Section II Inventory and Analysis

General Description of Wilmington and its Waterfront

The Town of Wilmington is located in northern Essex County, within the Adirondack Park. Wilmington has a quaint hamlet, magnificent mountains and the beautiful Ausable River. Making it unique is its location at the foot of spectacular Whiteface Mountain amid the high peaks of the Adirondacks. Wilmington is 10 miles from Lake Placid and 30 miles from Plattsburgh.

The West Branch of the Ausable River is a powerful and beautiful river that has long been a focal point in the Adirondack Park. Its situation at the base of the Stephenson and Sentinel Mountain Ranges, ease of physical access, proximity to abundant natural resources and beauty are the reasons Wilmington was founded in 1821 and why it remains a visitor destination today. The West Branch of the Ausable River is also recognized internationally as one of the finest fly-fishing venues in the Northeastern United States.

Approaching Wilmington along Route 86 from Lake Placid, the area is characterized primarily by the rugged wilderness beauty and the ever-changing colors of rocks and trees. This route follows the west branch of the Ausable River on one side of the road; the other side is primarily lined with rocky, wooded ledges. A number of trailheads are visible, as well as parking areas leading to other trails and ponds. Driving through “The Notch” (approximately 5 miles north of Lake Placid) is an experience unto its own. The road narrows and is guarded by rock walls and lush vegetation. The mountains rise sharply to the sky through this narrow canyon. A little further along Route 86, in the shadow of Whiteface Mountain, one can take a nature walk to view the Ausable River as it tumbles and spills over ancient granite cliffs at High Falls Gorge, a natural tourist attraction. It is no wonder Route 86 is designated as part of the New York State Olympic Trail Scenic Byway system.

Along Route 86 a handful of outlying motels, restaurants and business establishments have been built and nicely maintained. The area from the Ledge Rock Inn to approximately Steinhoff's Motel and Restaurant is one area of concentrated development. Within this stretch are smaller motels, a lovely bed and breakfast and typical Adirondack summer cottages. The popular Hungry Trout Motel and Restaurant sits above the rushing river and the fabled Flume area. This Flume area, another place where the river rushes and falls to create a spectacular vista, is a favorite swimming spot in the summer and provides access to multi-use recreational trails. The Wilderness Inn, the Evening Hatch Fly Fishing Shop and Restaurant and several more cottages complete this area of development. There are residences of varying character interspersed along Route 86 before, after and amidst the hamlet center. Abandoned, boarded up buildings and residences can also be observed and detract from the beautiful landscape of the area.

The community character of Wilmington is centered primarily in and around the hamlet’s historic bridge over the West Branch of the Ausable River. From that bridge, breathtaking views of Lake Everest, the dam and surrounding mountains are enjoyed year around by local residents and visitors. In warmer

months, people can always be seen fishing along the bridge and the banks of the river, walking around town, playing on the beach, biking. Here beats the heart of Wilmington. An attractive, well-lit driveway off of Route 86 leads visitors to the town beach area at Lake Everest, although the sign can be hard to see. This area is the center of waterfront activities in the summer months, when summer concerts and gatherings are held regularly. Lifeguards watch over swimmers and beach activities. In the summer months, the ice cream stand on Route 86 often becomes the "unofficial" meeting place, especially on warm evenings. At the beach area there is a pavilion, restrooms, barbeques, children's playground equipment, and picnic areas, which are less than adequate and could be improved. Town land adjoining the beach is also underutilized and has the potential for interpretive trails, a garden, or other uses. The beach is a primary put-in area for kayaks and canoes. In recent decades, however, water activities have decreased at the beach as sediment from many sources has begun to infill the impoundment.

Continuing north on Route 86 from the beach turn-off, a right turn at the stop sign takes travelers east through the center of Wilmington, and a left turn leads up the Whiteface Mountain Veterans Memorial Highway past Santa's Workshop to the top of Whiteface Mountain. The mountain road leads to the highest point to which one can drive in the state of New York, and provides a 360 degree view on clear days. Whiteface Mountain has hosted innumerable national and international skiing competitions, including the 1980 Winter Olympics, and the SUNY-Albany Atmospheric Sciences Weather Research Center on the mountain. It is open for mountain biking and gondola rides (approximately 55,000 visitors per year on average for the latter, according to ORDA), during summer months. The historic Marble Mountain Lodge still furnishes space for headquarters. The mountain road itself is a venue for competitions for hiking, running, biking, and cross-country skiing, as well as an average 60,000 motor vehicle visits per year during the summer months.

The Town character is defined partly by its economic and social history as well as by its inclusion within the boundaries of New York State's Adirondack Park. Wilmington is comprised of a roughly equal mix of working families making close to or less than the Essex County average annual income of $34,000 and second home owners and retirees whose recreational, economic, land use and social interests can conflict. The community of approximately 1100 people has roots largely in the working population, whose precedents made their living off the land through logging, mining, farming or other natural resource-based activities, and whose recreational pursuits were outdoor-oriented as well. (See Appendix 4 for Selected Community Input, or see the website for more complete information.)

This culture is reflected today in the strong interest in hunting, fishing, outdoor sports, and the needs of some families for the natural resources that still provide them with food (venison, trout) and fuel (wood). The trend of basing livelihoods around the natural gifts of the Town began in the late 19th century and continues today. Travel enthusiasts have long proclaimed the area's beauty and outdoor sport opportunities, from trophy fishing, to mountain hiking, viewing waterfalls, jumping in the river's swimming holes, paddling, and skiing. Wilmington's culture is slowly changing to encompass the character of newer residents and visitors, many of whom lived for long periods or still live part-time in more urban areas.

With 62 percent of its land within State preserves, the Town's residents and visitors have a strong interest in protecting their existing quality of life and the factors of natural heritage, scenery, and quiet that envelope them. A high percentage of local income is derived directly or indirectly from the proximity of these features, prompting Wilmington to establish an Empire Zone designation for most of its economic resources .

In this document special attention is to be given to the impoundment area, now called Lake Everest, which has existed since 1812 when it was established by a local entrepreneur to capture power for a range of natural resource-based industrial ventures. As these industries declined in the Adirondacks through the 20th century and Wilmington shifted to a tourism-based economy, the lake became more important in the lives of local people and visitors alike as a recreation venue and scenic vista. In the last 30 – 70 years, the impoundment area has accumulated sediment in quantities that are negatively affecting its health as a trout-friendly ecosystem, as well as in terms of its access as a recreation objective for paddlers and others. Many residents can recall a time when waterskiing was possible on the lake; today, many cite its shallowness as a constraint to a variety of recreational activities.

Existing Land Use and Zoning

Town Zoning

Use of Wilmington's 42,086 acres is guided by the Town Land Use Code of 1988, which was made in accordance with the Wilmington Comprehensive Plan of 1975. It consists of six categories: Village Center, Residential, Moderate Residential, Open Residential, Rural Residential and State (see Map 3).

