

Woods Road Management

Essential Question: Should the legal responsibility for managing the Woods Road Community Forest as a deeryard be transferred from The Woodlands to the town?

Background:

- The Woodlands Club deeded 100 acres of this 135-acre property to the town in 1989 to compensate for the loss of a deeryard on the land they developed west of Woods Road. The town donated an additional 35 acres of existing town-owned land that abuts the deeded portion as part of the agreement (see Map I).
- The entire parcel is subject to a DEP agreement that requires the property to be managed as a deeryard. A wildlife habitat management plan developed by IF&W, which is part of that agreement, requires that wood harvesting be done every ten years to maintain the property as a deeryard (see Attachment I).
- Management of the property as a deeryard – arranging for and supervising the ten-year harvests – is the responsibility of The Woodlands Club, not the town. The agreement does not specify who receives the revenue the wood harvest would generate.
- The DEP agreement prohibits hunting on the property, although it is not posted as such. People do hunt on the property in season. As public land, hunting would normally be allowed on property in accordance with town ordinances.
- ATVs and snowmobiles are permitted along the CMP utility easement that crosses the property (the town owns the land itself, not CMP). The ATV provision is in conflict with town ordinances prohibiting their use on town land. Snowmobiles are not permitted off the utility corridor, but there are marked snowmobile trails on the property. Snowmobiles are normally allowed on town land if they stay on marked trails.
- There are no walking trails on the property at the present time. The town intends to build walking trails within the property in the coming year, including a parking area along Woods Road if funding is available. These trails will extend to other town-owned and private parcels east of the property (see Map II).
- Woods Road Community Forest includes the most mature forest stands on all of the town's conservation properties. The Land Management Team recommends that any required harvesting be done in a way that preserves the maturity of this forest, and that a large portion of it (± 100 acres) be left alone to become late stage successional (old growth) forest. The regional IF&W biologist believes that can be done while still meeting the DEP requirement.

- Woods Road Community Forest is the only town-owned conservation property that a third-party has a legally proscribed management responsibility.
- The Woodlands would like to cede its responsibility for managing the property as a deeryard to the town. It is willing to pay the town \$10,000 for that to happen. The DEP and IF&W are willing to alter the existing agreement to allow for this shift in responsibility as long as the property is protected from future development and is managed as a deeryard according to the existing management plan. The DEP would also be willing to change provisions in the agreement that are in conflict with town policy (i.e. – ATV & snowmobile use, hunting).

Why the Land Management Team Believes the Responsibility for Managing WRCF Should be Vested in the Town

- The current situation, in which a private entity with no vested interest in the property, nor any expertise or capacity for carrying out the proscribed management activities, is an anomaly. No other town owned property is managed in such a way.
- The town's management goals for the property could be in conflict with each other under the current arrangement. For example, the goal of leaving much of the property to grow into late successional stage forest could be in conflict with the harvesting requirements if not done cooperatively. So too might a conflict arise between the town's recreational goals and a harvesting operation that might encroach on existing trails. That is, the town has no way of assuring that the overall management of the property is compatible with all elements of the management plan.
- Should the current arrangement continue, the town will still have to monitor harvesting operations to be sure it is done in ways that complement other management objectives (see above).
- Currently, it is very difficult to insure that harvesting will be done according to town standards (e.g. – by a certified logger), what time of year harvesting will occur, where a landing and access roads will be located, etc.
- Failure to modify the agreement will mean that existing conflicts regarding hunting, ATV and snowmobile use may continue.