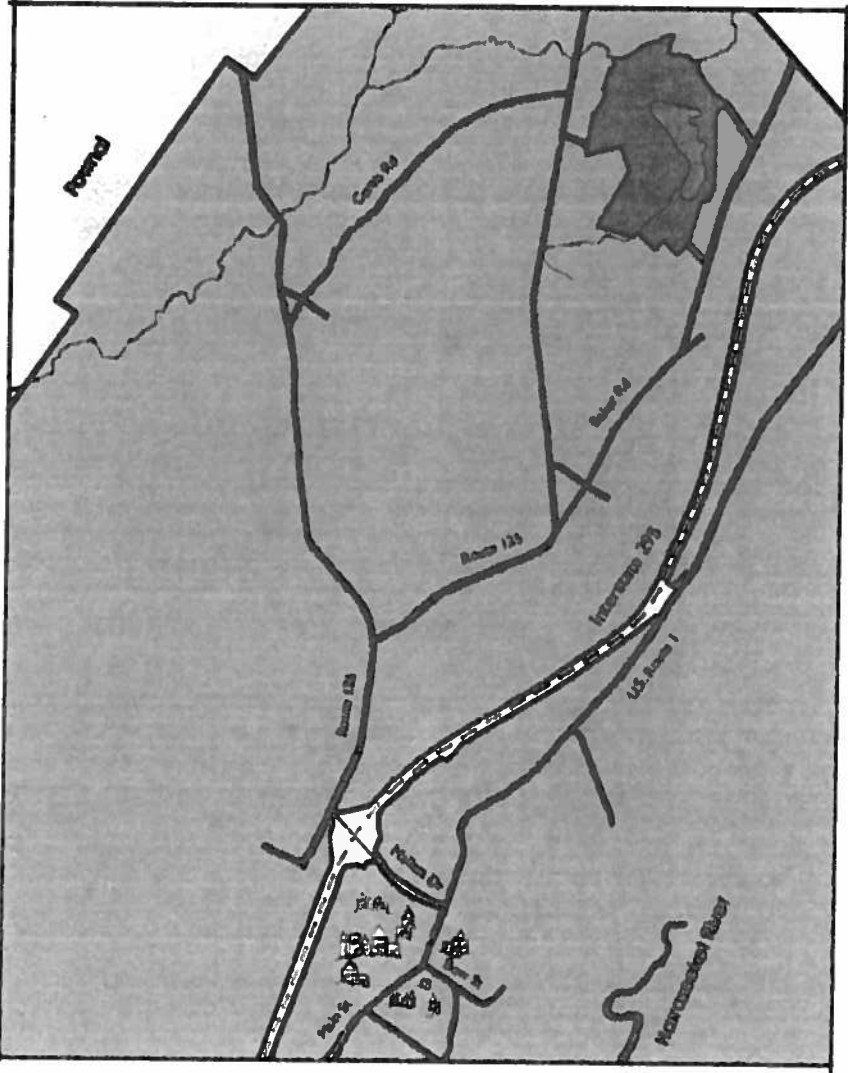


Florida Lake Management Plan



**Town of Freeport Conservation Commission
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Approved September 7, 2004**

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Purpose of the Plan

This plan for the management of the Town of Freeport's Florida Lake property was prepared by the Freeport Conservation Commission. A prior draft of this plan was discussed at a public workshop. 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 September 7, 2004.

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 Florida Lake or any properties acquired in the future. This is addressed in the management section of this report.

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

Overview

In 2002, the Town of Freeport completed the acquisition of approximately 167 acres surrounding Florida Lake. This effort started with a 68-acre land donation by David and Jennifer Marstaller. Acquisition of two adjacent properties, including the former Florida Lake Campground, was funded through a State Land for Maine's Future grant, a Casco Bay Important Habitats grant, and through the expenditure of funds from the Freeport Open Space Bond. An additional property was purchased with a U.S. Fish and Wildlife grant under the North American Wetland Conservation Act.

The acquired land is significant both from a local and regional perspective. A large block of unfragmented forest land extends from the northern edge of the site to the Durham Road in Brunswick. This is one of the largest contiguous blocks of habitat remaining in the Freeport/Brunswick region.

The wetlands on the site remain in exceptional condition, largely due to the undeveloped character of the surrounding landscape including setback from major roads, the undeveloped nature of the shoreline and unfragmented overland access for wildlife. Due to limited occurrence of open freshwater communities in southern Maine, this shallow open water and seasonally flooded scrub-shrub wetland creates varied and productive habitat that attracts many wetland-dependent species. One hundred and two species of birds, 21 species of mammals, and 15 species of reptiles and amphibians have been documented on the property.

