

Bennington County Regional Plan

Adoption Date: March 19, 2015

Amended (new Regional Energy Plan added): March 23, 2017



Bennington County Regional Commission
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Bennington County Regional Plan

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Numerous outdoor recreational activities benefit from the region's extensive upland forest areas. Hiking, camping, hunting (including camps for hunting or other occasional use), fishing, cross-country skiing, snowmobiling, and horseback riding are a few of the many recreational activities that are appropriate in upland forests. Limited commercial natural resource based recreation facilities (e.g., campgrounds, cross-country ski centers, alpine ski trails at Bromley Mountain) may be appropriate in areas with adequate access roads. Such facilities also may include lodging and other commercial and recreational facilities associated with carefully planned national or state parks. Particular care must be observed in areas above 2500 feet in elevation to avoid damage to fragile environments and ecosystems.

Energy Resources and Utility Development in Upland Forests

The region's upland forests contain vast biomass energy resources. As residential, commercial/industrial, and institutional uses all begin to reduce utilization of imported fossil fuels for space heating, greater use of wood obtained from the region's forests can be expected. Significantly higher levels of biomass extraction can be supported by the region's forests, provided logging practices avoid damage to critical resources, surface waters, and that soil nutrient levels are not depleted. Some level of biomass processing, especially for wood chip and cord wood production, also is appropriate in the upland forests.

Some of the high ridgelines and mountains of the upland forests also offer ideal locations for wind energy turbines and related electricity transmission lines as well as telecommunication installations. These facilities may become increasingly important to the region and can be sited in upland forests provided that sites are developed with proper environmental controls. While disturbance of high elevation lands during construction is inevitable, plans to mitigate damage and restore sites to stable conditions following construction must be developed and followed. Such facilities are, of course, visible over a wide area, so planning studies should be undertaken to ascertain locations that are both economically viable and acceptable to residents of the region. The amount of wind energy generation developed in the region should be limited so that it is not out of proportion with the energy demands of the region. The number of telecommunication facilities at high elevations should be limited to the extent possible through co-location of antennae on single towers and, whenever possible, use of multiple transmitters at lower, less prominent locations.



This wind energy development in Searsburg may soon be expanded. The region needs to carefully plan for the siting of future public utility development in upland forest areas.

Green Mountain National Forest

The United States Forest Service is the predominant land holder in the upland forest area, particularly in the Green Mountains, although it has purchased several large parcels in the Taconic Range as well. The [Green Mountain National Forest](#), with a regional office in Manchester, oversees management of these lands. The [Land and Resource Management Plan](#) for the Green Mountain National Forest stresses multiple uses of upland forest areas, including timber production, wildlife habitat, wilderness preservation, and recreational uses, all of which are important activities in the national forest. The Forest Service seeks input from local officials and the BCRC when developing management plans, implementation projects, and when identifying parcels suitable for acquisition.

7.7 Policies and Recommendations

1. New development should be concentrated in and around established growth centers; scattered development that is remote and has little relationship to existing settlement patterns should be avoided. Distinctive edges between urban and village centers and rural countryside should be maintained. Municipal plans and zoning regulations should strive to retain a clear boundary between the urban/village areas and countryside.
2. A variety of residential, commercial, industrial, cultural, and recreational uses, at relatively high densities, is appropriate and encouraged in urban centers. Public investments in infrastructure and public services, and private development activities, should seek to support the development or redevelopment of established urban centers rather than the creation of new concentrations of development. Development from urban centers must not sprawl into surrounding rural areas.
3. A variety of residential, commercial, industrial, and cultural and recreational uses is appropriate in villages, but at a significantly smaller scale and lower density than in urban centers. Public investments and private initiatives should support growth in existing or planned village areas. New development should respect the small scale and historic character of existing village development.
4. In rural areas, emphasis should be placed on the conservation and use of natural resources, and the avoidance of costly scattered development that is disruptive of the region's rural character. Low-density residential, commercial (small general/convenience stores, home occupations) and compatible recreational uses also are appropriate in rural areas. Development should reflect historic settlement patterns and preserve important resources, including productive agricultural soils. Creative land use techniques should be used to retain the integrity of special natural resources.
5. Planned commercial or mixed uses within existing roadside commercial zoning districts must be developed carefully to avoid sprawl, traffic congestion, and safety hazards. Roadside commercial areas should not be expanded and should be retracted when feasible and appropriate.
6. Land use in upland forest areas should emphasize the conservation and wise use of natural

resources. The development of permanent improvements and structures for year-round use is generally not appropriate in upland forest areas, although certain important public service facilities may be permitted with proper controls. Forestry and outdoor recreation also are appropriate activities in these areas, and facilities associated with national or state parks are consistent with these uses. Special care must be exercised in areas where the elevation exceeds 2500 feet because of the fragility of the environment. Acquisition of important upland forest parcels by the United States Forest Service is encouraged.

