

Woods Road Community Forest Management Plan

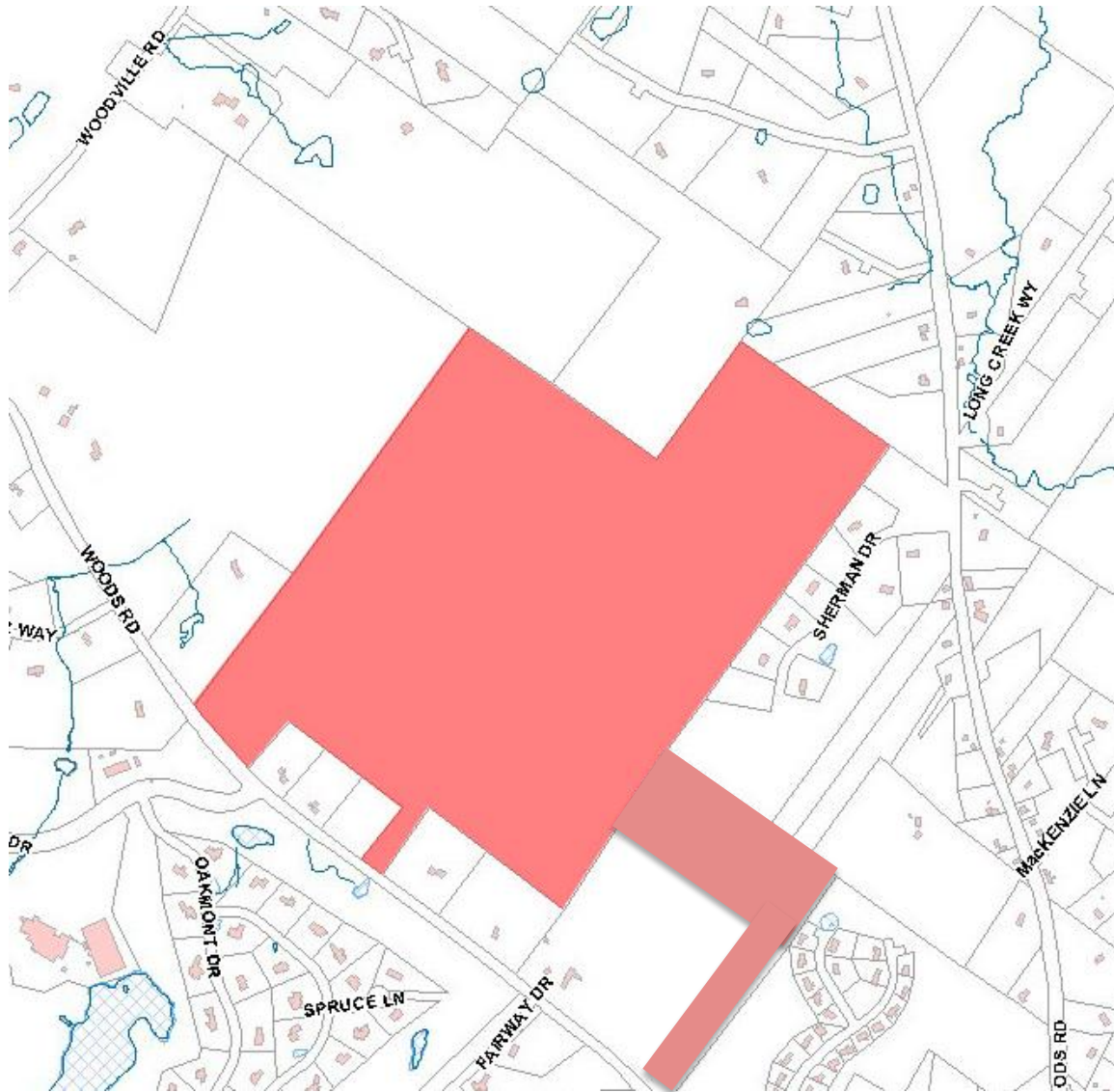


**Town of Falmouth
January 2013**

Table of Contents

Map I: Location.....	1
Summary	2
Description.....	2
Conservation Values	3
Deed Restrictions	3
Management Goals	3
Management Activities	4
Future Opportunities / Plans	5
Budget Summary	5
Longterm Management Issues	5
Table I: Summary of Management Tasks	6
Map II: Forest Stand Map	7
Map III: Proposed Trail Map	8

