

East Branch Conservation Area

Management Plan

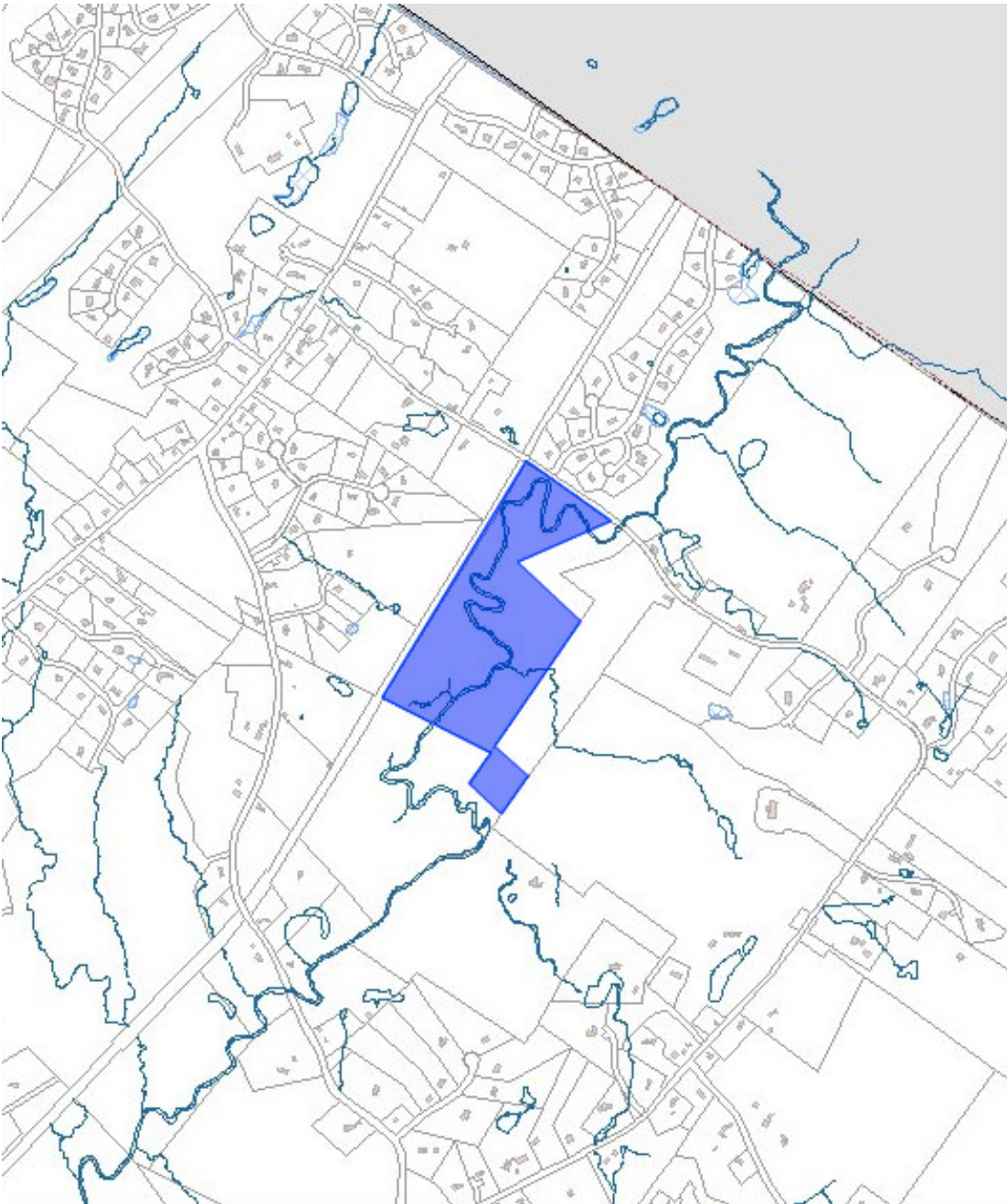


Town of Falmouth
March 2012
Revised January 2013

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Maine Natural Areas Program Inventory	Appended as a separate file

Map I: Property Location



I. Summary

The East Branch Conservation Area, 55.5 acres in size, is a “forever wild” conservation property with very limited public access. Its primary value is the protection it offers the East Branch of the Piscataqua River and the wildlife habitat it provides.

