

North Falmouth Community Forest Management Plan

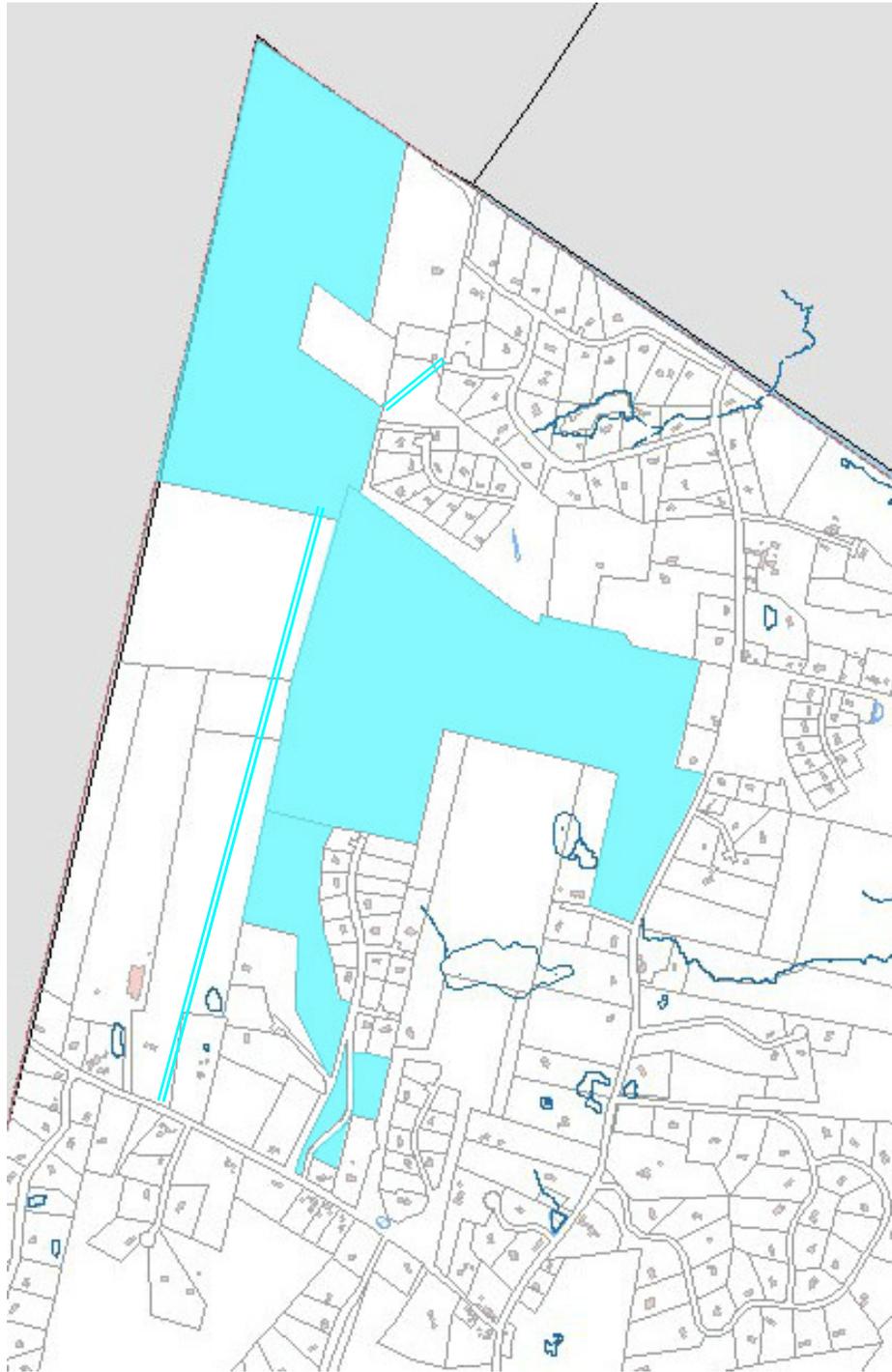


Town of Falmouth
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Map I: Location



The Forest is located between Blackstrap and Babbidge Roads in the northwesterly corner of Falmouth. Access is via a town-owned right-of-way from Babbidge Road or from frontage on Blackstrap Road.

