, a 5% decrease from the 2004 level.

### **Public Opinion**

The 2012 community forum and 2001 comprehensive plan update survey results indicate that Searsmont residents generally support an increase in small-scale commercial development (<10,000 square feet) and would like to see such development in certain locations rather than spread throughout town. Approximately 80% of those polled indicated that Searsmont should only allow larger commercial development in certain locations rather than anywhere in town, with 77% of respondents identifying Route 3 as the most suitable location for larger scale new commercial or industrial development. Approximately 67% of 2001 survey respondents considered small-scale commercial development as desirable. Many respondents stated that they would like to see additional small retail shops and medical and dental services in Searsmont. According to 2001 survey results, the village area and the Route 3 area are the most desirable locations for this type of development.

While most respondents agreed that growth is inevitable and even desired with respect to keeping Searsmont economically viable, certain types of growth are definitely not desired. Approximately 82% of respondents to the 2001 survey opposed new large-scale commercial development. Large industrial or commercial enterprises such as casinos, big box/chain stores, strip malls, ski resorts, and racetracks are among uses specifically identified as undesirable. Many people expressed concern that any development that contributes to noise, light, water, air, or land pollution, or that impacts views of the landscape, would negatively affect the rural quality of Searsmont. Although most people do not want to see any large-scale commercial development, more survey respondents identified the Route 3 area as suitable for large-scale commercial development than any other area of Searsmont.

### **Conclusions**

Future economic conditions within Searsmont will be determined in large part by economic factors outside its boundaries. Over the next ten years, Searsmont will continue to serve to some extent as a bedroom community to regional service center communities, such as Belfast and Camden. The town's major forest products industries will continue to provide jobs and a significant contribution to the tax base and character of the town. Commercial activity, consisting of new small businesses and home occupations, will probably continue to develop, and some existing businesses will expand, or go out of business, depending on factors outside the control of the town.

Even though these outside economic forces will have a much greater impact on the local economy than any actions the town might take, the town can be proactive in supporting and directing the growth and change of its local economy. The viability of businesses and industries within the community is crucial, particularly those that contribute significantly to the tax base and/or that provide employment. A number of local businesses also provide necessary goods and services for local people, which recycles money within the town. Searsmont's business and industries are also part of the community's unique character.

The community faces a key decision regarding the extent to which it wishes to encourage additional economic development; and the nature, character, and location of new development. The Town's involvement in regional economic initiatives will become increasingly important as the mid-coast area grows over the next ten years.

## **RECREATIONAL RESOURCES**

For many people Maine is synonymous with recreation, especially outdoor recreation. Searsmont is fortunate to have many opportunities for land and water activities. Quantabacook Lake is a 739 acre lake located in the northeast section of the town. Lawry and Levenseller Ponds are smaller water bodies in the southeast. Ruffingham Meadow, a noted waterfowl habitat, is in North Searsmont on Route 3. The St. George River winds through the western section of town, and smaller streams, such as Jam Brook, abound. Much of the private land in Searsmont is available to the public for hiking and hunting.

### **Boating/Fishing Access**

Public boat access to Quantabacook Lake is available on state owned property at the lake's north end. The access on Quantabacook is on a small, swampy parcel and the potential to improve the site is limited. MDIFW took down the sign on Route 3 identifying the access because of accessibility issues. Public boat access to Levenseller Pond is available at an area on Route 173 deeded to the town for that purpose.

Private boat access to Quantabacook Lake occurs in numerous areas. Access to the lake via Anderson Stream is available across from the post office. Access is also available by the Route 3 bridge in North Searsmont. Public access to Ruffingham Meadow Pond is on Route 3 by the dam in North Searsmont.

Access can be gained to the St. George River within Searsmont from private sites in Searsmont at the Woodsman's Mill bridge, the Ripley Road bridge, the Route 173 bridge, the Ghent Road bridge, and by the Route 131 bridge in the village. The addition of the parking lot across from the post office has provided an informal point of access to the river for the public. Access is also available from the Georges River Land Trust property on Woodman's Mill Road (Route 173).

### **Camping Sites**

There are no public sites in town. Nearby in Liberty, Lake St. George State Park has campsites available for a fee from May through October.

### **Swimming Sites**

Public swimming sites at Levenseller Pond are available along the right-of-way on Route 173. Private swimming sites are located at various locations on Quantabacook Lake. The St. George River and Anderson Stream are also used for swimming, particularly where bridges cross them. However, access is through private property.

### **Trails**

Tri-Town Riders and the Appleton Ridgeriders are the two snowmobile clubs that maintain a system of trails in Searsmont and the surrounding towns. No inventory is offered due to the nature of the trails and the fact that they are mostly on private lands. The clubs may provide a map to those who are interested.

Private or traditional trails are located on Brown Road (a one mile long access trail to the St. George River from Route 173), on Pond Road Extension (from Pond Road to Route 3), and on the Georges River Canal located off from the Ghent Road bridge.

The Georges River Land Trust maintains a series of trails in the Georges River watershed. A map is published that lists current and future paths as well as parking and path access. The Land Trust does not charge a fee for using the hiking trails and uses volunteer help and landowner cooperation to maintain their inventory. The Land Trust also plans on creating a canoe trail on the Georges River for recreational canoeists.

### **Hunting Access**

Much of the land in Searsmont has traditionally been opened to the public for hunting. Robbins Lumber is a member of Project LandShare. LandShare is a cooperative effort with the landowners through the Maine Forest Products Council that encourages multiple use of land for recreation, hunting, fishing, ATV's, and snowmobiling. The program encourages timber resource based companies to open their land to the public with an understanding that the public will not abuse the land. Signs are posted next to roads where land is easily accessible to the public. This program promotes public access as well as the understanding that these are working forests. The increase in development and population has resulted in the posting of some areas that have been open to generations of hunters. Additional growth and development is likely to further limit the land available to local hunters.

### **Lands Open to Public Access**

As noted above, Project LandShare properties are open to the public for a variety of recreation purposes. The Georges River Land Trust also allows access to the Gibson Preserve, a 124-acre property along the St. George River off of Woodsman's Mill Road (Route 173). The Land Trust also holds a conservation easement on 62 acres of an organic farm in North Searsmont. The fields and woods of this farm are accessible to residents for hiking and other non-motorized activities.

### **General Recreation**

Various organizations in the area offer recreational opportunities, including Searsmont Parks and Recreation, Cub Scouts of America, Boy Scouts of America, Webelos, Tiger Cubs, Pixie 4-H Club, Searsmont Beavers Farm team, the Searsmont Snowmobile Club, and the Camden Snow Bowl.

Searsmont residents also now have the benefit of using the facilities of the Belfast YMCA. This newly expanded facility has increased recreation opportunities for the residents of Waldo County. The YMCA offers many adult and youth programs as well as child care services.

A Cal Ripken baseball league team was formed in Searsmont in 2011. Robbins Lumber Company dedicated land by the North Searsmont Manufacturing Center for a recreational field for baseball and the facility is being constructed in 2012. A playground and gymnasium are located at the Ames Elementary School. Though not regulation size, the gym offers residents the opportunity to practice and play locally through the winter.

### **Community Events**

Searsmont has been the site of several popular community events in recent years. The annual St. George River Canoe Race starts at the Route 131 bridge over Anderson Stream in the village and is sponsored by the Belfast YMCA and local businesses. This event attracts hundreds of racers from as far away as Canada and is usually held the third Saturday in March.

Each May Searsmont hosts a Memorial Day Parade. This event has increased in popularity every year and a separate Parade Committee was established in 1999 to better organize and manage this annual celebration.

The Searsmont Woodsman's Field Day and Parade celebrated the town's woods-working tradition with contests and games. It was sponsored by the Searsmont Neighborhood Activities Program but was discontinued due to lack of volunteer support. Several street dances with music provided by local musicians have been held in the village. In recent years, the Historical Society has hosted an annual barn dance and pig roast at the new barn at the Community Building.

Searsmont Parks and Recreation (SPAR) is a volunteer committee appointed by the Selectmen to plan community events. Holiday parties, and an annual Easter Egg Hunt have been the major activities organized by SPAR in recent years.

Recently a renewed interest in cultural events has emerged on both the county and local level. The Waldo County Arts Discovery Project, an effort to identify and inventory the county's cultural resources, held initial meetings in Searsmont. The new Community Building has allowed both the Searsmont Town Library and the Searsmont Historical Society to have expanded activities. The Library hosts regular exhibitions of artwork by local and regional artists. Its annual book and bake sale in July is always well attended and provides an opportunity for residents and summer people to visit.

The Historical Society displays many items of local historical interest in the new Heritage Center and barn, and has been sponsoring an annual old-fashioned pig roast and barn dance in recent years. People from throughout the region attend and the event has grown each year. The Society has also initiated a project of photographing the old barns of historical significance in the town.

### **Public Opinion**

Most of those polled at the 2012 Community Forum (80%) believe there is adequate access to Searsmont's lakes and ponds and the St. George River. Although more than 70% of those polled were aware of publicly available conservation land in Searsmont, half of those who are aware of these lands do not use them for recreation. Importantly, approximately 30% were not aware that there are publicly available conservation lands in Searsmont.

