

Town Forest – Community Park North

Management Plan

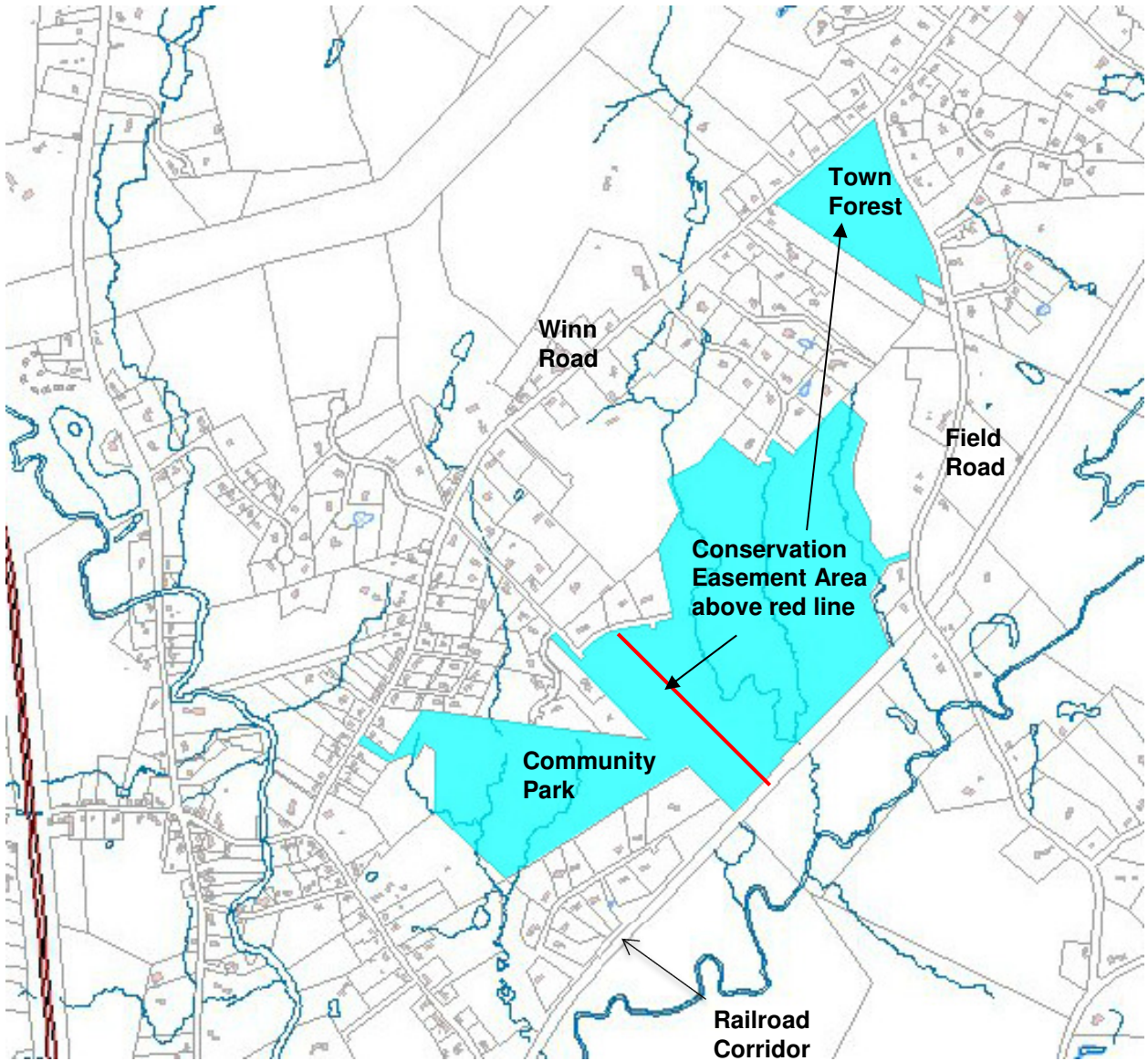


Town of Falmouth
February 2013

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Map I: Location



I. Summary

Community Park and Town Forest are one of the most heavily used open space properties in Falmouth. Its central location, 4.4 miles of walking trails, and ease of access make it one of the most popular recreational areas in town.

The primary management challenge is to keep the trails and appurtenant structures in good condition, and to keep unauthorized motorized vehicles off those trails.

There is an opportunity to create early successional forest habitat to help restore New England Cottontail rabbits to the area by clearcutting 15-20 acres of scrubby white pine and invasive species growing on the western end of the former Harriman property. US Fish & Wildlife biologists have identified the site as an excellent candidate for such an effort.

A somewhat rare (S3) Maple-Baswood-Ash forest community type is located just west of the proposed clearcut area and should be managed in a way that sustains it.

II. Description

The Central Falmouth Conservation Corridor begins at Hadlock Community Forest and extends to River Point on the Presumpscot River. In the middle of that corridor are 181-acres of town-owned land, 81-acres of which are protected by and easement held by the Falmouth Land Trust.