The Maine State Planning Office has ranked the Florida Lake wetland complex as one of the most significant in the Casco Bay Watershed Wetlands Characterization. Separate GIS habitat analyses conducted by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service verify that the property protects important habitat for wading birds, black ducks, Canada geese and freshwater fish, and further predict that the Florida Lake property provides habitat for at least 14 rare, threatened, endangered or declining species of national significance. Particularly noteworthy for its breeding and migratory waterbirds, the Florida Lake property has been identified by the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife as High Value Wading Bird and Waterfowl Habitat.

Location of the Site

The 167-acre Florida Lake property is separated from the coast by Interstate 295 and the

commercial US Route 1 corridor. The eastern edge of the site lies approximately 2000 feet west of Interstate 295 within the upper watershed of Collins Brook. The property is located in the area between Wardtown Road (also known as Route 125) and Baker Road, close to the Freeport-Brunswick border. The property includes the entire shoreline of Florida Lake, a small pond known as Little Florida Lake, and borders a portion of Collins Brook.

Prior to the purchase of the four properties that make up the Florida Lake parcel, boundary surveys were conducted at the request of the Town of Freeport. The surveys were conducted by Owen-Haskell, Inc. Boundaries were blazed and flagged for ease of recognition. The Conservation Commission is in the process of posting signs identifying the border along the boundary property.

The property does not include direct road frontage on either Route 125 or Baker Road. Primary access to the pond shoreline and existing network of trails is via the former campground entrance on Route 125. The Town has a right-of-way over that entrance. The right-of-way is 20 feet wide and extends approximately 500 feet to the Town's Florida Lake property boundary. The right-of-way crosses land retained by Alan and Vera Rogers, the former owners of the campground.

A small gravel parking area located just within the Town's property line has been designated as the main parking area. A single-lane dirt and gravel road, approximately 0.3 miles, connects the parking area to the pond. This road is intended for use by approved maintenance vehicles and those with limited mobility. The Town also has two rights-of-way to the pond from the Baker Road. Both rights-of-way cross land retained by David and Jennifer Marstaller. These rights of way are unimproved.

Current and Historical Uses

This area of Freeport is zoned Rural Residential and includes low-density residential development, agricultural lands, and small businesses. Current uses of the Florida Lake parcel include hiking, birding, fishing, hunting, and snowmobiling.

Ron Cummings and his family farmed the land for many years, raising chicken, beef, and producing hay. According to historical notes by Mr. Cummings, beavers built a dam on the Collins Brook in the early 1940s, flooding almost 30 acres. The beavers eventually abandoned the dam, which washed out, leaving behind dead trees and other debris. In the early 1960s, the Cummings, like many other farmers in the area, began offering recreational opportunities on their property. The impoundment was rebuilt in the summer of 1964, and the resulting body of water was named Florida Lake because its shape resembled the state of Florida. The following year, owners installed a small railroad, bought an airboat, and stocked the lake with trout. The area was run as a recreation area for Freeport youth before being sold to Alan and Vera Rogers several years later. The area was turned into a private campground, and remained a campground until the town purchased the land in 2002. Old picnic tables, signage, shelters and fire rings have been removed. The former trail network has been mostly restored, but will require additional work in the future.

Description of Natural and Cultural Resources

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

Soils

The Soil Conservation Service Medium Intensity Soil Survey depicts soils within the Florida Lake property as being primarily Scantic and Buxton silt loams. Both soil types are typically somewhat poorly to poorly drained. Seasonal soil saturation is at or near the surface in a large portion of the site. Well-drained soils occur on most raised knolls in the former campground location and slopes south of the pond.

Geology

Much of the Florida Lake property lies within a Presumpscot formation and includes sub-marine outwash fans. The silty clays characteristic of the Presumpscot formation enabled the successful construction of the pond. Higher areas along Baker Road and southwest of the pond consist of thin drift over bedrock.

Topography

The Florida Lake property is relatively flat. Topographic elevation varies by only 30 feet across the site with high knolls limited to those along Baker Road and southwest of the pond.

Hydrology

The property lies in the watershed of Collins Brook, which drains into the Royal River. Four headwater streams contribute to the pond's hydrology. The property also includes several forested wetlands that are primarily fed by groundwater discharge along hillsides and streamside slopes. An artesian well on the adjacent property provides additional evidence of a high water table.

Forest and land cover

The wetlands on the site remain in exceptional condition, largely due to the undeveloped character of the surrounding landscape including setback from major roads, the undeveloped nature of the shoreline and unfragmented overland access for wildlife. Due to limited occurrence of open freshwater communities in southern Maine, this shallow open water and seasonally flooded scrub-shrub wetland creates varied and productive habitat that attracts many wetland-dependent species.

The forest communities of the Florida Lake property are healthy, but have been subject to varying degrees of harvesting for different wood products. The former Cummings property was largely managed for softwood pulp, and the former Marstaller land was managed for saw logs and hardwood pulp. The forests remain well-stocked, but a few stands appear under-stocked. It is not expected that cutting would improve stand health at this time.

