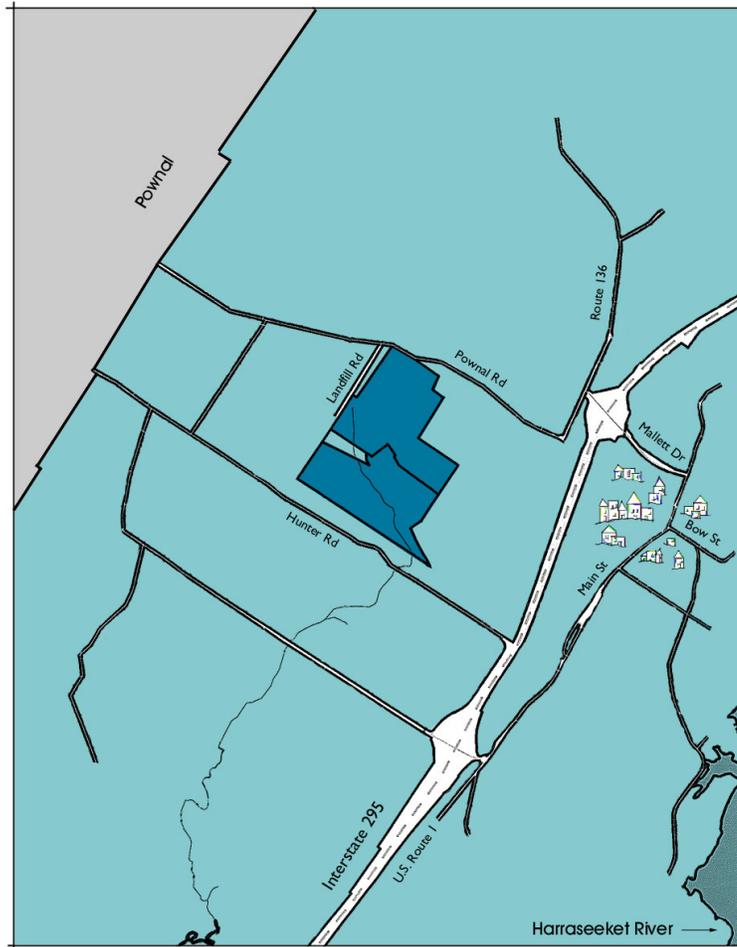


Hedgehog Mountain Management Plan



Town of Freeport Conservation Commission
Submitted July 2004
Approved September 7, 2004

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Purpose of the Plan

The Conservation Commission is charged with managing and maintaining the Hedgehog Mountain property, consistent with the Hedgehog Mountain Management Plan (Section 35-8). The Commission periodically reviews the management plan and recommends to Freeport Town Council any changes. A prior draft of this plan was discussed at a public workshop in 2003. A revised draft, approved by the Conservation Commission, was submitted to the Freeport Town Council for a public hearing and amendments or approval. This final plan, approved by the Town Council on September 7, 2004, replaces the previous management plan.

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

Overview

In 1989 the voters of Freeport approved by referendum the purchase of the 100-acre Hedgehog Mountain or Soule property, located off the Pownal Road and adjacent to the Freeport Recycling Center. The acquisition was funded by corporate and individual donations, and funds from the Freeport Land Bank Commission (now known as the Conservation Commission).

In February 1992, the Freeport Town Council established the Hedgehog Mountain Planning Committee to develop and prioritize land use options, which led to the original management plan. The committee conducted field surveys and interviews with the Freeport Historical Society, Bradbury Mountain State Park, the Maine Forest Service, the Winslow Park Commission, as well as townspeople who had special knowledge or interest in the property.

In 2001 the town expanded Hedgehog Mountain by acquiring an additional 96 acres of property owned by Scott and Margaret Keith abutting the original tract to the south towards Hunter Road. The acquisition was made possible through funding from Freeport's Open Space Bond Fund, Hedgehog Mountain Fund, L.L. Bean, Inc., and the Davis Conservation Foundation.