From northwest to southeast those lots include:

- A one-acre lot on the west side of Winn Road that was acquired in May 2011 to insure a trail connection to Hadlock Community Forest over land owned by Brian and Patsy Milliken. This parcel is not easement protected and might be sold by the town at some future date once a trail easement has been placed on the property.
- Town Forest, a 21-acre property acquired for back taxes in 1941.



The sign marks the entrance to Town Forest from Winn Road.

Land formerly owned by Charles Harriman, 29.9 acres in size, acquired in part with Land for Maine's Future funds in 2008, and now incorporated as part of Community Park.

- Ten acres of land deeded to the town in 2005 as part of the Paddock Way subdivision, now incorporated as part of Community Park.
- The original 119-acre Falmouth Community Park property, part of the former Zacharias dairy farm, was acquired by the town in 1995. The northernmost 20 acres of this property are easement protected, as are Town Forest and the former Harriman and Paddock Way parcels.

Historically, all of these properties were active farmland until the mid 20th century, with the flat portions in fields and the ravines wooded. Abandoned farm machinery along one of the trails is testament to the days when agriculture was a prominent activity in Falmouth.

The most salient feature of these properties, beyond their undeveloped state, is the network of trails that can be found there. 4.4 miles of trails exist in Community Park and Town Forest, all easily accessed from several places on both Winn Road and Field Road. These trails are well developed and used heavily by hikers, skiers, cross-country runners, dog walkers, mountain bikers, and snowshoers. A trail extends from Town Forest to Hadlock Community Forest to the north, all part of the Cross Falmouth Trail.



This 30 ft. bridge, built by FCC volunteers, spans one of the ravines in Community Park.

All of these parcels are heavily wooded with mixed forest growth, except for two areas of grassy fields in Community Park. Red oak, Eastern hemlock, white pine, sugar maple and red maple are the dominant tree species. A forest management plan was prepared for the property in 2009. Some wood harvesting was done on both the Town Forest and Harriman parcels in 1970s.

Invasive plants are abundant, especially on the western end of the former Harriman property where they are the understory in a very scrubby white pine stand. The forest management plan recommends clearcutting this stand to reset plant succession in an effort to create New England cottontail rabbit habitat. Invasive control in this area could also be attempted at the same time. This opinion is also shared by US Fish & Wildlife Service biologists involved in regional New England cottontail restoration efforts.

A Maple-Basswood-Ash community type can be found just north of the proposed clearcut area. Relatively rare (S3), this stand should be managed in ways that allow it to sustain itself. The best way to do that is to control the many invasive plants in the understory in ways that allow for natural regeneration.

A fairly deep ravine that contains a small stream originates in Town Forest and runs through the former Harriman parcel and under the railroad tracks to the East Branch of the Piscataquis River. There are no other wetlands on the property, although there are two streams on the lower section of Community Park.

Town Forest and Community Park do not connect directly, although there is a trail connecting the two parcels. The properties are separated by two private landholdings. One of these landowners has given the town permission, through a trail license, to establish a trail on his land. The other owner has not, but neither have they posted their land, thus keeping it accessible according to Maine law. While no trail construction or blazing has been done on this property, there is an existing trail segment that was built by area residents that does complete the connection between Town Forest and Community Park.

These properties are bordered by residential development on the north (along Winn Road), by the railroad tracks and private homes on the south, by Field and Winn Roads to the east, and by residential development to the west, include some conservation land around the Twin Ponds subdivision.

The railroad tracks create a formidable barrier to connecting the trails along the East Branch corridor, and the school campus, to Community Park. The only practical way to cross the railroad right of way is through an underground tunnel, a very expensive solution that has been investigated, but put on hold unless and until financial support for its construction can be obtained.

III. Conservation Values

The conservation values being protected in Town Forest and Community Park include:

- The unfragmented habitat the properties provide for wildlife species that live and breed in habitats such as those found on these parcels.
- The watershed protection the forest contributes to surface and groundwater quality. By moderating run-off and absorbing rainfall and snowmelt, and by buffering the non-point pollution sources found in the area, the forest contributes to the water quality in Casco Bay.
- The aesthetic value such a large block of undeveloped property offers area residents in an easily accessible area of town.

IV. Easement Provisions

The easements in force on both properties are identical in their requirements.

- The property may be used only for conservation, non-intensive outdoor recreation, and forest management activities.
- No industrial, residential, quarrying, mining, large-scale commercial groundwater extraction, or building development activities are permitted.
- Minor structures that enhance the opportunity for low-impact outdoor recreation, nature observation and study can be built, such as bridges or kiosks.
- New trails can be established and maintained (paved or unpaved).
- Invasive species can be controlled with chemical means.
- Commercial forest management is allowed according to the terms of a professionally prepared forest management plan.



Honeysuckle and bittersweet are pervasive at the Field Road entrance to Town Forest.

- Public access is guaranteed.
- Hunting and trapping are permitted unless the town explicitly prohibits these uses.

