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## Property Overview, Regional Significance, and Management Summary

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Alford is a very small, rural, residential town with a population of about 500 people. Population apparently was near its high in 1773 when residents numbered 577 ("Town of Alford 250<sup>th</sup> Birthday, 1750-2000," by Bud Bresciani, July 4, 2000). It declined gradually, and then increased back to about 560 in 1860 (near the peak of farming), declined steadily to a low of 200 around 1930, and has again increased to approximately 500, according to statistics offered in Wikipedia ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alford,\\_Massachusetts](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alford,_Massachusetts)). The village contains just the church, Town Hall, and the former Alford Center School, which now houses the town offices. Much of the land was cleared for dairy or sheep farming in the 1800s, but appears to be about 80% forested now. Just a few working farms remain. Many properties are managed for wood products, and a substantial number are enrolled in Chapter 61 or 61A with professional forestry assistance being used. Real estate values are among the highest in the Berkshire region. Many larger properties have been fragmented into smaller parcels to satisfy the high demand for both second home and new resident home sites.

The local valley region flanking the Alford Brook (and encompassing the Schiffman Lot) is underlain with limestone, and is part of a geological area known as the New England Marble Valley ecoregion. There are caves and disappearing streams (typical of limestone geology) nearby, and the quarrying of marble was a significant industry in Alford in the 1800's. Alford marble, prized for its color, was used in building the New York City Hall. It is said that oxen drew some loads of marble through the subject property, traveling from the quarry on East Road, Alford, to the Hudson River (personal conversation with Gary Shepard, 2014).

A small perennial brook barely enters the northeast corner of the property from the adjoining Wilcox farm before flowing easterly through a culvert under West Road. About 1,000 feet east of the Schiffman Lot, it joins the Alford Brook, a large perennial brook and cold water fishery of high water quality. The Alford Brook in turn joins the Green River about four miles southerly in Great Barrington, where the Green River serves as a public water supply source for parts of that town.

Alford has several parcels of protected land, the largest of which is the nearby "Alford Springs" parcel (884+ acres) owned by Berkshire Natural Resources Council (BNRC), with a conservation restriction (CR) held by Massachusetts Division of Fisheries & Wildlife on most of that area. This is about 700 feet west of the Schiffman Lot. The entire west edge of Alford bordering the New York state line (and particularly from West Road westerly) is within the U. S. Forest Service-designated Taconic Range Forest Legacy Area, for which federal funds may be used to purchase private lands or CRs on private lands to conserve forestland. There is an agricultural preservation restriction on the portion of Shepard Farm east of West Road (directly across the road from the Schiffman Lot), the Wilcox Farm adjoining the north side of the Shepard APR, the Scribner Brook Farm (170 acres+) about a mile north on West Road, and the

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Dunn Farm on Green River Road touching the New York state line. Another APR protects about 16 acres of land owned by Berle (the former Wolfe farm) along the south edge of the town, which adjoins a much larger piece of Berle APR land in Egremont. BNRC holds CRs on two adjoining parcels on East Road – the Gardner CR property of about 90 acres, and the Hardy CR property to the north of it, a 63.7-acre conservation restriction given to Alford Land Trust and BNRC in March 2006. Both of these parcels include some length of the Alford Brook. BNRC also holds a CR on about 43 acres of the Vanecko property, east of East Road on the steep face of Tom Ball Mountain. New England Forestry Foundation owns an 82-acre forest tract just west of Alford Village named the Maxson-Pederson Memorial Forest, which has a deed restriction limiting its use to conservation purposes. The Town of Alford owns a small (3-acre+/-) lot along the east side of the Green River that was conveyed for wildlife conservation purposes. To the west, adjoining Alford Springs on the New York side of the state line, the Yonkers Rod & Gun Club owns several hundreds of acres of forestland devoted to hunting and forest management, but not permanently protected. The New York Department of Environmental Conservation owns the Harvey Mountain State Forest that is northwest of Alford Springs, along the west (New York) side of the state line.

The ALT Schiffman Lot contains 10.00 acres, as mapped on a 1970 survey titled “Lands of: Henry M. Shepard to be conveyed to Ruth K. Astmann,” and recorded in Map File #59 in the Berkshire South District Registry of Deeds, Great Barrington, MA. The parcel of land was gifted to the Alford Land Trust in December 2012 by Stephen, Hank, Peter, and Theodore Schiffman, who had inherited it from their father, Philip Schiffman. Philip Schiffman had acquired the land from Ruth Astmann in 1987, and she had purchased from Henry Shepard (grandfather of Gary Shepard, a present owner, with wife Roberta, of the adjacent Shepard farm) in 1970. Prior to 1970, this parcel had long been a part of the Shepard Farm, owned by Henry and Ruth Shepard since about 1952, and by Henry’s parents, Albert and Mary Shepard, from 1901. Before 1901, one Tuttle owned the farm for several years, and before that, John L. Milligan was owner for many years. Around 1880, the Milligan house burned; its site was 100-150 feet south of the ALT land, on the same (west) side of West Road. In this writer’s opinion, the small stone cellar in the northeast corner of the ALT parcel may have been for a farm tenant house, as it is relatively small (roughly 25 feet square), and has myrtle growing in and around it, as well as a few large sugar maples (20-34” diameter, of shade tree form) very close to it.

