

# Falmouth Nature Preserve Management Plan

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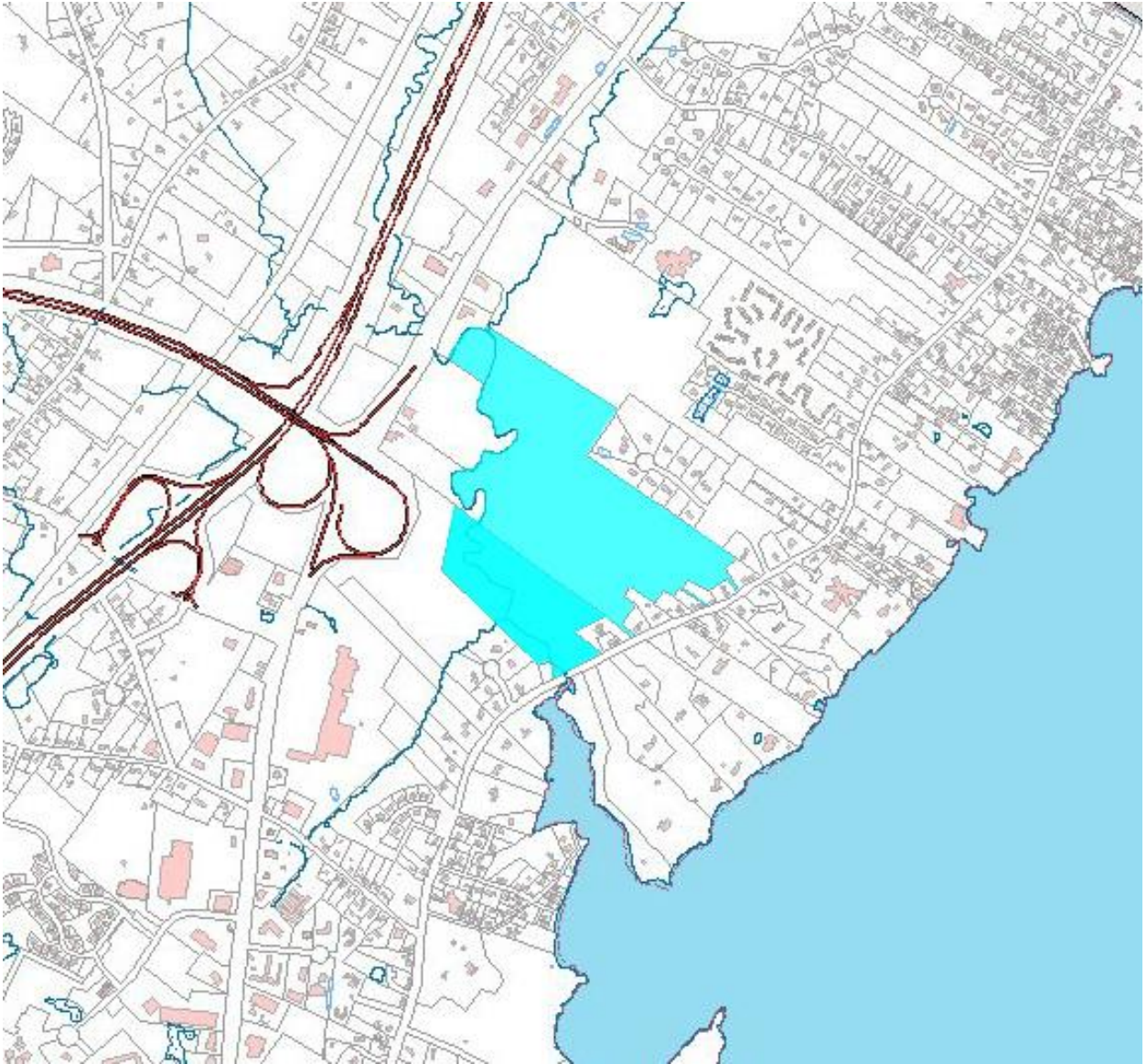


**Town of Falmouth  
March 2012**

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## Map I: Location





## I. Summary

Falmouth Nature Preserve (FNP) is a 106-acre conservation property located between Foreside Road and Route 1. FNP is the oldest town-owned conservation area, portions of which were first acquired in 1971. It is also the largest town owned open space property located east of the Interstate 95 spur. An abutting \_\_ acre parcel owned by the Falmouth Land Trust and protected by a conservation easement held by the town brings the total area of the Preserve to \_\_ acres.