Approximately 60% of the respondents to the 2001 comprehensive plan update survey indicated there are adequate recreational opportunities in Searsmont, while 40% indicated there are not enough. Many respondents expressed a desire for more recreational facilities such as playgrounds, picnic areas, a community park and a youth center with organized activities for young children and teens. Some also want tennis courts, basketball courts, a skating rink, soccer fields and more baseball fields. These facilities should provide organized sports for both youth and adults. A large number of respondents would like to have walking/biking and bridle trails. Some people said they would like better lake and pond access, including a public landing and swimming place on Quantabacook Lake and public access to Lawry Pond and other areas.

### **Conclusions**

The need to balance recreational needs with the fiscal restraints of a small town like Searsmont leads to a reliance on volunteers to plan and organize community activities. Fortunately, there is a strong tradition of citizen support in Searsmont.

One of Searsmont's greatest recreational features is the cooperation by local landowners to allow private access across their land. The town should encourage more public access sites available through cooperative efforts with landowners. This can be accomplished primarily through public education about open space tax programs and involvement in land trusts or other access programs.

Regionally, it is important that Searsmont reach out to neighboring communities to coordinate and augment use of abutting recreational facilities, both land and water based.

## TRANSPORTATION

The old Maine saying, “you can’t get there from here” does not apply to Searsmont, historically a transportation hub for Waldo County. Today, convenient access from the village to Route 3 via the New England Road (for points west), or Route 131 (for points north and east), or to Camden and Routes 1 and 17 (for points south) make Searsmont an attractive place to live. Transportation plays a key role in the future economics and quality of life in Searsmont.

### Road Classification

Roads can be defined according to the functions they are intended to serve. The federal functional classification system includes:

- Arterials - 10,000-30,000 vehicles per day;
- Collectors – 2,000-8,000 vehicles per day; and,
- Local roads – 100-500 vehicles per day.

Another way of classifying roads is to consider the purpose each road serves in the community. Generally, there are two categories of roads. Mobility roads are characterized by relatively high overall speeds with minimum interference to through movement. Route 3 is a principal rural arterial road connecting the mid-coast with Augusta. Route 3 has been noted as a mobility corridor by the Maine Department of Transportation (MDOT). Mobility corridors are intended to allow travelers to get to locations along the corridor in a reasonably short amount of time.

Access roads are characterized by moderate speeds with entrance/egress to adjacent land the most important purpose. Most of the roads in Searsmont fall into this category, including collector routes and local roads.

Collector routes are characterized by a roughly even distribution of their access and mobility functions. These routes gather traffic from lesser facilities and deliver it to the arterial system. Traffic volumes and speeds are typically lower than those of arterials. There are two State Highways that are collectors within the Town of Searsmont, Route 131 and Route 173.

Local roads are characterized by many points of direct access to adjacent properties and have a relatively minor role in accommodating mobility. Speeds and traffic volumes are usually low. Most of the roads in Searsmont are local roads. Searsmont shares local roads with Appleton, Belmont, Morrill, Montville, and Lincolnville.

### MDOT Route 3 Corridor Management Plan

In 2009 the MaineDOT through the Mid-coast Regional Planning Commission published a study of the Route 3 corridor from Belfast to Liberty that identified Searsmont as having the most population growth in the study area from 1990 to 2008. Although congestion and safety concerns on Route 3 in Searsmont were not identified as a problem, specific recommendations were made

for improvements to Route 3 at the New England Road intersection (turning lane) and Ruffingham meadow area (storm water runoff improvements). The study also recommends control of entrances onto Route 3 to manage congestion.

### Average Daily Traffic Counts

The MDOT provides Annual Average Daily Traffic (AADT) counts in some Searsmont locations. AADT volumes are determined by placing an automatic traffic recorder at a specific location for 24 or 28 hours. The 24-hour totals are adjusted for seasonal variations based on factors that run 365 days a year on similar types of roadways. Table T-1 compares available MaineDOT AADT count data for various locations in Searsmont.

The growth in AADT in certain locations exceeds the population growth rate of 25% for the last decade. According to MDOT, the rate of growth in Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT) in Waldo County was double the population growth rate from 1990 to 1999. The increase in traffic is due, according to the MDOT Twenty-Year Transportation Plan, to changing demographics. The increase in households with more than one wage earner, and the migration of families from urban to suburban/rural settings have all contributed to the substantial increase in traffic on Maine roads.

<b>Table T-1. Average Annual Daily Traffic for Selected Locations in Searsmont</b>					
<b>Location</b>	<b>AADT 1995</b>	<b>AADT 1997</b>	<b>AADT 2000</b>	<b>AADT 2006</b>	<b>% Change 1995-2006</b>
<b>Route 131 Village</b>	2060	2280	3390	2620	27%
<b>Route 131 South Towards Robbins</b>	1660	2030	2590	2140	29%
<b>Moody Mountain – from Route 131</b>	270	340	400	440	63%
<b>Route 173 East</b>	570	660	Not available	590	4%
<b>Route 173 West</b>	600	790	760	760	27%
<b>New England Road near village</b>	870	1160	1190	1070	23%
<b>Thompson Ridge Road</b>	670	Not available	800	910	36%
<b>Source:</b> Maine Department of Transportation					

The MDOT predicts VMT to grow by 18% statewide in the next 20 years. The higher than average population growth in Searsmont will likely result in a higher rate of change in VMT locally in the coming years. Increasing numbers of access points along the Route 3 will degrade the highway as a mobility corridor and create congestion. All cities and towns along the highway must balance the mobility of Route 3 with local access.

## **Road Maintenance**

In the early 1980's, the Maine Legislature authorized and directed the MDOT to classify all public roads throughout Maine for maintenance purposes. The classification system that was established was based on the principle that the roads serving primarily statewide or regional needs should be the State's responsibility, and roads serving primarily local needs should be a municipality's responsibility. The MDOT's classification system includes the following:

- State Highways - A system of connected main highways throughout the state that primarily serve arterial or through traffic. With the exception of urban compact areas, State Highways are mostly maintained by the MDOT. Route 3 is the only State Highway in Searsmont.
- State-Aid Highways - Those highways not included in the system of the state highways which primarily serve as collector and feeder routes connecting local service roads to the arterial state highway system. Generally, State-Aid Highways in the rural area are maintained by the MDOT in the summer and by the town in the winter. Routes 131 and 173, and the New England Road are the State-aid Highways in Searsmont.
- Local Roads - Include all other public roads that provide primarily local service. Local roads are maintained entirely by the town.

Searsmont also has 41 private roads. Most of these are E911 driveways or subdivision roads and are maintained by private individuals or road associations. A list of town and state roads and mileages is provided in Appendix D.

Winter maintenance has become a larger percentage of the overall municipal portion of Searsmont's budget in recent years. The Town is divided into three sections for winter maintenance, and the sanding, salting, and plowing are contracted out to four different contractors who are paid a fixed rate per mile. Costs have risen 28% in the last 10 years. In addition to rising contract prices, the increase in residential development has forced the Selectmen to plow roads previously closed to winter maintenance.

## **Road Safety and Condition**

High crash locations are defined by MDOT as roads in which 8 or more crashes have occurred within a 3-year period and whose critical rate factor (CRF) is 1.0 or greater. Searsmont has one area that MDOT classifies as a high crash location: the stretch of Route 131 from Belmont to

Route 173 (Lincolnville Road). This location combines a fairly steep hill and a long, flat straightaway. Crashes here are usually the result of excessive speed or slippery conditions on the hill during inclement weather.

There are no highway projects in Searsmont proposed by MDOT in their current Six-Year Transportation Improvement Plan. Route 3 is in fair condition for its length in Searsmont. Route 131, the New England Road and sections of Route 173 were lightly resurfaced by MDOT in recent years.

Local roads vary in condition. Sections that have been paved or reconstructed recently are in good shape. Plans for repairing local roads are developed annually by the Selectmen and are not currently described in a formal road improvement plan. The table in Appendix D could be expanded into road maintenance and capital improvements program for the upcoming 5-6 years, with costs spread out over that time period. This system would facilitate greater consideration for the prioritization of road improvements based on location within rural versus growth areas.

Another chronic safety concern is speed control. The reliance on the state and county law enforcement limits the amount of speed regulation that occurs in town. The Selectmen purchased of a trailerable flashing speed control sign about 10 years ago, but it has had maintenance issues and is not frequently used.

### **Bridges**

There are 13 bridges in Searsmont that are inspected annually by MDOT. A copy of the most recent inspection report is included in [Appendix D.] There are several bridges that are listed as in need of repair. The Town relined the 12-foot culverts on Thompson Ridge and on Magog Road in 2002. MDOT was originally supposed to participate in the replacement of these two bridges, but town officials determined that it was more cost effective to reline the culverts than to replace them.

The bridge over the St. George River on Route 131 in Searsmont village was rebuilt and widened in 2010.