7. Important historic sites, structures, districts, and archaeological sites should be preserved. New development in historic areas should be architecturally compatible with its surroundings. The adaptive reuse of historic buildings is encouraged, and renovation work should maintain the architectural integrity of historic structures.

8. Municipalities should ensure that their implementing land use regulations remain consistent with their comprehensive plans.

Towns and Villages also should consider use of innovative tools such as “form-based” land use regulations.

9. The following policies apply to new residential development:

- The density of development should be appropriate to natural conditions limitations, and consistent with historic and planned land use.
- Residential development should be accomplished in a manner that protects soils and mitigates other environmental disturbances where predominant natural slopes exceed 15 percent; residential development should not be permitted where slopes exceed 20 percent.
- Residential projects in rural areas should utilize open space planning techniques by including designs that cluster development in relatively small areas to preserve contiguous open land.

Form-Based Land Use Regulations

Form-based zoning has been developed to overcome the problems of sprawl created by use-based codes. Form-based zoning regulates land development with an emphasis on controlling urban and rural form with less focus on controlling land uses. Features regulated under form based codes, such as “[SmartCode](#)” include lot dimensions, size of blocks, building setbacks, height, and design, placement of buildings on lots, location of parking, pedestrian facilities, landscaping, and other important aspects of development.

Form-based regulations are well-suited to serve as unified land development codes that can include zoning, subdivision regulations, urban design, signs, landscaping, and basic architectural standards.

One of the basic principles in SmartCode and other form-based codes is that towns should be structured as a series of walkable neighborhoods. Such neighborhoods require a mix of land uses (residential, office, and retail), public spaces, and pedestrian-oriented transportation design.

The zones within a form-based regulatory scheme are designed to create complete human habitats ranging from the very rural to the very urban. Where conventional zoning categories are based on different land uses, form-based zoning categories are based on their rural-urban character. All categories within the a form-based code allow some mix of uses. These zoning categories ensure that a community offers a full diversity of building types, thoroughfare types, and civic space types, and that each has characteristics appropriate for its location.

- Residential development in village and urban centers should use a traditional grid street system whenever possible to improve vehicular and pedestrian connections.
- Residential and mixed use developments should include sidewalks, open space areas, and where possible, areas for recreation and community gardens. These development should be linked to neighboring developments where possible via roads, trails, and common open space. An efficient utility network should be provided.
- During construction, all necessary measures should be taken to minimize soil erosion.
- Natural vegetation, landscape features, and historic landmarks should be preserved to the greatest extent possible and incorporated in the development design. Streams, ponds, and wetlands should be maintained in their natural state, and access to these and other open spaces should be provided for residents.
- Prior to any large-scale residential development, a road system capable of handling traffic in a safe and efficient manner must either exist or be planned for immediate construction. The road system should be designed to safely accommodate vehicles, pedestrians, and cyclists, and to provide an attractive streetscape.
- Development which exceeds a town's planned growth rate, or which causes substantial economic hardship to a town because of the increased demand for facilities and services, is inappropriate and shall not be permitted.

10. The following policies apply to new commercial development:

- The intensity of commercial development needs to be consistent with the character of the land and surrounding area.
- Commercial developments should include an architectural and landscape design plan that complements the surrounding environment.
- Space and amenities for public use (e.g., pedestrian walkways/paths, landscaped areas with benches, bike racks, restrooms) should be provided.
- The amount of noise, glare, and lighting observable from off-site locations must be minimized.
- Adequate parking and loading spaces should be provided and sited/screened to minimize visibility from streets and neighboring residential areas.
- Provide for safe and efficient vehicular ingress and egress. Access onto roads where steep grades exist or within 400 feet of a major intersection should be avoided. Adjacent commercial developments should use combined curb cuts and connect parking lots and sidewalks internally whenever possible.