A canoe trail begins at the north end of the property, but there are no existing foot trails. A loop trail through the property that could be accessed by canoe would be a desirable addition to the parcel.

Invasive species dominate the western side of the river, but population levels on the east side are manageable and should be controlled. Five vernal pools on the property should also be monitored to assess their level of significance.

Easements or outright ownership of additional undeveloped land abutting the northwestern boundary of the property should be pursued if the opportunity presents itself. Doing so will insure protection for the entire river corridor between Woodville and Field Roads.



One of five potential vernal pools on the property, shown as VP#5 on the attached map.

Description

The East Branch Conservation Area is a 55.5-acre conservation property located along both sides the East Branch of the Piscataqua River south of Woodville Road. It was created through the purchase of two adjoining pieces of private property, a 51-acre parcel owned by Michael and Monica Bordick and a 4.5-acre parcel butting that parcel in the rear of the lot owned by Lauritz Dyhrberg.

It is bordered on the north by a railroad corridor and on the south and west by private land. The eastern boundary includes private land and Woodville Road frontage that is slated for future development as two house lots. The property can

only be accessed by water, or by foot – with difficulty – from Woodville Road between the river and the railroad corridor. The property was purchased with a Maine Natural Resources Conservation Program mitigation grant in 2011.

Much of the property consists of a relatively rare Hardwood River Terrace Forest community type, with red maple, black cherry, basswood, blue beech and white pine predominating. Muscle wood or blue beech is also common. The upland portions of the parcel, located in its southwest corner, consist of mature red maple, red oak, red spruce, balsam fir, hemlock and white pine. A complete description of the property prepared by Maine Natural Areas Program staff is appended.

There are five potential vernal pools, none of which have been monitored, in the northern portion of the property. Several small tributary streams also drain into the main river. Wildlife populations are diverse, with populations of beaver, mink and otter being most notable.

There are no trails on the property, other than wildlife trails, and the main portion of the property can only be accessed by foot with the permission of abutting landowners. There is an unimproved carry in boat (canoe/kayak) launch off of Woodville Road. Currently, the land is used primarily by hunters.



The East Branch of the Piscataqua River is the most notable landscape feature in this Conservation Area.

Invasive species, particularly Japanese honeysuckle and some bittersweet and barberry, have established themselves in several areas of the property. The north side of the river is completely infested with honeysuckle; south side population levels, while significant, are still at a level at which they could be controlled by mechanical (pulling) and chemical means.

The boundaries of the property have been marked with signs. An identification sign has also

been placed at the edge of the field bordering Woodville Road.

II. Conservation Values

The conservation values being protected in the East Branch Conservation Area include:

- The watershed protection this forest contributes to surface and groundwater quality is the primary conservation value and the reason for its protection. 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 large block of unfragmented habitat it provides for wildlife species that live and breed in forests such as this one.
- Its wetlands, including the vernal pools and their associated upland habitat, the tributary streams, and the river floodplain.
- The aesthetic value such a large block of undeveloped property offers area residents.

III. Visitor Experience

The only way to visit this property is by canoe via the East Branch of the Piscataqua River. Thus, the visitor experience is one of isolation and quiet enjoyment of the riparian community.

IV. Easement Provisions

The entire property is protected by a conservation easement held by the Falmouth Land Trust. Key provisions of that easement include:

- Public access and passive recreation is permitted, including trails and appurtenant structures. Motorized vehicles are prohibited; bicycle use is permitted.
- Any other structures, such as buildings, are not permitted, nor are surface alterations, mining or dumping.
- Forest management is not permitted – the property is to be left in a “forever wild” state – although diseased or blown down trees can be cut. Invasive plants may also be controlled.
- The property can’t be subdivided.