Map I: Location



I. Summary

Woods_Road Community Forest (WRCF) is a 140-acre block of town-owned conservation land located in central Falmouth. It was acquired as part of a mitigation agreement between The Woodlands Club and the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) in 1987. Deed restrictions prevent future development of the property, but also require that it be managed as a deer yard.

Although town-owned, responsibility for managing the property rests with The Woodlands Club, not the town. This creates an unusual situation in which the town has only limited responsibility for managing one of its own conservation properties. The Land Management Team recommends that full management responsibility be transferred to the town.



Woods Road Community Forest exists to provide winter shelter and food for whitetail deer.

Approximately 100 acres of the 140-acre property should be designated as old growth forest, to be kept “forever wild.” Many of the trees in this portion of the property are already 100-120 years old and should be left to mature. The remaining two areas should be actively harvested to conform with the requirements of the DEP mandated wildlife habitat management plan. One of these areas, abutting the Transfer Station, should be periodically clearcut to provide early successional stage habitat.

Trails, including a parking area, should be constructed to provide public access to the property, and to other public and private parcels to the east.

The existing DEP agreement should be modified to allow hunting and snowmobiling on marked trails, and prohibit ATVs as per town ordinances.

II. Description

Woods Road Community Forest is located on the east side of Woods Road, between Woodville and Longwoods Road. Its 140 acres are entirely forested, except for a Central Maine Power Company utility corridor that runs across the property. Unlike other utility corridors in town, CMP does not own the underlying land, but holds it by means of an easement.

Most of this property was acquired as part of a mitigation agreement between The Woodlands Club and the Department of Environmental Protection in 1987. Development of The Woodlands Club adversely impacted an existing deeryard and this parcel was acquired to offset that impact. It was then deeded to the town as conservation land, with future development prohibited. The same restrictions apply to 40-acres the town contributed to help facilitate the deal.

The DEP agreement requires that the forest be managed as a deeryard according to a wildlife habitat management plan developed by the Department of Inland Fisheries & Wildlife (IF&W). That plan requires the area to be cut every ten years to maintain the habitat conditions needed by deer in winter time. The Woodlands Club is legally responsible for compliance with the DEP agreement and If&W management plan.



Large white pine trees such as this one can be found on the property.

The DEP agreement also contains other provisions regarding management of the property. Hunting is prohibited; ATV and snowmobile use are allowed on the utility corridor, but prohibited within the forest itself. Both of these provisions are widely disregarded and are contrary to town land use ordinances.

There is no obvious public access point to the parcel and no pedestrian trails within the forest. There are several snowmobile trails extant, mostly on old woods roads and along the utility corridor. These trails are heavily rutted in places, probably from ATV use. Hunters access the property from the Woods Road intersection of the utility corridor and several old deer stands can be found in the interior. An abutting landowner is apparently tapping birch trees on the property.

Boundary signs have been placed on all but the eastern boundary of the property. A survey of the parcel believed to have been done at the time can't be found, so some boundaries are indistinct. In fact, there is some confusion about the exact area of the property and particularly the location of the preserved area donated by the town in 1989.

The property abuts private residential lots along most of its boundaries, including house lots on Woods Road and the Sherman Drive subdivision. It also abuts forested conservation subdivision land in the Sherman Drive development, and larger privately owned forested parcels to the north and east. Finally, it abuts town-owned land to the south on which the town Transfer Station is located.

There are several small intermittent streams on the property and several small wetland areas. No vernal pools are known to exist on the parcel.

A forest management plan for the property was developed in 2010 by Southern Maine Forestry. Stand I, ±100 acres in size, contains some of the largest and oldest trees to be found on any conservation property in Falmouth, making it an excellent candidate for "forever wild" status. Pine, hemlock and red spruce, often 100-120 years old are found in this stand. White pines are already showing evidence of advanced red rot disease and in 40-50 years the entire stand will be over mature. As these trees die and fall over, a new cycle of regeneration will begin.