The majority of waterfront property in the Town is classified as Residential or Village Center. As the entire Town is located within the boundaries of the Adirondack Park, the Adirondack Park Agency (APA) Land Use Plan guidelines also apply to development within the Town of Wilmington, though the Town has more control over development within the Hamlet area (Map 4).

The Town's Land Use categories are as follows:

- **Village Center**: 1 acre per principal building. This zone follows the Rte. 86 road corridor from approximately 4000 feet past Fox Farm Road to Bilhuber Road, to just past Reservoir Road on Rte 431, and down both sides of Springfield Road to Quaker Mountain Road, then only on the eastern side of Springfield almost 4000 feet further. The majority of commercial properties lie within this zone and most of those depend to a degree on waterfront activity for their livelihood. Cultural resources, including churches, a library, a crafts store, and two small private schools exist in this zone. Few pedestrian-friendly accommodations currently exist, though the potential is high to create a pedestrian zone and stronger community-oriented presentation in the hamlet center.
- **Residential**: 1 acre per principal building, with the exception that multiple family dwellings require a minimum of 2 acres. This zone is primarily two large areas, one south and one northeast of the hamlet center. Several important water-dependent commercial ventures lie in this zone, including the Hungry Trout motel and restaurant and the KOA campground.

- **Moderate Residential**: 3 acres per principal building or use. This zone is primarily two large areas, one west and south (toward Hardy Road and along Springfield to Upper Jay) and one north (encompassing Bonnie View, Lenny Preston, and John Bliss Roads) of the hamlet center. Extensive ties to the water exist here, from fly-fishing access points to farm-friendly valley bottomlands to traditional trails.
- **Open Residential**: 5 acres per principal building or use. This zone is primarily two large areas, one west of the hamlet center and one north of the moderate residential zone, and a smaller area east of the residential zone, to the Jay town line. The western component seems to be a source of sediment flow into the river via Stephenson Brook, possibly due to sand deposits in winter conditions on Rte. 431.
- **Rural Residential**: 8.5 acres per principal building or use. This zone is three large areas, one northeast along the Jay boundary, one east of Hardy Road and one south of the residential/moderate residential zones. The northeast section follows the river through farmland and presents excellent fishing opportunities, but is all privately owned. The other two sections surround Beaver Brook, an important stream for local landowners.

Exceptions and conditions apply to certain aspects of each category, which must be approved by the Zoning Board of Appeals.

The Land Use Code also contains Special Shoreline Regulations, based on APA regulations, which are applicable in all zoning districts and pertain to all lakes, ponds, rivers and streams navigable by boat. The regulations include:

1. Minimum setbacks for on-site sewage facilities: requires a minimum 150’ setback from the mean high-water mark for any on-site septic system or leach field, and applies to all lakes, ponds, rivers, streams, marshes, swamps or wetlands.
2. Cutting Restrictions: the removal of vegetation is permitted within 35’ of the high water mark and not more than 30% in excess of 6” dbh at any time over a 10 year period. No removal of vegetation is allowed within 6’ of the mean high water mark, except that up to 30% of the shoreline may be cleared on any individual lot. These standards shall not prevent the removal of diseased vegetation or dead, rotten or damaged trees that pose a health or safety hazard.
3. Minimum shoreline frontage for deeded or contractual access: a minimum shoreline frontage shall be required:
    a. Where 5 to 20 lots or multiple family dwelling units are involved, a total of no less than 100’.
    b. Where more than 20 and not more than 100 lots or multiple dwelling units are involved, a minimum of 3’ for each additional lot or multiple dwelling unit in excess of 20.
    c. Where more than 100 and not more than 150 lots or multiple dwelling units are involved, a minimum of 2’ for each additional lot or multiple dwelling unit in excess of 100.
    d. Where more than 150 lots or multiple dwelling units are involved, a minimum of 1’ for each additional lot or multiple dwelling unit in excess of 150.

No other land use regulations or restrictions specific to the waterfront exist in the current Land Use Code, which is 19 years old. The language is vague in several areas, and is in need of updating. Specifically, the site plan review guidelines are very general and require only that the zoning board "consider," rather than prioritize, issues deemed critical in the LWRP, such as pedestrian access and erosion control. Updates to the Land Use Code will be required to implement many of the recommendations listed in this LWRP.

APA Land Use Classifications

APA Land Use Classifications are guided by the State Land Use Master Plan. Lands in the Town of Wilmington are broken down into the APA land use classifications in addition to being guided by the Town's zoning code. Map 11 shows the APA land use classifications for the Town of Wilmington.

See Table 2 for a breakdown of the land use classifications for lands within the Town of Wilmington.

Table 2 - Adirondack Park Agency Land Use Classification Plan

Classification	Intensity Guidelines	Percent of Total Town Area
Hamlet	No Limit	1.4%
Moderate Intensity	1.3 acre average lot size	4.0%
Low Intensity	3.2 acre average lot size	9.7%
Rural Use	8.5 acre average lot size	15.7%
Resource Management	42.7 acre average lot size	6.0%
Wilderness	No development	30.4%
Wild Forest	No development	25.2%
Intensive Use	No development	7.2%
Water	No development	0.4%

Discrepancies between Town Zoning and APA Land Use Classifications

There are several areas where Town land use boundaries and category definitions differ from those of the APA. The most critical areas where this discrepancy occurs are located in and around the functional hamlet area of Wilmington. Much of the land surrounding the current APA classified "Hamlet" is developed in a dense pattern and with land uses that are inconsistent with the lower density classifications that are currently applied to them. Bringing the APA classifications for lands in the "Village Center" area in line with the existing development pattern will allow the Town of Wilmington to better manage its hamlet area and exert the appropriate local control over future development that occurs there. A discussion of the specific issues involved with this land classification change can be found in Section VI.

Other Relevant Local Development Controls or Planning Initiatives

The following is a list of plans prepared for the Town of Wilmington, local laws that are currently in place, and other documents, laws, and plans that impact decisions made by the Town. These documents

were taken into consideration during the creation of this LWRP and should continue to be referenced during implementation of the recommendations outlined in Sections III and IV.