These provisions are consistent with other easements on town-owned properties, with the exception of prohibiting forest management activities.

V. Management Goals & Activities

Recreation



Otters are one of more unusual animals found in the area, best seen from a canoe.

The “forever wild” nature of this property suggests that it be managed with a very light touch. The East Branch is an excellent canoe stream when water levels are sufficiently high, so establishing a canoe trail that begins on Woodville Road should be a priority. However, keeping the river clear of fallen trees and limbs will have to be done on an annual basis. Even so, several beaver dams and at least one shallow spot will require boaters to portage occasionally.

Foot trails, although desirable, are problematic for several reasons. The best place for such trails is on the west side of the river, but since there is no public access from Woodville Road to this portion of the property a trailhead cannot be established there. A trailhead on the northern side of the river is possible, but a bridge would be needed to cross the river to the larger and more interesting southern portion of the parcel. Given the propensity for flooding in this area, such a bridge would be difficult and expensive to build. Alternatively, a canoe/kayak landing might be established on the southern bank, with a trail starting from that point into the property.

Hunting and Trapping

Hunting is permitted on the property and hunters are active there in the fall. Trapping is also permitted for fur bearing animals living along the river corridor (mink, otter, beaver).

Vernal Pools

The vernal pools on the property have never been monitored, but should be in the spring of 2013. The results need to be reported to the Maine Natural Resources Conservation Program and the Maine Natural Areas Program.

Stewardship

The Ombudsman is responsible for steward-ship of the property. The Falmouth Land Trust has also appointed a steward who monitors the property annually to ensure that the terms of the easement are being complied with.

VI. Future Opportunities / Plans

Given the goal of protecting as much of the East Branch river corridor as possible, it would be very desirable to obtain either an easement or ownership of the private land that lies between this property and an easement property farther down the river, north of Field Road, that was also obtained with the same MNRCP grant.

VII. Budget Summary

The property needs very little in the way of improvements at this time. Canoe launches downstream would make a canoe trail more viable and would be the largest expense, perhaps \$800 apiece for materials and signage.

Otherwise, \$1,800 would pay for the proposed trail improvements and herbicides for invasive control.

