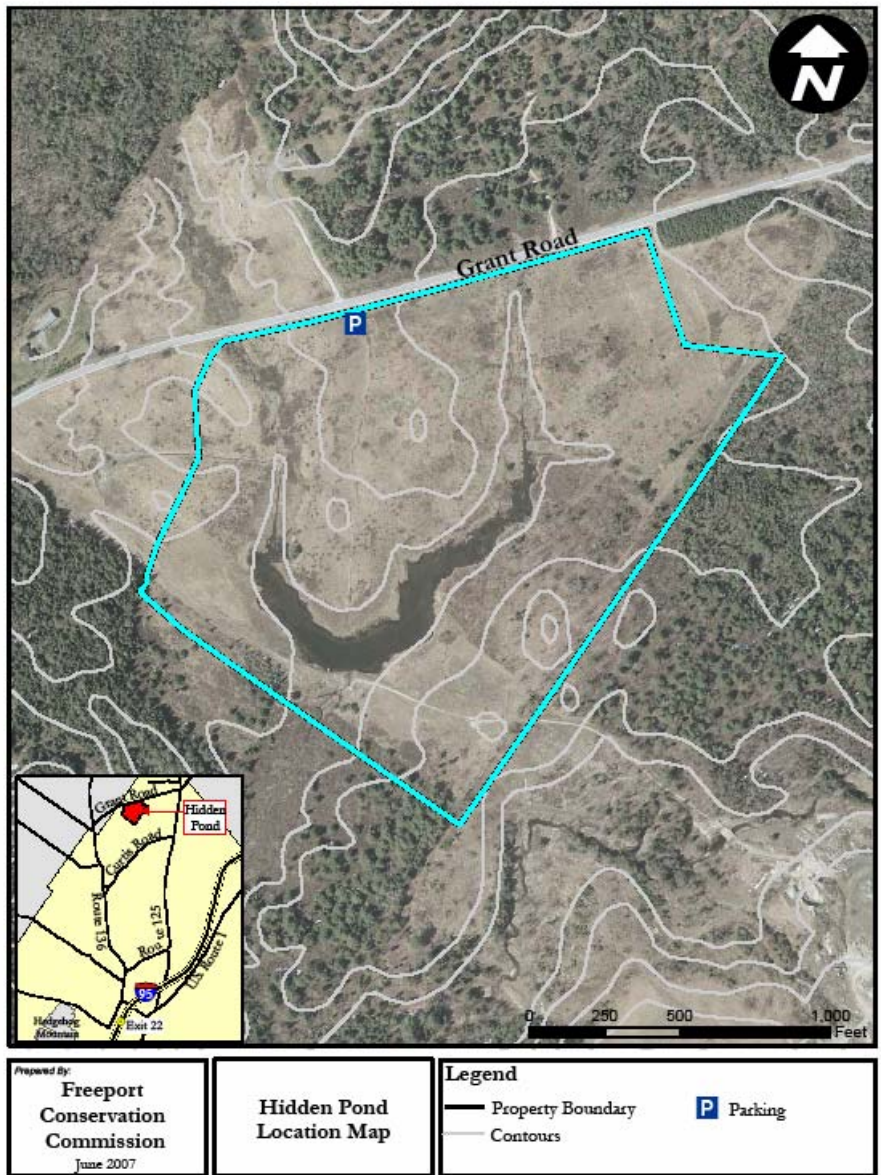


Hidden Pond Preserve Management Plan



Map 1 Hidden Pond Preserve

Town of Freeport Conservation Commission

Approved October 2, 2007

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Purpose of the Plan

This plan for the management of the Town of Freeport's Hidden Pond Preserve property was prepared by the Freeport Conservation Commission. A draft of this plan was discussed at a public workshop held June 26, 2007. This plan was approved by the Commission, presented to the Freeport Town Council for a public hearing, and amended and/or approved by the Town Council on October 2, 2007.

While the Conservation Commission ordinance requires that the Commission prepare a management plan for Hedgehog Mountain, there is no provision in the ordinance to require a plan for Hidden Pond Preserve or any properties acquired in the future. This is addressed in the management section of this report.

The Hidden Pond Preserve Management Plan includes background information, a description of the natural and cultural resources, rules for the property, and future management actions.

Overview

The Hidden Pond Preserve consists of approximately 56.5 acres of land on the south side of Grant Road near the Freeport-Durham line (Map 1). The majority of the land is relatively open with early successional shrub type vegetation. A small pond is located near the western edge of the property. About 5 acres of forested upland is located at the eastern side of the property.

