

Management Plans for
Conservation Commission Lands

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INTRODUCTION

Within the town of Williamstown, there are 124 parcels--about 1/4 of the total land area--with some sort of open space/recreation interest or restriction. Our project involved nine of these parcels; the properties overseen and managed by the town's Conservation Commission. The nine parcels with which we were involved vary greatly in size from one acre (Bloedel Park) to 176 acres (the Hunter property). They are located in all areas of town, forming a rough ring around the central area of Williamstown (Figure 1). Some are within easy walking distance of many town residents, while others would require a good hike or even a drive. The parcels themselves are extremely diverse in nature. Some are entirely wooded, while others are in agricultural production. Some already have a good deal of use and are commonly known to residents, while others lie unknown and unnoticed even by nearby residents.

As a group, we came to this project with almost no knowledge of the nine parcels; as college students and residents of Williamstown, we shared what we quickly came to perceive as a general ignorance of the lands. We were astounded as we began visiting the parcels, discovering their great beauty, lovely views, and unique habitats. We quickly came to recognize the value of these lands as we worked, and our hope grew that we could somehow set in motion a process that could both improve the quality of the parcels, and to the appropriate degree, share their beauty and benefits with the residents of the town. Working within the framework of an Environmental Planning workshop, our assignment was to facilitate design of management plans to make the sites more effective educational and natural resources for the town. It is our hope that the following document will aid the Conservation Commission in the process of designing concrete management plans for the lands so that they can truly become a resource, rather than a burden or forgotten space, for the town and its residents.

PROJECT GOALS

As a group, we came into the realization that there were two fundamental obstacles to our desire to see these lands used well and shared by the residents of the town. The first was a general lack of knowledge about the parcels, and the second was the lack of a definitive management plan for each parcel. These two obstacles, then, generated our primary goals: to create baseline documentation for each property, and to formulate suggestions for their appropriate uses and management.

Baseline Documentation

Our first goal was to collect and organize information on the nine parcels of land. We felt that a base of knowledge about the properties was one of the most important things we could provide for the Commission. We designed a list of knowledge objectives, and spent much of our initial time collecting information, researching, and visiting the parcels. While the Conservation Commission's files do contain information relevant to the parcels, we recognized the need for more current, comprehensive and relevant information regarding each of the properties before real decisions could be made about their appropriate use and management. The following section describes in detail our areas of research, and our methods in collecting information. Each set of baseline documentation for each parcel contains the following six items:

Maps: To know what a land is, you first have to know where it is. First, we located each of the parcels on the Williamstown assessors maps. However, assessors maps are not legal documents, and in the case of some parcels where information appears to be missing or wrong, we feel that surveying is necessary. In addition, we have provided topographic maps for each of the parcels. The topographic maps clearly show the topography of the parcel, as well as its features relative to the topography of the surrounding area. We obtained digitized versions of the maps we used from the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission and the town of Williamstown. The

assessors map overlays on the topographic maps were generated in GIS and are saved on a disc; we did this in order to facilitate use of the information by individuals or groups in the future.

History of the Land: We visited the registry of deeds in Adams and determined past owners of the parcels. In many cases, we were also able to find out something about the history of the parcels by talking to residents or users of the land; in some cases, the parcel had been written about by a past Williams class. Another information source was aerial photographs, and in some cases, drawings and other material in the Conservation Commission files.

Site Description: While we were not able to complete a comprehensive inventory for each of the nine parcels, we were able to generate a general catalogue of land, water, and wildlife features for each parcel. The catalogues were completed through numerous site visits; however, we were limited by our own capabilities and knowledge, and suggest that further information could be gathered to supplement what we have found.

Current Structures and Developments: Many of the parcels have been used in the past to varying degrees. Information in the Conservation Commission files sometimes referred to trails, roads, or picnic knolls, but there was often no indication of whether things that were mentioned still existed. Since structures and developments can influence appropriate uses of the lands, we used our site visits to determine what actually existed on the lands, and whether things mentioned in the past still existed.

Current Site Uses: As in the previous category, the stress here was on the word current. To the best of our ability, we determined how the parcels are used today, focusing on who (what groups, ages, etc.) uses the properties, and how often (which season, how many people per year). We determined use primarily by talking to nearby residents, and members of the larger Williamstown community.

General evaluations of neighboring regions: Finally, during our site visits, we noted land uses surrounding the parcels: whether land was primarily agricultural, residential, or commercial. We also tried to evaluate whether surrounding uses or issues on adjacent parcels would affect our lands in any way.

Management Recommendations and Considerations

Once we had established the baseline information for each property our second goal was to develop management options for each land. The possible options for each parcel came from a variety of places, including our own imagination as well as suggestions from people already involved with the property. We evaluated each option by a variety of criteria listed below and in many cases chose one recommendation we felt optimized these criteria.

Our first criterion was the specific nature of the land itself as represented by the baseline information that we had collected. Since these lands are under the auspices of the Conservation Commission, we felt that preserving the environmental integrity of each parcel is important. In keeping with this aim, we investigated flora, fauna, soil, and hydrology of each property in order to understand what environmental qualities are available to incorporate in the human use of the land as well as what impacts such use might have. In some cases we found the environmental qualities of the property extremely limiting to the use of the property, but for the most part this information simply provided a guide to the most appropriate uses of the unique characters of each land. Besides environmental qualities, the baseline information provided us with past and present human use of the property. We considered these factors to be an important aspect of the character of the property because past and present uses provide a benchmark for what has been or is considered appropriate by those who actually use the land. In some cases these uses are manifested as deed restrictions in which case they are not only a benchmark, they are also a legally binding mandate of what can or cannot be done on the property.

Our management recommendations reflect more than just what we learned about the lands themselves, however. The second major set of criteria that we evaluated for each option was the goals, abilities, and limitations of the Conservation Commission. Through conversation

with the Williamstown Conservation Commission and examination of the Massachusetts Association of Conservation Commissions training manual, we determined two goals of the Conservation Commission which could be met through appropriate use of their lands¹. These goals include (1) the desire to provide passive recreation to the town and (2) to conserve and protect open space and critical habitat in Williamstown. We found for the most part that both of these goals could be met, but for lands where the fulfillment of one goal was exclusive of the other, we tended to place a greater emphasis on protection of critical habitat. We feel that this is in keeping with desires of the current Conservation Commission as well as the first guideline of stewardship listed in the MACC handbook which states the purpose of said stewardship is to “Ensure[] the land’s ecological integrity for future residents.”² We also found that the Conservation Commission’s ability to meet these goals is limited by their funding and labor capabilities, so we took these factors into account when making recommendations. In general we prioritized our options with these limitations in mind so that the Conservation Commission could determine how to best use any available funding and labor. We also looked for other resources available to the Conservation Commission that could increase the feasibility of a recommendation.

Since these are town owned lands, we looked at what Williamstown in general wants from its open spaces. We determined the needs and wishes of the town as a whole by using the 1995 Open Space Plan which includes a public survey of 181 town residents. The town goals for open space closely matched those of the Conservation Commission, focusing on increasing passive recreation, preserving open space, and conserving natural resources³. The Open Space plan highlighted the additional needs of diversity and equity of uses of open spaces. In order to help meet these needs with Conservation Commission lands we tried to recommend uses of the land that would be accessible to many different groups, especially the elderly and families with

small children. We recognized as well that much of Williamstown's economy is based on tourism, and tried to consider how the use of these lands could be made attractive to both residents and visitors alike.

The last criteria we looked at in detail when providing our management recommendations was how public and private interactions could be developed for these properties. We looked especially at partnerships that the Conservation Commission could foster that would help them to meet both their goals and the Town's goals for these lands. These partnerships we hope can be specifically helpful in overcoming some of the limitations of the Conservation Commission with regard to resources. In most cases partnerships will also have the added benefit of involving and informing a larger number of residents about the lands.

THE NINE PARCELS:

BASELINE INFORMATION AND MANAGEMENT SUGGESTIONS

The following are summaries of the nine parcels, containing baseline recommendations and our management suggestions.

Bloedel Park

Introduction:

Bloedel Park, located at the intersection of Routes 7 and 43, Hancock and Green River Roads (Figure 2), and Sloan Rd, is a small, underutilized parcel of land with significant historic value. Currently it consists of a few trees along the Green River and a dirt road connecting Rt. 7 and 43. With a few improvements and proper management, Bloedel could become a pleasant rest stop for passing motorists or a nice place to eat a picnic lunch.

History:

Bloedel Park, despite its current unassuming appearance, has had a significant place in the history of South Williamstown. A number of historic buildings, now gone, were once located where Bloedel Park now sits, at the Five Corners intersection. In 1724 it was the site of a woolen mill and hatters shop. A blacksmith lived there in 1796, and a store owner lived there in the 1820s. A post office and general store occupied the site from the 1820s until 1926. During the 1960s and 70s it was variously the Volunteer Fire Department and an art studio. Eleanore P. Bloedel gave the park as a gift to the town of Williamstown in 1973, to be managed by the Conservation Commission. The park is included in the National Register of Historic Places as part of the Five Corners Historic District, established under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966.⁴

Site description:

Bloedel Park is 1 acre of land, primarily flat, with slight overall slope downward from north to south, towards the Green River. The Green River flows the length of the site on the south side, and flows under the bridge of Rt. 7 at the edge of the site. The bank of the river is quite steep (estimate of 2 vertical feet in per 1 horizontal foot at the very edge) except at the point

...closest to the bridge where the bank is slightly more gradual. Soil erosion is occurring along the steepest part of the bank, generally on the western portion. Trees in the center of the site include gray birch (*Betula populifolia*), ash (*Fraxinus* sp.), red maple (*Acer rubrum*), and pin oak (*Quercus palustris*). These are of varying sizes, although all are young (15-30 years old). Species along the border of the river include *Cornus* sp., *B. populifolia*, *Fraxinus* sp., honeysuckle, *Prunus virginiana* (choke cherry), *A. rubrum*, *A. saccharum* (sugar maple), and *Tilia americana* (American Linden), among others. Several lilac bushes have been planted near the river at the southwest corner. There are several dead trees, and the limb of the large white ash overhanging the road is cracked and looks ready to fall. Located the bottom of a hill, the site is picturesque, with views of the river, farms, the store, and to some extent, the surrounding mountains.⁵



Bloedel Park : the view facing Store at Five Corners

Current structures and developments:

Currently there are two concrete and wood picnic tables, one located in the center portion of the site, one along the river. One large green garbage can is located next to one of the picnic tables. One gravel/crushed rock road enters the site off Rt. 43 south and goes through the site--fairly close to the river--with another access point to Rt. 7 directly adjacent to the bridge over the river. This road is in bad shape, unattractive, and full of potholes. In addition, it is not well defined; it is spreading into the grassy area. A faint trail runs down from the lawn to the river near the bridge where the bank isn't as steep. Adjacent land uses include: residential (across Rt. 43, across the river, across Rt. 7), commercial (Store at Five Corners), and agricultural (a farm diagonally across the road).⁶

Current site uses:

According to the people at Five Corners, the site is used primarily by people traveling by as a rest stop; people will pull in and use the picnic tables and look at the river. There are very few other rest areas, so this land is valuable for this use. Truckers will often park on the road in order to rest; this use should probably be discouraged, as it is contributing to the deterioration of the road. Some fishermen use the site as an access point to the river (probably the reason for the faint trail noted above).⁷

Five Corners also noted that many accidents happen at this intersection, and cars may “go flying over” into the site. The area has been used as a parking lot during festivals held by the store, although this is an illegal use that has been discouraged by the Conservation Commission.⁸

Management Recommendations:

We have determined several management options, listed in order of most pressing to least pressing.

1. *Existing vegetation in disrepair should be removed.*

Removing dead trees and limbs is a basic safety consideration and would enhance the beauty of the site and allow a better view of the river. This is basic maintenance that should be addressed by the Parks and Cemeteries Department.

2. *The entrance from Rt. 7 should be closed off, and the road from Rt. 43 changed into a small crushed gravel parking area.*

Access should be changed to prevent cars from driving through the park, and to prevent it from being used as a parking lot for The Store At Five Corners. The access point from Rt. 7 is not needed: cars coming from the south do not see it in time to turn there, and cars coming from the north could choose to turn in on Hancock Rd in order to access the site. Restricting access to Rt. 43 would encourage visitors to use it as a rest stop. The parking area should be large enough that drivers would not have to back out onto Rt. 43. This improvement would probably not be very costly to the town, as it would entail only spreading more gravel for the parking lot, planting additional grass, and erecting attractive barriers to keep cars from parking on the grass.