I. Summary

North Falmouth Community Forest (NFCF), 274 acres in size, connects two other large conservation areas that together constitute a very large block of unfragmented forest land. While much of this property is not central enough to be a prime recreation area, it does have great value for its forest resources, watershed protection qualities and wildlife habitat value. It also keeps land out of development that would be expensive for the town to service given its distance from schools, public works, and emergency services.

Over the next several years, a series of tasks need to be done to increase the recreational value of the property, including building new trails, signage, and access (parking) improvements.

The property should be managed as a working forest to the extent that is practical according to the existing forest management plan, using forestry as a tool for improving the health of the forest and its habitat value.

Opportunities for expanding the forest should also be monitored on a regular basis, especially the status of the inholding lot, and the four abutting properties to the west whose owners have expressed a willingness to sell.



Rocky outcrops are found in several areas of the property

II. Description

Located in the far northwest corner of town, North Falmouth Community Forest (NFCF) is the town's most remote conservation property and the least accessible. 274 acres in size and covered almost entirely with mixed forest growth, NFCF abuts the 300-acre Lowell Preserve in Windham to the west and conservation subdivision land surrounding Summit Terrace.

The two westernmost parcels that constitute NFCF were purchased with \$430,000 in town open space funds in 2007 & 2008. Neither is protected with a conservation easement and could be subject to future development. A third, much smaller parcel was already town-owned, probably tax



Scarlet tanagers nest in the mixed hardwood forest found on the property. acquired at some point. The fourth parcel, the proposed 100-Acre Woods subdivision land, 134 acres in size, was acquired in 2013 as part of an effort to mitigate the town's former elementary school property encumbered by the Land & Water Conservation Fund. That parcel cost \$1.16 million dollars, paid for from proceeds from the sale of the school property.

The fifth parcel, 27 acres in size, is conservation subdivision land deeded to the town when the Oxford Woods subdivision was created in 2000. Oxford Woods Road is currently a private way, but if the developer's plan to turn the road over to the town is successful, the town will gain another access point to the property at the end of that road.

A right of way easement connects the property to Babbidge Road over several lots of privately owned land. A pedestrian easement across the abutting conservation land surrounding the Poplar Ridge subdivision connects the property to Tanya Lane. Trails planned for the former 100-Acre Woods' parcel will connect the property to Blackstrap Hill Community Forest.

Historically, land in this area was used as woodlots by their owners in the late 19th and early to mid-20th centuries. Prior to that it was likely cleared and used as pasture by area farms. An abandoned town road, the Goose Pond Road, borders the northern edge of the property. It once ran from North Falmouth corners to what is now known as Forest Lake. An old utility line also traversed the property many years ago; "stumps" from the poles are still evident in some areas.

Elevations of the property range from 300 to 475 feet above sea level, making the parcel one of the highest in elevation in Falmouth. Prior to reforestation, rocky outcrops must have provided panoramic views of the surrounding area.

One permanent pool, which is also a vernal pool, exists on the property, as does a ±2-acre emergent wetland. Three other vernal pools are

also found on the property. There are several small intermittent streams, though no permanent streams. The area around the lower southwest boundary is very low lying and wet much of the year. The property lies within both the Highland Lake and Forest Lake watersheds, with precipitation draining to both water bodies.

A professionally developed forest management plan was prepared for the westernmost parcels in 2009, although no harvesting has been done since the town acquired the land.

The rear portion of the former 100-Acre Woods parcel was heavily cut prior to its sale and is now regenerating into early successional forest type. Such forest types are rare in Falmouth and thus welcome, but it will be decades before any further harvesting will be possible in that area.

Invasive plants are not common on the property, although the potential for them exists on the area where harvesting has been done in recent years. That area needs to be monitored and treated if necessary. A small patch of bittersweet growing on Poplar Ridge should be eliminated.



There is a major snowmobile trail / woods road that traverses the property east to west, the

The remoteness and beauty of North Falmouth Community Forest makes for great snowshoeing.

same trail that runs through Blackstrap Hill and Hadlock Community Forests. That trail is used by ATVs – their use is allowed on the Lowell Preserve – and heavy damage to the trail is evident as a result. Area residents have created a pedestrian trail along the former utility line that runs from the northeast boundary to the snowmobile trail / woods road. A loop trail starts from that trail, runs through the northern section of the property, and connects back to the snowmobile trail / woods road (see

Map II). It was built by the local mountain bike club in 2010. No trails have yet been built on the 100-Acre Woods parcel.