Stand II is a hardwood stand, with trees 70-80 years old. Stand III, next to the Transfer Station, is a young successional forest stand, as rare a forest type in Falmouth as late successional stage forest. (See Map II.)

III. Conservation Values

The conservation values being protected in Woods Road Community Forest include:

- The large block of unfragmented habitat it provides for wildlife, including deer, fisher, porcupine, 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 aesthetic value such a large block of undeveloped property offers area residents, located ±5 miles from downtown Portland.
- The watershed protection the forest contributes to surface and groundwater quality.



Public access to the property is very limited since it has no trails or parking area.

IV. Visitor Experience

The mature forest on this property, with its large old trees, offers the visitor an opportunity to experience the majesty of this rare plant community. The longer the area is free from disturbance, the greater that experience will be.

Visitors to the property, be they hikers or hunters, 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 dedicating the most of the property as a "forever wild" area; by limiting the amount of available parking to 3-4 cars maximum at the Woods Road access point; and by building a trail network that spreads visitors out around the property.

V. Deed Restrictions

Although there is no conservation easement on the property, deed restrictions embedded in the DEP agreement, and what the DEP requires be done in regards to its management, have the same effect as an easement. Those provisions include the following:

- The parcel shall be maintained by The Woodlands Club in compliance with the DEP mandated Wildlife Habitat Management Plan.
- There shall be no future development of the property, except recreational amenities.

- Recreation is limited to passive activities, except that snowmobile and ATVs are permitted on the CMP easement.
- No hunting shall be permitted on the premises.

In addition to the deed restrictions, the Wildlife Habitat Management Plan requires that harvesting be done on the property every ten years to maintain the kind of habitat that provides winter food and shelter to deer.

In spite of the deed restrictions, there are snowmobile trails within the forest, and evidence of ATV use. The site is also popular with hunters. Nor has harvesting been done according to the proscribed schedule.

VI. Management Goals

Management of this parcel by the town is a challenge because the primary responsibility for doing so is vested in a private entity, The Woodlands Club. They alone have the responsibility for conducting the harvests proscribed by that plan. While the town can still build trails on the property, it would be difficult to do so without also controlling the area to be harvested every ten years.

The first management goal should therefore be to get the management responsibility transferred from The Woodlands Club to the town. If an agreement can be reached with the Woodlands, and if the Council approves, DEP and IF&W have indicated a willingness to permit that management transfer.

Assuming that happens, Stand I should be managed as an late successional (old growth) forest if it can be done within the parameters of the Wildlife Habitat Management Plan. The regional IF&W biologist believes that can be done if Stands II & III were actively managed through periodic harvesting to provide the browse deer require in the winter months. Such an agreement would satisfy the town's interest in seeing much of the property left forever wild while still being in compliance with the DEP management agreement.

The second management goal is to open the property up to public access by providing a parking area and network of walking trails. Map III shows a proposed trail map that would extend from WRCF to other private and town owned properties farther to the east. Trail licenses have been obtained from the private landowners involved. All that is needed now is the funding required to do the work. To that end, a Recreational Trails Grant has been submitted to obtain that funding.

A third more overarching goal is to firmly establish the boundaries of the property, particularly in the southerly portion adjacent to the Transfer Station. A

survey was reportedly done in the 1987, but needs to be located.

VII. Management Activities

Forestry & Wildlife

Whitetail deer is the principal wildlife species to be managed on this property, specifically to provide them with winter cover and food. That is done by managing the forest growth to provide both shelterwood (softwood trees tall enough to provide winter cover) and browse (young deciduous tree growth).

To accomplish that while still meeting the other management goals for the property, wood harvesting should be conducted in Stands II and III according to the forest management plan, with stand III periodically clearcut to provide the early successional stage habitat needed by many wildlife species, including the endangered New England cottontail rabbit. Stand I would be left forever wild. IF&W cooperation will be needed to implement this forest management strategy.