3. *Erosion could be controlled along the river either by planting a ground-cover plant with dense root systems, or by using rip-rap.*

Erosion control would improve the quality of the Green River. A path for fishermen could be maintained on the more gradual bank, and could be reinforced and/or made into steps to control erosion.

4. *More picnic tables and/or benches should be added to facilitate passive recreation. Existing trash receptacles should be replaced by more aesthetically pleasing containers.*

Adding more structures for passive recreation would encourage a diversity of users to visit the park, including families and the elderly. More motorists could use the park as a rest stop. The Williamstown Parks and Cemeteries Department is planning to build picnic tables this winter (1998-99). Each picnic table will cost roughly \$200-\$300, depending on the method of construction. Charcoal grills would cost \$118 each.

5. *More trees and other vegetation could be planted.*

Two or three more trees could be planted in the center grassy area, to create shade for picnickers. Ground cover and/or flowering bushes could be planted to reduce the area to be mowed and maintained. Perennials would require little maintenance after a few years. If funds permit, a professional landscape architect might be consulted to determine what combination of plants would be most suited for the conditions of the area (low maintenance, road salt, harsh winters). Adding more vegetation would make the park more attractive to visitors, adding to the scenic character of South Williamstown. Trees and shrubs are expensive, and vary depending on species. We recommend hiring a landscape architect to determine what arrangement would be appropriate for Bloedel Park. The Williamstown Garden Club has expressed interest in planting flowerbeds in town parks, and might create a planting for Bloedel.

6. *The South Williamstown Historical Society might add a historic monument or sign to the park.*

Adding a sign would attract tourists to the park and would capitalize on the historic character of the property, as well as being an educational resource.

Partnerships:

Bloedel Park is a very visible property, and accordingly would be a good opportunity for the community to get involved in maintaining town property. We suggest contacting the following potential partners:

The Store At Five Corners, to contribute funds for plantings and structures. We talked to the new owner, who expressed her interest in beautifying the park.⁹

The Williamstown Garden Club, to fund and/or coordinate planting of flower beds.

The South Williamstown Historical Society, to make a historic sign.

The community at large, through Volunteer Days or other community events.

Contacts:

Meddy Woodyard, owner, The Store At Five Corners, (413) 458-3176

Betsy Taylor, Williamstown Garden Club, (413) 458-8429

Bob McCarthy, landscape architect, (413) 458-3070

Pamela Weatherbee, (413) 458-3538

Paul Yarder, Parks and Cemeteries manager, (413) 458-4288

Bridges Pond

Introduction:

Bridges Pond is a property with distinctly complex features that lies to the south of the Hoosic River, to the east of northbound Rt. 7 (Figures 3 and 4). The man-made pond, originally built to service steam engines for the railroad, is fairly contaminated, difficult to access, and poorly maintained. Nevertheless, some town residents use it for walking and other recreation, and it supports a variety of wildlife. Bridges Pond is in need of extensive management, but with proper care it could become a valuable recreational and educational resource.

History:

The 1990 Environmental Studies 302 project, “Bridges Pond Conservation Area: Site History and Management Proposal,” has a comprehensive history of the site, from which the bulk of this history is taken. At an unknown date, the Boston and Maine Railroad created the pond by diverting Henderson Brook. The pond provided water needed to supply steam engines. Before that time in 1850, in its earliest known historical reference, the land was part of the extensive Bridges Farm where the Bridges family sold ice from pools of water among the marshes of Henderson Brook. In the 1920’s and 30’s, the farm ran a steam powered sawmill on the northwest shore of the pond. In the 40’s, 50’s, and 60’s, the pond was a recreational resource used for ice-skating, swimming, and fishing. The banks were reportedly firmer and drier while the water was deeper and cleaner¹⁰

In 1969, the town bought the 25 acre lot from the Boston and Maine Railroad for \$2,750.¹¹ Half of the sum was paid for by state self-help funds.¹² The deed designated that the land be given to the Conservation Commission for administration and maintenance. It also specified that no “right of way either by necessity or otherwise” over remaining the railroad land was included with the conveyance.¹³

In 1972, the water of the pond was found to have very high concentrations of chloride and phosphates. Natural drinking water has a chloride content of 2.5 mg/liter; Bridges had a concentration of 305 mg/liter. The total phosphate concentration limit is 0.05 mg/liter, but Bridges had a much higher concentration, 2.4 mg/liter.¹⁴

In 1990, the Hoosic River Watershed Association and students from Mt. Greylock Regional High School asked permission to clean up the area.¹⁵ Also in 1990, the Williams College Environmental Studies 102 class surveyed the pond for vegetation.¹⁶ Some students in the class devised independent projects on the contamination of plants, sediments, and fish. These students found that the fish and sediments had greater concentrations of contamination than the plants.¹⁷

Site Description:

The entrance to the Bridges Pond property is marked by a white hanging sign most easily seen when driving south on Route 7. Traveling north on Rt. 7, the entrance is immediately on the right after crossing the bridge which spans the Hoosic River and the railroad tracks. The beginning of the road is on town land, but, at the bottom of the ramp from Rt. 7, it merges with the railroad access road following the tracks. Cars have difficulty using the rough and rocky road, but there is no designated parking space on Rt. 7. On the railroad access road, there is currently a fallen tree which forces a car to drive on the gravel of the track bed.¹⁸

Bridges Pond is located in a depression south of Hoosic Road and north of the Hoosic River. It is part of the Hoosic River drainage. Though the 25-acre property has wooded areas on its narrow ends, it is dominated by a 7-acre pond created by the diversion of Henderson Brook.¹⁹ The pond is located at a relatively low elevation, on flat land that slopes up to North Hoosac Road (figure 4). The pond is somewhat protected from the wind since it is in a depression, and is

exposed to fairly continuous sunlight throughout the day since trees are generally not directly on the water's edge.

Henderson Brook enters on the upper east corner and exits on the lower east side. The northern side has a small border of cattails. A field lies between the cattails and the lawns of the houses on North Hoosac Rd bordering that area. Near the north west corner in an outcrop of cattails, a large and recently installed culvert dumps road drainage directly into the pond from North Hoosac Rd.²⁰

A soft grassy and vegetated bank steeply slopes the few feet down to the water on the western side. There is a trail following the western perimeter from the tracks to the field on the north side. It crosses a very wet area that can be traversed using a crude bridge made from rough pieces of wood from crates and a metal "Eating Fish May Be Hazardous To Your Health" sign (see picture). The southern side has an almost flat slope with cattails and *Phragmites spp.* in the shallow water and thick vegetation on dryer margins. A wide muddy area that could be used as a boat ramp cuts through the vegetation between the railroad tracks and the water.

A peninsula covered with birches extends out cutting off the sight of the entrance of Henderson Brook from the boat ramp. This south eastern peninsula is the location of the picnic knoll . It has a trail clearly visible from the railroad tracks. The knoll itself is little more than a slightly cleared area on the edge of the pond with a number of mature trees. There is a fire circle and a small bench constructed from old logs. There are no other trails leading to the picnic knoll. The pond looks fairly shallow; debris is visible underneath the surface even in the center of the pond. Dead logs and various water plants are distributed throughout.

An old landfill lies on the adjacent land to the east while the town's phase II landfill is across the tracks to the south. Beyond the Phase II landfill lies the Hoosic River. Most of the land is covered by trees and scrub growth including maples, paper birch, quaking aspen, sumac,

and alder except the grassy border between the houses and the pond. Trash litters the ground around the pond, especially near the railroad tracks. There is even a stuffed chair along one of the paths.

Both human and wildlife activity is apparent. Ducks and geese use the pond while other birds can be heard in the trees. Evidence of beavers is obvious in the chewed quaking aspens around the picnic knoll and south of the tracks. To the north, there are eleven visible houses and cars passing on North Hoosac Rd. are both visible and audible.

The surrounding lands are predominantly privately owned. To the north west of the pond, the Spring Meadows housing development has a small round pond at a high elevation. Currently, there is a trail that extends south from this parking lot and crosses Bridges to meet the tracks.



Bridges: trash walkway, including sign

Key Issues:

Access is large problem for Bridges Pond. The access described in the site description is technically illegal because the deed specifically states that the land was bought without a right of way over railroad land. The entrance on Rt. 7 is on the land, but the lower part of the road next to the tracks is not.

We explored other points for access around the pond. The most obvious possibility is the old access road to the east of the property. Taconic Lumber owns this non-residential (including the old landfill) lot. The remnants of an old access road to the landfill are only evidenced by a narrow foot path. The path is blocked by a five foot pile of debris. This old road has access to North Hoosac Rd. at the intersection for Henderson Rd. Although refurbishing this access road and creating a parking lot is an attractive option to the town, it is on land owned by Taconic Lumber. The company is concerned about theft if access were to go through their land.²¹

Another point of access could be from the northwest where the housing development is located. This land is owned by Scarfoni Realty and includes abundant parking. Some of this parking is in the corner where the path crosses Bridges from the small pond. Elain Ealy, of Scarfoni Realty, said that access is not permissible across their land, but does not rule out exploring the acquisition of a legal right-of-way.²² Without the permission of abutting landowners, a trail from the entrance on Rt. 7 to the pond could be sufficient for access. However, this option does not solve parking issues.

A second key issue for the pond is the contamination. Some points of pollution are uncertain, but others are quite clear. From the past, the railroad use and the abutting landfill could be points of pollution.²³ More recently, on the north margin of the pond near the west side, the culvert was noted in the site description. This drainage runs directly from the road bringing toxic levels of salt into the water. Intensifying this problem is the lack circulation caused by

Henderson Brook. Construction upstream along the brook has increased the silt in the pond.²⁴ It has created a delta that prevents a large amount of water to flush through the pond from east to west. The entrance and exit of the brook is limited to the small eastern part of the pond.

Recommendations and Partnerships:

Our recommendations depend on improvements in access. It is not appropriate to encourage further use of the pond without devising a legal means of access. The easiest way to create access is to create a trail from Rt. 7, but this option does not provide for parking. The other options are preferred because they could be used by visitors driving to the site. The previous mentioned option of permission or a right of way from the railroad or other abutting land owners is the most apparent. Designated parking may be possible with either the housing development or the lumber access road. The access option on land owned by Taconic Lumber includes building a new road and parking lot.

If access is improved, visitors should be encouraged to use the land. According to Leslie Reed Evans, most town residents do not even know it exists. Simple improvements like cleaning up trash, creating new trails, and adding picnic tables can improve the recreational attraction of the property. If the Conservation Commission has the resources, we also recommend a major clean-up of the pond. The Williamstown Rural Lands Foundation has expressed an interest in improving the environmental quality of the pond.²⁵ Although this would probably take the expertise of an environmental engineer, some basic improvements we can add are to increase the circulation in the pond, prevent road drainage from running directly into the pond, and determine a way to remove contaminated sediment.²⁶ If this major overhaul were performed, the pond could possibly be used for swimming or fishing for keeps.

Even without an intensive clean-up, the pond is a great resource for education. It has already been used a resource for the Williams Environmental Studies 102 class to study wetlands

contamination. It could also be used by school groups and nature programs. The wetlands could be delineated and species identified by signs. These programs could demonstrate the importance of wetlands and the Conservation Commission's role in wetland protection.

If access is not improved, i.e., made legal, the public should not be encouraged to use Bridges Pond. Those residents that use the pond now will continue to use it, but the illegal access should not be advertised. Improving the environmental quality of the land is still important. The trash should be picked up and the land maintained, even if access is not improved.

As previously mentioned, the WRLF has expressed an interest in improving the environmental quality of the pond by changing the Henderson Brook drainage²⁷. In addition, there are grants that could provide funding for restoring a wetland. For maintenance, the community can be asked to volunteer their energy to clean up the area.

Contacts:

Elain Ealy, Scarfoni Realty, 664-4539.