The condition of the old Goose Pond Road which traverses the property is very poor. ATVs and/or 4-wheel drive vehicles have heavily eroded this part of the road, leaving ruts that area often filled with water. Improving this road will probably be necessary should harvesting be done on the property. Until then it should be left as is to reduce vehicle access.

Due to its remoteness and relative inaccessibility, the property gets less recreational use than other town conservation properties. Snowmobilers, mountain bikers, and hunters are primary users and residents of the Poplar Ridge sub-division also use the property. They have created a trail into the property from Summit Terrace. Expanding the trail network east to Blackstrap Road will open the property up to much greater recreational use.

All of the normally occurring southern Maine woodland wildlife species are likely to be found here, including the occasional moose or even black bear. The unfragmented condition of the forest and the surrounding area – several thousand acres in all – make the area a particularly good wildlife habitat.

III. Conservation Values

The conservation values being protected in North Falmouth Community Forest include:

- The large block of unfragmented habitat it provides for wildlife, including deer, fisher, porcupine, moose, bear and other large and small mammal species; for woodland nesting bird species, including thrushes, tanagers, ruffed grouse, owls and many kinds of warblers; and for the myriad of other vertebrate and invertebrate species that live and breed in forest such as this one.
- The forest products it can provide, including biomass fuel (wood chips) that is used as an alternative to petroleum-based energy sources, as well as the pulpwood, firewood and saw logs that contribute to Maine's economy.
- The watershed protection the forest contributes to surface and groundwater quality. By moderating run-off and absorbing rainfall and snowmelt, the forest contributes to the water quality in Highland and Forest Lakes, the West Branch of the Piscataqua River, the Presumscot River, and ultimately Casco Bay.
- The aesthetic value such a large block of undeveloped property offers area residents, located only ±15 miles from downtown Portland.

IV. Visitor Experience

Visitors to this property will be attracted by its remoteness and the opportunity it affords to “get away from it all” in an otherwise highly developed part of the state. They will also be attracted by the the elevation of the property and the views offered from Poplar Ridge. Hunters will be attracted by its remoteness and its wildlife populations. Mountain bikers will be attracted to its miles of trails, and the connections those trails provide to other large conservation properties to the east and west.

V. Easement Provisions

Although most of the property was purchased with dedicated open space acquisition funds, none of the land within the North Falmouth Community Forest is currently protected by a conservation easement. The former 100-Acre Woods property is encumbered by a Land & Water Conservation Fund requirement that it be used as recreational land. Should it ever be developed, the town would be required to offset that development by acquiring other recreational land of equal value (at current market prices). This requirement makes future development of this portion of the property unlikely.

VI. Management Goals

The primary management goal for North Falmouth Community Forest is to manage the property as a working forest in ways that preserve the watershed protection the property affords, its wildlife populations and its recreational and aesthetic values.

Given its remoteness and accompanying access challenges, much of the NFCF’s primary recreational use will continue to be by hunters, snowmobilers and mountain bikers. Only the most adventurous hikers, snowshoers and nature lovers are likely to make the effort required to get to the western end of the property. The Poplar Ridge portion of the property, adjacent to Blackstrap Road, is expected to get most of the recreational use due to its easy accessibility and short trail loop available for hiking.

Pedestrian and bicycle trail development is a primary need, including a parking area, kiosks and trail signage. The latter is particular important given the property’s remoteness.

Forestry operations should parallel those on Hadlock and Blackstrap properties – a “worst first” harvesting plan that is designed to grow large, old trees over a 150-year cutting cycle while at the same time creating diversity of species and age classes.

VII. Management Activities

Forestry

Tree growth is the highest and best use of this property. The activities described in the forest management plan should be implemented in the next few years, assuming adequate access can be obtained to the property. Implementation of that management plan needs to pay special attention to avoid any adverse impacts to the vernal pool on the property, the emergent wetland, trail corridors and steep slopes. Hemlock density should be reduced in favor of white pine and red oak growth.

Like the town’s other community forests, NFCF is enrolled in the American Tree Farm program and is managed according to their standards.



Trails

This large vernal pool is wet year around.

Trail building, with accompanying access improvements will begin in 2013 and continue over the next few years. Before that work begins, an overall trail plan needs to be developed for the property, with trail locations laid out on a map, then pin-flagged on the ground before construction begins. Some areas might want to be opened up to afford trail users with panoramic views.