Approximately 51.5 acres of the land at Hidden Pond Preserve was donated by The Nature Conservancy (TNC) to the Town of Freeport in 2003. Patricia H. Bousfield of Bar Harbor, Maine had donated this land along with additional land on both sides of Grant Road to TNC in 1995. The donated property was considered a "trade land", i.e., land that does not meet TNC's biological criteria for full protection as a nature preserve but is donated with the expectation that TNC will sell it and apply the proceeds to the protection of land with higher ecological values. TNC subdivided the property in 1996 designated the land that is now Hidden Pond Preserve as open space. TNC then sold the designated house lots on the north side of Grant Road, and ultimately one lot on the south side of Grant Road. The remaining land originally designated as open space on the subdivision plan was donated to the Town to be used for conservation. Before the land was conveyed to the Town, TNC granted a conservation easement to the Freeport Conservation Trust in 2003. That easement contains several restrictions that legally limit the uses of the property. These restrictions have been incorporated into the Management section of this plan.

Around the time of discussions with TNC regarding a possible donation, the Town in 2000 invited input on the disposition of a tax-acquired property located south of Grant Road. The 10-acre tax-acquired property lay adjacent in part to the eastern edge of the TNC property being offered to the Town. Both the Conservation Commission and the Freeport Housing Trust expressed interest in the 10-acre parcel. Both groups worked together to formulate a plan that would provide maximum benefit for both affordable housing and conservation uses. The Town Council agreed with the plan under which the Freeport Housing Trust would develop two 2.5 acre lots on Grant Road to be used for affordable housing and the remaining approximately five

acres would be reserved for conservation purposes. The conservation area of this parcel includes the land behind the two house lots as well as a strip of land approximately 30 feet in width to the east of the house lots. This strip of land provides access from Grant Road to the easternmost part of Hidden Pond Preserve.

The 51.5 acres of land donated by TNC and five acres of land reserved from the tax-acquired property together comprise the Hidden Pond Preserve. This land is significant from a local perspective because it provides a mix of old fields and early successional shrub-dominated habitats both of which have shown significant declines with the loss of farming in the region. These habitat types are important for several species of song bird, upland game birds, snowshoe hare, and winter forage for white-tailed deer.

Location of the Site

The 56.5-acre Hidden Pond Preserve property is located in the northwestern corner of Freeport within the upper watershed of Collins Brook. The property is close to the Freeport-Durham border and is located south of Grant Road, with approximately 2,400 ft of road frontage. Grant Road extends from Route 125 (Wardtown Road) in Freeport to Route 136 in Durham.

A small pond is located near the western edge of the property approximately 900 ft back from Grant Road. The pond is fed by two perennial streams. An outlet stream drains eventually into Collins Brook.

Surveys have been conducted of the TNC and tax-acquired property although there is not one survey that includes the entire 56.5-acre property (TNC and tax acquired parcel). At this time, the boundaries of the property have not been flagged but the Conservation Commission may do so in the future.

Primary access to the property is from Grant Road along the direct road frontage. There is a gravel parking area with an information kiosk on Grant Road. Access is also available from Grant Road through the approximately 30-ft wide strip of land located at the easternmost part of the property.

The Town has a 20-ft wide easement along the western boundary of the seven acre privately owned lot located west of and adjacent to the Town's property. This easement may be used solely for accessing Hidden Pond Preserve for construction, maintenance and repair of the dam and pond, should such activities be undertaken in the future.

Current and Historic Uses

This area of Freeport is zoned Rural Residential and includes low-density residential development, agricultural lands, and small businesses. In the past, the land donated by TNC was used for sheep grazing, and topsoil was stripped from portions of the site at some point. The pond was originally created by impounding two stream drainages with an earthen dam constructed with two outlet culverts and a small dock.

Current uses of the Hidden Pond Preserve property include walking, birding, hunting, snow shoeing, cross country skiing and snowmobiling.

The conservation easement granted by TNC to the Freeport Conservation Trust provides that the property shall be used for wildlife habitat, low impact recreation, education and scenic open space purposes only. The easement contains the following use restrictions among others:

- no residential development;
- no commercial, industrial or mining activities;
- dogs are permitted only if under effective voice command;
- hunting is limited to shotguns no larger than 12 gauge;
- no trapping except with written approval of Freeport Conservation Trust;
- no motorized vehicles except those used for permitted construction and maintenance activities, and snowmobiles that are allowed on well-marked trails (the location of which shall be approved by Town) that form a part of a larger, established trail system;
- no disturbance of the surface with certain permitted exceptions; and
- no placement, collection or storage of trash, waste or other unsightly or offensive material; and no use or activity that is inconsistent with the protection of the scenic, recreational, educational and natural habitat values of the property and the conserving of those values.