Trails

A network of pedestrian trails should be created to give recreational users a variety of trip length options both within the property and beyond it (Map III). These trails will be built by Falmouth Conservation Corps volunteers beginning in the summer of 2013. A parking pad also needs to be constructed off of Woods Road and a kiosk constructed.

ATV use on the property will have to be closely monitored to prevent further trail damage. The DEP agreement needs to be modified to prohibit ATV use on the property, and to allow snowmobiles within the property on marked trails.

Hunting

If the DEP agreement is renegotiated, the existing ban on hunting should be reversed. Hunting will be allowable as it is on other large conservation properties.

Education

Public events should be held on the property, organized by Community Programs and the Falmouth Land Trust to educate people about its existence, natural features and ecological value.

Controlling Invasive Plants

Invasive plants are not known to be a problem on the site, but will have be monitored as they are on other conservation properties.

Stewardship

Stewardship of the property is the responsibility of the Ombudsman, with Conservation Corps assistance.

VIII. Future Opportunities / Plans

There is little opportunity to expand the size of this property since it is largely hemmed in by existing housing. However, there is open land to the north and west that might be put into conservation status in future years.

IX. Budget Summary

The cost of implementing this plan over the next five years is estimated as follows:

Boundary signs (signs are on hand)	\$0
Parking area	5,000
Parking kiosk	500
Trail blazing, signage	300
Trail construction (lumber, gravel)	3,500
Large kiosk map & UR Here kiosks	<u>100</u>
	\$9,400

If agreement is reached with The Woodlands Club to transfer the deer yard management responsibility to the town, and if a Recreational Trails Grant is not awarded, the \$10,000 payment they have agreed to make at the time of the transfer might be applied to offset these costs.

X. Longterm Management Issues

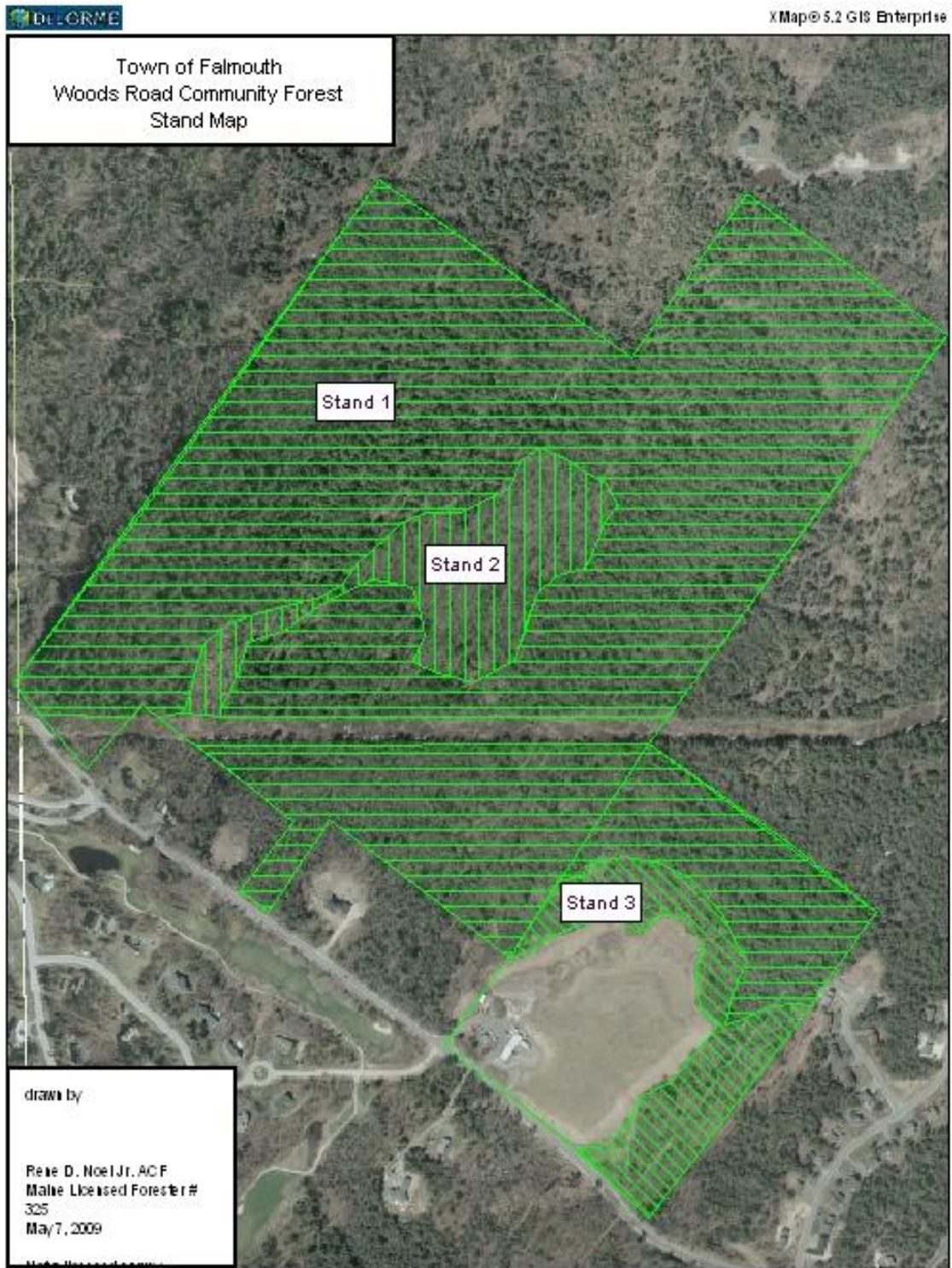
Other than the need to comply with the harvesting requirements imposed by the DEP Agreement, there are no current longterm management issues.