Taconic Lumber, 458-8121

The Burbank Property

Introduction

The Burbank property is the Conservation Commission's second largest parcel: 139 acres. The majority of the property is located between Stratton and Luce roads, just south of Longview Terrace; the other segment of the property is east of Luce road (figure 5). The Burbank property has historically been used for agriculture, and this use continues today. Issues for the Burbank property include whether or not access and non-agricultural use should be increased and if so, how that could be accomplished. Our recommendations for the property primarily follow historic uses of the site.

History

The land was owned by Sherman Burbank in the 1940's, but was actually farmed by the Chenail family beginning in 1943. In 1950, the Burbank land let the land go for taxes in order to keep someone (apparently the son-in-law) from inheriting the land. The town received three parcels from the Burbanks; two are included in the current Burbank property, while the other was used for the Williamstown Reservoir. At that time, the Burbanks believed the Chenails would be able to purchase the land from the town. However, when the Chenail family attempted to purchase the land, they were told that the town was required to sell to the highest bidder. There was an article in the Town Warrant directing the town to sell the land to the highest bidder, but this was never carried out. Despite this, the Chenail family has continued to farm the property through through periods of both Burbank and town ownership^{28,29}.

The land had two structures on it when it was acquired by the town. The barn was destroyed by fire in the spring of 1991 and had to be removed. There was also a house, which Mr. Chenail used for a few years as a storage place for farm equipment, but in the fall of 1995 it was determined that the building was structurally unsound and it was demolished by the lowest bidder. Some maintenance work on the hedgerow along the property was done by volunteers in 1991. One interesting historical use of the land was for a hang-gliding landing area; Williams students apparently used to hang-glide off a cleared area on top of Mt. Prospect and land on the

upper part of the Burbank property. Mr. Chenail stated that the hang-gliding was stopped by the state for liability reasons, and that while he hadn't minded the activity, it scared his cows³⁰.

Site Description

The Burbank property lies at the base of Mt. Prospect, and generally slopes down from south to north. There are both steep and flat areas on the parcel. The land near Stratton Road and along Longview Terrace slopes gently up to the highest point on the parcel, but the area near Luce Road forms a steep gully. The part of the lot that is east of Luce Road is fairly flat (figure 6). The land is primarily open, with several--at least three--corn fields and grassy areas that are hayed (figure 7). Soil on the Burbank property is primarily Amenia silt loam, which is well suited for cultivated crops and is excellent for agriculture³¹. The parcel also includes two woodlots; the larger one is adjacent to Longview Terrace, while the other is on the more southern portion of the lot. The larger woodlot has clear evidence of past logging; there are many large old rotting stumps scattered on the ground. Current tree species include black cherry, beech, and ash; sugar maples are the primary samplings. There are several paths running through this woodlot, but they are not well defined. The lower woodlot along Longview Terrace also has a variety of species. There are a number of huge old sugar maples, and other species including black cherry, oak, striped maple, hop hornbeam, a few white pine, and many sapling beech trees. This woodlot does not have trails, but its openness makes it easy to walk through and it is more extensive than the other woodlot. There are several hedgerows on the site, including some along Stratton Road and Longview Terrace, and one through the middle of the property perpendicular to Stratton and Luce Roads. There is a fence along the Luce Road edge of the parcel. A small drainage area runs through the middle of the property but does not have enough water to truly be classified as a stream. The lot has one unpaved, rough road that runs from Chenail property to the cornfield on the western side of the parcel. Other than this road, the land does not appear to have any structures still standing on it; the barn that was once on the land has burned down, and now its spot is occupied by piles of hay bales. The view from the top of the hill includes beautiful views of the mountains, Williamstown, and parts of North Adams.

Access to the parcel is limited despite a large amount of road frontage. Private lots to the north along Longview Terrace restrict access on that side. A thick hedgerow, which functions as a sort of fence for the herd of cows, and a small, deep, ditch run along Stratton Road, where parking is limited due to the quality and width of the road. The land has no access to the south, which is also agricultural land. The Luce Road side of the property is fenced, and a deep gully along the road would make access to the main part of the land difficult³².



Burbank: southeast view of Prospect Mt.

Current Uses

The Burbank property is legally preserved from development, which limits the number of possible uses of the land. Currently, the primary use of the land is agriculture as it has been in the past; there are several corn fields and hay meadows. A herd of cows roams the property, and three horses live on the western end. The Chenail family has a three year permit to grow corn on 30 acres and to hay 67 acres of the property. This generates revenue for the town at a rate of \$350.00 per acre for corn, and \$140.00 an acre for hay³³. The property is also used to a limited

extent by area residents for cross country skiing, and by some young people for an area to ride ATVs. Mr. Chenail stated that the land had been used as a shooting area, although it is unclear whether it still occurs or not. The use of the property as a shooting area may have led to the Conservation Commission signs--which were posted at one time--being torn down; Mr. Chenail said that he thought the reasoning (on the part of those who objected to the shooting and took the signs down) was that if no one knew the land was town land, then fewer people would think it was available for shooting practice. Mr. Chenail also stated that he did not think that many residents knew that the land was town owned³⁴.

The Burbank property is surrounded by agricultural land to the east, south, and west. The Chenail farm, easily visible from most of the Burbank property, is adjacent to the land; Mr. Chenail still operates a dairy but no longer bottles his own milk. Another major use of adjacent land is for residential development; a substantial residential area has developed in the area between Route 2 and Longview Terrace, along both Stratton and Luce roads, and the land between them. Development in this area has been relatively rapid; Mr. Chenail stated that Luce road has gone from having five houses to being heavily developed within the past forty years³⁵.

Management Options

We came up with three possible management options for the Burbank property. Before putting forth these options, however, we would like to make a basic recommendation: that the boundaries of the Burbank property again be posted as Conservation Commission land. We do not feel that a survey of the Burbank property is necessary since roads and hedgerows mark most of the boundaries, but do feel that the land would benefit from being posted. However, since area residents have apparently been concerned about shooting practice on the land in the past, the matter of shooting on the property should be investigated. Shooting on the land could be stopped by putting a no hunting restriction on the deed, then posting and enforcing the land's status. In addition, it may be that according to Massachusetts law the whole parcel--due to its proximity to the houses along Longview Terrace--is off limits to hunting or shooting practice. If this were the case, the law should be enforced. Posting the land would require little expenditure; however,

putting a no hunting restriction on the deed might require some legal fees, so other options for limiting the use of guns on the property should be examined first.

Option 1. *Continued agricultural use, with no increase in access or public use of the parcel.*

This option basically preserved the current state of the land. This option would continue to allow Mr. Chenail or another farmer to use the land for agriculture. The option benefits Mr. Chenail since he would be able to use the land to grow crops, hay, and graze his herd. This option also benefits the town, which receives money for the acres used for cultivation and hay. Area residents (those living in residential developments near the property) continue to benefit to a small degree- those who know about and use the land for cross-country skiing would still be able to use the land.

2. *Continued agricultural use, but encourage greater public use of the property for winter-time activities.* This option could be done with an increase in access or no increase in access.

Wintertime activities could include cross country skiing, snow-shoeing, and sledding (for which there is a great hill). Encouraging public use of the property could be achieved by posting the land as available for winter activities, and through other measures which we will discuss at the end of this paper. This option would benefit Mr. Chenail, who again could keep using the land, and the town, which would continue to receive money for its use. The two access options would have different costs and benefits. If access were not increased, the only benefit would be to nearby residents who can access the lands from their homes. As a whole, they would benefit more from this option than the first one since it is possible that many people do not know the land is town owned and currently do not use it, but might if they could. Increasing access would probably require a small to medium monetary investment from the town. To benefit Williamstown residents other than those in the nearby neighborhood, a parking area or pull-off would have to be provided. The only feasible place for this would be along Stratton road. However, the project would most likely involve widening a part of Stratton road, installing a culvert in the ditch, and laying out a certain amount of gravel or other parking material. In addition, access could only be gained if there was a hole cut in the thick hedgerow. This would probably also require a gate to

be installed since the hedgerow currently functions as a fence for the cows (another option would be to have a fence further inside the property which would restrict the movement of the cows). Such a project would increase access to more Williamstown residents.

3. *Devote part of the property to a playground; the rest would remain in agriculture.* Since this option would take some land out of agricultural production, it would have reduced benefits for Mr. Chenail and for the town, in terms of diminished income. In addition, this option would probably require an increase in access that would also cost the town. The playground might be expensive as well, although partnerships or volunteers could reduce the financial burden. This option would benefit the substantial number of families living near the property. There is currently no playground in the area, although one was proposed for the end of Luce road at one time. Children in this neighborhood are somewhat restricted in their ability to access other parts of town because Route 2--the only means for moving to other areas other than Luce and Blair roads-- poses a dangerous obstacle. A playground could be located in the grassy corner of the lot at the intersection of Stratton road and Longview Terrace. This option would also require that liability issues be dealt with.

Management Recommendations

For the Burbank Property, we recommend the second option: continued agricultural use, with encouragement of public use and either an increase or no increase in access. We believe that option two is the best on for a number of reasons. First, because continued agriculture is in keeping with the historic use of the site and the character of the area. Agriculture preserves open space and enhances the beauty of the town. In addition, the characteristics of the site, including location, topography, and soil type make this parcel well suited for agricultural use. Second, this option is most in keeping with the Conservation Commission's goals and limitations. The Conservation Commission's goals of conservation, preservation of open space, and passive recreation fit well with this option. Cross-country skiing, snow-shoeing, and sledding would benefit town residents while not interfering with the primary use of the site in the summer months. A playground does not seem as well suited to the Conservation Commission's goals,

and might require both funding and legal considerations beyond the Conservation Commission's capabilities. Third, this option probably would result in the most benefit at the least cost. Mr. Chenail and the town would continue to benefit. Area residents would benefit more than in the first option, although perhaps less than in the third option. However, the loss of benefit is made up for by the reduced cost to the town and Mr. Chenail. The cost of this option would be very low, especially if there were no increase in access. If the Conservation Commission did want access to be increased, this could be done if funding became available or a donor or partnership made it possible.

While we recommend the second option, we feel that the first option, the "do nothing" option, is still a fine option for this land since it means that the land would continue to be taken care of. The third option, although it is not quite in keeping with Conservation Commission goals and would require more effort and funding, was included because of what we feel to be a lack of recreational facilities and community gathering points in the residential area near the property. We feel that looking into this issue should be a fairly low priority in relation to the rest of the nine parcel options.

Partnerships

The Burbank property is currently being used and maintained by Mr. Chenail. The quality of the parcel does not seem to be deteriorating, and the land is cultivated and hayed regularly. Thus, partnerships with area farmers can help maintain Burbank. If the Chenail family at some point did not need or want to use the land, partnerships with other area farmers could be explored.

Contacts

Mr. Winthrop Chenail, farmer. 481 Luce Road, Williamstown. (413) 458-4910.

Deans Lot

Introduction:

Deans Lot is a 47-acre parcel of land located off White Oaks Road on the northeast side of Williamstown (figure 8). It has remained undeveloped and unused because of access issues and also because of its unique geological and natural characteristics. Because of its fragile nature, Deans should not be used by the public.

History:

In the 1800s, Deans was one of the properties to the north of town which was parceled into woodlots. The property passed through numerous hands until the 1960s, when it was owned by the Deans family.³⁶ In 1975, Deans was acquired by the town for nonpayment of taxes, and in the 1980s the management of the property was given by town vote to the Conservation Commission.³⁷ The paucity of concrete historical information on Deans stems from the fact that it has very few potential uses, and therefore little of note in the historical record.