**Access Management** – Adapted from *Working with the Maine Department of Transportation – A Guide for Municipal Officials* (MDOT 1995)\*

Land use plays a key role in preserving the effectiveness of arterial roads and other transportation systems. The unregulated addition of driveways and access points on an arterial road can greatly reduce traffic speeds and roadway efficiency. The growth along Route 3 in Belfast, and more specifically the congestion at the Reny's parking lot, is an example of how poor planning can create traffic problems.

In the spring of 2000, the law 23 MRSA § 704 was significantly enhanced to allow MDOT and compact communities to control the design, location and construction of entrances. The purpose is to *"protect and promote the safety of the traveling public and maintain highway right-of-way drainage"*. For rural arterial roads, the MDOT also shall limit the number and spacing of entrances to maintain existing posted speeds and ensure safe travel.

New access management rules were adopted by MDOT in the fall of 2001. Routes 3, 131 and 173, and the New England Road are affected by these new rules. These rules require permits for new driveways and entrances on these roads, as well as permits for changes in existing driveways and entrances, including changes of use. The town is required by MDOT to develop a process of informing landowners and potential buyers in these areas of this permit requirement. MDOT has developed standards (sight lines, vertical alignment, driveway width, etc.) for the construction of the driveway entrances within MDOT's right-of-way.

Access management standards are best implemented locally once the following three items have been determined:

- Land Use- Where development should be encouraged and where it should be limited is extremely important since land development patterns can have the most impact on traffic conditions;
- Traffic Flow- The extent to which traffic on the arterials in the community has increased in recent years and is likely to increase in the future; and
- Plan's Relationship to Access Management- How the community's transportation and land use policies can be enhanced by sensible access management standards.

Sections of Routes 3, 131, 173 and the New England Road have been housing growth areas in Searsmont in recent years. These areas have also experienced the highest growth in AADT in Searsmont and are subject to MDOT access management rules requiring MDOT permits for new entrances. Any new local access management standards should focus on these areas.

The Searsmont Land Use Ordinance addresses access management to some extent. The regulations governing subdivisions, mobile home parks and site plan review projects (e.g., multifamily, commercial and industrial uses) require consideration of impacts to adjacent highways, and include some requirements for site distances, number of curb cuts, and intersection designs. There are no access standards for land uses unless they are associated with subdivision, mobile home parks or developments requiring site plan review.

### **Local Road Standards in Searsmont**

There are several sections of Searsmont's Land Use Ordinance that specify construction standards for new roads. Section 903.8 deals with new roads constructed within the Shoreland Zone and focuses primarily on minimizing impacts to protected water bodies. Section 1007.4

governing subdivisions and mobile home parks contains detailed road/street construction standards that specify required widths and other dimensional characteristics, road grades, drainage, construction materials and other specifications. The Site Plan Review (Section 1100) provisions are not nearly as detailed but do address over design features, such as internal vehicular design, access grades, and parking.

### **Public Parking**

Town-owned public parking is located at the new community building, and at a lot across the road from the post office. Public parking has not been identified as an issue of concern by local residents or municipal officials.

### **Alternative Transportation**

The only currently available public transportation in Searsmont is the Waldo County Transportation bus service. This service receives considerable Medicaid funding and provides transportation for elderly or disabled residents to and from Belfast for shopping and errands. There is no long-distance scheduled bus service with stops in Searsmont, but residents can take a Concord Coach bus to points north and south from a stop in Belfast. There is also no rideshare parking available in Searsmont, although there are commuters within the region that work in Augusta who might be able to utilize the state rideshare program. The MDOT rest area on Route 3 could potentially be utilized as a park and ride lot.

Bicycling has had resurgence in popularity in recent years. The MDOT published the Maine Bike Map in 2000 and several roads in Searsmont are included in the Waldo County Ridge Bike Tour (Number 8). The sections of Routes 131 and 173 included in the tour are narrow and do not have paved shoulders. The increasing automobile traffic on these roads creates use conflicts and increases the likelihood of accidents occurring. The West Appleton Road and the Appleton Ridge Road, also included in the tour, are local access roads and additional bicyclists should not create problems on these roads.

The village area has the most pedestrian traffic in Searsmont. For the most part, there are no sidewalks. Although the re-built bridge over the St. George River improves pedestrian safety, the narrow bridge over Anderson Stream creates a potential hazard for pedestrians. The construction of the new community building has separated the town office and the post office, which could potentially increase the number of pedestrians in the village area.

### **Air and Rail Transportation**

There are no public rail or air facilities located within Searsmont. The Bangor International Airport that provides commercial passenger and cargo service is located about 50 miles from Searsmont. Mack Point Deepwater Cargo Terminal in Searsport has been recently upgraded and offers an opportunity for local manufacturers to ship product worldwide.

## **Public Opinion**

The 2001 comprehensive plan update survey respondents indicated that they are content with the quality of road maintenance (79.6%), while approximately 20% expressed dissatisfaction. Other transportation issues identified include concerns about the increasing traffic and the speed and noise level of many of the vehicles that travel through the town, particularly the speed of traffic through the village. Many respondents expressed a desire to see sidewalks constructed in the village.

At the 2012 Community Forum, among other subjects attendees were polled about transportation. 97% of those polled were satisfied with the condition of paved roads. 77% were satisfied with the condition of gravel roads (10% responded that they did not use gravel roads.) When asked if they would be willing to pay more taxes to have better roads, 73% responded “No”.

## **Conclusions**

Current growth patterns indicate that traffic on Searsmont’s roads and bridges is going to increase steadily over the next decade. Although there are no specific locations currently identified as a major traffic problem, with the exception of the high crash location on Route 131, additional development without adequate access planning could create traffic management problems in the future. Also, the increase in traffic and speed of vehicles traveling on our roads is of concern to many residents.

# **PUBLIC FACILITIES AND SERVICES**

## **Town Government**

The Town of Searsmont is governed by an annual Town Meeting, usually held on the first Saturday of April, at which one selectman and one assessor is elected to a staggered three-year term of office. A sexton, civil defense director, fire chief, one or more town library trustees, and one or more members of the seven-member Planning Board are also elected at the annual town meeting. A town representative to the R.S.U. 20 school board is elected at least once every three years to serve all or part of a three-year term.

Selectmen appoint a town clerk, treasurer, tax collector, code enforcement officer, health officer, plumbing inspector, constable(s), registrar of voters, and members of the parks and recreation committee, scholarship committee, and boards of appeals. The selectmen serve, *ex officio*, as Road Commissioners. The Selectmen may also appoint members of *ad hoc* committees such as the comprehensive planning committee.

Seven planning board members are elected, with two or more elected at each town meeting to serve staggered three-year terms of office. The planning board, working with or through the code enforcement officer, is responsible for issuing building permits for residential and commercial construction, including for mobile homes and subdivisions, in accordance with town ordinances including the Town of Searsmont Land Use Ordinance, which includes subdivision, shoreland, floodplain and town-wide land use provisions. The appeals board's three members are appointed by the selectmen, and meet as needed to review appeals of planning board decisions and to consider requests for variances from town ordinances. A code enforcement officer, appointed by Selectmen, investigates infractions of town ordinances at the direction of selectmen and reports to the selectmen and the planning board.

Day-to-day town services are provided at the town office by a staff of two full-time and two part-time people who collectively serve twenty public functions, from town clerk to bookkeeper and notary public. Assessing is handled by a contracted assessor, currently Jim Murphy. The town office is open all day Monday through Wednesday and until 2:00 pm on Thursday. It is closed on Friday to save on energy costs.

According to both the 2012 community forum and the comprehensive plan update survey conducted in 2001, satisfaction with the town office is very high.

## **Community Building**

Through the year 2000, the town offices were housed in an old two-story building, a former school house, located in the village center on Routes 173 and 131. The building was accessible

by a wheelchair ramp, but its second floor was reachable only by a stairway. The second floor contained the selectmen's offices and real estate records and maps. The Searsmont Town Library, open to the public during parts of three days weekly, had a room in the building's ground floor. The property included a parking lot and the post office, owned by the town and leased to the United States Postal Service.

In 2001, the community building property was sold to a private buyer who also assumed the post office lease and took possession of the building in early February 2002.

In February 2002, town offices and library moved to the newly constructed a 16,000 square foot community building with fireproof two-story vault storage. The building is located in the village at the intersection of state highways 173 and 131. The new community building was primarily funded through donations and grants. The town office section was also partially funded by proceeds from the sale of the former town office property, as well as funds voted by the town for that purpose during consecutive town meetings from 1997 to 2001. The community building houses Searsmont Historical Society's Heritage Center, and a community meeting room, a youth room and a senior room are on the lower level. This new, spacious facility should serve the needs of the town well into the future.

In 2010, the Searsmont Historical Society constructed a barn on the site of the community building to house some of the larger town artifacts. The Historical Society sold the barn once it was completed to the town for a minimal sum (\$1.00), but has an agreement to lease the building long-term. An annual pig roast and barn dance is held as a community gathering and fundraiser for the Historical Society.