Once a trail system, including a parking area, is constructed, some structures, such as bog bridges, will likely be included. These will have a 15-20 year projected lifespan. The replacement costs should be covered by income generated through the forest harvesting activity.

Table I: Summary of Management Tasks

Goal	Task	Action Steps	When	Who	Cost	Other
<i>Transfer management responsibility for the property from The Woodlands to the town.</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Get Woodlands and Council agreement on the transfer terms. 2. Get the existing DEP permit modified to reflect this change. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Finalize transfer agreement. 2. Get both parties to approve it. 3. Get the DEP permit modified. 	Spring 2013	Town manager Ombudsman	\$500	Legal work?
<i>Manage the forest according to DEP requirements</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Implement the wildlife habitat management plan in stands II & III. 2. Follow-up to insure the harvest was done according to standards. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Contract with So. Maine Forestry to manage the harvest. 2. Onsite inspection after the harvest. 	Winter 2014	Ombudsman, forester	None	
<i>Improve recreational opportunities</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Implement the trail plan for the property by constructing new trails, a parking area & kiosk, and all needed signage. 2. Expand the trail system to adjoining public and private lands. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Layout potential trails on the ground. 2. Construct trails as planned. 3. Define the parking area; contract for its construction. 4. Build the kiosk, acquire needed signs. 	Spring 2013 Summer 2013 Summer 2013 Summer 2013	Ombudsman, FCC volunteers Ombudsman Ombudsman Ombudsman	±\$9,400	RTP grant pending.
<i>Invasive control</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Monitor the presence of invasives; treat as necessary. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Walk disturbed areas. 	Summer 2014	Ombudsman	\$0	
<i>Establish clear property boundaries.</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Locate the missing survey, if it exists <u>or</u> contract for a survey. 2. Post boundary signs. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Locate original survey or contract for survey. 2. Erect boundary signs. 	Summer 2013	Ombudsman, FCC volunteers	None or \$7,000	
<i>Education</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Co-sponsor outings on the property 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Work with Community Programs and Falmouth Land Trust to organize and publicize events. 	>Fall 2013	Ombudsman	None	
<i>Control motorized use</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Change the permit to prohibit ATV use & allow snowmobiles on marked trails. 2. Post "NO ATV" signs. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Negotiate the terms with DEP. 2. Monitor for enforcement. 	Summer 2013	Ombudsman	\$0	