There is an extensive trail system on the property, which gets frequent use, particularly by dog walkers. Although dogs are supposed leashed, in practice they rarely are. Consequently, there is not as much wildlife presence on the property as might be expected in such a large undeveloped area.

Conservation easements and deed restrictions prevent development on most of the property, but not all. Existing easement and deed restrictions should be replaced with one encompassing easement on the entirety of the property.

If possible the abutting ±40 acres of undeveloped land to the north should be acquired and incorporated into the Preserve. A existing informal trail that connects the Preserve to Underwood Park should be improved and incorporated into the existing trail system. Description

## II. Description

Falmouth Nature Preserve (FNP) is a 106-acre conservation property located between Foreside Road and Route 1. FNP is the largest town owned open space

property located east of the Interstate 95 spur. It is bordered on the south and east by residential properties; on the west by commercial property; and on the north in part by the Preservation Drive subdivision and by undeveloped land that lies behind Route 1. An access driveway and small parking area are located off the Foreside Road.



*This old rock wall and the large “pasture pine” attest to the land’s former agricultural use.*

The property has a somewhat complicated acquisition history. The original 56-acre parcel, which includes the entrance road and parking area, was donated to The Nature Conservancy of the Pine Tree State, Inc. in 1971 by the Brown family. In 1973, The Nature Conservancy deeded this property to the town of Falmouth. There is no conservation easement on this lot, but there are deed restrictions that both require and prohibit various activities.

A 23-acre lot to the south, known as the Mill Creek Preserve, was donated to The Nature Conservancy by Charles Payson in 1971. In 1975, The Nature Conservancy deeded a conservation easement to the town of Falmouth, and then subsequently donated the fee

interest in the property to the Falmouth Land Trust in 1997. This parcel was separated from the original Brown lot by the Otte property (see appended map).

In 1999, the 12-acre Otte property (aka the Outhouse parcel) was purchased by the town with financial support from the Friends of the Nature Preserve, thus uniting the two conservation properties. A conservation easement on this lot was conveyed to the Falmouth Land Trust that same year.



*Mill Creek is the most distinctive landscape feature in the Preserve. It is tidal up to the Route 1 bridge.*

In 2001, the 15-acre Fish parcel was conveyed to the town as part of the Preservation Drive development agreement. It is located directly behind (west) of this sub-division. There is no conservation easement on the property, nor any deed restrictions.

The entire town-owned portion of the property is mixed forest growth. It has an interesting mix of older stands that originated when agricultural use was abandoned about 100 years ago, and younger stands that originated in the mid 1900's, some from cutting and some from field abandonment (see appended stand map).

Stand 1 is a hardwood to mixed wood type. Hemlock, balsam fir, white pine and red spruce are the most common softwoods. Red oak, red maple, white birch and yellow birch the most common broad-leaved trees. This stand became established after commercial clear cutting. It is a two-age stand with the younger component between 50 and 60 years of age. The older component is composed of stems passed over in previous cutting and are now 100 plus years in age. There is little understory and thus little wildlife beyond those species that live in the canopy.

Stand 2 is a softwood type. White pine is the dominant species. The stand is a mix of age and size classes. Some areas were evidently planted on old fields. Red oak, soft maple, beech, hemlock, red pine, red spruce and balsam fir stems are found scattered through the pine. Age of the stand varies, with the younger stems being 40 to 50 years of age, to the oldest that are 100 plus years in age. The understory consists of mostly shade tolerant species such as balsam fir. Invasives are well established at the



*Lady slippers are one of the many wildflowers found on the Preserve.*

Foreside Road end of the stand. Again, wildlife populations are limited to species that dwell in the canopy or those that travel through or deer that use it for winter cover.