Note: A 1973 sketch map printed for a folder marking Alford’s bicentennial (and reprinted in the 250<sup>th</sup> Birthday booklet referred to herein) shows an “old Indian burying ground” roughly in the vicinity of the ALT Schiffman lot. Personal conversations with Gary Shepard (2014), and reference to the previously mentioned booklet, “Town of Alford 250<sup>th</sup> Birthday, 1750-2000,” page 20, support that the burial site (reportedly of Indians and perhaps 50 colonists) is further south, roughly 250 feet north of Shepards’ Pond (the man-made pond that fronts on the west side

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of West Road, constructed in the 1940s by Gary Shepard's late uncle, James Shepard), close to a driveway that passes through a former pasture that was once part of the Shepard farm (and part of the Milligan farm in the 1800s). A single stone marking the grave of two children, Hiram and David Andrews, died 1799, may still stand here, and was located on a 1993 survey map titled "Plan of Land Surveyed for Gore Realty Trust in Alford, Massachusetts," by Kelly-Granger-Parsons and Associates, and recorded as Plat G-116.

The entire ALT Schiffinan lot is forested generally with white pine and mixed hardwoods that originated on former pasture. The terrain slopes very gently to the east, whereas a steep mountain slope (where timbering and charcoaling were past land uses) rises up to the west of the parcel. About two acres are wooded wetland, but with similar composition of white pine-hardwoods forest. Trees in the main canopy range from 6" to 36" in diameter at breast height (dbh), though most fall within the 8-24" dbh range.

Within 200 feet of West Road, white pines ranging 12-20 inches in diameter at breast height (dbh), and only of poor to fair quality, comprise about 80% of the forest canopy, as this area was more recently abandoned as pasture, and then cleared of brush and young trees around 1970. The larger, remaining part of the property has older (roughly 60-90 years old) forest, with logging of scattered timber having last occurred around the 1960s.

No vernal pools were encountered during the 2014-15 forest examination, and none are certified on the tract. Some invasive plant species, including Japanese barberry, honeysuckle, multiflora rose, and garlic mustard occur at low density. Currently, the Massachusetts Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Program (NHESP) shows no endangered species or priority habitat sites within the property, though mapped zones of both occur about 900 feet to the east, near Alford Brook. Based on the findings of "BioMap 2: Conserving the Biodiversity of Massachusetts in a Changing World" published by the NHESP and the Massachusetts Program of The Nature Conservancy (2010), the property falls within mapped areas of critical natural landscape and critical natural landscape blocks. According to the MassGIS website (<http://www.mass.gov/anf/research-and-tech/it-serv-and-support/application-serv/office-of-geographic-information-massgis/datalayers/biomap2.html>), "Critical Natural Landscape" complements Core Habitat and includes large natural Landscape Blocks that provide habitat for wide-ranging native species, support intact ecological processes, maintain connectivity among habitats, and enhance ecological resilience; and includes buffering uplands around coastal, wetland, and aquatic Core Habitats to ensure their long-term integrity." Directly across West Road from the property are other areas mapped for BioMap 2 "Core Habitat" and a sub-component of Core Habitat called "Species of Conservation Concern." Per the MassGIS website, "Core Habitat is critical to the long-term persistence of rare species and other Species of Conservation Concern, as well as a wide diversity of natural communities and intact ecosystems

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across the Commonwealth."

The easterly two-thirds of the property lies within the MassGIS Scenic Landscapes datalayer, and the westerly quarter (approximately) is within Alford's mapped Scenic Mountains Act (SMA) zone, which requires Conservation Commission approval of activities that could impact scenic or watershed qualities of the landscape.

Alford Land Trust's mission is "to protect Alford's significant natural, agricultural and scenic resources and to promote and encourage land stewardship for the benefit of the environment, the economy, and future generations." These goals can be accomplished through long-term conservative forest management. Little forest management activity is warranted now; the forest is generally well stocked with a desirable mix of dominant trees that are healthy and have potential to grow and increase in value. In most areas, it will be best to maintain a dense overstory as trees continue to mature, to discourage growth of non-native invasive plants that impede or displace desirable forest regeneration.

The present diversity of tree species within the forest, plus the large, unbroken forest area to the west, provide good wildlife habitat for a wide variety of songbirds and mammals with larger home ranges, especially in concert with the nearby agricultural fields to the east. Whitetail deer, black bear, moose, coyote, ruffed grouse, and many rodents, songbirds and other non-game species are evident on the property. Establishment of a walking trail will promote public recreation and education regarding forest stewardship. Cutting of perhaps one or two small openings could improve songbird habitat while providing some wood products for trail construction and other uses.