Forest communities represented on the site include red maple swamp, red oak-northern hardwoods-white pine forest, and spruce-northern hardwoods forest. Open wetland communities include alder shrub thickets, pickerelweed-macrophyte aquatic bed, mixed graminoid shrub marsh, bulrush bed, cat-tail marsh, and water-lily-macrophyte aquatic bed.

Wildlife habitat

The habitat values provided by the site are a key attribute. The shallow, well-vegetated pond offers breeding, and opportunity for a myriad of dabbling ducks, shorebirds, and wading birds. The riparian shrub and forest cover provides nesting opportunity for many neotropical migrants. During migration, concentrations of wading birds, waterfowl, shorebirds, and songbirds are at their highest.

Mammals typical of rural Cumberland County all occur at this site. Some of the more notable occurrences include river otter, moose, and a relatively high population of snowshoe hare likely resulting from dense balsam fir regeneration on the former Cummings property.

Many naturally occurring and artificially created vernal pools are located within the Florida Lake property. The highest value pools occur in winterberry-dominated basins associated with the lake, but isolated behind ice berms. Many borrow ponds created during trail and road construction function as vernal pools. A survey of pools will be completed.

Fisheries

Efforts to survey fish populations in the pond and Collins Brook have been limited. Anecdotal reports from local fishermen indicate that the pond supports pickerel, bullhead, and possibly bass. The freshwater mussel *elliptio* is also known to occur in the pond. Collins Brook is known to support a native brook trout population. Two species of freshwater mussel (*elliptio* and eastern pearlshell) also occur in Collins Brook.

Invasive species

Few invasive species occurrences have been found on the property. Purple loosestrife could have significant implications for the emergent wetland communities however this species has not been found on the site. The only invasive species identified are located at the pond impoundment and along the former narrow gauge rail bed. These plants include *lonicera morrowii*, *rosa multiflora*, and *frangula alnus*. It is likely that these species were planted to enhance wildlife values during pond construction prior to knowledge of their invasive habits. Where possible, stems of these species have been cut, but follow up monitoring will be required.

Cultural and historic features

As part of the State Land for Maine's Future review, the Maine Historic Preservation Commission conducted a phase I archeological survey of the property during the fall 2002. No indications of prehistoric habitation were discovered as a result of this effort. Historic artifacts include several stonewalls, a stone-lined well, and a granite slab bridge found during the construction of the pond.

Existing site amenities

The presence of a recreational area and private campground prior to purchase by the Town of Freeport has resulted in a network of hiking trails, a central snowmobile trail, and a well-maintained gravel road. During fall 2002 the Commission restored many of the former trails and cut brush along the access road. A new bridge has also been installed for pedestrian access from the former campground to "Little Florida Lake" located on the former Cummings property.

Management of Florida Lake

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 Florida Lake.

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 Commission is working to preserve the natural beauty and ecological functioning of Florida Lake while supporting recreational opportunities for the citizens of Freeport and visitors to the community. Current uses of the Florida Lake parcel include hiking, birding, fishing, hunting, and snowmobiling. The intent is to continue to allow these uses, improve public access, and control access to particularly sensitive areas.

The management of Florida Lake 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 Florida Lake 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 have little or no impact on soils, water and air quality, noise levels, vegetation, and wildlife. Due to the wet and 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.

Rules

The following rules will apply to Florida Lake:

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 permitted.
4. All garbage must be carried out from the property.
5. Alcoholic beverages are not permitted.
6. Motorized vehicles are prohibited, except snowmobiles on designated trails in winter, and vehicles used for approved maintenance.
7. Mountain bikes are permitted on designated trails.
8. Dogs are allowed but must be on leash or under voice control.
9. Hunting is permitted for shotgun and bow hunting only.

Management actions

The following actions shall govern the future management of Florida Lake:

1. Amend the Conservation Commission ordinance to assign the Conservation Commission responsibility for the ongoing management of Florida Lake.

2. Establish a comprehensive signage system, including trail signage, boundary markers, features of interest, 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.
5. Preserve the ecologic, historic, and archaeological features of the property.
6. Enhance wildlife habitat and forest health through sustainable forestry practices.
7. Encourage pet walkers to carry out waste.
8. Investigate options for acquiring adjacent lands and those necessary for possible connections to other public open spaces.
9. Engage local citizens and identify a core group of volunteers to help maintain trails, act as stewards, and guide nature walks.
10. Monitor the site regularly for the presence of invasive species and implement control techniques when necessary.
11. Work with partners to restore and improve the existing impoundment for ease of long-term maintenance including water level manipulation.
12. Install nesting structures, observation blinds, and boardwalks to improve wildlife viewing options.
13. Allow hiking, cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, hunting for shotgun and bow hunters only, fishing, horseback riding, wildlife observation, and other compatible uses.
14. Encourage hunters to use safe hunting practices. Urge visitors to be aware of hunters and to wear blaze orange during hunting season.
15. Encourage users to respect property boundaries.