

Hardy Road Conservation Area Management Plan



**Town of Falmouth
December 2013**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|---|---|
| Summary | 1 |
| Description | 1 |
| Conservation Values | 1 |
| Visitor Experience | 1 |
| Deed Restrictions | 1 |
| Management Goals | 1 |
| Management Activities | 2 |
| Future Opportunities / Plans | 2 |
| Budget Summary | 2 |
| Table I: Summary of Management Tasks | 2 |
| Map I: Hardy Road Conservation Area Map | 3 |
| Map II: Area Map | 4 |
| Photographs..... | 5 |

I. Summary

The 16-acre Hardy Road Conservation Area is located on the site of a former town dump that was closed in 1974. The dump area was capped with clay and has since grown into shrub and early successional forest. That forest, and several large vernal pools, make this property a valuable wildlife habitat area.

A 0.5 mile walking trail on the property that already largely exists could be improved, perhaps to ADA standards. A snowmobile trail also runs through the property.

Refuse dumped on the property since its closure should be removed. Trees over 4" in diameter growing in the capped area need to be removed before they windthrow and expose the underlying refuse. Grassy areas need periodic mowing to prevent tree growth and leachate areas need to be fenced off.

Acquisition of all or part of an adjacent 26-acre parcel would add to its size and also connect with a 12-acre town-owned conservation subdivision lot farther to the east.

II. Description

The Hardy Road Conservation Area is an 16-acre parcel located on Hardy Road. It is bordered by private land in the city of Westbrook to the west and south; by private land in Falmouth to the south and east; and by Hardy Road to the north.

The property, once an active gravel pit, was acquired by the town in 1946 and became an open town dump. The dump was closed by the town in 1974. An agreement with the Department of Environmental Protection requires the Public Works Department to maintain the filled area through periodic mowing. Large trees cannot be permitted to grow there as they will be subject to windthrow given the shallow base of soil they are growing on. Grassy areas will need periodic mowing to prevent tree growth. DEP has reviewed the property and reports that no permitting is needed if the town wishes to establish trails there, but written permission from them is required.

The eastern and southern edges of the property are mature woodlands, with white pine, eastern hemlock, red oak and red maple predominating. Some red spruce, white birch, black birch, white oak and black ash also grow there.

Some of the capped dump section has grown up into shrub and early successional forest, with gray birch, white pine and red maple predominating. Several fairly sizable vernal pools have also become established in low-lying portions of the property. Since the pools are man-made, they are not subject to state regulation. Other natural wetlands also exist on the property, adding to its wildlife habitat value. Invasive plants – knotweed, multi-flora rose, and buckthorn – are found

on the property, but at levels that can still be controlled. Some leachate is visible on the eastern side of the capped area, but poses no direct hazard. Such areas do need to be fenced off to keep people and pets away.

A woods road / trail provides access through the lot and extends into an abutting privately owned parcel in Westbrook (see Map I). A section of snowmobile trail maintained by the Westbrook Snow Blazes connects with trails extending to the north and south using the westerly part of the woods road. A kiosk has been erected by the Westbrook snowmobile club near the road. Hunting is permitted on the property, and it is particularly used by deer hunters.

III. Conservation Values

The conservation values being protected in Hadlock Community Forest include:

- The early successional habitat it provides for wildlife, particularly those bird species that require such habitat and perhaps for New England cottontail rabbits.
- The wetlands it contains, including several active vernal pools and their associated upland habitat.
- The opportunity it provides people for nature study and outdoor recreation.

IV. Visitor Experience

Visitors to the property, particularly bird watchers, will be attracted by the early successional habitat and by the trail. Hunters will continue to find the property an excellent place to pursue their sport. Snowmobilers and mountain bikers will ride through the property as they use the more extensive trail that passes through it.

V. Property Restrictions

There are no known restrictions on the property, other than an agreement with the DEP that the town periodically mow the capped area over the former dump to prevent tree growth.