Site Description:

Currently there is no legal access to this 47-acre property, although it is possible to walk onto the land by using a bridge on the adjacent parcel, owned by Brent and Magalis Filson. There is no bridge crossing Broad Brook at the point where Deans touches White Oaks Rd. The rest of the property extends to the northwest of White Oaks, and slopes upward in that direction (Figure 9), toward Mason Hill. At the base of the hill is a raised mound that is the remains of an old road that used to extend north into Vermont in order to transport gravel extracted from nearby pits. Several small streams flow through this area and feed into Broad Brook.³⁸

The most usual and fragile part of the Deans Property is a calcareous seeping fen; water wells up from the ground through limestone and flows down the slope on the eastern side of the

property. Several rare and endangered species of plants can be found here. In a recent survey, the National Heritage Foundation found 6 rare species of plants on the property, including maidenhair fern, dwarf horsetail, and grass of parnassus. The slope is very wet and easily disturbed, even by walking. This area would probably fall under the Massachusetts Wetlands Protection Act as a Bordering Vegetated Wetland, although this is largely irrelevant given that the land is unsuitable for development. Soils here are Hinckley gravelly sandy loam, which is erosive and permeable, unsuitable for agriculture (although the slope would prevent it anyway).³⁹ There are also several species of plants usually found in acidic soils, such as white oak, shagbark hickory, bracken fern, sphagnum moss, and wintergreen. Many trees in this area have fallen over, because their roots cannot penetrate very deeply into the moist soil without being deprived of oxygen. Root balls tend to be shallow.⁴⁰

At the top of the hill (roughly at the center of the property) is a forest composed of red oak and red maple. This area was probably used as a woodlot in the 1800s. There are signs of hunting here as well, as evidenced by a platform erected in one of the trees, probably by deer hunters. Near the top of Mason Hill, beyond the deer platform an old road runs along the contour of the hill. It is eroding badly, and peters out at the northern edge of the property as it enters a forest of young saplings. This forest extends through much of the western section of the property⁴¹.

Pamela Weatherbee owns the abutting property to the south, a triangle-shaped wedge cut out of the southwest part of Deans, which was an orchard and is now becoming forest.⁴²

Current structures and developments:

There are no current structures and developments, aside from the deer platform and two old roadbeds. Adjacent land uses include residential (White Oaks Rd.), institutional (White Oaks Chapel) and open space.

Current site uses:

Hunters often cross onto the property from Vermont and hunt around the summit of Mason Hill. Other than that, the property is not used by townspeople.



Deans: deer stand in the red oak/red maple forest

Management Recommendations:

We have two management recommendations.

Option 1: Deans remains under Conservation Commission oversight. If this option is adopted, the property should be surveyed and clearly posted. Because the land is so delicate and contains so many rare species, it should not be used for anything besides limited scientific research, but remain under conservation. Limited access will not be an issue, since no one will be using it. Information about rare species should not be made public, in order to minimize the risk that they will be disturbed by curious visitors.

Option 2: The Conservation Commission/Town of Williamstown makes a land swap with the Williamstown Rural Lands Foundation, giving up Deans in exchange for a property with greater recreational use (Figure 9).

The Williamstown Rural Lands Foundation (WRLF) owns a piece of property on Berlin Road called the Kelly Lot, which is adjacent to the Bullock Property, owned by the town. The WRLF's property contains the trailhead to the Class of '33 Trail, which runs through town property and up to the top of Berlin Mountain. The WRLF also constructed new loop trails on the Kelly Lot during the summer of 1998, including educational signs. This property is prime open space of value to the public because of its recreational value. The Conservation Commission could give Deans to the WRLF in exchange for the Kelly Lot, which would have advantages for each party, as well as to the public. A transfer of ownership would require a town vote, but no action on the state level, since there will be no change in use.

We recommend Option 2: the land swap, for the following reasons: First, Deans should NOT be used by the public, because it is so fragile, and because there is no legal access. However, all town lands are by definition open for public use, and information about them should technically be available to the public as well. This could have potentially destructive impacts on the rare

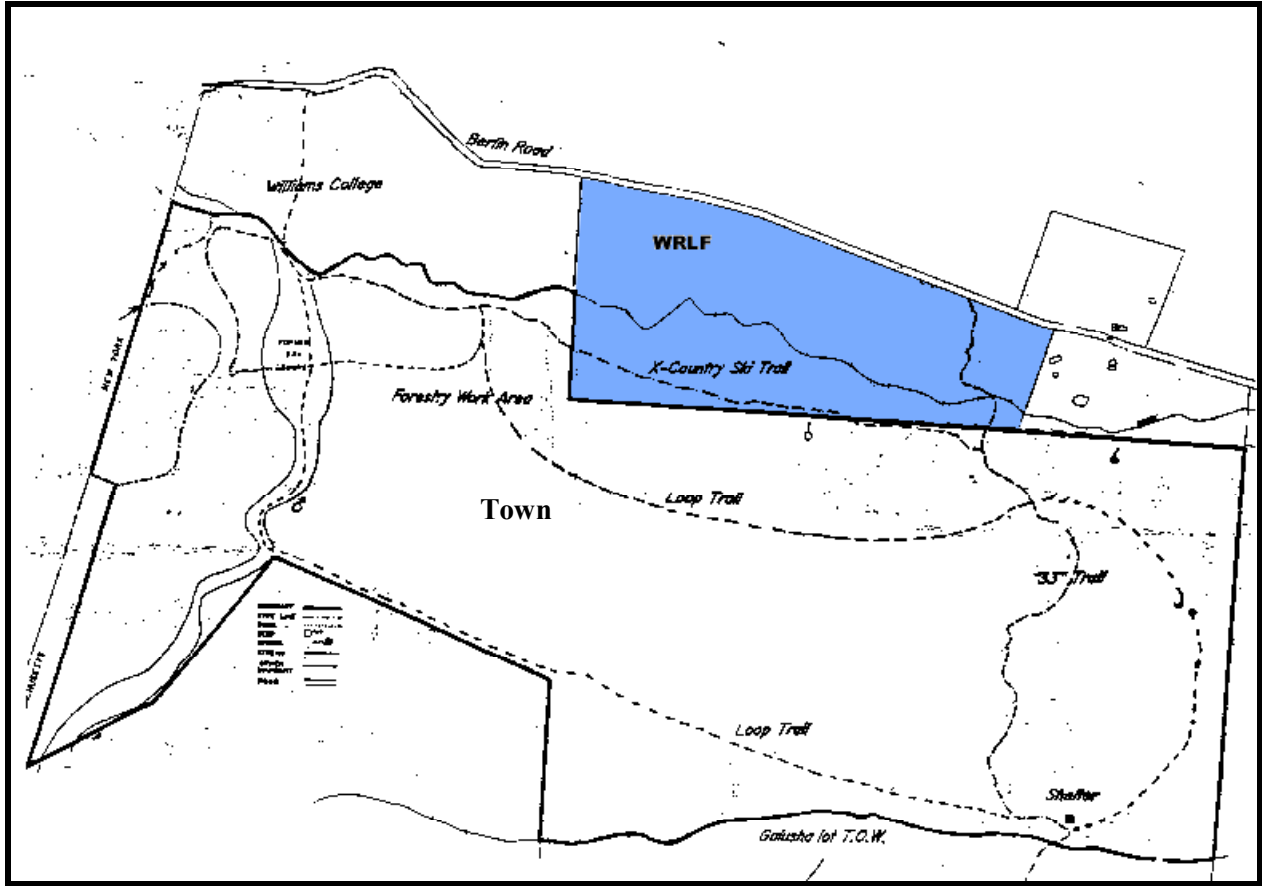


Figure 10. The Kelly Lot.

habitats on the Deans property. These fragile habitats would be better protected under private conservation. Second, gaining the Kelly Lot would be beneficial to the town and its residents. By acquiring the Kelly Lot, the town gains road access to one of its most valuable properties, as well as popular trails. This would promote the Conservation Commission’s interest in providing recreational space for public use. If the Conservation Commission does not have the resources to maintain the trails on the Kelly Lot, money from the Bullock Trust could likely be used for this purpose. The WRLF might also be able to contribute to trail upkeep on the trails they created. In the interest of future management, there are already good maps of the Kelly Lot and its associated trails and topography.

Partnerships:

The Williamstown Rural Lands Foundation, to help with upkeep of trails on the Kelly Lot.

Contacts:

Pamela Weatherbee, adjacent property owner, (413) 458-3538

Brent and Magalis Filson, adjacent property owners, (413) 458-5285

Leslie Reed Evans, executive director, WRLF, (413) 458-2494

The Hunter Property

Introduction

The Hunter property, a 176 acre parcel, is the largest under the management of the Conservation Commission. The parcel is east of town, with frontage on Petersburg Road just west of its intersection with Northwest Hill Road (figure 11 and 12). The Hunter property is entirely forested and has been used for trails at different stages in its history. There are no major issues facing the Hunter property, and our recommendation for the site is a system of trails.

History

Unfortunately, much of the history of the Hunter property still remains to be discovered. The land was once part of the Cole Porter estate, and old aerial photographs (from 1935 and '70) show that the land has been cleared in parts, and the forest has changed as well. The aerial photographs also show a prominent cut for the telephone line which ran through the property; the poles can still be found, although most of them have been cut down⁴³. Within the property, old road cuts and several stone walls indicate past uses, perhaps for pasture. The Conservation Commission files and the evidence of old logging road indicate that parts of the land were logged at one time. The exact date has not been noted, but the logging roads are now old enough to have medium-sized beech saplings (estimated DBH is three inches) growing in them⁴⁴.

The recent history of the parcel begins in 1976, when the Berkshire Natural Resources Council began working with the Hunters to put restrictions on the parcel's deed. At that time, the following restrictions were put on the deed:

1. No hunting shall be permitted on said parcel.
2. No motorized vehicles of any nature or kind, including but not limited to cars, trucks, motorcycles, all-terrain vehicles, and skimobiles, shall be operated or permitted to operate on said parcel except as may be necessary for maintenance or to fight fires or the management and harvesting of forest products.
3. No activity shall be permitted on said parcel which will in any way impair, pollute, divert, diminish or otherwise adversely affect the present supply of ground or surface water emanating

from the parcel. The public can enter the land for: hiking, snowshoeing, cross-country skiing, horseback riding, nature study, overnight camping, and other passive recreational activities, provided that trail markers, posted signs, and regulatory notices shall be erected and maintained. Property boundaries are to be clearly posted annually for the benefit of the grantors and the general public.

4. The Conservation Commission may cultivate and harvest forest products in accordance with recognized forestry conservation practices, including the construction of fire roads for the harvesting of forest products and the performance of such work as may be necessary for forest fire prevention and control, insect pest and disease control, and the removal of damage caused by natural disaster, provided that all revenues from the harvesting of forest products shall be appropriated to an account entitled "The Conservation Fund" which was established by the town in October 1967⁴⁵.

In 1978, the Hunter family gave the property to the town, offering it for conservation purposes and to preserve open spaces. That year, a Williams College student, Jacquie Glatz, prepared a plan for a trail in the property; there is no record of whether it was built. A Boy Scout trail was made on the land, although there is no date given for the time it came into existence. An entrance bridge was constructed in 1996 as an Eagle Scout project. There was a map--posted on a tree near the entrance--which had the Boy Scout trails on it until the first week of December, 1998, when this sign was ripped off the tree and thrown in Hemlock Brook.

Site Description

The terrain on the Hunter Property is varied and interesting. Elevations range from 740 feet--near the boundary along Hemlock Brook and Petersburg Road--to 1480 feet (along the western property line adjacent to the Taconic Trail State Park). Overall, the property can be thought of as a large ridge running parallel to Petersburg Road. The low points of the ridge are Hemlock Brook and the Flora Glen Brook, which forms the southern boundary. There are two areas of special interest with regard to topography. The first is the part of parcel near Petersburg

Road, where a number of gullies, stream, stone outcrops, and what appears to be an old sunken road, spread out into the forest. The other major feature is on the western side of the property, where the side-slope of Birch Hill enters the land. The summit of Birch Hill is located on State land. On the western side, the top of the Birch Hill ridge is fairly flat, but begins to descend towards Flora Glen Brook. The embankment of the Flora Glen is generally steep (figure 12). Soils on the site include: the Taconic-Macomber association, the Lanesboro-Dummerstone association, and the Fullam-Lanesboro association. All of these soils are very stony, and occur on steep slopes of 15-45%. Permeability is moderate, the soil tends to be acidic, and the rooting zone is restricted by firm substratum. These soils are unsuited for cultivation, and erosion and wind-throw of trees is a moderate hazard. The soil book states that "Minimizing soil disturbance and retaining the sponge-like mulch of leaves helps increase absorption of precipitation, retain limited soil moisture, reduce run-off, and control erosion. Constructing access roads and trails on the contour and installing water bars helps to control erosion."⁴⁶ Due to the elevation of most of the parcel, views of the surrounding mountains--at least in the wintertime--are expansive and beautiful.



Hunter: Birch Hill slope, south view.