Hedgehog Mountain is a significant natural resource belonging to the Town of Freeport. Less than a mile from downtown Freeport, it features the town's highest point of land (elevation 308 feet), almost 200 acres of woodlands, and over five miles of trails enjoyed year-round by walkers, mountain bikers, hunters, and snowmobilers. The Conservation Commission maintains the property as a natural resource where Freeport residents and visitors are able to experience nature in quiet solitude. This plan has been developed with respect to the ecology of the site, public input, the Conservation Commission ordinance, and the Open Space and Public Access Plan.

Location of the Site

The 196-acre Hedgehog Mountain lies approximately 4000 feet west of Interstate 95 within the upper watershed of Merrill Brook. The northern boundary is approximately 300 feet south of Pownal Road. The southern boundary runs approximately 600 feet north of and parallel to the Hunter Road.

This area of Freeport is separated from the coast by Interstate 295 and the commercial U.S. Route 1 corridor. It is zoned Rural Residential and includes low-density residential development, agricultural lands, small businesses, Pine Tree Academy, the abutting Freeport transfer station, and recreational ball fields.

The property is accessed from Hedgehog Mountain Road. A gravel parking area located before

the recycling center gate can accommodate 3-4 vehicles. The town currently has no deeded access from the south. This is addressed in the management section of this plan.

Two unimproved roads, Reed Road and Soule Road, bisect part of the property. Other than the Soule Road, there are no known rights-of-way on the property. Prior to the purchase of the Soule and Keith properties, boundary surveys were conducted for the town by Owen-Haskell, Inc.

Current and Historic Uses

Prior to its purchase by the Town of Freeport, the property was in the ownership of the Soule and Keith families, and the land was historically used for its pastures and forest resources. Children frequented the area, exploring the summit and building small forts and shelters in the summit area. Many people viewed the 1932 eclipse from the Hedgehog summit.

Many of the current trails, originally skid roads, are now used by hikers, horseback riders, mountain bikers, hunters, snowmobilers, and cross country skiers. Over the years, the trails have increasingly been used by recreational vehicles—primarily snowmobiles and all-terrain vehicles (ATVs). Many of the trails are heavily eroded due to the ATV use. This is addressed in the management section of this plan.

Natural and Cultural Resources

Below is a summary of Hedgehog Mountain resources. The Conservation Commission will continue to conduct inventories of the natural and cultural features of this site.

Soils

Based upon the Soil Conservation Service Medium Intensity Soil Survey, soils on the original tract of the Hedgehog Mountain property consist of Hollis, Buxton, Belgrade and Suffield soils.

Hollis soils cover approximately 30% of the site, primarily on the higher elevations of Hedgehog Mountain. These soils are shallow, somewhat excessively drained, gently sloping to steep, and moderately coarse textured with several rock outcrops. Depth to bedrock is about 14 inches.

Buxton soils cover approximately 20% of the site and are moderately to somewhat poorly drained with depth to bedrock five feet or greater. These soils are sensitive to erosion, part because of a seasonal high water table and frost action.

Belgrade soils cover approximately 30% of the site and consist of deep, moderately drained nearly level medium textured soils. Depth to bedrock is 5 feet or greater. Wetness and seasonal high water table are characteristic. These soils are found adjacent to the small streams in the southern end of the property.

Suffield soils cover approximately 10% of the property and consist of deep, well-drained, steep, medium-textured soils. Depth to bedrock is five feet or greater. Steep slopes exceed 25%. These soils are located along two small streams in the southernmost portion of the property.

Topography

The topography of the property spans nearly 300 feet in elevation between the summit and the deepest gullies. Contours vary from rolling hillside to steep-sided ravines. Hedgehog Mountain, the highest point of land, is located in the northern portion of the property and has slopes ranging from 8% on the northeast side to 60% on the southwest side. South of the mountain,

slopes flatten and then again become steep in stream areas.