Stand 3 is a mixed wood type that is similar to Stand I and has a similar history. Less timber was removed from this area in the cutting that occurred 50 or 60 years ago. Hemlock, white pine and red spruce are the most common softwoods. Red oak, soft maple, and yellow birch the most common broad-leaved trees. It is again a two-age stand, with the younger 50 to 60 year old pole to small sawlog size component being a smaller portion of the stand. The older component is composed less of stems passed by in previous cutting and more of stems growing in areas that where no harvesting occurred. These are now 100 plus years in age. The understory is mostly shade tolerant species.

Two streams, Wiebe Creek and Norton Brook enter Mill Creek through the Preserve. Other than some other mostly intermittent streams in various ravines, there are no other known wetlands on the property.

The town-owned property has not been posted with boundary signs. The Mill Creek Natural Area boundaries have been posted by the Land Trust.

Elevations on the parcel range from 5 to 75 feet above sea level. Given the low elevations, any future sea level rise due to climate change will have a major impact on the Preserve land, flooding large portions of the property and reducing the available area significantly.

A sewer easement (pipeline) runs north to south across all four of the parcels.

A forest management plan was developed for the property in 2009. That plan noted some major issues concerning the health of the forest, but given the nature of the easements and/or deed restrictions and neighborhood concern about any alterations to its current condition, no forestry work is intended. This property is thus to be left “forever wild.”

Invasive species, such as honeysuckle and bittersweet, are found in several distinct areas of the property and will be difficult, though not impossible, to control at this point.

An extensive pedestrian trail system has been constructed on the Nature Preserve and it gets steady use, in all seasons of the year, particularly by dog walkers. A few trail bridges are the only structures on the property, several of which are reaching the end of their useful life. The town plows the access road and parking area in winter. The Falmouth Land Trust handles stewardship of the property.

It is possible to walk from FNP to Underwood Park on an existing, unofficial trail that crosses various privately held



*Bittersweet is a common invasive plant within the Preserve, as it is in many areas in this part of town.*



properties lying between these two public areas. If possible, this trail should be legally established, through trail licenses or easements from the various owners, and improved to facilitate public use. The entrance sign says that dogs must be leashed at all times, though there is no easement or deed requirement for leashes. State law requires leashes or voice control of dogs, but that law seems to be widely ignored and has resulted in limited wildlife populations on the property.

The Preserve provides habitat for the usual species of plants and animals found in southern Maine woodlands. Hunting is not allowed in the Falmouth Nature Preserve.

### **III. Conservation Values**

The conservation values being protected in the Falmouth Nature Preserve include:

- The large block of unfragmented habitat it provides for wildlife species that live and breed in forest such as this one.
- Its tidal wetlands along the shore of Mill Creek, a rare habitat type in Falmouth.
- 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 this, the most intensely developed area of Falmouth.

### **IV. Visitor Experience**

Falmouth Nature Preserve is a green oasis in an otherwise highly developed area of town. Thus, it offers the visitor a way to get away from – at least visually – the built environment that surrounds it to experience the beauty and restorative powers of nature. The intent is for visitors to have minimal contact with other people while they are visiting the Preserve. Excepting Mackworth Island, the property is probably the most heavily used open space parcel in town due to its proximity to so many people and its ease of access.

Visitors to the property should have the opportunity to observe and identify native plants and animals. They should also be able to think and reflect in a quiet setting without disturbance.

This is accomplished by limiting the amount of available parking – 5-6 cars maximum right now – and by the extensive trail network that spreads visitors out around the property.

The visitor experience would also be enhanced by (1) insuring that dogs are under voice or leash control; and (2) removing invasive plants that diminish the natural plant communities found on the property.

### **V. Management Goals & Activities**

The Falmouth Nature Preserve is intended to be what its name proclaims: a preserved area whose present and future character will be determined by natural events and where human impact will be specifically limited to pedestrian trail use only.

Thus the only real management concern is the maintenance of the parking area and existing trail system and the prevention of all other impacts that might negatively impact the natural condition of the property.

With that as context, there are several management goals the town might pursue. The first would be placing an easement consistent with the restrictions in place on Otte parcel on the remainder of the property. The result would legal protection for the entire 106-acre Preserve property, insuring its “forever wild” status.