- *Comprehensive Plan for the Town of Wilmington (October 1975)*
  This plan identifies the natural character of the Town as a critical asset, and identifies the direct relationship between recreational-based tourism and the town's economic growth potential. The Comprehensive Plan lists land within ½ mile of the river as a Critical Environmental Area. It also states that the "land and water resources in Wilmington have a variety of forms and functions. The capacities of these resources for use by people must be identified. Once identified, the use of these resources must be reasonably managed or used. Not only are the health and welfare tied to the land and water resources, the projection of the Town's image and the potential for growth objectives is related to the way in which land and water resources are managed."
- *Town of Wilmington Subdivision Regulations*
  The Wilmington Planning Board adopted their subdivision regulations originally in 1975, and made revisions in July 1977 and most recently in 2004 to include new erosion prevention practices.
- *Hamlet of Wilmington: Strategies for Development (November 1983)*
  This report explores the historic evolution of Wilmington dating back to 1799 and traces the boom and bust cycles that it has experienced through time. It provides a framework for revitalization that capitalizes on its natural and scenic resources to transform the community into an important Adirondack destination. The last section of the report outlines a number of action programs aimed at revitalization, including physical improvements to public areas, redevelopment of private sites, promotional activities, marketing and human resource development and organization.

- *Town of Wilmington Community Revitalization Plan (June 2001)*
  This report focuses not on land use or design issues, but a strategic and market-oriented approach to community revitalization. A facilitated public planning process was conducted in order to help residents and stakeholders understand the market factors that offer opportunities for economic development, create consensus among the stakeholders for the community's future direction and prioritized development goals, and create public ownership in plan implementation. Specific to the town's waterfront, the strategy identified the Ausable River and Lake Everest as important natural resources and major tourist attractions. The participants have identified outdoor recreation revolving around the Ausable River as a primary strategic goal for improving the economic viability of the community.
- *Olympic Scenic Byway Corridor Management Plan (August 2004)*
  This regional planning document provides for the planning and promotion of tourism and economic development as well as the conservation and enhancement of the byway's intrinsic qualities. The plan includes all the cities, towns, villages and hamlets (including Wilmington) along the 170-mile New York State Byway that travels through Jefferson, Lewis, St. Lawrence, Franklin, Essex and Clinton Counties. The overall goals of the Byway Program are to recognize,

interpret, maintain, enhance and preserve the unique qualities of the Byway. The Management Plan can be used as a reference tool for future regional planning efforts in Byway communities along Rt. 3, Rt. 86, and Rt. 9N from Lake Ontario to Lake Champlain.

- *Wilmington Wild Forest Unit Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement (October 2005)*
  This five-year plan covers activities of the Dept. of Environmental Conservation and the Adirondack Park Agency – following the State Land Master Plan - within the Wilmington Wild Forest Preserve. It establishes a public-private partnership between the DEC, local governments, interested groups and citizens to cooperatively develop strategies for the use, conservation, enhancement, and enjoyment of this area. The WWF includes areas of forest preserve within the LWRP Boundary area. Its goals are broad and overlap with those of the LWRP: to provide for the long-term protection of the area and natural resources, to encourage various outdoor recreation activities without destroying the natural character of the area, to preserve and protect known cultural resources within the area.
- *Whiteface UMP Amendment /EIS (2006 Amendment to 2004 UMP)*
  This amendment document addresses trail construction above 2800 feet and includes erosion control plans, an expansion of facility construction at the children's ski area, protection plans for the Bicknell's Thrush, whose habitat is extremely restricted, changes in water/snow pump operations, and a new staff road. Its impacts should be reviewed carefully over time and in the context of a sedimentation source or watershed study, for potentially increased erosion and wastewater pollution effects on the area downstream.
- *Wild, Scenic and Recreational Rivers System Act*
  The Ausable River is designated as a Wild, Scenic and Recreational River under the State's Wild, Scenic and Recreational Rivers System Act, and is subject to special protection. Inside the Adirondack Park, the law is administered by the Adirondack Park Agency. With respect to designated rivers, the law and regulations:
  - Require an agency permit and establish standards for subdivisions, single-family dwellings and most new uses and structures in river areas
  - Regulate the cutting of trees in the entire river area (within ¼ mile of the river), including a prohibition on cutting within 100' of the river
  - Restrict motor boating and other motorized activities
  - Regulate bridge and road building
  - Regulate structures (such as dams) and activities (such as dredging or filling) that alter a river's natural flow
  - Allow continuation of lawfully existing, non-conforming uses, but require permits or variances for expansion or change in use
  - Prohibit certain "non-compatible" uses
  - Prohibit new structures in wild river areas
- *Adirondack Park State Land Master Plan (Revised 2001)*
  This document sets forth the master plan for all state lands within the Adirondack Park. The classification system and guidelines set forth are designed to guide the preservation,

management and use of these lands by all interested state agencies in the future. In Wilmington, this includes land owned by the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) and Department of Transportation. The DEC has the authority independent of the Master Plan to regulate uses of waters and uses of wild, scenic and recreational rivers running through state land, but may not have such authority to regulate certain uses of waters where all or part of the shoreline is in private ownership. The APA has the authority to regulate motorized use of wild, scenic and recreational rivers and their river corridors on private lands. Existing power and authority of the state and local governments over state waters should be reviewed with consideration given to legislative needs to more accurately define authority over these waters.

- *NYSERDA Energy Smart Community (2003)*
  The Town Board of Wilmington adopted a resolution to become an energy smart community in February 2003, urging its inhabitants, businesses, and others to cooperate with NYSERDA to introduce energy efficient technologies in the Town. (See Policies for full text of resolution.)

Water Resources, Quality, and Management

Water Resources

The Ausable River

The Ausable River begins in the High Peaks region of the Adirondack Mountains and travels almost 60 miles to Lake Champlain. The watershed of the river drainage is approximately 516 square miles and the Chubb River, along with over 70 small streams, feeds the Ausable.

The Ausable River is recognized nationally and internationally for its exceptional resources, including white water and non-white water river recreation, regionally significant tourist attractions, and wild trout fishery. The Ausable is designated as a Wild, Scenic, and Recreational River, a program operated under the New York State Environmental Conservation Law that recognizes and protects waterways with “outstanding scenic, ecological, recreational, historic, and scientific values.”

In 1989-1991 and 1994-1995 the National Park Service conducted a comprehensive study of the Ausable River with the Towns that border the river. This report includes ecological, cultural, and recreational information and makes several recommendations that should be reviewed and updated. A second report compiled in 1994 by William Schoch of the DEC Bureau of Fisheries, entitled “West Branch Ausable River: Habitat, Fishery Resources and Angler Concerns,” is the most comprehensive analysis of the West Branch of the Ausable River to date. Many of its conclusions and data are included in this Inventory. The East and the West Branches of the river are different in several characteristics, including water quality, land ownership patterns, species composition, and erosion and flooding patterns.

The West Branch of the river flows 35 miles from Heart Lake to Ausable Forks. In Ausable Forks the east and the West Branch meet to form the Main stem and flow an additional 22 miles to Lake Champlain. The West Branch of the Ausable River passes through Forest Preserve Lands throughout its course as well as private lands in the Village of Lake Placid and in the hamlets of Wilmington and Ausable Forks before joining to form the main stem.