Hydrology

The property lies in the watershed of Merrill Brook, which drains into the Cousins River. Headwater streams and tributaries etched the numerous gullies and ravines cutting through the property. The property also includes several forested wetlands that are fed primarily by groundwater discharge along hillsides and streamside slopes.

Forest and land cover

Over the years, the Hedgehog Mountain forest has been managed for timber, retaining the essential character of forests in midcoast Maine. No old growth occurs on the site, but several stands are mature and offer the plant diversity expected within the region. In general, the forest communities of the property are healthy. Cavity trees, poorly formed trees, and potentially diseased trees occur in normal densities. There is some evidence of beech bark disease, and some of the white pine has been weeviled. None of this is unusual.

As detailed in a 1995 study conducted for the Conservation Commission by Woodlot Alternatives, Inc., the land supports several forest communities—hardwood, softwood, and mixed wood types—with a broad range of age, size, and species across the property. The diversity ranges from the dry, shallow-to-bedrock summit of Hedgehog Mountain to cool shaded hemlock slopes in the ravines, at the headwaters of Merrill Brook. Extensive hardwood slopes, facing primarily to the west and south, contain red oak, beech, sugar maple, white birch and white ash. Pure white pine stands lie at the heads of a network of deep, stream-cut ravines draining the tract to the south.

The shrub Leatherwood (*Dirca palustris*) occurs at the top and near the summit of Hedgehog Mountain. Leatherwood is an indicator of relatively rich (non-acidic) soil conditions, and is uncommon in Maine. Additionally, Back's Sedge (*Carex backii*) was identified near the summit trail in summer 2000. This species is currently listed as critically imperiled by the Maine Natural Areas Program. Otherwise, no endangered, threatened, or rare plant species are known to occur on the Hedgehog Mountain property.

Wildlife

Many of the bird species that occur are migratory (i.e. neotropical migrants such as warblers, vireos, thrushes). Resident species include forest songbirds, raptors, and upland game birds. Commonly occurring mammal species on the property include deer, moose, raccoon, porcupine, skunk, fisher, mink, gray squirrel, red squirrel, chipmunk, voles, moles, shrews, and bats. To date no effort has been made to document reptile, amphibian, or invertebrates utilizing Hedgehog Mountain's diverse habitats.

No rare or endangered wildlife species are known or expected to occur at the Hedgehog Mountain property. The Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife conducted initial surveys in the Town of Freeport and found no evidence of any Significant Wildlife Habitats or Essential Wildlife Habitats as specifically defined by state law.

Cultural and historic features

Along the so-called Soule Road are the foundation remains of a house and sizeable barn, which existed until about 1930. Also present, near each of these remains, are two stone-lined wells. The well nearer the house site remains in good condition, with its cover in good repair. Above the old house foundation, but below the summit, is a well-preserved stone wall.

A number of trails cross the Hedgehog Mountain property, and are outlined below. Some of these trails and footpaths have been created recently; others were originally logging roads.

- Hedgehog Trail leads from the parking lot and connects to the Summit Trail, Soule Road, and the Stone Wall Trail.
- Summit Trail extends from the Bridge/Hedgehog Trail, over the summit, to Soule Road.
- Wentworth Trail is a short loop accessible from Soule Road. Wentworth Trail is named after Paul Wentworth for his active involvement in trail building.
- Soule Road, an abandoned road that runs north-south across the former Soule property, ends at Reed Road.
- Reed Road, one of Freeport's abandoned range roads, runs from Hunter Road to the Freeport Transfer Station. The trail is not publicly accessible from either Hunter Road or the transfer station.
- Several loop trails extend through the former Keith property.

Management of Hedgehog Mountain

Oversight

The Freeport Conservation Commission ordinance (Section 35-8) assigns the Conservation Commission responsibility for the ongoing administration of Hedgehog Mountain, including monitoring uses of the area, overseeing maintenance, and other tasks. Through periodic updates of the Hedgehog Mountain Plan, the Conservation Commission will recommend to the Town Council administrative policies including, but not limited to land use, rules for the public use of the property, use of dedicated funds remaining from the purchase of the property, and annual budgets.