*The Preserve is a popular place for trail users. Tom Armstrong (l) and Gordon Clark have been strong advocates and protectors of the Preserve over the years. Gordon's late wife Karen is a member of the Brown family that made the initial property donation.*

The second goal would be improve public access by strengthening and even expanding the existing trail system. A formal trail connecting the Preserve to Underwood Park should be constructed. The route of that trail has already been largely established. The owners of the land should be approached as asked about their interest in granting the town a trail easement or trail license across their property. This can be landowner can put a stop to the entire project, but the attempt should be made. If successful, the existing trail will need to be formally established, blazed and whatever bridges needed constructed. The existing trail bridges are showing the effects of age and will need

replacing in the next few years. Existing blazes are also worn and need to be repainted.

A third goal would be to document the flora and fauna extant on the property, including the various natural communities that exist there and the specific location of invasive species. This might best be done through an organized BioBlitz survey. Some documentation on portions of the property does exist.

A fourth goal would be to clarify who has the management responsibility for the property. Currently the Land Trust stewards all the parcels; the town Parks & Public Works Department does plowing and some maintenance; and the open space ombudsman prepared this management plan. While all of these various roles may well continue, overall responsibility for the property should be assigned to one entity. (Is FNP a park or an open space property?)

Finally, the property boundaries need to be marked with the town's standard boundary signs.



## VI. Future Opportunities / Plans

There are two areas of undeveloped land abutting the Preserve that potentially could be acquired to expand it size.

To the west, a significant tract of land owned by the company that owns the Falmouth Shopping Center, some of which borders Wiebe Creek, remains undeveloped. Given its location, some future development of this property is probably likely, but final approval of any such project would probably include buffering development from the Creek and existing Preserve land. The town should be prepared to advocate for that if and when the time comes, or to purchase the land outright if it ever comes up for sale.

To the north, the Preserve abuts a 50-acre tract of undeveloped land (U59-11) that fronts Route 1. The owner is willing to sell it as part of a more comprehensive plan to break off two commercial lots facing Route 1 and Northbrook Drive. As of this writing, that plan is being pursued by the owner.



*Norton Brook runs parallel to Route 1 before entering Mill Creek in the Preserve. This picture was taken after a heavy rain; water levels are not usually this high.*