Route 86 follows the west branch of the Ausable River on one side of the road; the other side is primarily lined with rocky, wooded ledges. A number of trailheads are visible, as well as parking areas leading to other trails and ponds. A significant portion of Route 86 is in the shadow of Whiteface Mountain, and one can take a nature walk to view the Ausable River as it tumbles and spills over ancient granite cliffs at High Falls Gorge, a natural tourist attraction. The fabled Flume Area is a favorite swimming spot in the summer and provides access to multi-use recreation trails. Multiple fishing spots line the entire stretch of Route 86 into Wilmington. There has been some sampling for fish in the tributaries of the West Branch, where native populations of trout can be found.

One long-time resident notes: "There have been many recreational uses on the West Branch of the Ausable River such as swimming, fishing, motor boating for fishing and pleasure, ice skating, speed skating events, snowmobiling, skiing, waterfowl hunting, frog hunting, trapping furbearers, fishing contests, water skiing, canoeing, tubing and picnicking. All of these activities, with the exception of water skiing, which is no longer feasible due to shallow water depths and the distance from shoreline rules, are things that are regularly pursued and should continue to be in the future."

Lake Everest

Lake Everest is a 30 -acre impoundment of the West Branch of the Ausable River that is used for swimming, boating, kayaking, canoeing and fishing. The dam that created the impoundment was constructed in the early 1900s as a source of electricity for the Town and was reconstructed in the 1930s. At this time, a lakeside park was developed to provide residents and tourists increased access to the lake. This area is the center of waterfront activities in the summer months. Lifeguards watch over swimmers and beach activities. There is a pavilion, restrooms, barbeques, children's playground equipment, and picnic areas. The beach is a primary put-in area for kayaks and canoes, and summer concerts and gatherings are regularly held at the beach. The hamlet's center, especially in the vicinity of the historic bridge over the West Branch, provides breathtaking views and a publicly accessible fishing spot.

In recent decades, water activities have decreased at the beach as sediment from many sources has begun to infill the impoundment. The recreational value of Lake Everest has declined due to the buildup of sediments, reducing or limiting swimming and navigation of the lake by boat. The increased sedimentation has affected the overall health of the river and is believed to have reduced fish populations. This issue is discussed further in the Management section below.

Water Quality

The Adirondacks are well known for their clean and beautiful waterways and the Ausable River is no exception. The water quality is generally high, as evidenced by healthy trout populations that require clean water to survive. Groundwater in the watershed is also of high quality.

The water that moves through a watershed as overland runoff can carry sediments, pollutants, and other materials that can impact water quality in waterways and groundwater supplies. Healthy watersheds and good water quality are vital for maintaining both a healthy environment and a strong economy, as they provide water for drinking, recreation, commercial fishing and other water-dependent industry.

Tributary water quality and flow rates can greatly contribute to the overall quality of the Ausable River. There has been little attempt made to date to document the water quality of the tributaries flowing into the West Branch of the Ausable River. Tributary water quality and flow rates can greatly contribute to the overall quality of the river. The Chubb River is the largest tributary to the West Branch of the Ausable River, and it has a great deal of sedimentation and water quality issues that affect the West Branch of the Ausable River.

Land use can have a major impact on water quality in the watershed. Some activities that contribute to water quality impacts include: sediments from construction sites; pesticides and fertilizers from lawns and golf courses; animal wastes from farms; and nutrients and pathogens from improperly functioning septic systems. Additionally, large areas of impervious surface can increase runoff leading to increased pollution, eroding stream banks, and decreased infiltration to recharge groundwater supplies. Development that encroaches on wetlands and riparian areas can lead to increased flooding, decreased water quality, and loss of habitat. See Map 6.

In the summer of 2002 and again in 2003, high coliform bacteria levels in the West Branch of the Ausable River closed the Town of Wilmington Public Beach on Lake Everest. The single largest source of coliform bacteria loading is the Lake Placid Village wastewater treatment facility. Although it is clear that the bacteria load from the Lake Placid Village wastewater treatment plant was, prior to its completion and the installation of additional treatment (UV) technology, the largest source of bacteria in the project area, additional sources, possibly including failing septic systems and/or wildlife, were not clearly identified. In 2005 and 2006 the Town's quarterly water quality monitoring of E. coli bacteria and other pollutants indicated safe levels were maintained.

Wetlands provide habitat for many species and act as natural filters for the harmful substances that enter our waterways. Wetlands also play a significant role in reducing flooding and improving water quality. There are a number of APA designated wetlands within the river corridor (see Map 7). The majority of wetlands occurs on privately owned lands and is located along the lake/river corridor. Projects designated within classified wetlands on both private and public lands require a permit.

The primary responsibility for regulating land use and development in New York State rests with local municipalities. Through local land use controls, municipalities play a major role in guiding and regulating land use and development. By strengthening these local controls, municipalities can achieve water quality improvement, restoration, and appropriate development in the watershed.

One resource for the Town is the Ausable River Association (ASRA), formed as the result of the afore-mentioned National Park Service process and report in 1995. Early projects with the ASRA have focused on the East Branch of the river, as the East Branch was considered to be in greater need of study due to its lesser overall quality and greater overall level of threat. The ASRA recognizes the significance of the West Branch of the Ausable River and has several programs planned for this branch, which makes the ASRA a valuable partner for this LWRP.

A Watershed Management Plan is currently being prepared for the Ausable River with funds provided by the Department of State through the Environmental Protection Fund Local Waterfront Revitalization Program. This report is being overseen by an Advisory Committee with representatives from each of the seven watershed towns, two villages, the Essex and Clinton County Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs), the Essex County Water Quality Coordinating Committee (WQCC), and departments of NYS DEC, NYS DOT, and NY DOS. Other partnering organizations include Adirondack Sustainable Communities, NYS Adirondack Park Agency, the Lake Placid Shore Owners Association, the Nature Conservancy, Mirror Lake Watershed Association, and Whiteface Mountain Ski area. The purpose of the Watershed Management Plan is to protect and enhance water the quality and quality of life within the watershed and it should be used as a guide by Municipal Boards Planning Boards, and County Planning Offices within the Ausable Watershed.

Management

Sedimentation

Sedimentation is the process of depositing solid materials in a fluid. It is a problem that occurs in many river systems and affects fish, plants, wildlife and human life along the river. Rivers provide drinking water, water for agriculture, a source of power, transportation, fish and wildlife and recreation. The disruption that sedimentation can cause may prevent the full utilization of the river as a resource. Although sedimentation is a natural occurrence, human activities associated with development and construction greatly exacerbates it. The consequences can range from limiting recreational opportunities to fish kills to flooding.