Vegetation on the property has clearly been influenced by past land use. Tree species include ash, birch (yellow, black, and paper), oak (several kinds), Bigtooth aspen, maples (sugar, red, striped), beech, hemlock, white pine, and a number of others. Understory vegetation is present in some areas, where it includes ferns, honeysuckle, and other brush and herbaceous plants. The vegetation in places indicates a shifting landscape; birch (early successional) have reached their maximum size and are dying out, while beech, hemlock, and other trees appear to be spreading out. The species composition is noticeably different, depending on one's location within the Hunter parcel. The parcel is good habitat for wildlife including a fair number of deer.

The parcel has had a variety of uses in the past, and evidence of these uses remains today. There are still traces of old logging roads and the old Boy Scout trail starting from the entrance bridge. The most defined pathways (trails or logging roads) occur on the southern side of the property. There is a path along the top of the Birch Hill ridge which leads into state land. There are also several old roads running parallel to the Flora Glen embankment, and one that goes down to meet the brook. The remnant paths and roads are not well defined, not marked, and there is no indication of where they begin or end; further investigation is need before the actual routes can be determined. Other structures currently on the property include old stone walls in the gully near Petersburg Road, and fences along the western boundary of the land, some of which are quite substantial. There are also a number of deer stands that have been built and appear to be used. Property boundaries have been marked with flagging, stone corner posts, and some "No Hunting" signs along the northern and western boundaries, and the Flora Glen delineates the southern boundary. However, the eastern side of the property is neither marked, nor posted with "No Hunting" signs⁴⁷.

Land bordering the Hunter Property is generally wooded. The parcel is adjacent to the Hunter house lot, several other residential lots on the Petersburg and Thornlibank sides, State land, and Boy Scout land (figure 11). The property directly to the west of the property has been logged, and more remains on the logging contract for that property. The RRR Brooks trail runs

along the Flora Glen at the southern end of the Hunter property (figure 13). Access to the parcel can be gained from Petersburg Road; there is room for three to four cars to park along the road, and room for around three more in the pull-off just up the road from the entrance bridge. Mr. John Bledsoe, the owner of the majority of the pull-off area (the rest is apparently on the Hunter property) stated that use of the pull-off would be fine for a reasonable number of visitors. Access to the parcel on foot is definitely possible; the land is within walking distance of several major Williamstown residential areas, and is within easy walking distance for Williams College students.

Current Uses

Current use of the site appears to be very limited. Area residents stated that they very rarely saw anyone using the parcel, but that when they did, it was usually hikers. The site appears to be used by deer hunters, as evidenced by the deer stands and perhaps the recent destruction of the trail map sign, although most of the periphery is posted as "No Hunting."

Management Options

We thought of three possible management options for the Hunter Property. Again, though, we would like to make several basic recommendations. First, that the boundaries of the property be posted. This recommendation is in accordance with the restrictions in the deed. It would also be a good idea since the logging that has occurred on other properties is directly adjacent to the parcel and more logging could occur in the future. In addition, all of the boundaries should be posted with no hunting signs, also in accordance with the deed. The deer stands should be removed from the property. Finally, the access bridge, built in 1996, should be maintained or improved. The cost and effort required for these basic measures should be slight.

Option 1. *Maintain the Hunter Property in the current state of conservation.* This option would not cost anyone anything, but no one would benefit either. However, the integrity of the land would be maintained and the land would continue to be conserved as open space.

Option 2. *Sustainable timber harvesting.* Of all the Conservation Commission parcels, the Hunter Property is probably the one most suitable for logging. This option is provided for in the deed, which allows logging roads to be built, and other logging related activities to occur on the land. The property has been logged on the past, and traces of logging roads still remain. While we don't have the exact figures for the worth of timber on the lot, the logging that has occurred to the adjacent lot would tend to indicate that harvesting this forest is profitable. Drawbacks include the possibility of erosion and run-off on this steep, rocky land, and the probable loss of the land to the public for other recreational activities. In this case, the money would apparently go to the Conservation Fund which the deed states was set up in 1967. If the funds did come to the Conservation Commission, they could be used to conduct surveys or to fund projects on the other eight parcels. The aesthetic character of the land would be changed and the forest ecosystem altered to some extent.

Option 3. *Develop a system of trails on the Hunter Property.* (figure 13) There are several possibilities for such a trail system. There could be a trail loop entirely within the Hunter Property. In addition, a trail could link Petersburg Road to the RRR Brooks trail. There are several areas of the Flora Glen embankment where a trail link would be possible. The RRR Brooks trail would provide access to the Taconic Crest Trail, and through that, to the trails in the Hopkins memorial forest. In addition, the RRR Brooks trail would connect the property with the bottom of Bee Hill Road, and through the Fitch Trail--a trail to the geographic top of Bee Hill recently constructed by the Williamstown Rural Lands Foundation on Boy Scout land--to the upper portion of Bee Hill Road⁴⁸. Two other possible trails could be constructed in conjunction with trails on the Hunter Property. One would be a trail linking the Hunter Property along Petersburg Road to the lower section of the Hopkins Memorial Forest, using an old trail that runs through private property. A second possible trail could run from the RRR Brooks trailhead at the

bottom of Bee Hill Road to Thornlibank. This would create an additional Hunter loop
(Petersburg Road to RRR Brooks, from there to Bee Hill Road, then back to Thornlibank and

Petersburg Road) and eliminate the treacherous stretch of busy, narrow Rt. 7 that many hikers and runners now use to access Bee Hill Road and the RRR Brooks Trail. Such a trail would only travel through two or three private lots, and trans open meadows. Overall, this option would benefit area residents, who could access the trails on foot, or by the parking opportunities previously mentioned.

Our Recommendation

We recommend the third option, to develop a system of trails on the Hunter Property. The land was given to the town as a place for recreation, and trails have historically been found to be appropriate for the property. Several trails have been built in the past, and plans (Jacquie Glatz) have been developed for others⁴⁹. The trail and logging road traces would aid in placing new trails. The Hunter Property is a beautiful site which would be ideal for a trail, and the variety of trail options would allow the site to be used by people of different ability levels. The trail is within walking distance and has some parking, which makes it accessible to a large number of people. In addition, a link from the trails on Hunter would improve access to the RRR Brooks trail, which recently had its parking reduced by construction near its trailhead on Bee Hill Road. The cost of putting in and maintaining the trails would be minimal since there are several possible partnerships that can be explored. Two of the most promising potential partners are the Boy Scouts, who have historically been involved with the land and are currently interested in helping out, and the Williams Outing Club, which has trail maintenance equipment. Trail maintenance on the Hunter Property would be well suited for Trail Crew P.E. classes because of the proximity of the parcel to the college. Thus, a trail system would confer many benefits on town residents while costing virtually nothing.

We feel that the third option has greater benefits than either of the two options. The first option would not cause a deterioration in the land, but other than the simple value of conservation--which we do not wish to discount--there are few additional benefits. The second option, logging, is another feasible option if done in a sustainable manner. This option would bring some benefits (money) to the town and Conservation Commission. However, we felt that

the trail system would result in an overall greater benefit, since all residents could then enjoy the land, and the wooded habitat would be preserved. We felt that logging the site could possibly degrade it (through erosion and other factors) and adding large amounts of cleared area to the already logged area directly to the west would significantly detract from the wildlife habitat and aesthetic presence of this area of Williamstown.

Partnerships

Previous individuals and groups have found the land suitable for trails, and some have been built. However, due to the lack of maintenance, the trails today are mere traces. Along with our recommendation for trail construction, we thought it was important to investigate partnerships so that new trails would not disappear as well. Both the Boy Scouts and the Williams Outing Club have expressed interest in the project of trail development and maintenance on the Hunter Property⁵⁰. There is also the possibility that an internship to make the trails could be funded by a grant from the Center for Environmental Studies at Williams College or the Williamstown Rural Lands Foundation. Additional maintenance could be provided and public knowledge of the land increased by having volunteer days, which will be discussed at the end of this paper. Finally, public knowledge of the parcel could be increased by inclusion of the trail system in the new, unpublished, Williams Outing Club map and other trail maps.

Contacts and Resources

Mr. John Bledsoe, pull-off area owner and nearby resident. 458-5103.

Mr. Jay Palmer, owner of adjacent parcel that has been logged, and parts may be for sale.

Ms. Marianne McDonough, real estate agent for Mr. Palmer's land. 458-5300.

Mr. David Casey, Williamstown Boy Scout Troup 70 leader. 458-0968.

Mr. Ed Denham, Bay State Forestry Service. 232-4000.

Williams Outing Club. 597-2317. Contact Ethan Plunkett or Scott Lewis.

AMC Field Guide to Trail Building and Maintenance, Robert Proudman, 1981: a guidebook for trail construction

Lowry

Introduction

The Lowry property is 30.64 acres of land to the west and north of the Stratton Hill Condominium Development (figure 14). The road frontage of the property is a cattail marsh that lies just south of the juncture of Adams and Stratton Roads. The Lowry was the focus of a 1992 Envi 302 project much of whose information has complimented this report.

History

The Lowry property was originally part of Clover Hill Farms which was established in 1915 by George Lowry. George died in 1944 at which point his son Floyd and daughter Rachel jointly inherited the land. Floyd bought his sister's portion and continued to farm the land, including the Lowry property, which they used to haying and pasture. In 1956 the town purchased the Lowry property for \$29,000 with the expectation of building the new regional high school on the parcel. However, after the property was purchased the town was unable to gather the funds to actually build the school, and the property was left vacant. The cattail marsh on Stratton road received wetland designation in 1984 under the Massachusetts Wetland Protection Act. This left the property essentially land locked since no road or trail could be built through the wetland. So, in 1987 the land was transferred to Conservation Commission management at the annual town meeting by a 311 to 92 vote in favor of the transfer. Then in 1990 the Williamstown Board of Selectmen attempted to remove 6.5 acres of Lowry from conservation to build an affordable housing unit. This was protested by both neighboring land owners who feared the effects of development on their properties, and by the Conservation Commission who were hesitant to take the parcel out of conservation without it having an established management plan. The land was consequently not taken out of conservation, and later that year Kim Wells gained permission to biannually hay half of the property. Initially there was some confusion

over who was allowed to hay what portion of the Lowry, with the owner of Clover Hills Farm haying half and Kim Wells haying the other. However, in 1991 the haying of the property was granted solely to Kim Wells who has mowed it twice a year for hay since then. Currently Wells hays approximately 20 acres of Lowry under a formal written permit that must be renewed every three years. In 1998 the current owners of Clover Hill Farm bulldozed trails which appear to cross the wood lots of the Lowry property (figure 15). The Conservation Commission has had the property surveyed to clearly delineate the parcel's boundaries and are currently looking into the matter.

Site Description

The Lowry is a relatively flat property (figure 16) that currently contains two open hay meadows, a separating hedgerow, two wood lots on the northern portion of the property, and a cattail marsh on the most northeasterly leg of the property. There are a total of five different soil types on the property. The two dominant soil types are Amenia Silt Loam which predominates the south of the property, and Copake Fine Sandy Loam which predominates the north of the property. Both of these soils are listed as prime agricultural soils in the 1988 Berkshire County Soil Survey. However both soils are inadequate to deal with septic systems, and if any housing were ever put on this property it would need to be connected directly to the town's sewer system.

Access to the property is severely limited by the cattail marsh on the road frontage of the property. Currently the town has a legal easement running from Stratton Road across the Condominium property. Wells also access the property through Dave Carter's field, which he also hays, to the south and through Clover Hill Farms. However, neither of these access points are currently open to the public. The legal access is limiting since it is not well marked or maintained, and it has no parking for visitors who drive to the property.



Lowry: the view of the Dome

Current Uses

As previously implied, the most active current use of the property is agriculture. Kim Wells mows about 20 acres of Lowry twice a year (figure 17). He uses some of the hay to feed his beef cattle and sells the rest to area farmers including Clover Hill Farms. Wells claims there are few people who currently use the property during the summer months. A few people walk on the property, and individuals from Clover Hill Farms sometimes ride on the property.

Occasionally Wells sees evidence of motorized vehicles such as ATV's, however he actively discourages such use since it is bad for the hay. Wells maintains a path around the periphery of the hay meadows so that an open path remains for any visitors to the property. Also, the trails Clover Hill Farms recently cut may be on Lowry.