### **Solid Waste Disposal and Recycling**

Prior to 1993, Searsmont disposed of its trash on a ten-acre sanitary landfill site owned by the town on Crie Road, off state highway 173 near the Lincolnville town line. In 1993, partly in response to the comprehensive plan, the sanitary landfill was closed and landscaped, and a four-acre transfer station was opened on adjoining town-owned property on Crie Road. The transfer station is open year-round on Saturdays and on Wednesday afternoons during the months of June, July and August. Crie Road, a gravel town road, has been upgraded to be accessible year-round. The transfer station is staffed by a town employee during all hours of operation.

Residents pay a one-time \$1 fee for a transfer station vehicle sticker permit and also purchase town trash bags in either 20 gallon or 33 gallon size for disposal of their household waste. Use of commercial grade trash bags is allowed if a higher fee is paid. Under contracts with Penobscot Energy Recovery Company and Pinkerton Waste Disposal, disposable waste deposited in dumpsters is collected and disposed of for a fee, and recyclables are collected and re-used. In 2011, 200.4 tons of waste, and the town recycled approximately 50 tons of materials. Automobile

tires are collected for disposal for a fee of \$1 per tire. Searsmont recently switched to single stream recycling and the success of the program will be evaluated over the next several years.

Searsmont's recycling rate (25% in 2011) compares favorably with other towns in Waldo County, and has been fairly steady over the past 10 years. Demolition debris is accepted for disposal at the transfer station two to four times per year, with a fee schedule set yearly for residents to pay for such disposal. Searsmont contracts with a local automobile salvage facility for collection of metal goods for recycling.

Solid waste disposal is an ongoing issue for small towns like Searsmont. Dealing with solid waste in a growing community requires a balance between adherence to state and federal regulations, and the need for residents to dispose of all their solid waste conveniently. In addition, the process must take place within the financial constraints of the Town budget.

According to the 2001 survey, 30% of respondents were "not satisfied" with the current system of solid waste disposal. Specific concerns included too few perceived hours of operation, lack of curbside pickup services, and a desire for more, and more intensive, recycling efforts. Changes have been made to the system since then, and the 2011 Community Forum results indicate that satisfaction is higher (73% extremely or very satisfied, 7% moderately satisfied, and 7% not at all satisfied).

### **Fire Department**

The Searsmont Volunteer Fire Department (SVFD) is staffed with a chief and a deputy chief, a force of 13 firefighters including lieutenants. In 2011, the SVFD responded to 83 calls, including eighteen structure fires, 15 vehicle accidents, six brush fires, and seventeen chimney fires. In addition, a member of the SVFD accompanies all Searsmont Rescue runs. According to both the 2011 community forum and the comprehensive plan update survey conducted in spring 2001, community satisfaction with the SVFD is very high.

The average age of firefighters has increased steadily between 1980 and 2011, accompanied by an increase in the average length of service of firefighters. Firefighters currently receive a modest stipend that recognizes firefighter services and ensures a clean-up crew after fires.

Most SVFD firefighters work at other jobs within and away from Searsmont during the week. Because of this, as well as because of the increase in the number of runs, the SVFD has mutual aid agreements with the fire departments of neighboring communities, assuring availability of additional firefighting equipment and back-up service when needed. Such services have been increasingly needed since 1996. In addition, state-mandated immunization, equipment and training requirements have become increasingly rigorous over the last ten years, and the fire fighters attended a total of over 970 hours of training in 2011.

The fire house, until 1998 a 50' x 60' retrofitted building with three vehicle bays, was expanded in 1999 through the addition of a 40' x 50' space largely built by volunteer labor and contributed materials at an out-of-pocket cost of less than \$80,000. The enlarged space has a combination meeting/training room upstairs, a radio room and bathroom on the ground floor, a dispatch room, and an office for Searsmont Rescue. The facility is deemed to be adequate at present and for the near future. Its central location makes it possible for fire service to reach any part of Searsmont in less than ten minutes, with even faster response time achievable in areas away from the Town center through mutual aid agreements from adjoining towns.

The SVFD now makes use of the following new, relatively new, or serviceable vehicles and equipment: two pumpers, a tanker truck with a capacity of 2,200 gallons, a Metal Fab fire truck with a 1,250 gallon-per-minute pumping capacity and a 1,200-gallon tank purchased in 2000; as well as 35 Indian tanks for use in fighting brush fires, hoses, radios, pagers, breathing gear, and other ancillary equipment. According to SVFD personnel, the need for additional equipment and updating of equipment is ongoing.

The SVFD has been busy in recent years installing E911 numbering signs at all occupied addresses in Searsmont. These highly visible signs make it easier for emergency vehicles to get to the right location in an emergency.

### **Searsmont Rescue**

Until the end of 1997, Searsmont First Responders provided emergency care to Searsmont residents stricken by illness or injury and to accident victims within Searsmont until an ambulance or other transporting unit (often from Liberty Ambulance) arrived. In 1997, First Responders acquired its own ambulance and its successor organization was formed as Searsmont Rescue. Ambulance and other safety equipment meet all state requirements and include a defibrillator unit.

A volunteer rescue force of eleven people in 2011 includes a chief and assistant chief (both Emergency Medical Technicians-B), three other EMT-B's, and six drivers who are members of the Searsmont Volunteer Fire Department. In 1998, Searsmont Rescue carried out 80 runs; in 2000 it completed 97 runs; and in 2011 it completed 92 runs. Searsmont Rescue also provided service, when needed, for the town of Liberty.

Community satisfaction with Searsmont Rescue is very high, and residents' appreciation for its services is explained in part by the lack of any medical services within the town of Searsmont and the need for transportation of ill and injured people to medical services outside the town.

Searsmont Rescue services are likely to continue to increase in volume in the next ten years as our

population ages. For this reason, additional volunteer staffing is likely to be needed. A new ambulance was purchased in 2008.

### **Police Protection**

Searsmont has no police department. Police services are provided by the Maine State Police, the Waldo County Sheriff's Department, and a police academy-trained town constable who handles matters of local concern including animal noise complaints. There has been no community comment regarding the need for a local police department. However, according to public safety literature, increases in population, accompanied by increases in the volume of residential and commercial properties, tend to produce greater public safety needs. As a result, the question of how to deal with the town's future police protection needs is likely to arise within the next ten years.

### **Enhanced 911 Services**

In 2001, Searsmont became part of the Waldo County 911 system. Emergency calls to "911" are received by the Waldo County Dispatch Office in Belfast, which forwards information to local fire and rescue services. In preparation for that system, Searsmont named all roads within the town between 1993 and 1999, erected named road signs between 1998 and 2000, provided road data to the Waldo County and state E-911 system, and provided all properties with a numbered location on their respective named roads.

### **Animal Control**

The selectmen appoint an animal control officer and an alternate animal control officer. In 2010, these officers responded to 17 calls, including roaming, stray and abandoned domestic pets, pest animals, and suspected rabid animals. Town taxpayers are responsible for costs connected with stray animals delivered by contract to the Camden-Rockport Animal Rescue League in Camden. Until 2012, Searsmont strays were taken to the Humane Society of Knox County in Thomaston. Animal noise complaints are the responsibility of the town constable. Community satisfaction with animal control is generally positive, with some concerns about officer access and the number of unleashed dogs.

### **Cemeteries**

The Town of Searsmont maintains eight cemeteries. They are:

1. Buzzell Cemetery off French Road
2. Marriner Cemetery on Route 173 at Crie Road
3. Heal Cemetery on Muzzy Ridge Road
4. Hillcrest Cemetery on Route 3
5. Lassell-Drinkwater Cemetery on Moody Mountain Road
6. Oak Grove Cemetery on New England Road

7. Pine Grove Cemetery off Route 173 near the Montville town line
8. River Side Cemetery on Route 131 in Searsmont Village

All cemeteries are town-owned. Burial plots are available in the East Side, Heal, Lassell-Drinkwater, Oak Grove, and Pine Grove Cemeteries. Buzzell Cemetery is for cremation burials only. In addition, Searsmont contains two private cemeteries and several very old family cemeteries that have reverted to woodland.

A sexton is appointed to a three-year term and handles the sale of cemetery lots and keeps records of burials in all cemeteries. A five-member cemetery committee, whose members are elected for staggered three-year terms at the annual town meeting, oversees cemetery activities and maintenance. Searsmont appears to have adequate cemetery space for the foreseeable future.

The Town obtained a \$39,000 Ice Storm Recovery Grant in 2001 used for tree removal, trimming and planting at several of the town cemeteries and the community building. Additional tree trimming and removal is necessary and an inventory of needs for each cemetery should be completed.

The cemetery committee created a manual for cemetery operations and management in Searsmont. This document should be reviewed regularly and updated as needed. Many old cemetery markers are in very poor condition and should be repaired. The cemetery committee authorized the use of perpetual care interest monies to be used to restore stones in Hillcrest Cemetery in 2011 and Riverside and Heal cemeteries in 2012. An inventory of markers, including maps of each cemetery, should be completed before the markers disintegrate completely. A complete capital plan for marker repair and restoration should be developed.