VI. Management Goals

This property has recreation potential, especially if the existing trails were improved. That would require either a relocation of the Westbrook segment or, preferably, a trail license from that landowner. A parking area already exists at the Hardy Road entrance to the property.

The property has significant habitat value for its wetlands and early successional stage forest. Efforts should be made to maintain the early successional habitat by periodic cutting and mowing, which will also reduce the chances of windthrown trees exposing the underlying dump refuse.

VII. Management Activities

The first management task would be to clean up the refuse that has been dumped on the property in past years. There is also a dead tree overhanging the parking area that should be removed.

The second task would be to remove trees larger than 4" in diameter from the capped area of the former dump, and perhaps to mow / bushhog the open areas.

A third task would be to improve the trail on the property that starts at Hardy Road. Given the flat terrain, the trail might easily – though not cheaply – be built to allow for handicapped access. One side of the existing snowmobile club kiosk could be used to post a trail map. Since the existing trail lies in part on private abutting land, permission

A winter survey looking for the presence of New England cottontails should be conducted in 2014.

The upland forest should be left "forever wild" to provide the upland habitat needed by amphibians breeding in the vernal pools.

The invasive plants on the parcel should be killed soon to prevent further spread and habitat degradation.

VIII. Future Opportunities / Plans

There is an abutting 26-acre wooded parcel that has recently come on the market that includes a significant stretch of Meader Brook, a tributary of the Presumpscot River. That parcel also abuts another town-owned parcel that was acquired as a conservation set aside when the Brookside sub-division was built in 2002. Given the Hardy Road frontage that property includes, a house lot might be broken out to help finance its acquisition. This idea should be evaluated by the Land Management & Acquisition Committee and, if positive, be presented to the Council for its consideration.

IX. Budget Summary

The only direct cost involved in implementing this plan would be for trail blazes /signage and invasive control. Those costs would not exceed \$500. Upgrading the trail to allow for handicapped access would likely cost \$8-10,000 and would best be funded through a trail grant. There is also the cost of Public Works Department staff time to clean up existing refuse and to maintain the vegetation.