Management Recommendations

We have several management recommendations which we feel are not exclusive of one another. We hope that in the near future all of these recommendations can and will be followed, but realizing the limitations of the Conservation Commission we have prioritized the options, starting with both the easiest and most pressing.

Our first recommendation is to clearly mark the boundaries of the property. This should be relatively easy since the boundaries have just been surveyed. Posting the borders will decrease future confusion such as the recent problem with Clover Hill Farms. It will also help inform the public that the land is open for public use. We recommend this should be done as soon as the survey is made public, and the Conservation Commission has made a decision regarding the trails cut by Clover Hill Farms.

Next we highly recommend that the property remain in agriculture use. This is in keeping with the historic use of the property, and it works well with the soil composition of the property. Haying also keeps the magnificent view from the property open for all visitors to enjoy, and it assures that someone is caring for and maintaining the property and the trail around the periphery. Agriculture benefits both the farmer and the visitors to the property. If Wells should ever decide he does not desire to hay Lowry, other local farmers should be approached to take on this responsibility.

Our third recommendation is improving access to the property. We feel the best way to do this is to move the current easement on the Stratton Hill Condominium land. The Condominiums already have a parking lot on their property for residents. We suggest that moving the easement so that it runs directly from the parking lot to Lowry would ameliorate access. Since this would be a smaller stretch of land, we suggest that the condominiums could include in the easement a few of their parking lots for the town to post as Lowry parking. From

our observations this parking area is never full to capacity and giving the town a few lots is not likely to be an undue burden. This would have a small cost for the Condominium owners, but this could possibly be offset by a tax break by the town. Also, clearly posting the easement and parking will inform the residents of the condominiums of the easy access to open space available to them.

If the newly made trails are deemed to be on Lowry property we recommend they should be repaired and maintained for use by visitors to the property. This would be especially beneficial if access could be improved as mentioned above. These trails would need to be repaired since the initial building appears quite haphazard and is likely to have unnecessary erosion. However, the trails could integrate the wood lots with the periphery trail in the hay meadow. This trail would be good trail for people who enjoy being out doors, but cannot manage many of the steeper hikes in Williamstown. It provides similar views and wild life habitats as steep hikes, but on a fairly level property. Since the trails are already made, this option would be fairly inexpensive for the Conservation Commission.

Our final recommendation includes more increase in access by adding a trail from Linear Park off of Water Street through East Lawn Cemetery to the property. This trail was recommended by the 1992 Envi Planning group, but was never built. We concur with their conclusion that this trail would be very beneficial to the property and hope that it could be included in any future improvements to the property. The trail would require a short easement through the Clover Hill Farms property, however if it is determined that the newly cut trails are on Conservation Commission property such an easement could possibly be obtained as reparation. This trail had the added benefit of making the property more accessible to the center of town which would benefit both residents, and visitors who are looking for an easy walk.

Partnerships

Kim Wells: His continued haying of the property maintains the open views and maintains the trail around the periphery.

Cemetery Department: They could maintain the Linear Park trail if it were built, and possibly assists in the trails construction.

Rural Lands Foundation: They have expressed interest in helping to coordinate moving the Condominium easement, including possibly providing any legal fees such a change would incur.

Contacts

Stratton Hill Condominiums (413) 458-8687

Kim Wells (413) 458-8085

Margaret Lindley Park

Introduction:

Margaret Lindley Park is a 13.5 acre parcel located at the intersection of southbound Rt. 7 and eastbound Rt. 2 in South Williamstown (Figures 16 and 17). The park is the only Conservation Commission land currently developed for recreation, and should remain in that state. Its main attraction is a small swimming pool formed by the damming of Hemlock Brook. The pool is open from June to August, and is overseen by the Williamstown Recreation Commission. The park is also used during the summer for children's nature programs. Additionally, there are trails that connect Margaret Lindley Park to the adjacent town-owned property, Torrey Woods. Residents could use Margaret Lindley year-round for hiking and picnicking.

History:

In the 1940's, Margaret Lindley Park was owned by the Taconic Restaurant, which had the practice of damming Hemlock Brook in order to form a swimming hole for the use of visitors to its tourist cabins. In 1967, the Town of Williamstown bought the property from the Taconic Restaurant for \$35,000 with the help of a grant from the Massachusetts State Conservation Services. At this time the Conservation Commission was designated to manage the land, and Hemlock Brook was diverted to form a warming pool. In 1970 the bathing area was chlorinated for the first time, to mitigate the bacterial contamination that has plagued the swimming pool since its creation. A 1991 report by Heather Stool, a student at Williams College, found that there are three main sources of coliform contamination upstream. In 1972, the average attendance at Margaret Lindley was 300 people a day. Management of the swimming facility was shifted to the Williamstown Recreation Commission in 1984, and they continue to manage it

today. In the early 1990's, the Recreation Commission began to hold summer nature programs for children in one of the cabins in the park.⁵¹

Site Description:

The most heavily used of the nine parcels under consideration, Margaret Lindley Park has relatively easy access from Rt. 2, although the entrance is rather hidden. This entrance is slated to be moved to Rt. 7 after a truck escape ramp is built at the base of eastbound Rt. 2. The gates are chained shut during the off season, from August-May. There is a grass parking lot immediately beyond the entrance to the park, with room for an estimated twenty cars. A nature cabin and concession facility accompany the pond with its lights/lifeguard structure. The whole park is quite near Rt. 2; the road is partially visible and audible. The land is at a fairly low elevation, lying at the base of the slope down from Rt. 2, and has variable topography, from the depression formed by the pond, sloping up to the south to a the slight hill or ridge where the nature cabin is located. The area would probably be protected from most severe weather and, because of slopes and large trees, partially shaded at all times of day.⁵² The soil at the base of the slope, near the swimming area, is Hero loam, a moderately well drained deep soil; the soil on the slope itself is Copkae fine sandy loam, a "somewhat excessively drained soil".⁵³

The swimming area in Margaret Lindley Park is created by diverting Hemlock Brook's water through a pipe to a collection area, and across a plastic-lined channel. The water drains out through an opening in the wall on the other end of the pond where the lifeguard chairs and lights are situated. At present (late Fall 1998) there is no water in the pond, and grass has begun to grow. The swimming area is chlorinated during the summer, because of coliform contamination from three non-point sources upstream. The 1991 report by Heather Stoll determined the highest levels of coliform contamination in the swimming pool to occur after heavy rains, indicating that

bacteria build up in the warming pool and then are swept into the swimming area. Stoll recommended continuing chlorination.⁵⁴

Footprints in the sand indicate that the area is used by deer and other animals. The pond is surrounded by forest, many of whose trees are quite large. Hemlock, yellow birch, swamp milkweed, quaking aspen, ash, chicory, and Queen Anne's lace are a few of the species on the site. Hemlock Brook is perhaps 2 feet across with a good flow of water even after a dry summer. Lush vegetation grows on both sides, and a bridge has been built over it near the diverting pipe. At least one trail follows the brook in a westward direction, towards Torrey Woods. Adjacent land uses include roads and some houses and stores along Rt. 7 and Rt. 2. None of the land directly around the park is heavily developed⁵⁵.



Margaret Lindley Park: the current entrance

Current Structures and Developments:

Current structures include the nature cabin and restroom facilities, as well as picnic tables and trash receptacles. There are also two horseshoe pitches. The swimming area takes up most of the cleared land on the property.

Current Site Uses:

Margaret Lindley is used for swimming during the summer months (July-Aug) and for children's nature programs. It is also the access point for hiking in Torrey Woods. Many residents come to the park with their children in order to enjoy a day of swimming and picnicking.

Management Recommendations:

Since the current recreational use of Margaret Lindley Park has been very successful, we recommend only that the park be left open for picnicking and hiking during the off-season, so that visitors can enjoy the park more days of the year. There is a shortage of picnic spots near the center of town, so keeping the park open would significantly benefit residents. If the picnic tables were to remain in the park during the off-season, the town would need to collect trash biweekly, depending on use. The Conservation Commission should continue to share responsibilities with the Recreation Commission.

Contacts:

Bob Hatton, Town Conservationist, (413) 458-3123

Williamstown Recreation Department, Williamstown Youth Center, (413) 458-5925

Pine Cobble

Introduction

The Conservation Commission land on Pine Cobble is a 30.8-acre plot of completely land-locked land that lies north of the Williams College Pine Cobble Development (Figures 18 and 19). The property is surrounded on three sides with land in conservation. To the south and east of the property lies land under the management of the Williamstown Rural Lands Foundation, while to the north lies land owned by Pamela Weatherbee, which is under conservation restriction. The Pine Cobble parcel is one of several town owned properties located on Pine Cobble Mountain which is in the Northeast corner of Williamstown.

History

The Conservation Commission Pine Cobble lot was established early in the history of Williamstown to be used as a wood lot. The town acquired it in 1966 for non-payment of taxes. The total of the unpaid taxes was \$24.97 and the negligent owner was listed as unknown. In 1974 an individual came forward to challenge the town's ownership of Pine Cobble, but the courts upheld the town's claim. Most recently in 1998 Chris Elkington built the Class of '98 trail which joins the Ledges on the Conservation Commission land to the frequently used Pine Cobble Trail.

Site Description

The Pine Cobble parcel is completely forested. The dominant trees include 5 species of oaks as well as hickory. The western portion of the parcel has a gentle slope of less than 15%, which transitions to a sharp, greater than 15% slope, to the east. This transition in slope corresponds to a change in soil composition. In the west the soil is primarily Peru-Marlow association which is typically found on the sides and crests of glacial till uplands. The soil is moderately to strongly acid, and is generally not suited for cultivation⁵⁶. On the steep slope on

the east of the property the soil is composed of a Lyman-Tunbridge association which overlays the granite bedrock. Lyman-Tunbridge soil is strongly to slightly acidic and is not suitable for cultivation. This soil is unsuitable for logging because rock outcrops and steep slope makes it difficult to manage equipment, and erosion becomes a problem if trees are removed⁵⁷.

The “Ledges” is a granite rock outcrop found along this transition line. This picture (see below) shows an impressive example of this beautiful feature of Pine Cobble. The Ledges span land on either side of the Conservation Commission going onto the land owned by Sweet and Weatherbee to the north and by the Rural Lands Foundation to the south. The new Class of ‘98 trail goes along these ledges and joins up with the Pine Cobble trail near Bear Springs⁵⁸.



Pine Cobble: ledges

Current uses

There are no structures currently on the property. It is currently used for hiking along the class of '98 trail.

Management Options

We determined two feasible management options for the Pine Cobble property. The first would be to improve and maintain a trail system on the land, the second would be to log the land in an ecologically sensitive manner. We also feel that the boundaries of this property are not well known, and that it would be beneficial for the Conservation Commission to survey this land in the case of either option. However, we recognize that surveying is expensive and since the land is surrounded by other conserved land it is not as imperative to survey this land as it is with some of the questionable properties closer to the center of town.

A trail system would include the addition of the already proposed trail leading from Chestnut Street to the Ledges. This trail would join up with the Class of '98 trail and through that to the Pine Cobble trail providing a more extensive array of trails on Pine Cobble which is a popular hiking destination. Also, while the current Pine Cobble trail is primarily on land that has a slope greater than 15% this new trail from would be entirely on land with a much gentler slope⁵⁹. This would make the beauty of Pine Cobble accessible to a greater variety of ability levels.

Logging the property has the benefit of bringing revenue to the town, however according to Leslie Reed Evans at the Rural Lands Foundation this money would go to the town in general and not into the Conservation Commission fund. Any logging would have to be restricted to the western portion of the property where the gentler slopes would help reduce erosion and could be traversed by logging equipment. However, since Pine Cobble is land-locked any logging would require an easement over neighboring parcels.

We recommend that trails be built and maintained on this land. This would help meet the Conservation Commission and Town goals of passive recreation, while keeping much of the land in conservation. It would also meet the Town goal of equity of access since it provides a much more gradual hike on Pine Cobble than the current Pine Cobble Trail. In addition it is in keeping with the conservation of much of the surrounding land. Thus the trails would benefit hikers of all abilities, both residents and visitors, and neighboring landowners. The trail option would have a small cost to the town by excluding the revenue from logging the property.