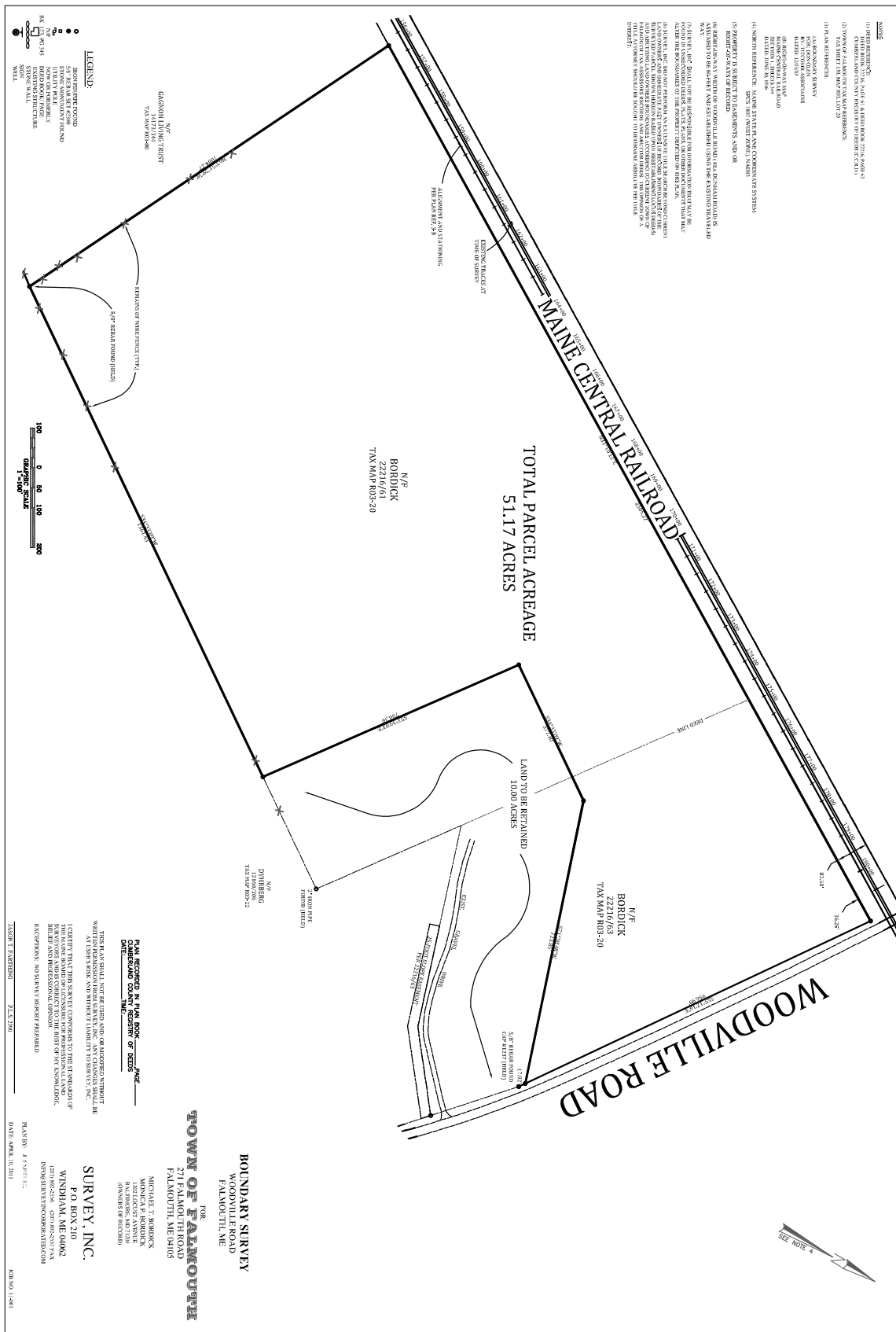
VIII. Long-Term Management Issues

As a forever wild property, with limited public access, there are few long-term management issues. Should a foot trail be established on the property, it will require periodic monitoring and its blazes and You Are Here kiosks replaced ever 10-15 years.