- Safe and convenient facilities for pedestrian access and circulation shall be provided.
- Commercial uses that generate large numbers of traffic turning movements should be avoided along sections of highway with low sufficiency ratings, unless located within an established downtown or village center.
- Small convenience shopping centers, reflecting the character of the surrounding community, are appropriate in villages, and urban centers may contain convenience, community, and regional shopping centers (see definitions in this chapter), but shopping centers are not appropriate in rural areas.
- Efforts should be made to improve the appearance, traffic flow, and pedestrian friendliness of existing shopping centers so that they enhance the region's urban centers. Careful planning should be conducted to ensure that any new shopping centers do not detract from existing commercial areas or appear out of character with the community.
- Large-scale ("big box") retail stores may be permitted in urban centers only if they exhibit exemplary architectural and site design and are shown to be in the best interest of the community after completion of a comprehensive economic/community impact study. Projects also should provide for a mix and balance of uses; site optimization including compact building groupings with parking located behind and to the sides of buildings, an architectural design that enhances the streetscape, and transportation facilities to accommodate and encourage access via public transportation, bicycling, and walking. Efforts must be made to minimize adverse impacts on existing highway operations and safety.

11. The following policies apply to new industrial developments:

- Large industrial developments should be located in or near urban centers or in village areas where adequate supporting infrastructure exists.
- Two or more adjacent industrial uses should be designed as a coordinated industrial park; land within industrial parks should be used primarily for industrial development.
- Utilities, roads, and other essential services should be available and adequate at the time of completion of the industrial development.
- Industrial parks should not be located in areas where truck or employee vehicle traffic would be channeled onto local streets in residential neighborhoods.
- The amount of noise, vibration, dust, odor, glare, and lighting that affects nearby residential areas must be minimized.
- Industrial development should provide meaningful well-paying jobs and should not pollute the environment. Industries that make use of locally available natural resources are encouraged.

12. The BCRC should continue to offer assistance to municipalities in the area of land use planning. Specific activities should include:

- Conduct workshops, prepare model bylaws, and undertake other educational projects covering topics such as: developing and implementing land use plans and bylaws, mixed use development, form-based land use codes, land conservation, historic preservation, and village and downtown development.
- Work with towns to help achieve and maintain village center, downtown, neighborhood, and growth center designations.
- Assist with planning for infrastructure that can accommodate additional development in downtowns and village centers.
- Cooperate with towns, the Bennington County Industrial Corporation, and other interested organizations in promoting new industrial development in the region consistent with regional plan policies.
- Continue to work with the United States Forest Service and towns to develop land and forest management plans and to establish criteria for identifying land that is appropriate for public acquisition.
- Promote continued coordination among municipalities to ensure that local land use plans remain consistent with the regional plan and compatible with each other.
- Offer assistance in promoting the development or redevelopment of historic downtowns through planning for capital investments, preparation of creative land use regulations, assistance in planning for the adaptive reuse of buildings and brownfield sites, and the development of riverfront parks and other public spaces.
- Work to minimize sprawl and support the efficient use of energy and other resources. A [Resilient Communities Assessment Tool](#) prepared by the Vermont Natural Resources Council can help towns and villages evaluate the effectiveness of those efforts.

resources by requiring aesthetically sensitive design of subdivisions and commercial buildings. In addition, zoning regulations can establish very specific standards and review procedures for new and altered buildings in designated historic design review districts.

Nonregulatory tools also can be used to protect identified scenic resources. Towns and villages should work with conservation organizations such as the Vermont Land Trust to acquire properties, or conservation or scenic easements to properties, that have particular scenic significance to the community. Local and state designated scenic roads, including the region's three state designated byways, can help provide support for preserving and promoting scenic roadway corridors.

Special attention should be given to visual gateways: points of transition along a public highway where it is evident that the traveler is arriving at a unique place. Gateways are located at entry points to historical downtowns and village centers and at places along rural highways where significant visual elements of the landscape first appear. These features can be improved through effective planning of adjacent land uses and integration of site features such as landscaping and careful placement of historic district signs.