A new trail by-passing the eroded woods road / snowmobile trail and connecting to the loop trail needs to be completed and a new set of trails need to be developed through the southern portion of the property. “You Are Here” kiosks need to be located at trail junctions. Other needs include:

- A parking area off of Blackstrap Road needs to be created and an information kiosk erected there.
- It may be possible to establish a trail head at the end of Summit Way and Oxford Woods. These possibilities need to be explored.
- Signs need to be posted along all boundaries of the property.

This property, perhaps more than any other piece of town-owned land, has the potential to be an attractive nuisance for people looking for a place to hold a party or to dump trash. The Babbidge Road access road / right of way is somewhat problematic. The first portion of that road is also the driveway for a residence and the owner is sensitive to uncontrolled access over it, although such access is legally permitted. Presently there is an unlocked gate at the end of the driveway portion of that property, then the road extends some distance up to the town land and parking area. At a minimum, a sign noting the area is closed from dusk to dawn will be necessary, but perhaps the abutter's help can be enlisted to notify the police of any night traffic he might observe entering the property.

Signs noting that ATVs and other motorized vehicles are prohibited on the property are also needed at all entrance points. Enforcement of this provision will be difficult given the remoteness of these trails, but necessary to prevent further damage.

Once the trail system and access points are completed, continued monitoring will be necessary to remove blow downs, re-route trails due to logging operations, and otherwise keep access to and the quality of the trails at a high level. This work will be done by assigned property stewards and Falmouth Conservation Corps volunteers.

Education

The property is too remote to be of much practical value educationally, but it is be a good place for such things as organized "Birds & Botany" walks in the spring or snowshoe hikes in the winter. These will be co-sponsored through Community Programs Department and Falmouth Land Trust for maximum publicity.

Mapping Natural Resources

No attempt has been made to map the natural communities that exist on the property, or to document the plant and animal species living in them. No rare or endangered species are known to live in North Falmouth Community Forest, but a number of birds species of "special concern" do live and breed there.

VIII. Future Opportunities / Plans

The 9.5-acre in-holding parcel should be a high priority for acquisition, R08-72. It borders NFCF on three sides and the Poplar Ridge subdivision on the fourth side. Thus it is inaccessible except through NFCF. The owner has no current interest in selling the property however.

Four properties, ___-acres in size, abut the southern boundary of the Forest and are also potential acquisition targets. The owners of these lots are interested in selling their land. One reason to target these properties would be to prevent their development as house lots, an expensive proposition given their great distance from town services.



The snowmobile trail / woods road is heavily eroded in places and needs to be by-passed for use as a foot trail.

IX. Budget Summary

The major cost to improve access to this parcel is the parking area. Other costs are relatively incidental.