Map II: Woods Road Community Forest Stand Map



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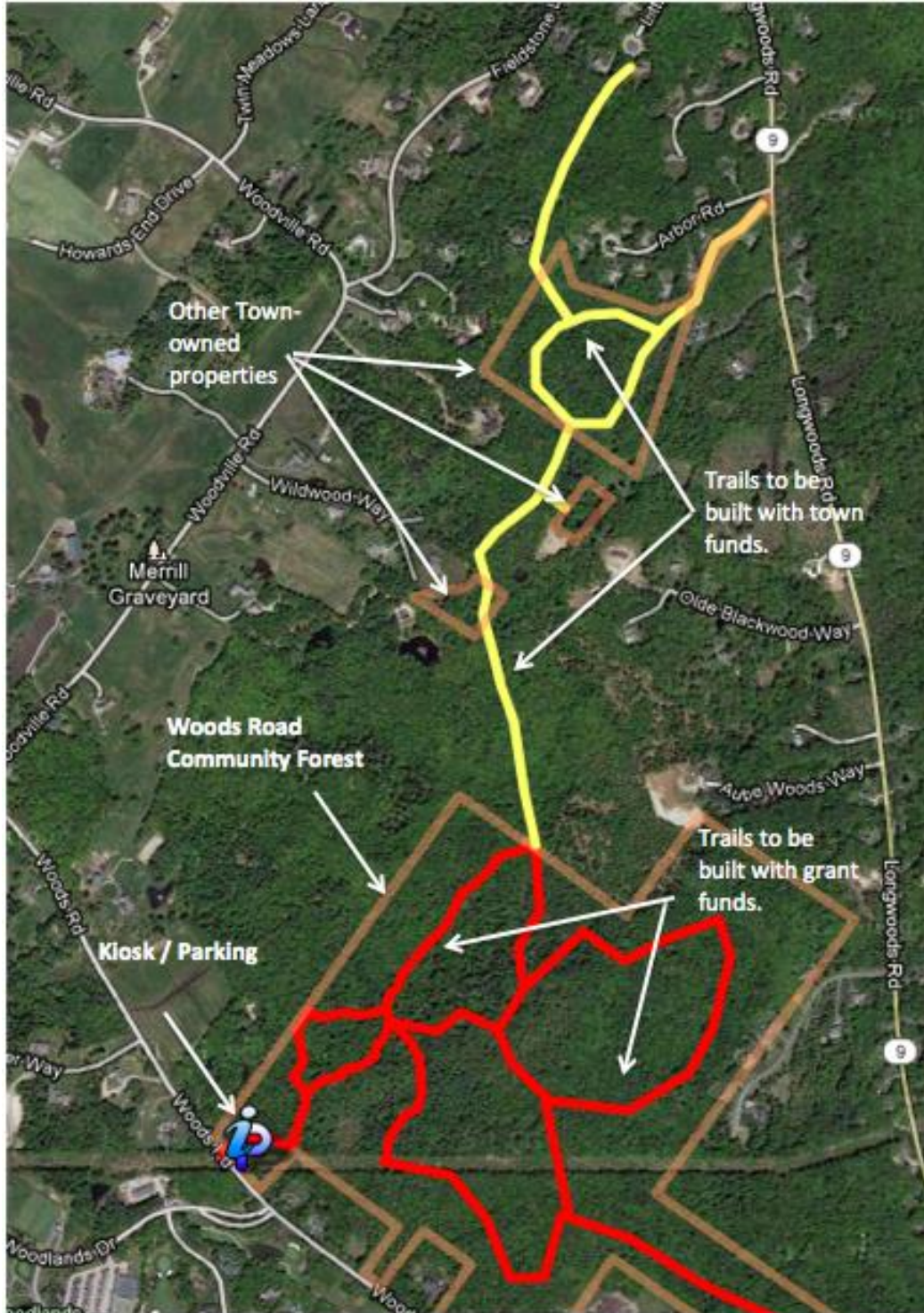
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Map III: Proposed Trail Network



Initial plan developed 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)