By contrast, logging the property appears to be a poor option. Because the land is land-locked any logging would effect the neighboring parcels. With so much of the neighboring land in conservation it is likely that abutting landowners would be hesitant to provide easements across their properties for logging. Also, since only the western half of the property can be logged the total revenue is not likely to justify the infrastructure that would be needed. In addition, the logging would not be consistent with the Conservation Commissions usual logging criteria. In most cases the Conservation Commission does not log to increase revenue, rather logging is used in situations where it would be ecologically beneficial to the habitat, or in some cases in areas where it would approve the aesthetic quality of the land⁶⁰. Neither of these benefits would be gained from logging Pine Cobble, so although we see logging as a feasible option for Pine Cobble it is not the optimal one.

Partnerships

Rural Lands Foundation: Since they own the land to the east and south they are the perfect organization to help mark the property and monitor the trail system. They also manage the conservation restriction on the Weatherbee property to the north, and with such a vested interest in the are they are eager to be involved with the management of the Conservation Commission property.

Neighboring LandOwners: This would be beneficial in creating a more extensive trail system connecting the town land with privately owned properties on Pine Cobble.

Williams Outing Club: They already maintain some of the trails on Pine Cobble and would likely be willing to help maintain some of the trails on the Conservation Commission land.

Forestry Commission: If the Conservation Commission does decide to log the property the Forestry Commission would probably help manage the project.

Contacts

Pamela Weatherbee (413) 458-3538

Stone Hill

Introduction

Stone Hill is a prominent Williamstown landmark, and the road over it was once the primary means of passage between Williamstown and South Williamstown (Figures 20 and 21). The town-owned lot, now managed by the Conservation Commission, was once designated as the town woodlot, and the land is still forested. Town residents and college students frequently use the parcel for hiking and running, accessing it through the loop trail, which starts on Clark Art Institute land, and via Stone Hill Road. There are few issues confronting this property, which appears to be used appropriately. In the future, partnerships with the Clark Art Institute and volunteer work could ensure the continued integrity and popularity of this parcel.

History:

The town's wood lot on Stone Hill was once owned by Amos Lawrence and Theresa B. Hopkins. The latter conveyed the land in 1929 to Charles Denison after the death of her husband. He then transferred the Stone Hill Charis Denison Crockett, his grandson, who gave the land to the inhabitants of Williamstown in February 1941⁶¹.

In the late 1960's and early 1990's, the town considered logging the lot. By coring trees, the town found one hemlock stand to be 150-200 years old. In 1995, a forestry company created the Stone Hill Forest Management Plan that found the lot to have an overall forest health of "fair" to "good". After much discussion, a town vote rejected this plan.⁶²

Site description:

The Stone Hill property is bordered on the north and west by the old Stone Hill Rd., which runs up to the summit of Stone Hill from land owned by the Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute. Stone Hill Road branches off South Street as a gravel road, but eventually becomes a narrow dirt path at the point where it curves to the south to form the western boundary of the

town lot. There is a gate at the bottom of the gravel road which is always open. It is possible for several cars to park in front of the gate on the shoulder of the road, and parking is also available in the Clark's lots. The Buxton School property lies to the east.

Stone Hill is a completely wooded lot containing hemlocks, birches, oaks, maples, and beech. While the town lot is forested, there are agricultural and open lands nearby. The Stone Hill area is part of the Hudson-Hoosic river basin with drainage to Christmas Brook and Hemlock Brook.⁶³ At the south-west corner, the topography is steep and cliffs extend to the adjacent land to the south where the Stone Hill summit is located; these cliffs run parallel to Stone Hill Road.

There are parts of several trails on the town parcel. The loop trail (see trail map of Stone Hill area), follows the north, west, and eastern margins of the lot. Near the center of the western part of the land, the loop trail has a side spur to Stone Hill Road, a wide dirt path at that point. This spur leads to the Stone Bench, a local landmark and destination. Following the loop counterclockwise, the southeast part of the trail is on Buxton land, but the line of town boundary markers converges with the trail shortly before it completes the loop at the bottom of Stone Hill Road. Yellow diamonds clearly mark some borders of the property, but the southwest corner boundary is not marked. There was a marked, but uncut, trail which would have run through the middle of the lot so as to go through the old hemlock stand⁶⁴. This trail was planned in order to create a loop entirely on town land.

Issues:

The network of trails on Stone Hill is well used by college students, Buxton School, and residents of Williamstown. It is unclear who maintains the trails. The Buxton School claims that their trails are maintained through public use and that they do not maintain the trails specifically⁶⁵, while the Clark says that their personnel walk the trails on their land after a storm

to clear and cut back branches⁶⁶. Both stated that they would not be interested in helping to maintain trails on town land. However, the Clark may mistakenly maintain trails on town land without realizing it, thinking that the loop trail is on their property.

Recommendations and Partnerships:

Although the trails currently seem to be in good shape, maintenance responsibility should be clearly delegated so that if a tree were to fall on a trail, it would swiftly be removed. The proposed trail that would cross the land to create a loop within the town lot should be built. Work could be done by a volunteer trail crew. Interest in volunteering to cut the trail might be high given the number of people who know about and use Stone Hill. Creation of a new loop trail would benefit users by allowing additional route options, and the cost and time needed to construct the new trail would be very low since the trail has already been marked and volunteers could assist in the process. However, we do not feel that cutting the new trail on Stone Hill is a high priority relative to recommendations for the other nine parcels.

We recommend that maps of the whole network of trails be posted at trailheads or made available to visitors. A partnership with the Clark Art Institute could facilitate this action since the Clark could both produce the maps and provide them to their visitors. Residents and visitors to the area would benefit from a marked and posted trail map since there is not one currently and those unfamiliar with the trails could lose their way. The trail map, if distributed, could benefit the Clark by creating more activities for visitors to the facility.

Contacts:

Peter Richardson – caretaker at the Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute (413) 458-2303

DISCUSSION

General Issues

In assembling baseline information and management recommendations for the nine Conservation Commission parcels, we repeatedly encountered three issues: access, public information, and maintenance.

Access

Throughout our discussion of the lands, access is a predominant problem. It becomes an obstacle for both use and management possibilities. For example, with Bridges Pond, all of the recommendations, except cleaning up the trash, depend on whether the land can legally be advertised and used. Lack of infrastructure, like designated parking, is a problem for the use of Bridges, as well as Burbank. Increasing access is often a very expensive undertaking, in either legal fees or constructing a road.

Public Information

Even if all of the access problems were to be solved, another issue is whether the residents of Williamstown know enough about the lands to use them. There is no formal system of publicity such as comprehensive and accessible maps that highlight these eight usable parcels. In our own research, we found the town's official files insufficient and inconsistent. Some properties, like Margaret Lindley, had a great deal of information while Pine Cobble did not even have a file. These files did not contain information that would be useful to the normal citizen interested in using the lands. A simple list accompanied by a set of directions to the lands has not been compiled.

Maintenance

During the span of our research and site visits, we found many lands that have deteriorated in recreational and environmental quality. The trails on Hunter have become overgrown with disuse while the uses of Bridges Pond are no longer appropriate - the wooded margins of the pond are covered with litter and teenagers often hold parties in the summer⁶⁷. Bloedel has become a rest stop for large trucks and a parking lot for the Store at Five Corners summer festival. Burbank and Lowry are relatively maintained only because farmers use them.

Table 1: Management Needs

	Access	Maintenance	Public Information
Bloedel Park		x	x
Bridges Pond	x	x	x
Burbank	x		x
Deans			
Hunter		x	x
Lowry	x		x
Margaret Lindley Park			
Pine Cobble	x	x	x
Stone Hill		x	

x = needs additional

A Look At Management In Williamstown

In order to enact the solutions we have just outlined, there needs to be not only a comprehensive management plan, but an effective system of management. We have put forth the major issues concerning these properties and a few solutions, but there remains the question whether the current system of management for these lands, as represented by the Williamstown Conservation Commission, is appropriate. To give ourselves a point of reference with regard to

land management in Williamstown, we talked to Conservation Commission members in two neighboring towns: Lenox and North Adams, Massachusetts.

The Conservation Commission in Lenox manages three parcels, two of which were donated to the town. Neil Carpenter, a Conservation Commission member, stated in an interview that these lands are managed by the Commission for historical reasons having to do with land transfer, not because of any special management arrangement. The town of Lenox does not have an Open Space Plan, although they are in the process of developing one. Unlike Williamstown, Lenox does not currently have an overarching plan for conservation and promotion of passive recreation on town lands. The town maintains the Conservation Commission lands, although Commission members also do a small amount of maintenance work. Mr. Carpenter pointed out that if the lands have been taken off the tax roles, and hence do not contribute property taxes to the town coffers, the residents should derive some benefits from using them. Lenox is also working on a pamphlet containing information on town lands, in order to promote use by residents and visitors.

In contrast, the North Adams Conservation Commission does not directly manage any parcels of land. Instead, decisions made about all town lands are first solicited to the Conservation Commission for their approval and suggestions. This power of the Conservation Commission stems historically from the construction of river flood chutes adjacent to town land, as any development on these lands required a wetlands audit from the Conservation Commission. Afterwards, the town began to consult the Commission whenever a decision was made concerning town land. Accordingly, the Conservation Commission's voice is quite powerful in influencing land use in North Adams. Like Williamstown, North Adams does have an Open Space Plan, although it pursues these goals mainly through the Parks and Recreation Department, not the Conservation Commission. Mr. Buswick, a North Adams Conservation Commission

member, questioned whether it was appropriate for a Conservation Commission to promote greater use of the property they manage, since it creates the potential for degradation through overuse. He views Parks and Recreation as the appropriate venue for developing areas for greater use.

The Conservation Commissions in Lenox and North Adams differ greatly in their views of their role in town government with regard to land management. Williamstown offers another perspective, having at least three different departments dealing with open space: The Conservation Commission, the Department of Parks and Cemeteries, and the Recreation Commission. These other departments contribute very little to the management of the nine parcels, however, aside from activities such as mowing, and the Recreation Commission's involvement with Margaret Lindley Park. Williamstown also has an Open Space plan, revised in 1995, which outlines several goals, including preservation of open space and promotion of passive recreation. Compared to the Conservation Commissions in North Adams and Lenox, the Williamstown Conservation Commission has a multiplicity of roles—to guide responsible development in Williamstown as well as manage nine lands—a relatively large number. In our comparison of these three Conservation Commissions, two major questions stand out. First, in promoting use, does the Williamstown Conservation Commission manage land responsibly, or should it only promote strict preservation? Second, how effective is the particular division of responsibilities in Williamstown in maintaining environmental and recreational quality in the nine Conservation Commission managed lands?

In the view of the North Adams Conservation Commission member, promoting additional recreational use is akin to promoting overuse. His view is indicative of the separate roles that the Parks and Recreation Department and the Conservation Commission play in North Adams. However, promoting use does not necessarily indicate irresponsible management.

Promoting use can actually result in improved environmental quality, perhaps better than restricting use to effect preservation or conservation. Use can both benefit town residents and promote environmental quality, by increasing the number of people who are invested in the care and protection of the land. Lands that receive no use are likely to be unappreciated, badly maintained, and attract inappropriate use. Which is not to say that strict preservation is always detrimental—properties like Deans, for instance, are not suited for recreation—but where there is a responsible use, it should be encouraged. An example within this project is Bridges Pond, which is currently in a state of neglect and used inappropriately. If more people can be able to use and enjoy this beautiful area, they will be more likely to be interested in participating in its improvement. From our experiences with the nine parcels the Conservation Commission manages, we conclude that promoting *responsible* use should continue to be one of the Commission’s goals. In fact, ideologically the Conservation Commission may be uniquely situated to address issues of responsible use and public investment, as compared to departments such as Parks and Recreation.

In Williamstown, the Conservation Commission seems to be the governmental entity most ideologically suited for promoting responsible use, which should make it a good manager of open space. However, as we have noted previously, the lands the Conservation manages seem to be poorly maintained. Because it is the only town body in Williamstown directly responsible for these properties (unlike the other Conservation Commissions we talked to, who are supported by Parks and Recreation or other entities) we question whether the Conservation Commission has the resources—temporal or financial—to effectively improve the recreational and environmental quality of these properties, and to implement the management plans we have laid out.