Recent interest in development of renewable energy resources raises a number of important issues. Commercial-scale wind turbines will be highly visible and should be located only in locations approved by local communities. Commercial-scale solar energy facilities occupy large open areas and should not be sited at important gateway locations or in the foreground of viewsheds that have been identified by communities as being of particular value. Biomass (wood) heating and electric generation involve significant tree harvesting and may include plants with smokestacks and visible plumes of steam; the environmental and scenic impacts of those operations must be considered. Finally, small-scale hydroelectric generation can impact stream water quality, fish habitat, and aesthetics; restricting development to existing dam sites will greatly minimize any such concerns.

Outdoor Recreational Resources

The region's natural environment provides a wide variety of outdoor recreation experiences; camping, hiking, running, hunting, fishing, road and mountain biking, snowmobiling, snowshoeing, downhill and cross country skiing, and swimming and boating are enjoyed by both residents and tourists. Many of these outdoor recreational pursuits rely on the willingness of landowners to allow access to private lands. While public recreational use of private lands is important, vandalism, littering, and a general disregard for private property can lead to more and more land being restricted. Landowners must feel confident that their land will be respected by the public if these areas are to continue to be used for recreational activities.

The Bennington Region also contains extensive public land and land owned by nonprofit organizations that are widely used for recreation. Portions of the Appalachian Trail, Long Trail, Catamount Trail, Taconic Crest Trail, and the D&H Rail Trail all traverse the region. The Green Mountain National Forest occupies much of the upland forests in the region, and three state parks, several wildlife management and fishing access areas, and a number of town-owned parks and forests mean that recreational opportunities on public land are never far away. These public and conserved lands are economic assets and contribute to the quality of life of the region's residents. Acquisition of additional land well suited for outdoor recreation by local, state, or federal agencies, and by private



BENNINGTON COUNTY REGIONAL ENERGY PLAN

BENNINGTON COUNTY REGIONAL COMMISSION
March 2017



It could be argued that it is possible to meet all of our future electricity needs from these imported renewable sources. That assumption, however, suffers from two principal flaws: poor efficiency and uncertain supply and cost.

A large amount of energy is lost during the transmission of electricity. Siting generation relatively close to points of use in our region would improve efficiency, and in turn reduce the need for costly development of new generation and transmission facilities. Future regional energy costs also face uncertainties linked to increased demand for renewably sourced electricity regionwide. As fossil fuels become more expensive and states' mandates require that communities source more of their power from renewables, costs for renewable electricity may soar if additional supply is not developed to match rise in demand. By developing renewable energy supplies within our region, both inefficiencies and rising energy costs can be prevented.

Aggressive conservation, combined with electricity generated from properly sited in-state solar, wind, and hydro and additional space heating from locally sourced biomass and, where available, geothermal resources offers the best long-term approach to ensuring the region's energy security. There is no question that some significant portion of Vermont's future energy supply will have to be imported, but greater local generation will result in lower costs, less risk, and improved efficiency.

Environmental Protection

Human activity has always affected the Earth, and our use of huge amounts of fossil fuels over the past two centuries has had a profound and enduring impact on air quality, water quality, and climate patterns. Climate change, sometimes referred to as global warming, has resulted from the rapid release of billions of tons of carbon that had been locked in solid and liquid fossil fuels. The worldwide impacts of climate change—destruction of ecosystems, sea level rise that threatens millions of homes, farms, and businesses, greater frequency and intensity of drought and severe storms—are already being observed and every effort needs to be made, locally and globally, to limit future damage and adapt to a changing reality. In Vermont, climate change has the potential to alter the composition of our forests, affect the viability of the ski industry, and result in more damaging tropical storms, floods, and other severe events.

Other forms of pollution from fossil fuel combustion (e.g., smog, acid rain) also damage natural ecosystems, adversely affect human health, and cause economic damage. If the region's energy does not come from clean renewable energy sources, it comes from other sources, most often fossil fuels or nuclear. These sources pose risks and cause environmental damage where the fuel is mined and processed as well as where it is used to generate electricity. Although local energy generation siting concerns are significant and are accordingly addressed in Section IV of this Plan, the environmental impacts of obtaining electricity from wind turbines on a Vermont ridgeline or from solar panels along a Vermont roadway should be considered against the environmental and social impacts that strip mining, mountaintop removal, fracking, and fossil-fuel power station operations produce in other states.