## **Parks**

Searsmont currently owns and maintains two parks and has a recreational easement on a fourth property. At the junction of Routes 131/173 and the New England Road in Searsmont Village, the town owns a commemorative park with a veterans memorial. At the junction of Routes 173 and 131 south of the village center is a park with an historic town well. A third park area, which was part of the sale of the community building property in early 2002, was located along the St. George River and is no longer available for public use. Searsmont has a recreational easement allowing access for swimming to Levenseller Pond near the Searsmont/Lincolnvill town line on Route 173.

In 2001, there was limited municipal access to Lake Quantabacook or Lawry Pond, the town's two largest bodies of water. Additional information on town parks, water access and recreational opportunities, is addressed in the Recreation and Cultural Opportunities section of this document.

## **Library**

The Searsmont Town Library, begun as a reading room with volunteer staffing, is located in the community building. Now containing more than 12,070 items and serving over 1,000

cardholders, the library is a valued town service. Six library trustees, elected for staggered three-year terms by town meeting, oversee the policies and practices of the library. A paid librarian provides services, assisted by many volunteers. The library lends books, offers internet access through computer terminals, coordinates inter-library loans, and provides a number of services for children, youth, adults, families, the elderly, and students. The story time and other children's programs served 828 children in 2011. In addition, over 1,400 computer users took advantage of the free computers available at the library.

In 1999, the library moved to smaller space within the community building to permit expansion of the town office. In 1999, a committee was formed to explore library expansion. In 2000, that committee expanded its concerns to raise private funds for a new Searsmont community center. In February 2002, the library moved into the new building, providing it with a facility that provided a space for a doubling of its collection and expansion of its services.

Community satisfaction with the Library is very high. The increase in Town population, especially in the number of families with children, and the number of residents who work outside Searsmont during the week, caused the library to expand its operating hours to 23 per week, and is now open Tuesday morning and afternoon, Thursday afternoon and evening, Friday afternoon, and Saturday morning.

The Ames Elementary School, a public school administered by RSU 20, provides a library to its students.

### **Hospitals and Clinics**

There are no hospitals or clinics within the Town of Searsmont; no physicians or dentists practice within the Town. A monthly clinic for children and mothers, formerly housed at the Searsmont Methodist Church, was discontinued in the mid-1990's. Ambulance service is provided by Searsmont Rescue. Residents of Searsmont use the full range of medical services provided by the 45-bed Waldo County General Hospital in Belfast, the larger Penobscot Bay Medical Center in Rockport, medical facilities at the Togus Veteran's Administration center near Augusta, and hospitals in Augusta, Bangor, and Portland.

### **Churches**

There are four churches within the Town of Searsmont. They are:

1. Searsmont Methodist Church, Searsmont village;
2. Faith Bible Baptist Church, Route 173;
3. Seventh Day Adventist Church, Route 3 and,
4. Abundant Grace, Route 131.

## **Electrical Service/Central Maine Power**

Electricity is transmitted to Searsmont residences and businesses by Central Maine Power Company (CMP). CMP provides transmission lines, metering, wires, and poles. Under electric power deregulation, electricity is generated from a variety of sources. Three-phase power is available in Searsmont village, along the Ghent Road, and along Route 3 in North Searsmont.

## **Public Water and Sewerage Systems**

The town of Searsmont provides no water services. All water service to residential and commercial properties in the town is private, through private dug or drilled wells. Approximately eight households within Searsmont village are provided with water through the Searsmont Aqua System, a private water company. Other private public water systems, defined as those that serve 25 or more people for 60 or more days annually, include the Ames Elementary School, Aldus Shores Lakeside Camping, the MDOT Rest Area on Route 3 (discontinued in 2010), and the Robbins Lumber facilities.

The Town of Searsmont provides no sewage services and there is no public sewerage system available within the limits of the town. All sewage service to residential and commercial properties in the town is private, and is provided through privately constructed and maintained septic systems.

## **Cable, Satellite and Community Access Television**

Cable television was available to Searsmont residents from 1991 through 2009, when service was discontinued. Private satellite television service is available at monthly subscriber rates to all residents. There is no Community Access Television (CATV) in Searsmont.

## **Telephone and Telecommunications Service**

Local telephone service is provided to the Town of Searsmont by Fairpoint Communications. Long distance telephone service is available from a variety of telephone companies. Cellular telephone communication is available from a variety of companies. Two cell phone towers of 200 feet or less in height and owned by private companies are in Searsmont. One is located on Appleton Ridge and the second on Thompson Ridge. Cellular and wireless telephone service in some areas of Searsmont is limited by poor reception.

## **Emergency Services and Hazard Mitigation**

Searsmont addresses a number of emergency services. The community building is a designated emergency shelter and has an emergency electrical generator for use during short- or long-term power outages.

The State of Maine requires that “[e]ach municipality shall prevent inappropriate development in natural hazard areas, including flood plains and areas of high erosion,” but does not address emergency services in cases of other hazards, including forest fires, hurricane and severe wind

storms, ice storms, long-term power loss, and war or external attack when war has not been declared. A listing of flood plain areas can be found in the Land Use and Natural Resource sections of this document.

Searsmont's growth in population, dwellings and other structures, and paved roadways makes it appropriate to consider a hazard mitigation plan and emergency service plans in such cases. The Maine State Planning Office, in its Comprehensive Planning Manual Addendum I of May 2000 suggests (in addition to planning, zoning, stormwater management and property protection strategies) that municipalities consider the development of a warning or evacuation systems, forest fire risk zone maps or inventories of populated areas and/or structures with limited access to firefighting water, warning signals, and critical facility protection.

### **Education**

Searsmont students are provided with public school services, including school bus transportation, by Maine Regional School Union 20. The Gladys Weymouth Elementary School school serves grades K-2 and is located in Morrill. Ames Elementary School (grades 3-5) is located on New England Road in Searsmont. The Troy Howard Middle School and Belfast High School are located in Belfast. There is much dissatisfaction with the merger of the former School Administrative District (SAD) 34 with the Searsport school district, and many are interested in the dissolution of the Union. The School Board representative and Select Board are working together to determine what steps the town can take to ensure a quality education for local children without the unsustainable cost increases experienced in recent years.

### **Public Opinion**

Results of the 2012 community forum and the 2001 comprehensive plan update survey indicate high levels of satisfaction with Searsmont's town government structure, town office services, Searsmont Volunteer Fire Department, Searsmont Rescue, and animal control services.

### **Regional Coordination**

Searsmont participates in a number of regionally coordinated efforts with adjoining and nearby towns and the city of Belfast to provide public facilities and services. These include mutual aid agreements for fire protection, rescue and ambulance services with Liberty, Morrill, Montville, Belmont, Hope, Appleton and Belfast; Maine RSU 20 for junior high school, high school, and special education programs (the Ames Elementary School is located in Searsmont); the Maine State Police and Waldo County Sheriff's Department for police services; the Waldo County Dispatch Center in Belfast for coordination of public safety services; the Maine Department of Transportation for road renovation and construction, bridge repair and replacement, and access management (a full discussion of road needs and ways Searsmont plans to meet those needs can be found in the Transportation section of this comprehensive plan) the Maine Municipal

Association for matters affecting the administration of town government; and the Maine Library Association for matters affecting library services.

### **Conclusions**

The construction of the new community building has alleviated municipal space constraints for the town office and library and together with the newly constructed barn allow ample space for the Searsmont Historical Society to store and display local artifacts. The building should meet town needs for many years to come.

The replacement of the bridge over the St. George River has intensified the need for sidewalks in the village area to allow safe pedestrian passage from the new community building to the post office.

There is adequate cemetery capacity for the foreseeable future.

There is a need for a review of the town's fire and emergency response needs to determine what additional facilities and services, if any, might be needed to deal with residential and commercial growth during the next ten years.

## FISCAL CAPACITY

The Town of Searsmont meets all statutory fiscal record-keeping and recording requirements imposed on Maine municipalities. It produces timely, accurate, consistent reports on its fiscal activities, regularly acquires and updates its computerized fiscal systems, trains municipal staff in use of those systems, and generates consistent but small surpluses (an indicator of expense control and revenue generation). Its fiscal efforts consistently generate unqualified audited financial statements.

### Expenditures

Annual recurring municipal expenditures between 1980 and 2010 are presented in Table FC-1. The summary of town expenditures combines 42 accounts into ten (10) categories as shown in the table.

The selected expenditure categories and their components are:

- 1) Town Administration: tax collector, ballot clerks, registrar of voters, treasurer, town clerk, selectmen, assessors, mileage, constable, code enforcement officer, fire chief and assistant, health officer and civil defense, town administration, contingency account, clerical, planning board, plumbing permits, tax map update, library, Maine Municipal Association dues, and parks;
- 2) Fire Department: equipment and operation, firemen, Searsmont Rescue, ambulance and emergency security, fire alarm telephone, E911 system, security patrol, and street lights;
- 3) Roads and Bridges: maintenance, repair, snow removal, and sanding
- 4) Transfer Station [2000]: formerly Sanitary Landfill [1980 and 1990];
- 5) Welfare: general assistance provided directly by the town;
- 6) Education: Town share of RSU 20 expenditures;
- 7) County Tax;
- 8) Insurance;
- 9) Interest on Tax Anticipation Note; and,
- 10) Unclassified: all other expenses, including cemeteries, animal control, Tri-Town Snowmobile, Post Office property loan and maintenance, records restoration, and donations.