Erosion along the banks of the West Branch of the Ausable River and its tributaries has increased over the years. A comparison of historic with recent aerial photographs of the project area also shows that

erosion and sedimentation have increased over the years, altering the river, its tributaries and Lake Everest. An inventory of the West Branch of the Ausable River for stream bank erosion and sources of sedimentation has not occurred as yet, but the Ausable River Association plans to conduct this survey soon.

A review of aerial photographs shows that some tributaries appear to be contributing significantly to the sedimentation of both the river and Lake Everest. Of particular note in the Town of Wilmington are White Brook, draining into Lake Everest (see photo), and an unnamed tributary entering the West Branch immediately downstream from the bridge at Whiteface Ski Area. In the Town of North Elba there is a large amount of sedimentation at the region of the ORDA ski jumps. Runoff from roads, such as Quaker Mountain and Rte. 86 at the Historic Bridge, is also problematic. See Map 8.

Due to the increased sedimentation in Lake Everest, usage of the lake for recreational activities has declined and is having a negative impact on residents and visitors of Wilmington. The impairment of uses based on these changes to the Lake is beginning to have implications for the future health and prosperity of the Town. Tourists and residents alike enjoy the recreational offerings of Lake Everest, and further loss of quality and navigability of the Lake could have significant economic and quality of life consequences.

As long as sedimentation continues upstream and as long as the dam is in place to trap the sediments, the materials will accumulate. There are several natural and man-made factors affecting the sediment accumulation rate. In order to slow the rate of sediments from accumulating, the sources of sedimentation would need to be addressed. This list is long and includes sources form the Town of Wilmington and the Town of North Elba. It would be critical for the two Towns to work together.

Community input regarding Lake Everest was collected from public meetings in January and April 2006, from two surveys widely circulated to residents, and from visits made by citizens' committee members to local venues including the Mountain Artist's Group, Fish and Game Club, Senior's "Pals" Club luncheons, and Youth Center. Opinion ran strongly in favor of restoring the Lake to a greater depth, and while dredging the Lake was the main concept proposed at this meeting, there are a number of options for lake restoration that need to be explored.

The Town of Wilmington is currently undertaking a Beach Master Plan and Dredging Feasibility Study for Lake Everest, funded by the New York State Department of State. The dredging feasibility study will explore such issues as sediment characteristics, the appropriate amount to be dredged, possible methods for dredging, disposal techniques, cost estimates and potential re-use opportunities.

Stormwater Management

The Ausable River Association completed a Stormwater Gap Analysis for Wilmington in May 2006 in response to new regulations from New York State regarding stormwater discharges in communities that meet certain criteria. Given Wilmington's overwhelming demand for recreational use of the impoundment area now and into the future, it will consider strengthening control over stormwater and other sources of runoff and erosion in the waterfront area.

Flooding

Flooding damage does occur along the Ausable River and its tributaries, particularly in the Towns of Jay, Chesterfield and Keene. Many locations along the Ausable River exhibit severe stream bank erosion problems. Flooding can occur in the community during any season of the year but is most likely to occur in the late winter-early spring months when the melting snow may combine with intense rainfall to produce increased runoff. Due to the steep topography of the river, the spring melt/rain can result in flooding, stream bank erosion and damage to adjacent properties. These problems are more abundant for the East Branch of the river than for the West Branch. During winter, flooding has been a threat when ice jams form at the structures. See photo (Flood Damage at Whiteface, 1996, J.Sibalski).

Due to the steep topography and mountainous terrain, run-off from the watershed accumulates quickly resulting in a rapid rise in the water surface elevations within the floodplains, coupled with high velocity flows within the river corridor. These hydraulic conditions produce a variety of flood control problems such as a short warning time for residents to evacuate the flood plain, and scouring and erosion which cause damage to roadways and bridge foundations.

In an effort to minimize the risk of flood hazards and to minimize public and private losses due to flooding, the Town adopted the Town of Wilmington Development Permit Law for Flood Prone Areas in 1985. The National Flood Insurance Program protects participating communities from extreme financial loss in the event of a disastrous flood. Under the program, insurance is subsidized, up to an amount specified, on properties in areas designated as hazardous by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). Wilmington currently participates in this program.

Dam Gates and Water Levels

Wilmington's dam was renovated in 2003, including replacement of the water gate. Residents are at times unhappy with the resulting management of the dam, especially when water levels are low, adding to the difficulty in using the waterfront to recreate and to the likelihood of further spread of water plants such as reeds that restrict open water areas. Some are concerned that the east side of the dam was not rebuilt during this renovation and its condition continues to deteriorate.

The problem with the dam gates was compounded in October 2005, when an extremely high number of consecutive rain events made it impossible for Town employees to remove boards on top of the dam. The boards were damaged by remaining under pressure during the Adirondack winter season, and consequently the Town needs to replace them or find another solution. In addition, the water was not

lowered adequately during the spring due to detritus blocking the gate. The Town is seeking improved methods of keeping the gate clear and may consider purchase of new technologies, such as rubber dam controls and special gate rakes.

Access

One of the most attractive tourism draws to the Adirondacks, and to the Town of Wilmington, is the ability for the public to enjoy the lakes and rivers of the region. The scenic and recreational value of the waterways are an inherent quality of the Adirondacks, but private ownership and land uses threaten the ability for the public to enjoy these resources. Wilmington has a number of publicly owned shoreline areas that can be used for boating, fishing, hiking, picnicking, bird watching, swimming, and other active and passive recreational purposes. Maintaining the existing access points and strategically acquiring new ones is critical to Wilmington's future as a recreational and scenic tourism destination.

Land Ownership Patterns, Including Underwater Lands

While the public is allowed to use the waterways due to government ownership of underwater lands, it is often difficult to gain access to the waterways across privately owned shore land. One critical issue is the challenge of obtaining easements for public access where private ownership dominates along the waterfront, for uses such as skiing, fishing, biking, riverside trails for hiking, and or other projects.

Topography and Geology

The Adirondack Mountains have shallow, nutrient poor soils and granitic bedrock. This is especially true for the watershed of the West Branch of the Ausable River. This area is also characterized by having low groundwater inflow. These features, coupled by a relatively steep topography, greatly affect the freshwater fisheries of the river and are discussed in that section. See Map 5.

The West Branch of the Ausable River drains approximately 236 square miles and is the second steepest river system in the state, dropping approximately 1,500 feet over its 35 mile run to its confluence with the East Branch in Ausable Forks.

The topography of Wilmington is quite dramatic and provides beautiful scenery, as well as a number of exciting opportunities for recreation activities. Respecting and preserving the topographic and geologic resources of the Town is crucial to maintaining water quality and scenic vistas, and promoting the region as a recreational tourism destination.