V. Management Goals & Activities

The primary management objective for these properties is passive recreation: keeping the various trails, bridges, and signage in good condition. In the northern portion of Community Park and in Town Forest, that responsibility lies with the Falmouth Conservation Corps stewards assigned to those properties. The lower portion of Community Park is maintained by the town's Parks & Public Works Department. There is no need for additional trails on either property.

Given the heavy recreational use the property receives, and the relatively small size of its woodlands, the forest should be left "forever wild," with tree removal only undertaken when dead or fallen trees create a safety hazard or trail barrier. An exception might be made for Town Forest where some harvesting may be needed to reduce the hazard posed by many large dying white pine trees.

Invasive plants pose a formidable management challenge, especially in the northern portion of Community Park and the Field Road entrance area to Town Forest. Given the density of these plants, especially honeysuckle and buckthorn, control will be difficult. For starters, control efforts should be focused on areas in which invasive populations are low enough that control is feasible. If successful, control attempts might be extended to more problematic areas. Chemical means will be required.

The opportunity to create early successional forest habitat of the kind needed by New England cottontail rabbits, and other species who favor this plant community type, ought to be pursued. That would involve clearcutting 15-20 acres of an otherwise scrubby pine stand and allowing it to grow back into early successional forest. Invasives are also very dense in this area. Clearcutting will allow for better invasive control in this area of the property.

Given the close proximity of houses to these properties, hunting with firearms is prohibited. Bow and arrow hunting is permitted. Snowmobiles are allowed in Community Park, on established trails. ATVs are prohibited, but some illegal ATV use has been noted on both properties. Signs noting that their use is banned need to be posted at all entry points, including an unofficial entry point at the end of Paddock Way.

VI. Future Opportunities / Plans

A priority for the future should be making an official trail connection between Town Forest and Community Park. This will probably have to wait until ownership of the "gap" piece of land changes. When that happens, perhaps the back section could be purchased or at least a trail license obtained.

Additional land abutting the lot to the west of Winn Road may also be obtained. The current owners are considering donating much of that property to the Falmouth Land Trust. In the meantime, they are willing to grant a trail license to the Town that will establish the connection between Town Forest and Hadlock Community Forest.

If at all possible, the town should pursue the construction of a tunnel underneath the railroad tracks, and if successful, a pedestrian / snowmobile bridge over the East Branch. That would connect Community Park to the East Branch trails, and to the school campus, allowing students and athletic teams greater access to and from the Park. It would also make possible a continuous trail from River Point to Rines Forest in Cumberland, and west to Blackstrap Hill Community Forest, North Falmouth Community Forest and Windham's Lowell Preserve.

VII. Budget

Due to heavy usage, sections of the trail on the former Harriman property need hardening, especially the southern side of the loop that leads from the "dead field" to Harriman bridge. This may require a ±\$300 worth of fill and might be accomplished with Parks Department equipment.

Invasive control would cost ±\$2,500 for labor and herbicides.

An estimated \$4,000 in income from clearcutting the scrubby pine stand would offset these costs.

VIII. Long-Term Issues / Opportunities

There are many bog bridges on the two properties, and one water crossing bridge, that will likely need replacing in 25-30 years. Three other water crossing bridges may need replacing in 5-8 years. Blazes, maps and signs will also need replacing over time. The cost of these materials is estimated at \$18,000 in today's dollars.

If implemented, the early successional habitat (clearcut) area will have to be re-cut periodically to maintain this habitat type.

Establishing a connection with school and conservation land across the railroad right of way is also a long-term issue. Although the cost will be high, there would be many benefits to be gained from such a connection.

Table I: Summary of Management Tasks						
Goal	Task	Action Steps	When	Who	Cost	Other
<i>Improve existing trail system.</i>	1. Harden muddy trails.	1. Add gravel to the east side of the loop trail on the former Harriman property.	Summer 2013	Ombudsman, Parks Dept.	\$300	
<i>Create early successional forest habitat</i>	1. Clearcut 15-20 acres of scrubby pine stand in the lower portion of the former Harriman parcel.	1. Get Council approval. 2. Delineate harvest area with forester & USF&W biologist. 3. Contract w/ harvester. 4. Conduct operation.	2014	Ombudsman		Est. \$4,000 in income.
<i>Control invasive plants.</i>	1. Treat invasives as they regrow on the clearcut area. 2. Treat other areas of the property on which invasives are found.	1. Mobilize the invasive team. 2. Acquire needed herbicides.	2013 and beyond	Ombudsman, FCC volunteers.	\$1,500	Labor & herbicide costs.
<i>Connect the property to the school campus.</i>	1. Build a tunnel underneath the railroad corridor. 2. Build a bridge across the East Branch.	1. Conduct a feasibility study. 2. Produce design & cost estimate. 3. Acquire funding. 4. Construct tunnel & bridge.	2013 and beyond	Engineering firm. Town Manager, Council.	\$1.5m?	

Initial plan developed February 2013

Approved by the Land Management Team: _____ (date)

Approved by Parks & Community Program Director: _____ (date)

Approved by the Town Manager: _____ (date)

Approved by the Town Council: _____ (date)