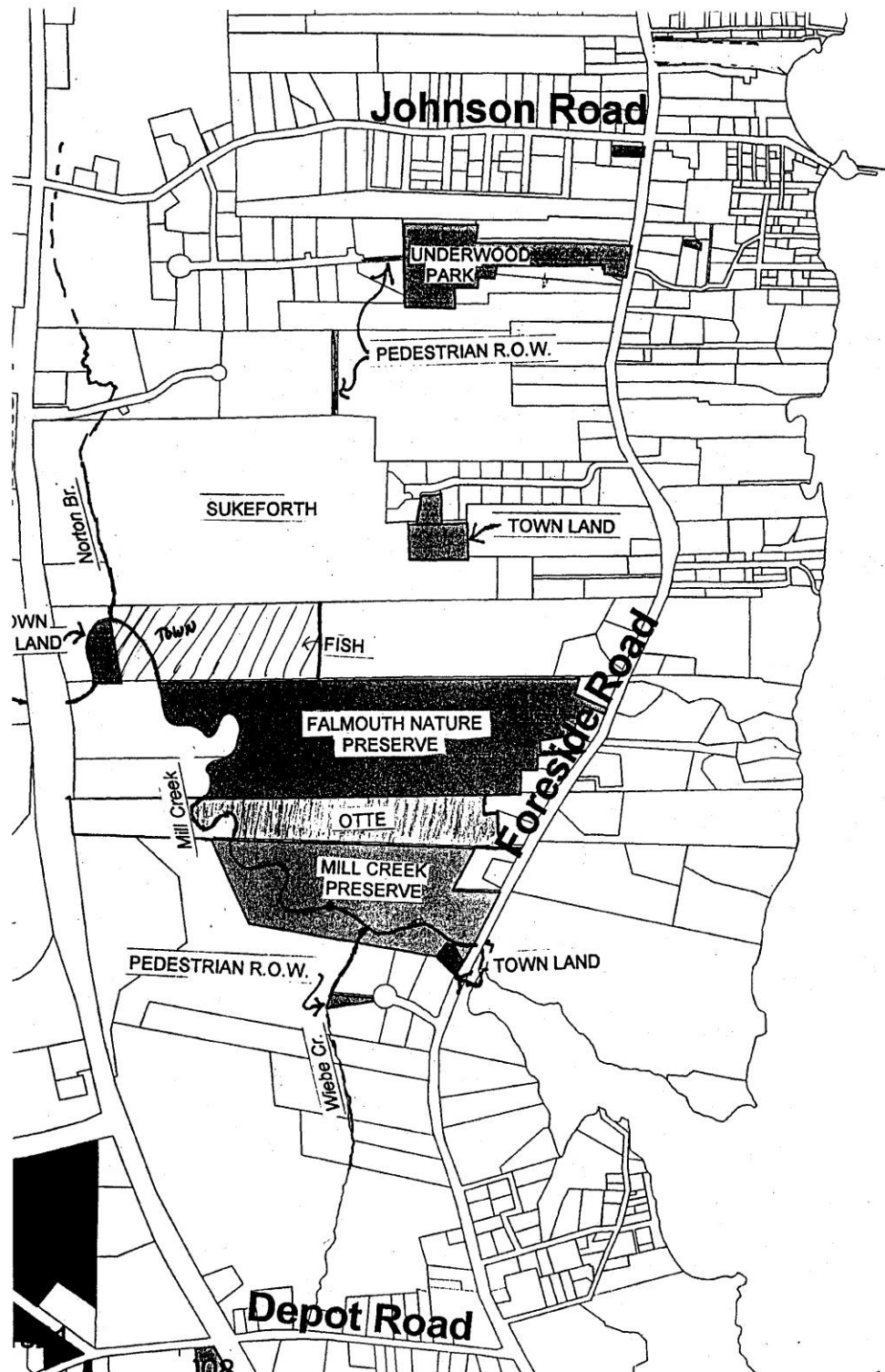
## VII. Budget Summary

The major cost to implement this plan will be the cost to acquire the abutting property, estimated at \$200,000. All other costs, including the cost of building and maintaining trails is estimated to be less than \$1,000 and can be paid out of existing budget accounts.