Natural Resources

Wilmington has an abundance of natural resources that contribute to its attraction as an outdoor recreation area. Whiteface Mountain (elevation 4,867 feet), the fifth highest peak in the Adirondacks, is located in Wilmington. Whiteface is unique in that it sits apart from the majority of New York State's 4,000-foot mountains and in that it has been extensively developed. The mountain has a two-lane highway that approaches its summit and a large ski center. According to the 2004 Whiteface Mountain Unit Management Plan, it also houses critical habitat for the highly endangered Bicknell's Thrush, and is

working to help protect it. Although Whiteface Mountain has been developed, a large portion of the mountain remains wild and undeveloped.

In addition to the mountain, the Town of Wilmington has other wild and undeveloped land within the Wilmington Wild Forest, the McKenzie Mountain Wilderness Area, and the Sentinel Range Wilderness Area. A final Unit Management Plan has been written by the NY State Department of Environmental Conservation for the Wilmington Wild Forest. Information in this section was drawn partially from the draft of this UMP, dated April 2005.

Climate

The general climate of the project area consists of long, cold winters with high winds. Arctic conditions are encountered on the summit of Whiteface Mountain and daytime temperature fluctuations of 20 to 30 degrees Fahrenheit are common. Summers tend to have warm days with cool nights, with the maximum daytime temperature seldom exceeding 90 degrees. Frost can occur any month of the year and freezing temperatures are occasionally recorded during July and August. The annual precipitation, in rainfall, is between 40 and 60 inches per year, with snowfall ranging between 100 and 150 inches per year.

Extreme climatic changes have occurred in Wilmington as recorded during the 1998 ice storm and the Hurricanes of 1950 and 1999.

Air Quality

Air quality is rated Class II (moderately well controlled) by federal and state standards. Class II is considered to be good to excellent. However, particulate matter blown in from outside pollution sources affects air quality. This outside pollution is commonly referred to as acid precipitation and is being studied by the NYS Atmospheric Science Research Station located on Whiteface Mountain.

Acid precipitation is known to contribute to the mortality and decline of red spruce populations at high elevations. Acid precipitation also changes the water quality of lakes within the Adirondack Park. Studies conducted by the Adirondack Lake Survey have shown sulfates have decreased in these lakes with decreases in sulfate emissions and depositions and nitrates have continued to increase with stable levels of nitrogen emissions and depositions.

In addition to the lakes, acid deposition does have negative effects to streams and rivers. These effects are more difficult to quantify, yet many streams and rivers cannot support native populations of Adirondack brook trout. Initial reports from fish collections made on the White Brook and Little Black Brook do not indicate an acidity problem. These reports also do not indicate a problem for the West Branch of the Ausable River.

Important agricultural lands

Although in Wilmington's early days extensive areas in the watershed were cultivated for rye and other crops, today there are limited agricultural lands within the Town of Wilmington. Upstream, in the Town of North Elba, there are a number of potato fields that border the Chubb tributary. The significance of

these potato fields to the volume of sedimentation in and the water quality of the river has not been examined. There are also the horseshow grounds and Haselton Road bottomlands, which may be additional sources of non-point pollution runoff to the Ausable River.

Significant Fish and Wildlife Habitat

Fisheries

The Ausable River is identified by fisheries biologists as one of the best trout fisheries in New York State. The entire river offers good trout habitat, however the east and the West Branch are best known for Brook and Brown Trout. (Rainbow Trout and Small mouth Bass are found in the main stem of the river and landlocked salmon occur below Ausable Chasm.)

The New York State DEC and Essex County stock hatchery raised strains of fish throughout the river. The West Branch is stocked with Brown trout, Brook trout, and Rainbow trout. The West Branch is reported to be one of the most heavily fished streams in the state. According to community wisdom, there are few if any "native" fish left in the Ausable. There is an ongoing debate about how to manage the West Branch fishery; some view the stream as strictly "put & take" (i.e., any fish stocked in one year have to be replaced by stocking the next year because all are caught and too few reproduce or over-winter to sustain a sport fishery); others long for an approach with less human interference.

Although trout reproduce normally in the river, these species have not been able to maintain their population sizes in the river. Ice conditions (anchor ice) and embeddedness (sedimentation) create circumstances where high mortality of fish is probable. In addition they cannot compete with hatchery fish when stocking occurs. Fish hatchery data confirm this mortality. These effects are discussed in greater detail later in this report.

In 1992 the DEC Fisheries Unit conducted a study to look at the quantity and quality of fisheries in the West Branch of the Ausable River. This study was prompted by anecdotal information suggesting that the fishery of the West Branch has lessened over the past several decades. The data that was collected was used in comparison to historic data in an effort to document trends. Although there are some differences in sampling sites and procedures over the years, general comparisons could be made.

The following four conclusions were made:

- Holdover of hatchery trout is low.
- Wild brown trout are present but relatively low in abundance.
- Growth rates of the wild brown trout are excellent.
- The relative abundance of large trout in the West Branch is low.

Significant Species Data and Natural Communities for the Wilmington Area

The Wilmington Wild Forest UMP has a species list for mammals, birds, amphibians, and reptiles that can serve as an indicator of which species may be found within the project area. Species lists for specific areas along the river exist, but are not all-inclusive for the project area.

According to local residents, snapping turtles are commonly seen laying eggs along the sandy areas of the Lake on summer mornings. Some sites may conflict with local land uses, including the beach playground area and private homeowners' waterfront access. Turtles might also provide a "natural heritage" interest point for residents and visitors that may not be aware of their presence.

The New York Natural Heritage Program (NYNHP), an inventory program in conjunction with the DEC and The Nature Conservancy, has identified several rare species and exemplary natural communities within the project boundary. A great number of these species and natural communities are associated with the alpine ecosystem and would not be found in the riverine habitat. Other species may be located within the river corridor and these areas should be considered sensitive. This data is constantly being updated. Prior to the start of any project within the study area, a request for updated location information should be made to the NYNHP. The presence of rare species may require special review, permits, or permits conditions for projects proposed within this region.

Invasive Species

Non-native invasive species directly threaten biological diversity and the high quality of natural communities throughout the Adirondacks. Invasive species alter native plant assemblages and may form mono-specific stands of a species. These mono-specific populations are typically of low quality forage for native wildlife and can eliminate the original, native species.

Invasive species have only recently become a recognized ecological problem in the Adirondack Park. Although invasive species are not yet predominant, their increase is of concern to the ecological, recreational, and economic value of the Park's natural resources. Because the numbers of invasive species locations are relatively low, a unique opportunity exists within the Adirondack Park to work proactively at detecting, containing, and eradicating invasive species. This is especially true within this project area.

The West Branch of the Ausable River corridor has confirmed multiple locations for one invasive species, the Common Reed (*Phragmites australis*). In contrast, the East Branch of the Ausable River has multiple locations of this and several additional invasive species. It is only a matter of time before the Common Reed spreads and Purple Loosestrife and Japanese Knotweed invade the project area.