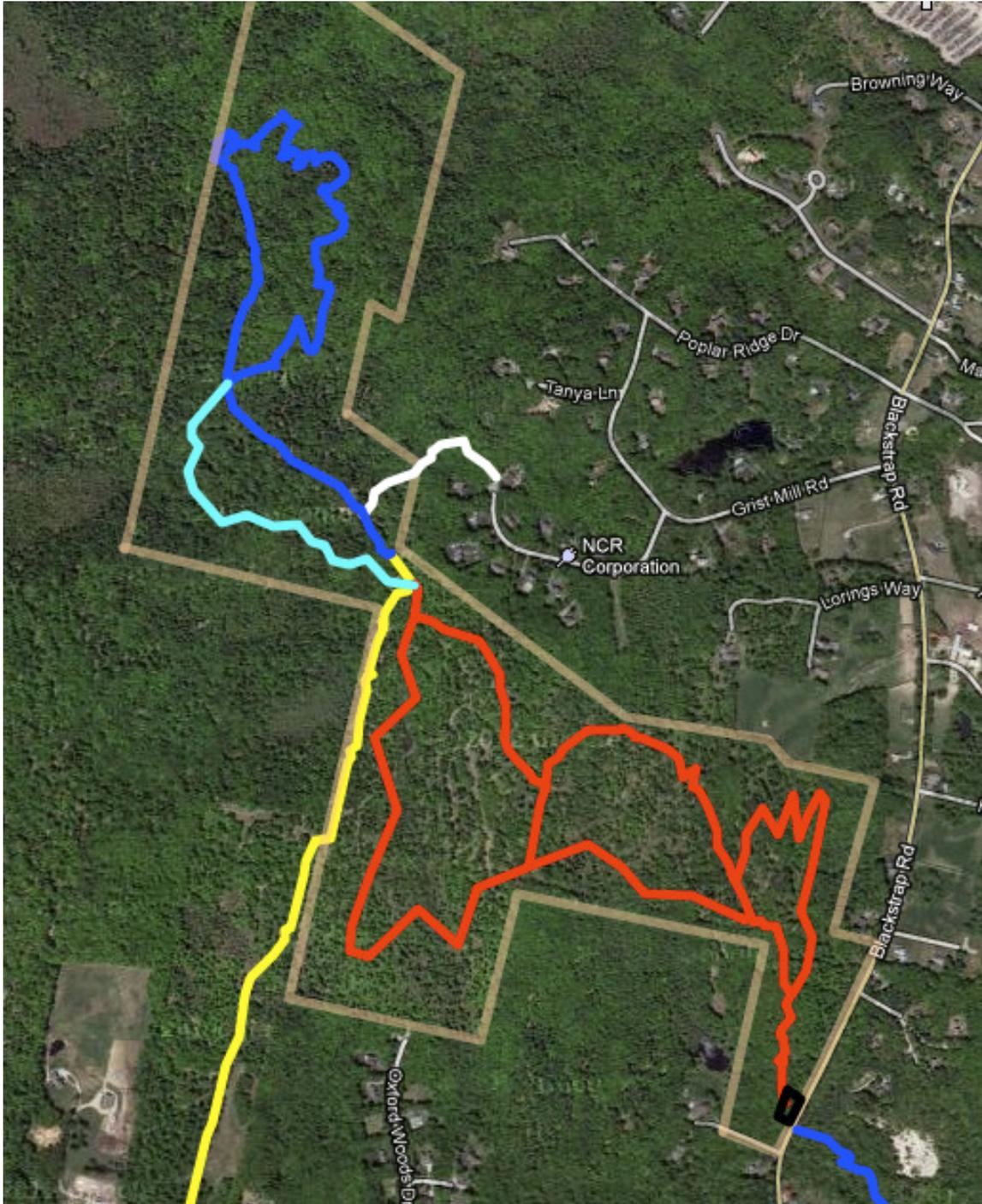
Parking area:	\$6,000
Kiosk	500
Signs/blazes/maps	300
Trail construction	<u>1,000</u>
Total =	\$7,800

Town funds will be required if the work is to be done in 2013.

Projected New Trail Locations

Table I: Summary of Management Tasks					
Goal	Task	Action Steps	When	Who	Cost
<i>Improve recreational opportunities</i>	1. Develop a trail plan for the property; flag and GPS likely trail locations.	1. Layout potential trails on a map; walk property to determine best routes.	Winter 2013	Ombudsman, FCC & NEMBA volunteers	None
	2. Construct trails according to the trail plan.	2. Mobilize FCC, NEMBA volunteers.	Summer 2013		\$1,000
	3. Construct parking area.	3. Define the parking area; build kiosk, acquire needed signs.	Summer 2013	Contractor; FCC volunteers	\$6,800
	4. Erect kiosk, signage.	4. Discuss possibilities with landowners.	Summer 2014	Ombudsman	\$0
	5. Explore the possibility of trailheads at Summit Terrace & Oxford Woods.				
<i>Invasive control</i>	1. Monitor the presence of invasives; treat as necessary.	1. Walk disturbed areas.	Summer 2013	Ombudsman, FCC volunteers	\$200
<i>Mark property boundaries.</i>	1. Post boundary signs.	1. Erect signs on boundaries.	Winter 2013	Ombudsman, FCC volunteers	None
<i>Education</i>	1. Co-sponsor outings on the property	1. Work with Community Programs and Falmouth Land Trust to organize and publicize events.	>Fall 2013	Ombudsman	None
<i>Manage the forest</i>	1. Write a Canopy grant to cover the 100-Acre Woods lot. 2. Implement the plan. 3. Follow-up to insure the harvest was done according to ATF standards.	1. Contract with So. Maine Forestry to do the plan & manage the harvest. 2. Onsite inspection after the harvest.	2015 and beyond	Ombudsman, forester	None
<i>Control motorized use</i>	1. Post "NO ATV" signs.	1. Monitor for enforcement.	Spring 2013	Ombudsman	\$0

Projected New Trail Locations



Projected New Trail Locations

Additional new trails shown in orange and purple. ROW shown in red.
Existing snowmobile trails shown in yellow.
Boundaries adjusted to reflect assumed acquisition of target parcels.