Regional Electricity Capacity & Production

It is important to note that the amount of electricity produced per megawatt of installed capacity differs among energy sources. Hydroelectric facilities, because they produce electricity more consistently than wind turbines, have a higher *capacity factor*, and wind turbines, in turn, generally have a higher capacity factor than solar photovoltaic facilities in Vermont. With potential new in-state hydroelectric supply capped at estimated physical limits of under 100 MW of capacity, and with projected generation from in-state solar just slightly more than from in-state wind, the result is that a much greater amount of solar capacity will need to be installed than wind or hydro capacity. However, a relatively small shift to more wind energy would significantly reduce the amount of installed solar capacity needed to meet the 90X50 goal.

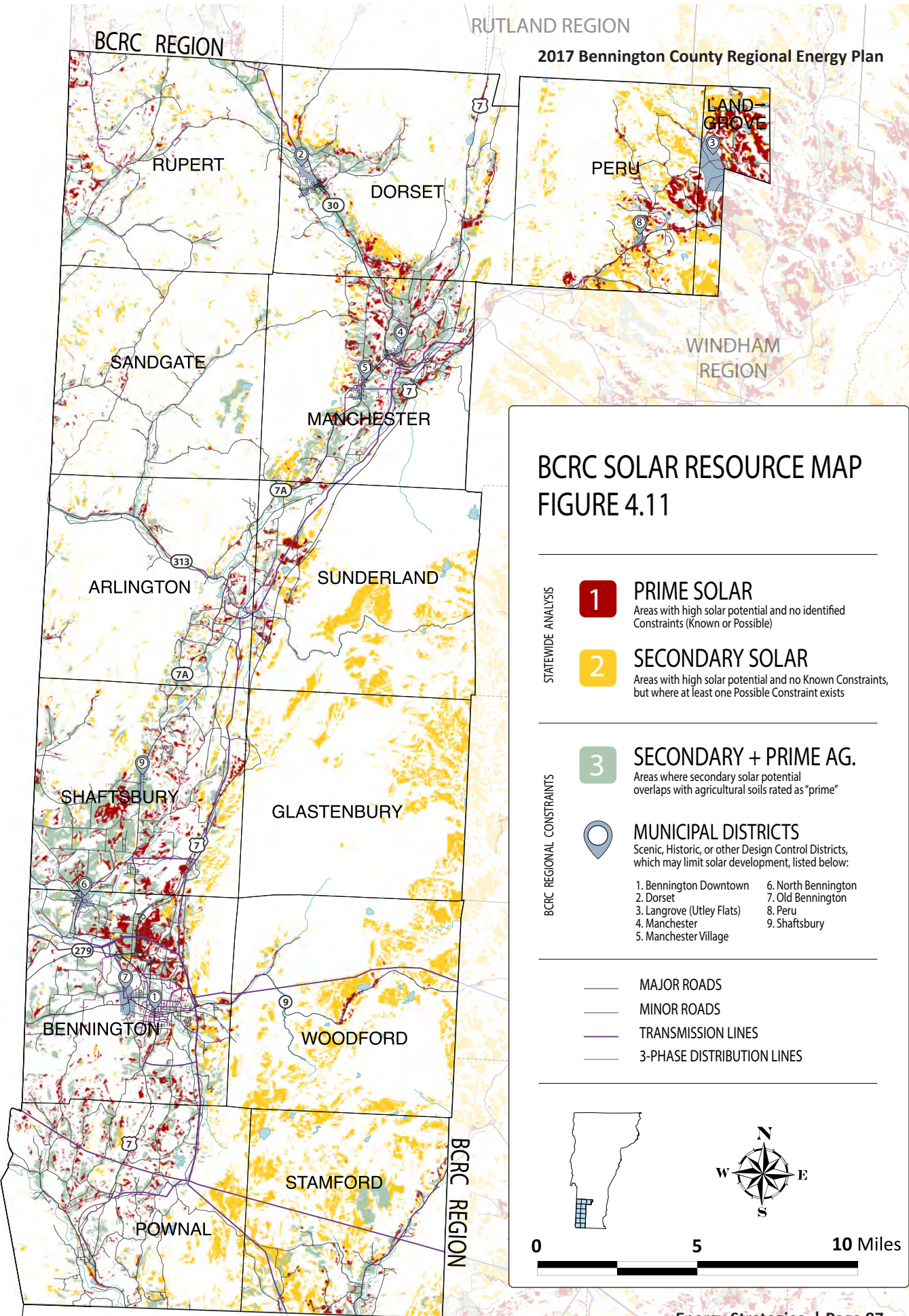
Currently, as was discussed in **Section II**, the Bennington region only produces about 4% of the electricity it consumes, deriving from about 10 MW of solar and a very small amount of wind and hydro. Electricity production in the region will need to increase dramatically based on the LEAP scenario modeling analysis. By 2050, the region should be generating a significant amount of electricity from local renewable resources.