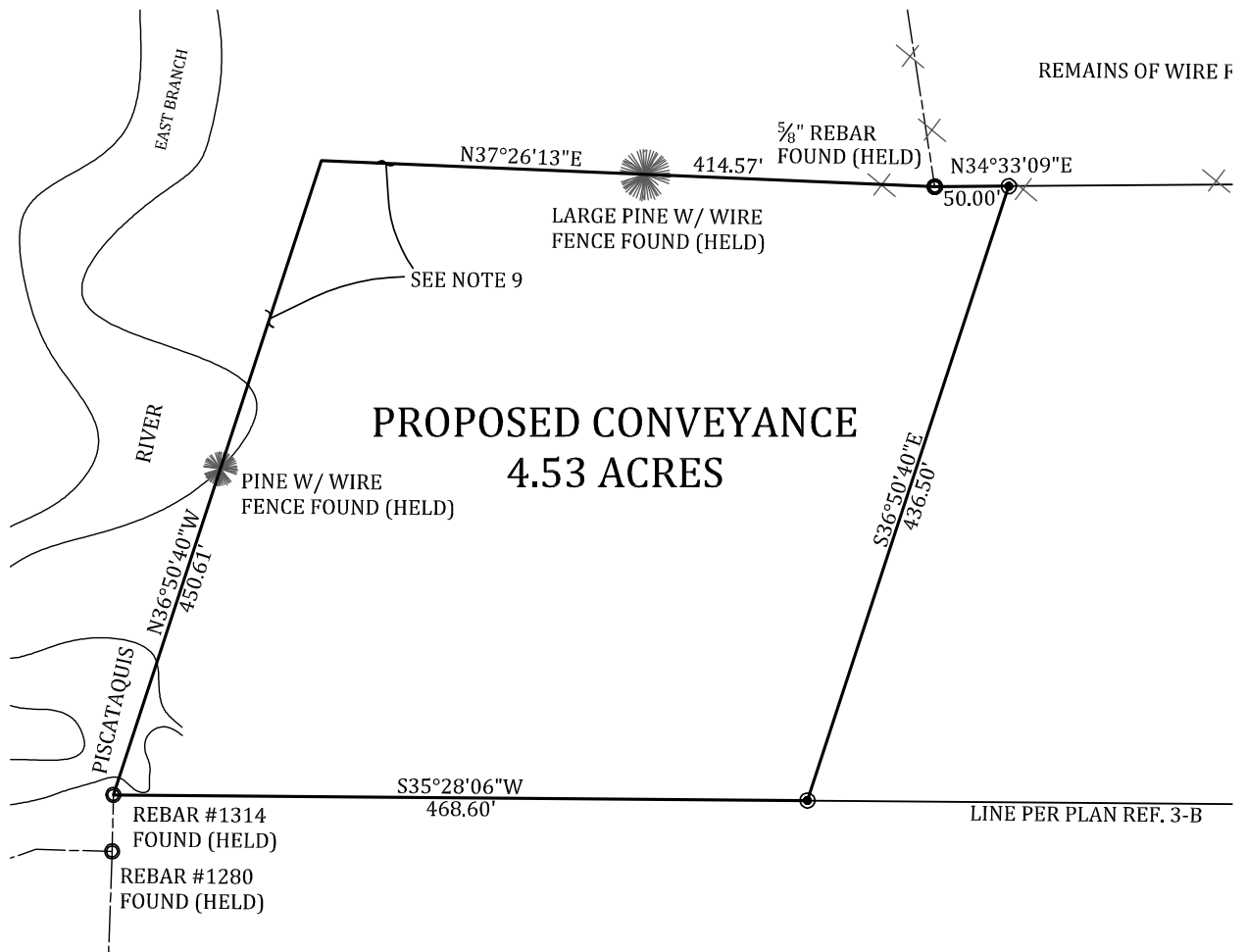
The East Branch Canoe Trail that runs the length of the property does require considerable maintenance. Each year, trees and/or large limbs fall into the river and need to be cut up to allow canoe travel. Much of that work is best done in winter, at no cost to the town, by Falmouth Conservation Corps volunteers.

Table I: Summary of Management Tasks						
Goal	Task	Action Steps	When	Who	Cost	Other
<i>Create an East Branch Canoe Trail that originates at Woodville Road.</i>	1. Open the river for boating.	1. Clear river of fallen trees. 2. Establish a canoe launch at Field and Falmouth Roads. 3. Add the trail to the trail map & website.	Ongoing Summer 2013 & 14 2014	Ombudsman, FCC volunteers.	\$1,600	\$800 per canoe launch
<i>Determine the status of the vernal pools on the property</i>	1. Monitor the potential vernal pools for their status.	1. Visit each pool 2X to observe egg masses.	Spring 2013	Ombudsman, FCC volunteers.	None	
<i>Open the southern portion to public access.</i>	1. Create a canoe landing on the southern river bank, then a trail within the property.	1. Identify a landing area, perhaps where the largest tributary enters. 2. Create a landing, construct a loop trail. 3. Establish a kiosk, blazes, etc. 4. Publicize the existence of the trail.	Summer 2014	Ombudsman, FCC volunteers	\$350	Cost of blazes and You Are Here kiosks.
<i>Control invasives on the property.</i>	1. Mobilize volunteers to tackle this problem.	1. Map invasive locations. 2. Apply control measures.	Summer 2013	Ombudsman, FCC volunteers	\$1,450	Herbicide & labor cost

Map II: Bordick Parcel Survey



Map III: Dyhrberg Parcel Survey



Initial plan developed March 2012
Revised January 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)