Infrastructure

Transportation

Wilmington is served by approximately 17 miles of State roads and one State bridge, 17 miles of County roads and 14 miles of Town roads. The hamlet of Wilmington is located on NYS Rt. 86, which runs through the commercial and residential areas of the hamlet. Route 86 leads to the Village of Lake Placid to the southwest along a 9-mile stretch which passes through Wilmington Notch. Route 86 leads to Jay to the east, where it meets NYS Rt. 9N – a major state route leading to the northern City of Plattsburgh and leading south to meet NYS Route 73 and Interstate 87 (the Adirondack Northway), an access route to the Adirondacks via Albany.

Route 86 through Wilmington is part of the State designated Olympic Trail Scenic Byway, which runs along Route 3, Route 86 and Route 9N from Sackets Harbor to Keeseville. The eastern section of the Olympic Byway begins at the Raybrook/Village of Lake Placid line on Route 86 and passes through the Olympic Village, Wilmington and Jay.

The other State Highway in Wilmington is the Whiteface Mountain Veterans Memorial Highway (State Rt. 431), a seasonal toll road constructed in the 1930s. The road is open from May to October, and rises over 2,300 feet in 8 miles from the Toll House, providing spectacular 360-degree views of the Adirondack Mountains.

Major county roads that connect Wilmington to other hamlets include Co. Rt. 19 (Bonnie View Road) which leads to Black Brook, and Co. Rt. 12 (Springfield / Haselton Road) which leads to Upper Jay to the south and Black Brook to the north.

The stone-arch bridge over the Ausable River on Rt. 86 in the center of town is owned and maintained by the New York State Department of Transportation. This historic bridge, constructed in 1935, is listed on the New York State Register of Historic Places.

Bicyclist/Pedestrian Facilities

The sidewalk infrastructure in Wilmington is limited. A concrete sidewalk exists on NYS Rt. 86 on the east side of the road beginning at Riverbend Way (a private road) and extends until the intersection of Rt. 431. From the intersection, it continues on the south side of Rt. 86 and terminates at Park Lane and the Northern Lights School. Sidewalks exist on both the north and south sides of the stone-arch bridge on Rt. 86, but the north side terminates when the bridge ends. An asphalt sidewalk exists on the south side of Springfield Rd., beginning at the intersection with Rt. 86 and extending approximately 100’ past the town offices where it abruptly terminates.

New crosswalks were installed in late 2006 under an agreement with the NYS DOT. Efforts to install bike paths and additional sidewalks have been launched multiple times with no success due to financial constraints, landowner objections, or lack of agency cooperation. The community indicates a very strong interest in improving road biking routes and pedestrian facilities throughout the downtown area and will seek additional support to achieve this goal.

Wilmington has a recreational trail system known as the Wilmington Wild Trail System (WWTS). The WWTS is designed to be a multi-use trail system for mountain biking, hiking, snow shoeing and cross country skiing. It is a cooperative project between the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation and the Wilmington Mountain Peddlers, a group of local volunteers, to improve access to the 14,000+ acre Wilmington Wild Forest. A total of six trails currently exist, of varying degrees of biking difficulty. The trail system consists primarily of an inter-connecting series of old logging roads, one of which connects to the Whiteface Mountain Biking Center system of down-hill skiing trails.

Sewage Disposal

The Town of Wilmington does not have a municipal sewage system. Sewage disposal is currently handled by individual, on-site septic systems. Many systems are closer to the Ausable River than would currently be permitted under code; they were "grandfathered" in as previously existing systems. State and Town officials suspect that several or many such systems may need to be replaced and/or upgraded. Maintaining healthy septic systems is crucial for the preservation of water quality.

Solid Waste Disposal

The Town maintains a landfill transfer station on Bonnie View Road approximately 5 miles from the Rte. 86 intersection. Littering and illegal dumping continue to be problematic in certain areas, including the Flume, Lenny Preston Road, on individual properties, and in other public areas, despite a stated Town fine of $1000 per offense. The Town hopes to pursue these problem areas with support from state agencies.

Municipal Water System

The reservoir that is the water source for the town is located off State Rt. 431. The reservoir in turn is sourced by White Brook and Red Brook, which therefore require protection. Wilmington currently has one water district. Water District #1 consists of a water filtration plant and storage tanks located on Reservoir Rd. about 1 mile from the intersection of Rt. 86 and Rt. 431, and a pump station on Quaker Mountain. The water distribution system consists of water mains of various sizes along Rt. 86 and roads including Haselton, Bonnie View, Quaker Mountain, Fox Farm and Manning.

Over the last several years, the Town has aggressively replaced the old, deteriorating asbestos-cement water pipe and undersized, shallow water mains in Water District #1 with new cast iron pipe. An extension of the existing Water District #1 is currently being proposed that will provide municipal water service to the Whiteface Mountain Ski Center, which is currently experiencing problems with insufficient potable water supplies and fire protection capabilities. The proposed Water District #2 will consist of approximately 2,960 linear feet (lf) of 8" water main, 2,040 lf. of 12" water main, 2,200 lf. of 16" water main, three fire hydrants, a concrete storage tank, and a booster station facility to provide municipal water service to Whiteface Mountain. The project will also include various improvements to Water District #1.

Environmental Issues

A workshop held in May 1990 in the Town of Wilmington and documented by the National Park Service Ausable River Study (1995) best describes residents' concerns and issues relating to water quality and pollution. Water pollution due to non-point sources was a major point of concern, including waste entering the river from insufficient septic systems and recreational use. Other non-point sources include sedimentation due to dirt roads, paved roads, construction, road sanding, stream bank erosion, road salt and silviculture. Water pollution from point sources included sewage treatment plant bypass valves, direct discharge from residents and leaking underground gasoline storage tanks.

Solid waste management is noted among community concerns raised during the LWRP process. Sites including an informal dump on Lenny Preston Road, the Flume swimming hole, and the beach were noted as places where trash receptacles are insufficient, nonexistent, or inadequately maintained by responsible authorities.

There is no Federal or State designated hazardous waste site within the Town of Wilmington.