**Table FC-1. Analysis of Town of Searsmont Expenditures**

*Source: Town of Searsmont Annual Reports  
for years ending January 31, 1981; January 31, 1991; January 31, 2001, January 31, 2011*

<b>Category</b>	<b>1980</b>	<b>Percent of Total</b>	<b>1990</b>	<b>Percent of Total</b>	<b>\$ Percent Change 1980-90</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>Percent of Total</b>	<b>\$ Percent Change 1990-2000</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>Percent of Total</b>	<b>\$ Percent Change 2000-2010</b>
<b>Administration</b>	\$19,000	7%	\$47,517	8%	<b>150%</b>	\$189,771	14%	<b>299%</b>	\$295,377	12%	<b>56%</b>
<b>Fire Department/ Safety</b>	\$5,792	2%	\$17,306	3%	<b>199%</b>	\$67,106	5%	<b>288%</b>	\$72,700	3%	<b>8%</b>
<b>Roads and Bridges</b>	\$54,616	20%	\$129,505	21%	<b>137%</b>	\$190,540	14%	<b>47%</b>	\$381,500	15%	<b>100%</b>
<b>Transfer Station</b>	\$2,420	1%	\$10,638	2%	<b>340%</b>	\$26,071	2%	<b>145%</b>	\$53,350	2%	<b>105%</b>
<b>Welfare</b>	\$938	0%	\$1,676	0%	<b>79%</b>	\$1,510	0%	<b>-10%</b>	\$7,500	0%	<b>397%</b>
<b>Education</b>	\$132,012	49%	\$364,699	59%	<b>176%</b>	\$744,330	56%	<b>104%</b>	\$1,290,885	51%	<b>73%</b>
<b>County Tax</b>	\$13,544	5%	\$29,469	5%	<b>118%</b>	\$74,847	6%	<b>154%</b>	\$289,541	11%	<b>287%</b>
<b>Insurance</b>	\$824	0.3%	\$8,227	1%	<b>898%</b>	\$9,245	1%	<b>12%</b>	\$19,000	1%	<b>106%</b>
<b>Interest on Tax Anticipation Note</b>	\$0	0%	\$2,195	0%	<b>100%</b>	\$5,589	0%	<b>155%</b>	\$1,000	0%	<b>-82%</b>
<b>Unclassified</b>	\$38,081	14%	\$8,769	1%	<b>-77%</b>	\$28,610	2%	<b>226%</b>	\$26,310	1%	<b>-8%</b>
<b>TIF Financing Plan</b>									\$101,535	4%	<b>100%</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$267,227</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>\$620,001</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>132%</b>	<b>\$1,337,619</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>116%</b>	<b>\$2,538,698</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>90%</b>

Based on the town's experience over the past twenty years, expenditures are likely to increase over the next ten years. That rate of increase may be as much as 100%, bringing the 2020 municipal expenditure total, allowing for an inflation factor at 3% annually, to approximately \$3,000,000.

Although not direct revenue to the town, Searsmont receives an annual subsidy from the State of Maine to help support the town's share of the RSU 20 budget. This subsidy has an effect on the town's ability to control the rate of increase in local property taxes by absorbing some education costs. An increase in the subsidy helps control the rate of increase of property taxes. A decrease in the subsidy or a slowing of the rate of increase in the subsidy means that the town must provide more of the funds necessary to support education from other sources. The subsidy is based in part on the total property valuation of the town. As the town's total property valuation increases, the amount of the subsidy decreases.

Data for the State of Maine Subsidy for School Expenditures for the years 1990, 2000 and 2010 for the Town of Searsmont are:

<b>1990</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>2010</b>
\$472,112	\$600,000	\$1,397,750

The following data summarize the values for land, buildings and personal property on which property tax assessments were based. In 2010, property was valued at 70% of true value for assessment purposes.

	<b>1990</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>2010</b>
<b>Land</b>	\$ 20,847,600	\$23,547,400	\$65,304,800
<b>Buildings</b>	\$ 23,851,450	\$30,710,900	\$62,693,250
<b>Personal Property</b>	\$ 3,486,700	\$ 7,992,600	\$ 7,320,000
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$ 48,185,750*</b>	<b>\$62,250,900</b>	<b>\$135,318,050</b>

*\*In 1991, Searsmont's property was professionally revalued and the total value was determined to be \$49,700,000, a figure equal to 103.1% of the valuation used in 1990. Of the 1991 total, commercial (rather than residential) property was valued at \$6,300,000, or 12.7% of the total.*

The tax assessment rates per \$1,000 of 100% assessed value were \$8.55 in 1990 (dropping to \$8.30 after revaluation in 1991), \$17.40 in 2000; and \$17.40 in 2010.

## **Revenues**

The summary of town revenues combines all revenue accounts into six (6) categories (Table FC-2). Consistent with the analytic framework presenting town expenditures (above), it is

informative to examine that trend of town revenues over twenty years (1990 to 2010), dividing the analysis into two ten-year periods, and thereby eliminate greater potential for one-time, non-recurring, or aberrant account fluctuations. The selected revenue categories are:

- 1) Property Taxes;
- 2) Excise Taxes;
- 3) Federal Revenue Sharing;
- 4) State Revenue Sharing;
- 5) State Highway Aid; and,
- 6) All Other: permit and other fees, grants, interest on bank accounts, tree growth reimbursement, homestead exemptions, donations (excluding donations collected in 2000 for construction of a new Community Center), rents, and cash balance carried over from previous year(s).

**Table FC-2. Town of Searsmont Revenues (in Dollars)**

*Source: Town of Searsmont Annual Reports  
for years ending January 31, 1991; January 31, 2001; January 31, 2011*

<b>Category</b>	<b>1990</b>	<i>Percent of Total</i>	<b>2000</b>	<i>Percent of Total</i>	<i>\$ Percent Change 1990-2000</i>	<b>2010</b>	<i>Percent of Total</i>	<i>\$ Percent Change 2000-2010</i>
<b>Property Taxes</b>	<b>448898</b>	66.3	<b>1011293</b>	66.4	125.3	<b>2325817</b>	81.5	130.0
<b>Excise Taxes</b>	<b>64250</b>	9.5	<b>146446</b>	9.6	127.9	<b>187815</b>	6.6	28.2
<b>State Revenue Sharing</b>	<b>44358</b>	6.6	<b>74122</b>	4.9	67.1	<b>66101</b>	2.3	-10.8
<b>State Highway AID</b>	<b>20873</b>	3.1	<b>39684</b>	2.6	90.1	<b>19842</b>	0.7	-50.0
<b>All Other</b>	<b>98647</b>	14.5	<b>251585</b>	16.5	172.7	<b>253501</b>	8.9	0.8
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>677026</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>1523130</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>127.5</b>	<b>2853076</b>	<b>100.0</b>	87.3

As shown in Table FC-2, since 2000 property tax revenues have more than doubled as a percentage of local revenues, while State revenues have decreased significantly. It should also be noted that the town consistently carries a fund balance (surplus) of approximately \$300,000 or more. Excess fund balance is used to lower the real estate tax commitment and in recent years has allowed the town to avoid the need for securing a tax anticipation note.

### **Capital Investment Planning**

The goal of capital investment planning is the anticipation of major capital outlays, and the prioritization and scheduling of funding for those projects in a fiscally sound manner that

minimizes drastic changes in tax levels – one of the proposed goals articulated in this section of the comprehensive plan.

The Town of Searsmont currently uses an informal budgeting process for capital outlays and sets aside funds in designated capital reserve accounts for anticipated purchases. As a matter of policy, the Town of Searsmont has incurred very little long-term debt over the years and currently has no debt. The town prefers to pay for capital purchases out of accumulated surplus funds on hand, out of current revenues, or with capital reserve funds. Searsmont has significant fiscal capacity for carrying additional long-term debt should the need arise.

Given Searsmont’s rapid residential and commercial growth rates since 1980, increasing school district assessments, and increasing county assessments, it is appropriate to predict that increased demands for services and facilities will continue.

### **Fiscal Capacity Analysis**

Evidence of the Town of Searsmont’s fiscal strength can be found in:

- 1) State guidelines suggest that a town’s debt should not exceed 5% of its assessed valuation, and its long-term debt should not exceed 15% of that value and currently, Searsmont has no debt;
- 2) Increasing levels of town property valuation;
- 3) A real estate and personal property tax collection rate of approximately 90% within the tax year, and of approximately 95% within two years;
- 4) Effective use and modernization of computer-assisted technologies in maintaining the town’s fiscal record-keeping and reporting functions; and
- 5) Continuous series of unqualified municipal audits.

Evidence of potential fiscal capacity issues can be found in:

- 1) The likelihood of increased demand for town services and facilities due to rapid growth;
- 2) The significant increase in property tax as a percentage of local revenue;
- 3) A decreasing percentage of total town expenditures supported by funds from the State of Maine (based in part on the increasing level of property valuation in the town); and
- 4) More than half of town funds required yearly by RSU 20 for school costs.