**Table I: Summary of Management Tasks**

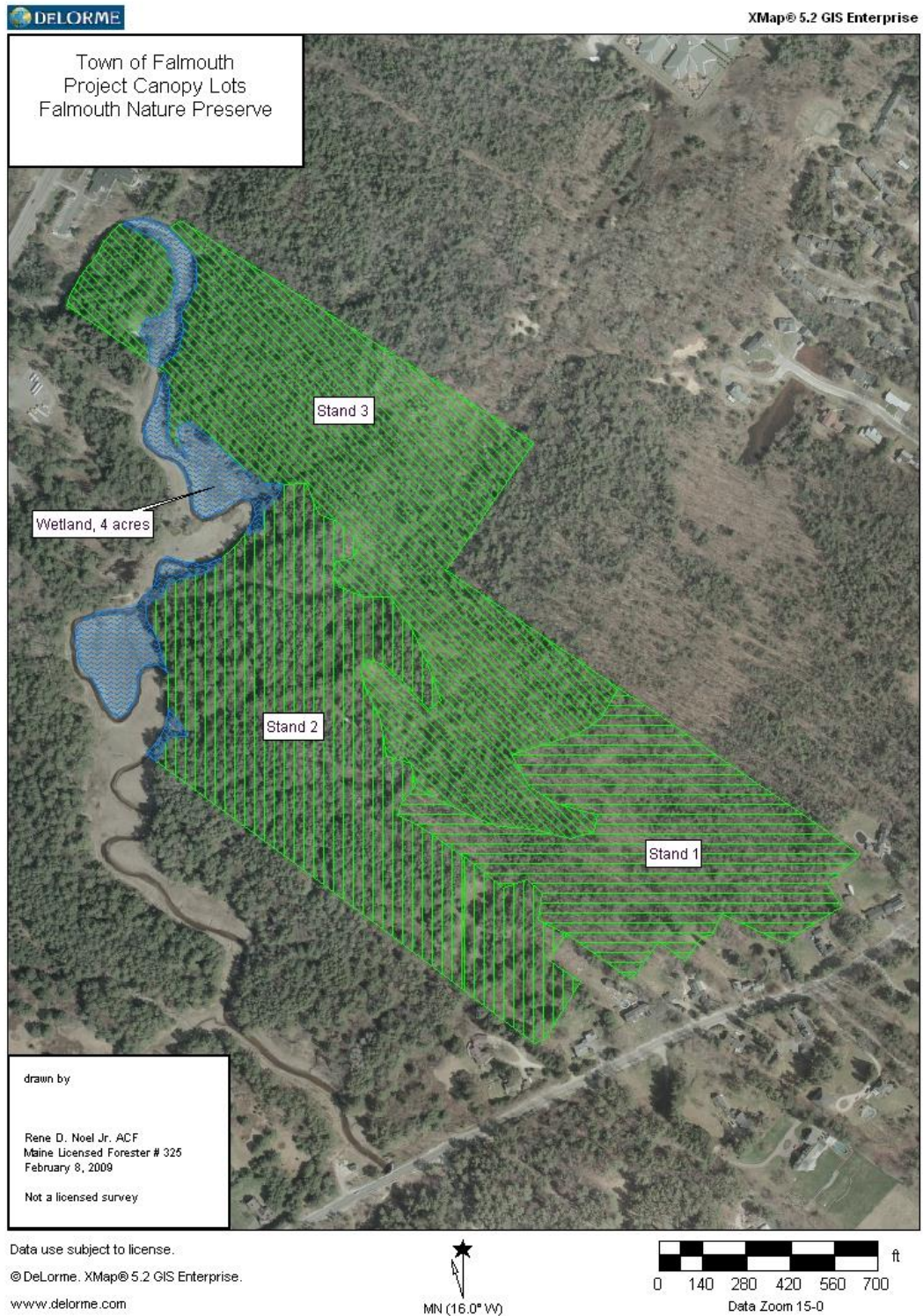
Goal	Task	Action Steps	When	Who	Cost	Other
<i>Protect the entire property with a conservation easement</i>	1. Place an easement consistent with the Otte easement on the remainder of the Preserve.	1. Draft easement. 2. Get Council Approval. 3. Execute & record the document.	Fall 2012 Winter 2013	Ombudsman, attorney  Nathan	\$2,000	Wait on the possible acquisition of the abutting property.
<i>Improve public access to the property.</i>	1. Layout potential route for a trail connecting FNP to Underwood Park.  2. Improve existing trails  3. Post boundary signs.	1. GPS trail location; 2. Identify private landowners. 3. Contact owners individually or get one owner to host a neighborhood meeting. 4. Execute trail licenses / easements with willing owners. 5. Build Trail if it's a "go." 6. Repair or replace aging trail bridges. 7. Re-blaze trails. 8. Schedule FCC volunteers to do the work.	Spring 2012  Summer 2012  Spring 2012	Ombudsman   FC Corps volunteers  Ombudsman	  \$1,000  \$600  None	
<i>Acquire additional land</i>	1. Acquire abutting parcel.	1. Deal with the owner's Realtor to negotiate acquisition terms.	Winter 2012	Town manager, Ombudsman	\$250,000	Possible conversion funding for this acquisition.
<i>Plan for rising sea levels</i>	1. Map the impact of a one, two or three foot rise in sea levels on the property.	1. Ask the Community Programs Department about their capacity to do this. 2. If they can't, ask US Fish & Wildlife if they can do such mapping.	Fall 2012	Ombudsman	None	
<i>Document Flora &amp; Fauna</i>	1. Conduct a Bioblitz.	1. Recruit the people & resources needed. 2. Conduct & compile results.	Summer 2015	Ombudsman	\$2,000	

**Map II: Map Showing the Four Original Lots that  
Constitute the Falmouth Nature Preserve**





# Falmouth Nature Preserve Forest Stand Map





## Trail, Features Map