Historic resources

Wilmington's history and current historical and cultural resources revolve closely around the Ausable River as noted in this background written in the late 19th century. The following is an excerpt from H.P. Smith's book, A History of Wilmington, 1885:

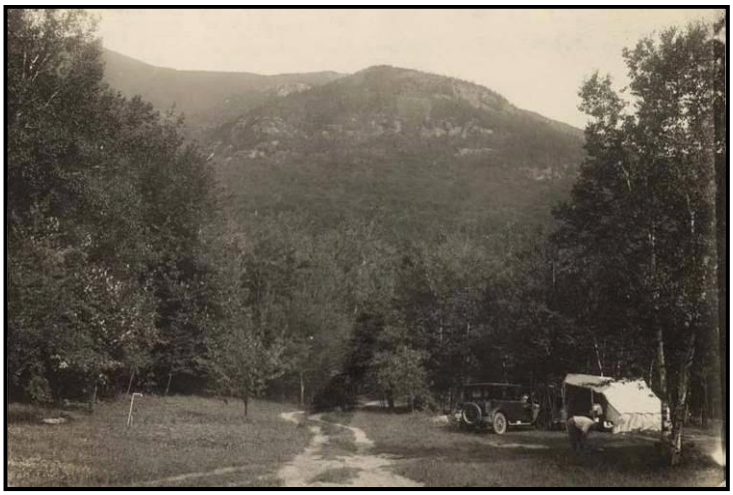

Photo from NYS Archives

From the summit of Whiteface can be had one of the finest views in Northern New York, owing not more to its great height (which is exceeded by several mountains farther south) than to its singular isolation and the beauties of the AuSable valley stretching north from its base. On the eastern side, impending directly over the AuSable, rises a perpendicular cliff of solid rock to an elevation of 2,000 feet and opposite to it another mountain rises with scarcely less terrible grandeur, compressing the river into a narrow pass, but ---- feet in width, through which the water tumbles and plunges with a confused and incessant roar, in one place leaping down a perpendicular precipice of one hundred feet this is Wilmington notch. Another place worthy of note is Copperas pond, so named because its waters are strongly impregnated with iron sulfate. The decomposition of iron pyrites has left also copious deposits of copperas among the rocks in the vicinity.

Thus the topographical aspect of Wilmington is seen to be rough, elevated, and mountainous, with long slopes descending to the AuSable and its tributaries and presenting varied and picturesque scenery. The soil is a sandy and gravelly loam, and where it can be cultivated without danger from the frequent floods and overflows, occasioned by the numerous declivities which diversify the face of the town, is very fertile and productive. Beds of iron ore are numerous but are only slightly worked. Sometime between 1815 and 1820 the Hon. Reuben Sanford… created an extensive iron manufacturing establishment on the site of the village of Wilmington, on the West Branch of the AuSable. He suffered great losses through the violence of the elements and the fluctuations of business, and was obliged at last to transfer the property to

others. It has since gone through a number of changes. In 1868 the site was occupied by a grist-mill and starch factory, a saw-mill with three gates and forty saws, and a forge owned by Weston & Nye, having two fires, but adapted to four, which in that year made about two hundred tons of iron. The ore was drawn from Palmer Hill. Wilmington and North Elba comprise about the only district of extent or value in the county which is occupied by the primitive forest of hemlock, spruce, and pine. Owing to the almost insurmountable barriers interposed by the mountains which environ this district, it is impracticable to export manufactured lumber from this region. Fifteen years ago it was estimated that this tract would yield a million of saw logs. In early times the tillage of the town was devoted almost wholly to the production of rye which was used to supply the distilleries. These works were far more numerous in Wilmington than in any other part of the county. During the war of 1812 the manufacture of whisky was a lucrative and therefore extensive occupation, and the revenue of the inhabitants of Wilmington not only, but of all the towns accessible to the genius of commerce, was greatly increased.

The dam has long been an important part of the economic and cultural climate of Wilmington as well. Karen Peters, president of the Wilmington Historical Society, noted in a speech at rededication of the Wilmington Dam, July 2005:

The dam served to create a log-holding pond for industry. Behind the dam was a containment pond to hold the logs needed for the sawmills, and for the cord wood needed for the charcoal kilns which in turn furnished the fuel for the iron forge. Upstream of the dam & bridge were 3 squared timber piers filled with rocks with a chain strung between them to act as a log boom.

At the end of the 19th century, with the iron mines opening in the West and the lumbering industry waning, the reasons for maintaining the Wilmington dam began to change. Local hoteliers began to advertise boats on the river pond behind the dam, a glimpse of the approaching transition to the tourism industry. And in the early 20th century, a new purpose for the dam - that of creating electricity – was advanced. But by the mid-20s, electric power generation began flowing to Wilmington via the power plant at Ausable Chasm, and the era of electric power generation by Wilmington's dam was ended.

Rustic Cabin near Wilmington Notch (NYS Archives)

In March of 1936, huge cakes of ice floated down the swollen West Branch and without warning, took out the wooden dam at Wilmington. The exposed marshy expanses along the river infused the Townspeople's camps along the river with abundant mosquitoes and the water was too low to permit residents and visitors to

practice their accustomed recreational habits. In 1937 the Town rebuilt the dam and updated it again in 2003.

Current historical sites are documented by the Wilmington Historical Society (see Map 9a and 9b) (http://www.wilmingtonhistoricalsociety.org/) and the Essex County Historical Society (http://adkhistorycenter.org/index.html).

In 1982, the Town prepared a proposal to the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation for the establishment of an historic district in the hamlet of Wilmington. The proposal gives an historic overview of the town and establishes the significance of the proposed historic district in relation to development, decline and potential renaissance of the community. An element of the proposal included a detailed Historic Resources Survey of the Town of Wilmington, completed in 1980 and sponsored by the Essex County Historical Society. The proposed historic district contains thirty-six structures, sixteen of which are dated before 1900. There are some 'archeological sites' of structures no longer in existence, although their general locations are known and within the waterfront boundary. These include the iron forge, the charcoal kilns, the potash factory, sawmills, and the grist mill.

Cultural resources in Wilmington include cottage industries such as a chocolate factory, an artisanal craft cooperative, the Adirondack Christian Day School (associated with the Baptist Church), the E.M. Cooper Library, and the first Waldorf School in the County. Wilmington's history is also closely linked with the surrounding Towns, especially North Elba and the Village of Lake Placid.

Scenic Resources

The waterfront area is stunningly beautiful. It is the scenic quality of the Adirondack Mountains, the West Branch of the Ausable River, and the Adirondack-Style Hamlet that define Wilmington. These scenic resources are a significant draw for tourism and complement the many recreational opportunities that Wilmington has to offer. Protecting aesthetic and scenic values associated with the waterfront and any areas designated as scenic areas of statewide significance are essential.

According to the Wilmington Wild Forest Unit Management Plan, scenic vistas include:

- State Highway 86, between Lake Placid and Wilmington, a state-designated Scenic-Byway
- Whiteface Mountain and its surrounding area
- Lake Everest and the beach area
- The Wilmington Dam
- The Historic Bridge
- The Flume
- Designated Trails
- Designated Fishing Areas
- Whiteface Mountain Ski Area, Tollbooth, Tower and Trails
- KOA Campground Overlook
- High Falls Gorge
- The Notch – Falcon Area

- Open farmlands along lower West Branch and Haselton Road
- Cooper Kiln Trail Views
- Heritage Park

Preventing impairment of scenic components that contribute to high scenic quality is of crucial importance to Wilmington.