Approximately 112 MW of new generating capacity (85 MW solar; 26 MW wind; and 1 MW hydro) will be required within the region to support attainment of state energy goals (**Table 3.1 and Figure 3.10**).

The targets for development and use of new renewable energy sources within the region suggest pathways that should be explored for effective implementation:

- **Widespread weatherization and efficiency improvements (largely through adoption of new heating technologies) will be needed to ensure that the projected supply of heating fuels (wood, electricity, and biodiesel) will be sufficient to meet demand.**
- **Infrastructure will need to be improved to support increased use of electricity, from both local, distributed sources and electricity imported through interstate transmission facilities.**
- **Identification of locations where new renewable energy based generation facilities will be most efficient while also minimizing impacts to the environment, important economic and historic resources, and to residents and businesses.**
- **Section IV of this plan will include strategies to promote these moves toward conservation, efficient alternative heating systems, and policies and geographic analyses that support appropriate generation and use of renewable resources and electricity generation.**

BCRC REGION



BCRC SOLAR RESOURCE MAP
FIGURE 4.11

STATEWIDE ANALYSIS

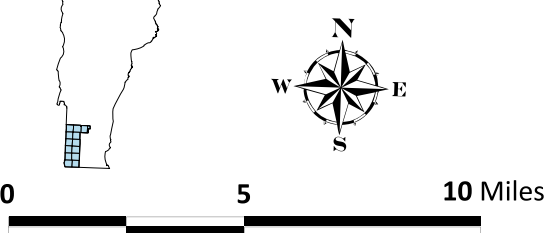
- 1 PRIME SOLAR**
Areas with high solar potential and no identified Constraints (Known or Possible)
- 2 SECONDARY SOLAR**
Areas with high solar potential and no Known Constraints, but where at least one Possible Constraint exists

BCRC REGIONAL CONSTRAINTS

- 3 SECONDARY + PRIME AG.**
Areas where secondary solar potential overlaps with agricultural soils rated as "prime"
- MUNICIPAL DISTRICTS**
Scenic, Historic, or other Design Control Districts, which may limit solar development, listed below:

1. Bennington Downtown	6. North Bennington
2. Dorset	7. Old Bennington
3. Langrove (Uttley Flats)	8. Peru
4. Manchester	9. Shaftsbury
5. Manchester Village	

- MAJOR ROADS
- MINOR ROADS
- TRANSMISSION LINES
- 3-PHASE DISTRIBUTION LINES



- Preservation of natural resources, scenic views, and other physical and aesthetic conditions critical to the sense of place in a community should be maintained; *areas of high importance should, in such instance, be specifically identified in municipal energy plans as sites that are not appropriate for facility development (discussed in **Step 3**)*;
- Project development should include planning and funding for decommissioning and site restoration once a facility's useful life has ended; a site must be returned to pre-project condition through the decommissioning process;
- The need for screening from neighboring sites should be considered. Existing topography and other natural features can often be used to create screening, and facilities should be designed accordingly;
- Facilities that generate significant sound should not be located within a specified distance of residential structures; *requirements related to sound (which would most likely apply to wind development) should articulate specific decibel levels and distances where possible.*

STEP 3 Identify preferred areas and conditions for facility development.

It is most helpful if municipalities can identify specific preferred sites for renewable facility development. In addition to identifying specific sites, municipalities should develop a list of criteria to be used to identify other preferable locations for development. These criteria should clearly reference type of renewable generation facility (Hydro, Wind, or Solar) and varying levels of generating capacity in conjunction with the conditions to be met for siting the facilities. Siting and facility preferences may include the following:

- Roof-mounted solar systems;
- Areas near large-scale commercial or industrial buildings;
- Brownfield sites;
- Unused areas where past uses have replaced or significantly impacted the natural landscape, including former gravel pits, quarries, or landfills;
- Areas where topography and existing features naturally screen a site from common view;