Budget

A Hedgehog Mountain Account dedicated to the property was established when the original parcel was purchased. This account funds administration and annual maintenance expenses for Hedgehog Mountain. Funds available are limited in amount to the annual income generated by the account, as prescribed in the Conservation Commission ordinance Section 35-8.

In 2000 and 2001, the account contributed towards acquisition of the Keith property. It is a priority of the Conservation Commission to identify and pursue outside sources of funding for site improvements and future expansions.

Goals

Hedgehog Mountain represents a unique public land holding and significant natural resource in Freeport. Its 196 acres contain diverse topography, forest types, and plant and animal habitats. The centerpiece of the property is the summit of Hedgehog Mountain. At 308 feet above sea level, it represents the highest point in Freeport, and is one of the last undeveloped high grounds. The summit offers expansive views towards the White Mountains and foothills in the west.

The Conservation Commission maintains the property as a natural resource where Freeport residents and visitors are able to experience nature in quiet solitude. The management of Hedgehog Mountain 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 Hedgehog Mountain plan has been developed in accordance with the Conservation Commission ordinance, which 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 have little or no impact on soils, water and air quality, noise levels, vegetation, and wildlife. Due to the erosive nature of the soils, activities such as mountain biking, horseback riding, and snowmobiling are limited to designated trails. All-terrain vehicles (ATVs) are not permitted.

Comment [CK1]: This sentence from Pratt’s Brook plan—please suggest any changes.

The Conservation Commission received comments in spring 2003 asking that the summit be opened to responsible mountain bikers. After much discussion, the Commission voted, as part of its recommendations, to continue to prohibit mountain bikes from the summit. Due to the existence of Back’s Sedge (critically imperiled), Leatherwood (uncommon status), and the erosion potential, the forest around the summit should be maintained in a natural condition. Mountain bikes, snowmobiles, and horses are not allowed on the summit trail. The Conservation Commission proposes to work with the local mountain biking club on designating trails within the property designed for mountain bikes.

Rules

The following rules will apply to Hedgehog Mountain:

1. The property is for day use only.
2. The property will be open from a half-hour before sunrise to a half-hour after sunset.
3. Camping and fires are not allowed.
4. All garbage must be carried out from the property.
5. Alcoholic beverages are not allowed.
6. Motorized vehicles are prohibited, except snowmobiles on designated trails in winter, and vehicles used for approved maintenance.
7. Mountain bikes are allowed on designated trails, and are prohibited from the summit trail.
8. Dogs are allowed but must be on leash or under voice control.
9. Hunting is allowed for shotgun and bow hunting only.

Management actions

The following actions will govern the future management of Hedgehog Mountain:

1. Establish a comprehensive signage system, including trail signage, boundary markers, features of interest, and information on hunting safety, and park rules.
2. Maintain trails for safe use and to correct and minimize erosion potential.
3. Maintain the natural character of the summit and the views that it affords.
4. Preserve the ecologic, historic, and archaeological features of the property.
5. Enhance wildlife habitat and forest health through sustainable forestry practices.
6. Encourage pet walkers to carry out waste.
7. Investigate options for acquiring adjacent lands and those necessary for possible connections to other public open spaces.
8. Pursue obtaining access to Hedgehog Mountain from Hunter Road and parking for 4-6 cars.

9. Improve deed by placing restrictions to preserve the property's conservation and open space values.
10. Engage local citizens and identify a core group of volunteers to help maintain trails, act as stewards, and guide nature walks.
11. Monitor the site regularly for the presence of invasive species and implement control techniques when necessary.
12. Allow hiking, cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, hunting for shotgun and bow hunters only, fishing, horseback riding, wildlife observation, and other compatible uses.
13. Encourage hunters to use safe hunting practices. Urge visitors to be aware of hunters and to wear blaze orange during hunting season.
14. Encourage users to respect property boundaries.