The conservation easement provides the Town the following rights among others:

- right to construct shelter for ice skating;
- right to construct and maintain fences, benches, nature observation blinds; foot bridges, steps and walkways, and one gravel parking lot for no more than six cars;
- right to repair, rebuild, improve and maintain the existing dam;
- right to construct and maintain trails no wider than 6 ft and maintain boundary and trail markers;
- right to mow and cut vegetation to maintain and reclaim open fields for purpose of maintaining trail access and enhancing grassland habitat values; and
- right to selectively cut and plant so as to promote and maintain qualities of property and wildlife therein.

The above discussion of the conservation easement provides only a summary. The full conservation easement, a copy of which may be viewed at Town Hall, and as recorded at the Cumberland County Registry of Deeds, determines the legal uses and restrictions on the property.

Description of Natural and Cultural Resources

Below is a preliminary survey of Hidden Pond Preserve resources. The Conservation Commission will continue to conduct inventories of the natural and cultural features of this site.

Soils

According to the soil survey for Cumberland County, the predominant underlying soil consists of Buxton silt loam with 3-8% slopes, and Scantic silt loam. The Buxton soils have slow to very slow permeability, mostly due to potential seasonal wetness and have severe classification

ratings with regards to suitability for septic systems. The Scantic soils, principally due to potential high water table, are classified as having severe or very severe limitations with regard to septic system capability. The best soils in terms of drainage are located on the eastern and northern portions of the site.

Geology

Hidden Pond is underlain by the Presumpscot Formation, which is characterized by silty clays which overlie rock and till. The Presumpscot Formation was formed from deposition of sediment from glacial streams and marine environments. It contains the ground-up fragments of minerals that make up the bedrock of Maine, such as quartz, feldspar, and mica, but in very tiny pieces. This glacial-marine mud is ubiquitous in mid-coast and in inland low-lying areas.

Economically, the glacial-marine mud was used for making bricks for many years. It was undoubtedly used by Native Americans for making their clay pottery, and by early Maine settlers and later industry for ceramic products including the earthenware known as Maine Redware. It is used today by some local potters and artisans for decorative pieces but today its most common use is as an impermeable fill to cap landfills or other hazardous-waste sites.

Topography

The Hidden Pond Preserve consists of gently rolling slopes and knolls. Topographic elevation varies by about 20 feet across the site. The pond was designed with depths ranging from one to eight feet deep. The impoundment failed in the early 1990's and water elevations have dropped approximately three feet.

Hydrology

The property lies in the watershed of Collins Brook, which drains into the Royal River. The pond is located at the confluence of two perennial streams, and outlets at the original channel leading to Collins Brook. Recent beaver activity has resulted in the formation of flooded wetland ponds along stretches of both streams. Scrub-shrub and wet meadow type wetlands also occur throughout the property.

Forest and land cover

The majority of the land includes an early successional shrub-dominated community with the better drained soils and knolls regenerating into mixed birch / aspen, pole-sized sapling dominated community. The more mature forested portions of the site to the south and east include a mix of balsam fir, red maple, big-toothed aspen, eastern hemlock, and white pine.

Fringing wetlands associated with the pond are dominated by a mix of sedges, rushes, and cattails. The streams are bordered by speckled alder, willows, and meadowsweet.

Wildlife habitat

The property includes two locally significant habitat types: old field / early successional uplands, and emergent and open water wetlands. The juxtaposition of these two habitat types has resulted in a diverse mix of breeding birds and much use of the area by large and mid-sized mammals.

Birds that require early successional and old field conditions for successful nesting are experiencing declines throughout New England as a result of natural forest regeneration resulting from the regional decline of agriculture. The early successional conditions may also be important for the New England Cottontail, a species under consideration for federal protection under the Endangered Species Act. This site provides ideal conditions for some of these species, but the area will require active management to prevent further succession into forest land. Such management may include brush-hogging, cutting, and controlled burns (under supervision of state agencies and local fire department).

Invasive species

No invasive species have been identified to date.

Cultural and historic features

No archeological investigations have been completed to date, but past excavation and topsoil mining activities would have likely disturbed the context of any artifacts thereby limiting their value. Culturally, the relative open nature of the site helps to maintain modern reminders of Freeport's past agricultural heritage. Today, the rolling knolls provide some scenic value that contrasts with surrounding forest land and residential development.

Existing site amenities

No existing trails other than an old haul road used to access the dam exist on the property. As a result of residential development at both the eastern and western end of the property, this road is no longer accessible from the Grant Road frontage. As mentioned above, an earthen dam was constructed to create the pond. This dam has been partially breached and water levels have dropped significantly. A dock, originally constructed with the impoundment, has collapsed, but some of the remaining structure is used as a perching site for kingfishers and other birds utilizing the pond.