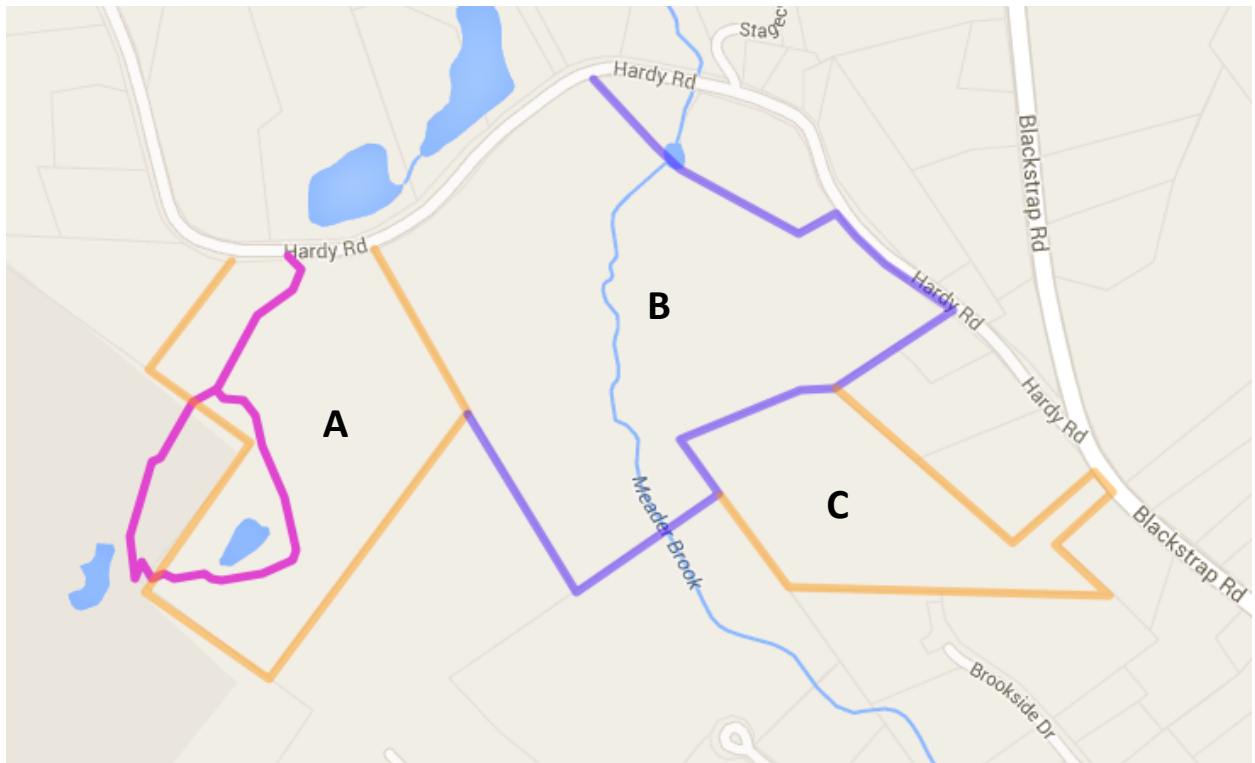
Table I: Summary of Management Tasks

| Goal | Action Steps | When | Who | Cost | Other |
|---|---|-------------------------|---------------------------|-------------|-----------------------|
| <i>Clean up debris; remove trees over 4" dbh.</i> | 1. Arrange for this work with Public Works. | Winter / Spring 2013-14 | Public Works Department | None | |
| <i>Upgrade existing trail</i> | 1. Obtain a trail license from the private abuttor in Westbrook. | Winter, 2014 | Ombudsman | None | |
| | 1. Improve and blaze the existing 0.5 mile long trail. 2. Post a map of the property on the kiosk. | Summer 2014 | Ombudsman, FCC volunteers | \$200 | Few materials needed. |
| <i>Survey for NECs</i> | 1. Conduct the survey after a fresh snowfall. | Winter 2014 | FCC, USF&W biologists. | None | |
| <i>Control invasive plants</i> | 1. Kill invasive plants. | 2014 | Ombudsman, FCC volunteers | \$200 | Herbicides |
| <i>Post signage</i> | 1. Erect a property identification sign at the parking area. | 2014 | Ombudsman | \$50 | |

Map I: Hardy Road Conservation Area Map



Map II: Area Map



A – Hardy Road Conservation Area

B – Available abutting parcel

C – Existing town-owned conservation land

Hardy Road Conservation Area Photographs



Woods Road / Trail



Meadow area



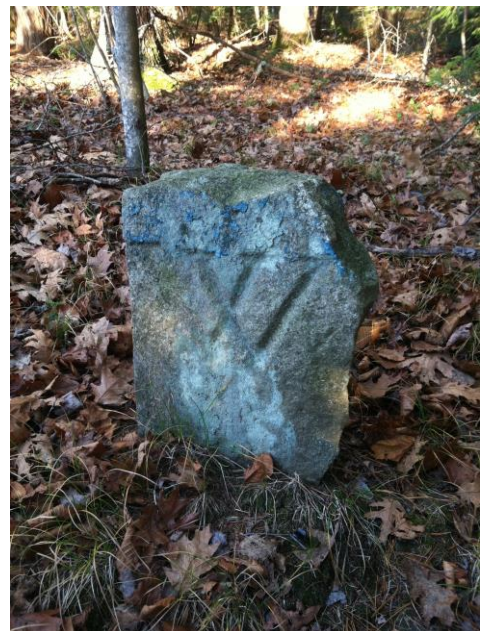
Dumped tire



Upland Forest Trail



Vernal Pool (fall)



Westbrook Boundary Marker