## LAND USE

Searsmont is a rural town encompassing nearly 40 square miles and 25,600 acres. The north end of town is situated along State Route 3, the primary east-west route between Augusta and Route 1 and the downeast coast. State Route 131 bisects Searsmont from north to south. The village center is located at the intersection of Routes 131, 173 and the St. George River, which runs through the center of town.

Development in Searsmont has followed the traditional New England pattern with a village center and narrow winding roads carved through the woods and over the hills toward other towns in all directions. Old farmsteads dot these winding roads, with farm fields turning to forest as agriculture fades as a way of life for many.

In recent years, new houses and buildings are beginning to fill in the gaps between the old farmsteads. A local lumber mill has grown from small, family-run sawmill to a substantial industry. New types of businesses have come to town. There is still a great deal of open space and forest land in town, but as development pressure continues to grow, so does the likelihood that the rural landscape and traditional land use pattern will change.

### **Water Bodies and Wetlands**

There are seven lakes and ponds located entirely in Searsmont totaling 909 acres (3.6%). Quantabacook Lake, at 693 acres, is the largest. Fox Bog Pond is the smallest (8 acres).

The St. George River is a defining feature of the landscape in Searsmont. The river parallels Route 173 from Montville and then passes through Searsmont village. It turns more southerly at the village and heads toward Ghent Road and Appleton.

There are also many large and small wetlands within the town boundaries. The major wetlands are Witcher Swamp, Maple Meadow, Fox Bog, Ruffingham Meadow, and Whitney Bog. The total wetland acreage (identified on National Wetland inventory maps) is approximately 1,452 acres, or 5.7 % of the town. The Natural Resources section of this comprehensive plan contains more in-depth information about water bodies and wetlands.

### **Searsmont Development Patterns**

Searsmont has a very traditional, mixed use, village center that is enhanced by its location along the St. George River and Anderson Stream. The village consists of a number of mostly older, single-family residences, a general store, church, fire station, community green, the post office, and the new community building and former municipal building. The new community building is located near the village center and houses the town offices, library, and Historical Society Heritage Center. The former Sprowl mill complex occupies a large parcel within the village and

was recently purchased by Robbins Lumber. The Ames Elementary School is located along the New England Road about a mile from the center of the village. Searsmont's village is a focal point for the community.

Most of the residences in Searsmont are single-family homes, with a high proportion of mobile homes. As of the year 2010, there were a total of 741 residential units, of which 575 (69%) were single-family houses and 254 (31%) were mobile homes. In 2000, there were a total of 620 residential units, of which 467 (75%) were single-family houses and 145 (23%) were mobile homes, indicating that manufactured housing is increasing as a proportion of total housing. The remaining 2% of Searsmont's housing consists of one small multifamily housing complex (6 units), and several houses with apartments. The chapter on Housing contains additional information on housing in Searsmont.

While the highest density of residential uses is in the village center, most of the town's residential uses are located in the outlying areas along rural roads. The one small apartment complex (5 units) is located on Muzzy Ridge Road less than a mile from the village. There is a mobile home park, currently with 8 units, located about 1.5 miles northeast of the village off Route 131 north. Another 3-unit mobile home park is located just off of the New England Road. The Whispering Pines mobile home park is located at the end of Thompson Ridge Road, just over the line in Montville.

The 2010 Census identified 127 seasonal housing units in Searsmont. Most of the town's seasonal housing is located on Quantabacook Lake and Levenseller Pond. There are also several seasonal homes on Lawry Pond. Hunting camps and other seasonal homes are scattered around the community.

Between 2000 and 2010, 135 residential units were added to the town's housing stock. Twenty-nine (21%) of these units were mobile homes. Recent residential growth has been scattered throughout town, primarily on individual lots as opposed to within subdivisions. Since 2001, the Planning Board has approved 4 subdivisions (22 new lots). A mobile home park on Route 131 North was approved in the late 1990's. Between 1981 and 1993, seven subdivisions were formed with a total of 40 lots (1993 Comprehensive Plan).

### **Commercial and Industrial Land**

Less than one percent of land in Searsmont is classified as commercial or industrial according to the town's TRIO tax system, or a total of approximately 165 acres. Searsmont village, Route 3 and Ghent Road are the principal commercial and/or industrial areas. Robbins Lumber Company, one of the town's major industries, is located on Ghent Road. Another former industrial establishment located in the village has recently been bought by Robbins Lumber, who intends to

utilize some of the area for its own manufacturing and also lease space to other businesses. A general store is also located within the village.

There are a number of small businesses located along Route 3, including several gift shops, a machine shop, an auto repair shop, and a day care business. There are several home occupations and small businesses on the New England Road. A nursery and greenhouse business is located along the Woodsman's Mills Road (Route 173). Other small businesses and home occupations are scattered throughout the town. There are also several commercial gravel pits in Searsmont.

Several significant changes have occurred over the past decade or so. A large industrial building was built on Route 3 by Crowe Rope LLC which subsequently went bankrupt. That building was then redeveloped as the North Searsmont Manufacturing Center by Robbins Lumber. Also, Maritimes Northeast has installed a natural gas pipeline adjacent to the Central Maine Power high-voltage lines that bisect Searsmont, as well as a gas compressor station.

The most controversial commercial project proposed since the last comprehensive plan was an automobile racetrack on Moody Mountain Road. A local resident submitted a Site Plan Application to the planning board to construct a dirt racetrack for weekend use by members of a private racing club. A group of citizens petitioned the Selectmen for a moratorium on racetracks, which ultimately passed at a special town meeting in January 2001. The applicant withdrew his application. The selectmen renewed the moratorium for a second 6-month period in June 2001, a third in November 2001, a fourth in June 2002, and a fifth in November 2002.

A second type of development, cellular towers, has also met with local resistance recently. In the early part of the last decade, several companies proposed constructing cellular phone towers in three locations, Muzzy Ridge, Appleton Ridge, and Thompson Ridge. Citizens once again petitioned the selectmen for a moratorium on cell towers. The moratorium was defeated at a special town meeting in May 2001. Towers have been constructed on Appleton Ridge and Thompson Ridge. The Land Use Ordinance was amended to address this issue.

### **Municipal/Institutional Properties**

There are a number of municipal, state, and other institutionally owned properties within Searsmont. The new community building houses the town offices, library, and Heritage Center. Additional space is available for a meeting room and other future uses. The building was built primarily with donated funds, labor and materials. The old community building and post office were sold to a private owner in 2001. The post office continues to be located in the same building. The old community building is currently for rent as a commercial property.

The Town also owns a fire station, which was recently expanded, and a salt/sand shed. Eight town-owned cemeteries, totaling approximately 9.0 acres, are scattered around the community.

The town transfer station is located on the Crie Road. Searsmont has no municipal water or sewerage system. However, there is a small, privately owned water company, Searsmont Aqua Association, which supplies water to a few properties in the village. RSU 20 owns the Ames Elementary School on the New England Road (6 acres).

The State of Maine owns approximately 257 acres of land in Searsmont, most of which is the Ruffingham Meadow State Game Management Area (250 acres). There is also a small public boat launch on Quantabacook Lake off of Route 3 that was managed by the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife (2 acres). A picnic area/rest area on the north side of Route 3 owned by the Department of Transportation (5 acres) was closed in 2009.

### **Current Land Use Regulation and Its Influence on Growth**

Searsmont's current Land Use Ordinance was drafted in response to the 1993 Comprehensive Plan. The Land Use Ordinance consolidates all of the previously separate land use related ordinances, including: Shoreland Zoning; Site Plan Review; Subdivision; Floodplain; and other miscellaneous ordinances and standards, such as minimum lot size and setbacks. In addition to the Shoreland Zones, a Village District and Village Extension District were created in 1995 to encourage the traditional pattern of higher density growth in the village area and discourage sprawl. The two village districts were designated as growth areas as a result of the 1993 Plan. The other areas proposed for growth in that Plan were not implemented.

The Land Use Ordinance allows for residential cluster developments on tracts with five or more lots. The cluster provisions are designed to allow for a reduction in the size of roads and utility systems and for "the permanent retention of the natural characteristics of the land".

Most of the town is zoned as rural, but the designation allows a broad variety of land uses, with a 1.9-acre minimum lot size requirement. While there are many areas with development constraints, such as wetlands, steep slopes, and limited access, advances in site engineering have increased the places where development can occur. The 1.9-acre minimum lot size is large enough to allow flexibility in placing a building on a site that may have wet spots or steep slopes.

An analysis of residential building permits issued between 2000 and 2010 clearly indicates that growth has been occurring throughout the town and has not been influenced by the creation of the two village districts. A substantial proportion of the new homes have been constructed along Route 173, the New England Road, and in the North Searsmont/Route 3 area.

Searsmont currently has an effective Code Enforcement Officer and the Selectmen are committed to fairly and consistently enforcing the Land Use Ordinance. There have been several recent enforcement actions that have been favorably resolved.