Management of Hidden Pond Preserve

Oversight

The Town of Freeport Conservation Commission ordinance, Section 35-8, assigns the Conservation Commission responsibility for the ongoing management of the Hedgehog Mountain property. The Commission recommends that a similar section be added to the

ordinance to assign the Commission responsibility for the ongoing management of Hidden Pond Preserve.

Budget

Currently no dedicated fund exists for maintenance and improvement costs at this facility. The Conservation Commission annual operating budget will be used as necessary. The Commission will continue to rely on volunteer labor for small projects such as trail construction, but will need to pursue grants for larger budget items.

Goals

The management of Hidden Pond Preserve is supported by the objectives of the Open Space and Public Access Plan “to protect special resource values and functions, provide trails and natural areas for public enjoyment, conserve scenic views and landscapes, and to create a pleasing and vital open space system” (Freeport Open Space Plan, p. 1). The Open Space and Public Access Plan was accepted by the Town Council in 1999 as part of Freeport’s Comprehensive Plan.

The Hidden Pond Preserve Management Plan has been developed in accordance with the Conservation Commission ordinance. The ordinance states that the commission may manage its land “in a manner which allows public use and enjoyment consistent with the natural, historic and scenic resources of the land” (Section 35-3). The ordinance prohibits “activities detrimental to drainage, flood control, water conservation, erosion control or soil conservation, or other acts or uses detrimental to the cultural, natural, scenic or open condition of the land or water areas” and requires that the Commission keep its property “predominantly in its natural, scenic or open condition” (Section 35-5). Thus, the activities allowed at the property should minimize impact on soils, water and air quality, noise levels, vegetation, and wildlife.

The Commission is working to preserve the natural beauty and ecological functioning of Hidden Pond Preserve while supporting recreational opportunities for the citizens of Freeport and visitors to the community. Current uses of Hidden Pond Preserve include walking, birding, fishing, hunting, and snowmobiling. The intent is to continue to allow these uses and improve public access. In 2007, an information kiosk was installed to highlight the public access point and to post a property map, rules, safety messages, and other information about the property. The commission hopes to construct a walking trail on the property. The trail will be laid out to avoid saturated soils but bog bridging may be required in some areas due to the wet nature of the property.

Rules

The following rules will apply to Hidden Pond Preserve:

1. The property is for day use only¹.
2. Camping and fires are not permitted.
3. All garbage must be carried out from the property.
4. Alcoholic beverages are not permitted.
5. Motorized vehicles are prohibited, except snowmobiles on designated trails in winter, and vehicles used for approved maintenance. All-terrain vehicles (ATVs) are not permitted.
6. Dogs are allowed but must be on leash or under voice control.
7. Hunting is permitted for shotgun (no larger than 12 gauge) and bow hunting only.
8. Trapping is not permitted without written permission of the Town of Freeport.

¹Except for snowmobile travel on marked trails.

Management actions

The following actions shall govern the future management of Hidden Pond Preserve:

1. Amend the Conservation Commission ordinance to assign the Conservation Commission responsibility for the ongoing management of Hidden Pond Preserve.
2. Establish signage including trail signage, boundary markers and information on hunting safety, and park rules.
3. Maintain trails for safe use and to correct and minimize erosion potential.
4. Maintain the natural character of the pond, wetlands, and forested areas. Keep the field open by periodic brush-hogging, cutting, and controlled burns (under the direction of appropriate state agencies and local fire department).
5. Inform the Freeport Conservation Trust about improvements and other management actions on a yearly basis.
6. Preserve the ecologic features of the property.
7. Enhance wildlife habitat and forest health through sustainable forestry practices.
8. Encourage pet walkers to carry out waste.
9. Work with partners to investigate options for acquiring adjacent lands and those necessary for possible connections to other public open spaces.
10. Engage local citizens and identify a core group of volunteers to help maintain trails and act as stewards.
11. Monitor the site regularly for the presence of invasive species and implement control techniques when necessary.
12. Work with partners to restore and improve the existing dam and pond for waterfowl and other wildlife habitat.
13. Seek funding and investigate feasibility of nesting structures, observation blinds, and boardwalks to improve wildlife viewing options.
14. Allow wildlife observation, hiking, cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, hunting for shotgun (no larger than 12 gauge) and bow hunters only, and fishing.
15. Encourage hunters to use safe hunting practices. Urge visitors to be aware of hunters and

- to wear blaze orange during hunting season.
16. Encourage users to respect property boundaries.