Obtaining Resources

Given that the Conservation Commission is likely to remain the sole caretaker of the nine parcels, and that they may not always have the resources to do so effectively, we suggest that the Commission take steps to involve outside interests, both public and private, to implement many of the management plans we have suggested. In most cases, these linkages are already explicitly outlined in our recommendations, as we tried to include as many opportunities for partnerships and public involvement as possible. Beyond these specific recommendations, we have also devised some recommendations for involving the public on a grander scale, with all the properties the Conservation Commission manages. We hope that increasing public involvement with more than one of the properties will give the community an appreciation and awareness of the value of these nine parcels.

Public Information

The first step in involving the public in maintaining these properties is letting them know they're there in the first place. Currently, the Conservation Commission has no formal method for informing the public about parcels that could be used recreationally. There are several modes of publicity that would work well in promoting responsible use of these properties. The first is an informational pamphlet describing recreational resources in Williamstown. Years ago, such a pamphlet was printed by the Recreation Commission, detailing what activities could be done on which town lands. Using the baseline documentation in this project, a similar type of informational brochure could be designed by the Conservation, to be available in local stores and the Williamstown municipal building.

A second, more high tech option is to include information about the properties on the town web page. Every piece of information in this project is already digitized and on a zip disc, meaning that with minimal fiddling, maps, etc. could be put on the world wide web.

Information about the properties can also be distributed through resources that are indirectly involved. For instance, the trails on Hunter can become part of the Outing Club, Hopkins Forest, or Taconic Crest Trail Guides. Similarly, several of the Conservation Commission managed lands lie along a proposed network of bike paths through Williamstown (see below). Any guide for these bike paths should make mention of the properties it nears.

Bikeways

Including the parcels in a plan for bike routes could have several positive impacts on their visibility and use. The proposed bikeway would be in the area of, or very near, five of the nine parcels: Lowry, Stone Hill, Bridges Pond, Margaret Lindley Park, and Bloedel Park. A bikeway could increase public awareness of the lands, increase access, and serve as a connecting "link" between these lands which are otherwise very spread out. A system of small parks linked by the bikeway could be developed; this pattern of connected parks has been created in a number of cities and towns across the country. Creating transportation linkages between the lands may help users to perceive them as part of the same community investment in public space. If these lands are to be part of the bikeway, installing racks for locking up bicycles should be included in their management plans.

Volunteer Days

Another potential way to increase public involvement in maintaining the properties is to run a high-profile summer program. We envision a series of weekends during the summer, when community members and their families are invited to come help improve town land. Similar activities have been conducted at Margaret Lindley Park in the past. The key is to involve new people, to get people interested in the lands who do not already use them, or who have not been involved in maintaining them. Some of the properties, such as Margaret Lindley, Bloedel Park, Hunter, Lowry, and Bridges Pond, are very well suited for activities such as planting flowers,

cleaning up trails, and picking up trash. These activities are limited, but can be the basis for further improvement. With sponsorship from local businesses, Volunteer Days could include breakfast, t-shirts, or other promotional items. Bringing local businesses, families, and Commission members together for weekend work could also build relationships that might be the foundation for more permanent partnerships in the future.

Education

Taking a cue from the nature programs at Margaret Lindley Park, a very valuable way to involve people of all ages in the management of open space is to offer educational programs using the resources the particular property offers. We have already mentioned examples of educational programs with regard to Bridges Pond as a wetlands site. Other possibilities include nature or bird walks at Bridges and Lowry, naturalist hikes on Hunter, or perhaps a demonstration plot of organic gardening at Burbank Farm.

Partnerships

We made a conscious effort to seek out and include as many potential partnerships as possible when devising management plans for the nine parcels, keeping in mind that local businesses, as well as private non-profit organizations and community groups, can have an interest in helping to maintain and improve open space. During the course of our research, we talked to numerous groups around Williamstown, including the Williams Outing Club, the Boy Scouts, the Williamstown Rural Lands Foundation, and The Store At Five Corners. All of them said they were interested in contributing.

These groups can provide assistance in a number of ways, not all of them financial. They can help with organization and planning, they can offer advice—there are numerous tasks to delegate. The key, of course, is finding some way for partnership to benefit each partner. Benefactors can be rewarded by having their name publicized; for example, in a list of sponsors

for Summer Volunteer Days. They also benefit by being in close proximity to the improved lands—for example, the Store At Five Corners and Bloedel Park. In addition, many youth groups and churches encourage community service. The Conservation Commission could provide an opportunity for interested young people to get outside and improve the community.

The Conservation Commission should also consider more extensive partnerships with other municipal departments. They already have limited relationships with the Recreation Commission and the Parks and Cemeteries Departments, but these could be expanded. The key is to clearly define maintenance responsibilities, so that no task falls by the wayside.

Coordination

The question remains: how can the Conservation Commission best allocate the limited resources it has in order to put the management plans we have outlined into place? As discussed previously, the Conservation Commission has the ideological resources to decide what is the best use for a property, and to make decisions regarding management. Partnerships can provide the resources in order to implement those decisions. However, there has to be someone involved to intercede between these outside interests and the Conservation Commission, to coordinate and maintain these partnerships. Designating a Management Coordinator would significantly decrease the organizational burden on the Conservation Commission, while increasing their ability to interact with a number of different management partners.

We envision the Management Coordinator to be a long-term, part-time, paid position, although with some reduction in responsibilities it could be a volunteer position. These responsibilities could also be taken on by a willing Conservation Commission member. The Management Coordinator would help to organize and update information on each parcel, coordinate with

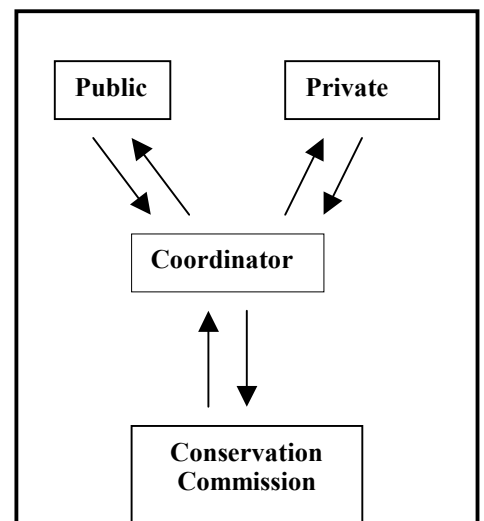


Fig. 22 : Role of the Management Coordinator.

other town organizations for maintenance, manage partnerships and volunteers, and maintain a network of interested parties. This position could be incorporated into one of the municipal jobs already in place, such as Town Conservationist, with a corresponding increase in salary. It also might be a new position, funded through an organization such as the Rural Lands Foundation, or through a grant. The most difficult part would be initiating programs such as Volunteer Days. Once partnerships are in place, the job would only require making a few phone calls a month in order to keep these relationships secure. We envision the Management Coordinator to be an additional link between community members and the Conservation Commission, as represented in Figure 22.

First Steps

In this report, we have outlined numerous strategies through which the nine Conservation Commission lands can be managed more effectively. It will take a concerted effort to begin to put these strategies into place. Better management can only develop incrementally, depending on resources and public investment. The first step is designating a concrete management plan for each property, perhaps from the recommendations in this report. The second step is to mobilize the available resources for each plan. The Conservation Commission might wish to get extra help during the initial management stages, which will take the most time and energy. We suggest summer or short-term internships, centered around specific projects, in order to get some of these recommendations off the ground. The Williams College Center For Environmental Studies regularly provides funding for summer internships for projects such as this one. The Rural Lands Foundation also might be able to help with funding a short-term project. Examples of short term projects that might be appropriate for a summer internship include: planning and marking trails on Bridges Pond or the Hunter property, designing informative signs for Lowry and Stone Hill, and designing plantings for Bloedel Park.

Priorities

In order to provide a starting point for the Conservation Commission we have designed a loose ranking of the properties, stating the order we feel it would be most beneficial to work on the lands. In making this ranking we tried to consider which properties would most effectively meet the goals of the Conservation Commission and the Town while overcoming the limitations of the Conservation Commission. We felt that Bloedel and Deans should have first priority, although for separate reasons. Bloedel provides a highly visible property with a relatively straightforward management plan that can motivate town interest and provide a working demonstration of how partnerships and volunteer days could function. Deans on the other hand, is a very sensitive property environmentally. It should probably be put under private conservation before an increase of use is encouraged on other Conservation Commission lands. Also the land swap with the Kelly Lot successfully meets the Conservation Commission goal for passive recreation. This swap is a high priority because it meets both of the Conservation Commission goals and requires virtually no resources. Next in the ranking is Hunter, which takes a greater number of resources, yet has great potential for passive recreation. It is also an exciting land that lends itself to involving many volunteers and motivating public involvement. Priority wise we feel that investigating access on Bridges follows improving Hunter. Bridges is the land we feel has the most potential, the most need for resources, and the greatest uncertainty stemming for lack of access. Until access is determined it is difficult to rank other improvements on the property, so we recommend looking into access first and then adjusting the priorities based on those results. After Bridges we placed Lowry since it is well designed to meet the Town's goal of equity of uses, as well as the common goal of passive recreation. While access is currently uncertain, both options we suggested should remedy that situation with very little resources from the town. Once access is improved very little resources are needed to make the

property useful. The possible connection to the bike path also makes this property one of high priority.

The four remaining lands require little to no change in use, and would require very few additional resources from the town. Of the four, we feel that Pine Cobble would provide the most benefit in terms of increasing passive recreation, and should thus be worked on first. Also, posting Burbank would take little energy and could be done relatively quickly. Both Stone Hill and Margaret Lindley Pond are appropriately used and managed currently, and energy and resources should not be expended on these properties until other lands have improved.

We would like to emphasize that these priorities are loose recommendations based on our current information on the lands and the goals of the Conservation Commission. They should be regarded as a malleable guide which can grow and change as new developments occur regarding the properties.

CONCLUSION

We hope that the information presented here will prove to be a useful resource, both for the Conservation Commission and the town at large. We believe that with minimal effort on the part of town government, and minimal financial investment, more residents of Williamstown could enjoy these currently underutilized public lands. In addition, the environmental quality of these open spaces will improve.

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Notes:

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 - ³ Open Space Plan. 1995. p 37
 - ⁴ Conservation Commission file, “Bloedel Park”, Department of Inspection Services, Williamstown, MA
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 - ⁸ Personal communication with the Store At Five Corners, 10/98.
 - ⁹ Personal communication with Meddy Woodyard, 12/98.
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 - ¹² Becher, *et al.*, 1990.
 - ¹³ Adams Registry of Deeds, Adams, MA.
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 - ¹⁷ Weng, K. Bioaccumulation of Chromium in a food chain of Bridges Pond. 1990 Envi 102 project.
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 - ²¹ Communication with Taconic Lumber, 11/98.
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 - ²⁴ Communication with Bob Hatton, 11/98.
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 - ²⁶ Communication with Bob Hatton, 11/98.
 - Communication with Leslie Reed Evans, 11/98.
 - ²⁷ *Ibid.*
 - ²⁸ Conservation Commission files, Burbank Property
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 - ³⁴ Communication, Mr. Winthrop Chenail, 11/98
 - ³⁵ Communication, Mr. Chenail, 11/98
 - ³⁶ Personal communication, Pamela Weatherbee, 10/98.
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 - ³⁸ Site visit, Deans Property, 10/98.
 - ³⁹ Soil Survey of Berkshire County, Massachusetts. 1988. United States Department of Agriculture.
 - ⁴⁰ *Ibid.*
 - ⁴¹ Site visit, Deans Property, 11/98/
 - ⁴² Personal communication with Pam Weatherbee, 11/98.
 - ⁴³ Photographs courtesy of Professor Hank Art
 - ⁴⁴ Conservation Commission files, Hunter Property
 - ⁴⁵ Adams Registry of Deeds, Adams, MA.
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 - ⁴⁷ Site visit, Hunter Property, 11/98
 - ⁴⁸ Map courtesy of Ethan Plunkett, Williams Outing Club
 - ⁴⁹ See Conservation Commission files or the Rural Lands Foundation for Jacquie Glantz’s map
 - ⁵⁰ Communication with Ethan Plunkett, and Mr. David Casey

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