The lack of effectiveness of the Land Use Ordinance in directing new growth to the Village Core and Village Extension districts is probably due to a number of factors including the desire to live in rural areas, the lack of choice in affordable land and/or vacant homes for purchase within the village, and the lack of incentives and disincentives within the Land Use Ordinance to locate in one place as oppose to another. The minimum lot sizes for residential development, 60,000 square feet for the Village Core District and 80,000 square feet for the Village Extension District, as compared to a minimum lot size of 1.9 acres in the Rural District, do not provide much of an incentive to locate in the designated growth areas. Further, there are more restrictions on land use in the village areas than in the rural areas. The restrictions in the village districts appear to be designed to provide protection to residential uses.

### **Rural Areas**

Searsmont is a classic New England small town with a village surrounded by large expanses of open land, woods, water bodies, and wetlands. Development has occurred along existing roads for the most part, leaving large forested, farm and open space parcels that should be included in the rural areas. Constraints to development are shown on a map in Appendix A.

Support for small woodlot owners, farmers, and the forest products industry practicing sustainable forestry is another assurance that the town's forests and farmlands will continue to exist. Further, encouraging landowners to have their properties evaluated by a professional forester, managed for sustainability using best management practices, and actively encouraging participation in the Tree Growth and Farm and Open Space Programs are other actions the town might undertake to protect forest resources.

### **Public Opinion**

A significant majority (75%) of those polled at the 2012 community forum think the rate of population growth in Searsmont is "just right". The remaining 25% responded that population growth is "too fast". In terms of housing growth, 60% of those polled think it is "just right" and 40% responded "too fast". A majority of those polled (80%) believe that Searsmont should allow large commercial (>10,000 ft<sup>2</sup>) or industrial development only in certain locations in town, with Route 3 being favored as the location (77%).

Most of the respondents of the 2001 comprehensive plan update survey identified the rural character of Searsmont as something they liked best about the town. More than 70% indicated that protecting farmland and open space is very important. Approximately half of the respondents felt that Searsmont is growing too fast, and approximately half thought the growth rate is acceptable, or had no opinion. Only one respondent indicated that growth is too slow (<1%).

Regarding development patterns, 2001 survey results indicated that concentrated patterns are more desirable than scattered development (71.5% vs. 36%). Approximately 67.3% of respondents indicated that small-scale commercial development is desirable or very desirable. Approximately 55% indicated that additional residential development is desirable or very desirable. Approximately 18% listed large-scale commercial/industrial as desirable or very desirable.

Respondents indicated a preference (more than 50%) for residential growth over other types of growth in all areas except for the village and Route 3. The village was rated by almost a majority of respondents as most desirable of all areas for small-scale commercial development (50%). Route 3 was rated most desirable of all areas for large-scale commercial/industrial growth but not by a majority of respondents (41.5%).

Many property owners that responded to the narrative portions of the survey and at neighborhood meetings indicated that large scale commercial and industrial growth is not desirable in general. Individual responses indicated a desire for more retail shops and restaurants in the village, as well as for a more “user friendly” design including sidewalks and better speed limit enforcement.

Of the various options provided in the survey for protection of Searsmont’s natural resources, more respondents favored additional land use regulation (48.2%) than any other option listed.

### **Regional Land Use Patterns**

There have been notable changes in the region related to the economy and growth since the 1993 Plan was adopted. The considerable growth Waldo County experienced primarily as a result of the expansion of MBNA into Camden and Belfast has slowed with the recent economic downturn. However, retirees continue to be attracted to the mid-coast region and many of the new homes built in recent years, as well as existing homes, are being purchased by retirees from Maine and many other places.

Further, with the heightened demand for housing, the cost of housing has increased to a point where affordable housing can be difficult to find in Belfast and Camden. Low and middle-income families have had to seek affordable land and housing in outlying areas, such as Searsmont. This may in large part explain why over the past decade over 50% of Searsmont’s new housing was manufactured housing.

Though the recent economic downturn has generally slowed the sale of property and stabilized home prices, it is unknown how long the lull in development pressure will last. It is expected that Belfast, Camden, and Augusta will continue to serve as the region’s service center communities, while Searsmont and its neighboring rural communities will serve as more affordable bedroom communities.

The municipalities adjacent to Searsmont have instituted various levels of planning and land use regulation. The towns of Morrill, Montville, and Appleton do not have town-wide zoning in effect at this time. Appleton and Montville are currently beginning the comprehensive planning process. Lincolnville is currently in the comprehensive planning process.

The towns of Belmont and Hope have town-wide zoning. Belmont has zoned land adjacent to Searsmont as “Rural Residential”, which is designated for agricultural, business and residential uses. Hope has zoned land adjacent to Searsmont as “Residential”. This district allows single-family housing on larger parcels. The “Rural Residential” and “Residential” designations may not be adequate to prevent development sprawl consisting of single-family residential development on large lots.

<b>Table LU-1. Planning and Land Use Regulation in Neighboring Municipalities</b>		
<b>Municipality</b>	<b>Comprehensive Plan Status</b>	<b>Status of Land Use Regulation</b>
<b>Montville</b>	no comprehensive plan, beginning process	no town-wide land use ordinance
<b>Morrill</b>	consistent comprehensive plan	state mandated shoreland zoning/ no town-wide land use ordinance
<b>Belmont</b>	consistent comprehensive plan	town-wide land use ordinance/ rural residential zoning adjacent to Searsmont
<b>Lincolnville</b>	inconsistent comprehensive plan, working on update	No town-wide land use ordinance/ state mandated shoreland zoning/floodplain management ordinance
<b>Hope</b>	no comprehensive plan	town-wide land use ordinance/ residential zoning adjacent to Searsmont
<b>Appleton</b>	no consistent comprehensive plan, beginning process	state mandated shoreland zoning/ no town-wide land use ordinance
<b>Source: Mid-Coast Regional Planning Commission</b>		

All of Searsmont’s neighboring municipalities have the state mandated shoreland zoning, which consists of zoning along the shores of rivers, lakes, ponds, non-forested wetlands greater than 10 acres in size and many streams and brooks. Searsmont shares Shoreland Zoning districts on inland ponds, rivers and streams with the towns of Appleton, Morrill and Lincolnville. Appleton has land adjacent to the St. George River zoned “Resource Protection Shoreland Zoning”. Morrill has “Limited Residential Shoreland Zoning” along Quantabacook Lake. Lincolnville has “Resource Protection Shoreland Zoning” along Levenseller Pond.

## Conclusions

If a fast rate of growth resumes in the near future, new development could have a significant impact on the rural qualities identified as so important to those who live, work and play in Searsmont. Public input and the community vision should be factored into trends in local and regional growth and economic forecasts to guide Searsmont in land use planning and regulation over the next decade.

Although Searsmont has grown in the last twenty years, there is more forested land protected by Tree Growth now than in 1993. There is also more land protected by the Farmland and Open Space tax program. The increased participation in these programs is likely partially a result of the increase in property taxes, as residents strive to find ways to keep their properties in the face of ever increasing land values and mil rates. However, the town's major industrial landowner, Robbins Lumber Company, maintains considerable land in Tree Growth and continues to expand and provide a significant portion of the town's tax base. This industry and any anticipated plans for expansion should be considerations in future planning for the community.

Recent residential development has been scattered throughout town, but there are still many large tracts of undeveloped land in Searsmont. However, as more people move to rural areas to escape the intensity of city life, Searsmont will continue to grow. Future development in Searsmont is likely to include mostly residential development, with some small-scale commercial and service businesses popping up to meet local demand. It is also likely that some new industry will locate either at the North Searsmont manufacturing site or near the pipeline. If current growth rates continue as projected, many of the large tracts of undeveloped land will be divided and developed, changing the landscape in Searsmont from rural to suburban.

This Plan projects that there will be a demand for an additional 62 or so housing units by the year 2018 (see Housing chapter). The plan takes into consideration that Searsmont will probably never be an intensively developed town for a number of reasons, including the:

- 1) Extent of development constraints, such as poor soils, wetlands, and steep slopes;
- 2) Lack of accessibility to back land and lack of centralized sewer or water facilities;
- 3) Extent of land enrolled in the Tree Growth and Open Space tax programs; and
- 4) Public support for maintaining a rural community.

Given the rural nature of the town, most of this housing will be single family, with a high proportion of manufactured housing. Small mobile home parks or multifamily developments with their own centralized water/sewer facilities may also occur. Future growth areas should be designed to support desired residential growth that is consistent with the rural, small town nature of Searsmont.

## **APPENDIX A – MAPS**

1. Known Archaeological Sites and Areas Sensitive for Prehistoric Archaeology in Searsmont
2. Agricultural Resources Map – Town of Searsmont
3. Significant Aquifers and Wetland Characterization – Town of Searsmont
4. Wetlands Characterization – Town of Searsmont
5. Water Resources and Riparian Habitats – Town of Searsmont
6. High Value Plant and Animal Habitats – Town of Searsmont
7. Undeveloped Habitat Blocks – Town of Searsmont
8. USFWS Priority Trust Species Habitats
9. Transportation Map – Searsmont
10. Development Constraints – Town of Searsmont