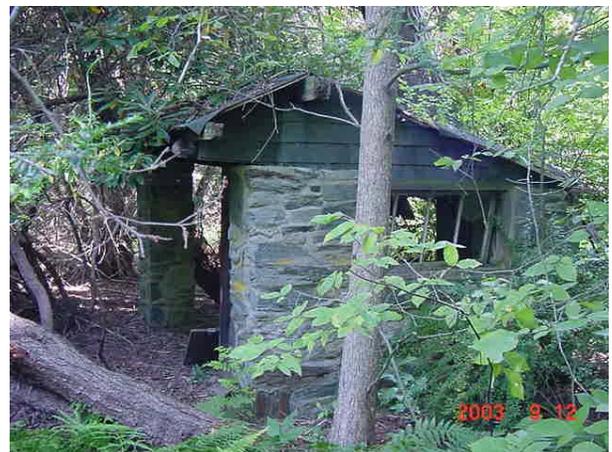


# Winnick Woods Master Plan

Final Draft



Draft May, 2005

## WINNICK WOODS MASTER PLAN

### Introduction

Cape Elizabeth has an outstanding array of natural resources and open spaces. Over the past decade, the town has embarked on a successful mission to preserve open space, which is supported by the most recent 1993 Comprehensive Plan. In addition, the 2001 Greenbelt Plan's vision statement is "to establish a town wide network of trails by connecting the Town center to important open spaces and all neighborhoods through a hub and spoke system." One of the priorities of the Greenbelt is Winnick Woods .

This 57 acre parcel was donated to the Town of Cape Elizabeth by Alice Larrea, a former resident. The donor expressly set forth in the deed that the property was to be used for passive recreational purposes, such as hiking, bird watching and nature observation. She placed a prohibition on active recreational uses such as organized sports, playing fields, bicycle tournaments, track events, etc. Ms. Larrea stipulated that any and all passive activities that occur on the property shall be of a character harmonious with the natural beauty of the property.

The primary recommendation of this plan is to create a trail system on the property, with a signature trail head on Sawyer Rd. The trail head is located next to a stand of pines on an existing farm road. The trail head will incorporate an existing stone shed as the trail head and information kiosk. The primary trail will extend from here to the south through a variety of meadow, wooded and wetland landscapes, eventually linking with existing trails on the Dyer-Hutchinson and Cross Hill conservation areas. The overall Master Plan will provide trails that allow the public to enjoy and still preserve the natural character of the land by minimizing construction and alterations.

### Purpose

The Master Plan is intended to be a guide for long-term management of this significant town resource. As a town property, it is appropriate that town residents visit and use the area. However, Winnick Woods includes sensitive areas such as wetlands and wildlife habitats that could be damaged by public use. The Master Plan will balance these sometimes competing needs by providing a well-marked trail system that allows the public to enjoy the land without trampling or damaging the essential characteristics that makes the land special. To accomplish this, the guiding principles of the plan are summarized below:

1. Trails. The plan will feature trails geared to pedestrian access. Trails will connect to abutting public access land and/or as self-contained loops on the property. Trails will be located to minimize impact on sensitive areas while still allowing the public to experience sensitive areas from the designated trail.
2. Varied Landscape. The land currently includes a varied landscape including old farm fields, successional shrub growth, woodlands and wetlands. Without some targeted management, the entire parcel will revert to a wooded/wetland combination and the variety of landscapes and wildlife habitats will be lost. A proactive approach will help preserve the diversity of the current landscape.

## **Methodology**

The first step in preparing the Master Plan was an exhaustive field evaluation of the physical characteristics of the property. Linda Francescone, a landscape architecture student and former member of the Conservation Commission, conducted the field evaluation. Her analysis included a focus on special sites, distinct ecological communities, existing roads and trails, and landscape-wide features.

The second step was to place Winnick Woods in context with the town-wide Greenbelt Plan. To the south, Winnick Woods abuts conservation land owned by the Town associated with the Cross Hill neighborhood. To the west is land owned by the United States Government Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). Also to the west and south of the USFWS parcel is a lot currently used as a tree farm. Most of this lot is encumbered by a conservation easement owned by the Cape Elizabeth Land Trust. Some of these parcels include trails that connect to Winnick Woods.

The third step was to coordinate with property abutters to Winnick Woods. In addition to the parties listed above, there are some single family home lots that abut the parcel to the north and east. The Moore/Chapman lot, in particular, required some boundary adjustments to address a lot and building misalignment issue. Public comment on the draft plan was solicited through a public forum sponsored by the Conservation Commission, as well as with meetings with individual property owners as needed.

## **Physical Description**

Examination of the site reveals a gently sloping upland forest along the southern and northeastern boundaries, two regenerating field communities near the eastern and western property boundaries, and a utility right of way that bisects the center of the property in a north/south direction. The presence of

regenerating fields and stone walls at several locations indicates that this was a former agricultural property. There is currently a working farm on the eastern border, as well as the historic Dyer-Hutchinson farm property on its southwest border.

## **Wetlands**

A Wetland Delineation report prepared for the Town in July 2000 identifies three wetland areas, which comprise a total of 23.3 acres. Wetland 1, which is forested, includes a stream channel and a potential vernal pool. Wetland 2 which is mostly forested is partially altered by a utility right of way. Wetland 3 is described as containing a forested / shrub / scrub community. (See Appendix \_\_\_ for Wetland Map)

## **Vegetation**

Analysis of the vegetation present reveals a wide variety of plant communities.

- Upland forest
- Regenerating field communities
- Shrub swamp communities
- Wooded swamp communities
- Stream bank communities
- Vernal Pool Habitat in the southern most area

## **Existing Trails**

Several existing trails are located on the property, many providing access to interesting views and areas of significant habitat. The vernal pool area, the excavated pool area, scenic views of streams and adjacent farmland are noteworthy. The identified trails and old farm roads are as follows:

1. Old Farm Road to Race Track Field
2. Utility Easement
3. Old Farm Road through Lower Field to Upland Forest
4. Existing Dyer-Hutchinson Trail
5. Existing Winnick Woods Trail
6. Old Snowmobile Trail

## **Recommendations**

## 1. **The Winnick Trail**

The first recommendation is to establish a trail from the northern edge of the property on Sawyer Rd and extend it generally southward to the Dyer-Hutchinson and Cross Hill parcels. Much of this trail already exists, however a distinctive trailhead is needed to guide the public onto the property. A trailhead is proposed on the northern boundary with Sawyer Road. Utilizing an existing partially paved old road, a trailhead can be created with a small parking area (approximately 4 spaces). An existing potting shed should be rehabilitated as a trailhead, including a kiosk information center with a map of the Winnick Woods Trails.

The old farm road extends to the southernmost part of the upper regenerating field. The trail skirts the edges of wet areas, in order to provide the adjacent neighbors with as much privacy as possible. The existing farm road provides a trail from the upper to the lower regenerating field, where a bridge will be needed to cross a stream. There are 3 old apple trees that have been overcome by bittersweet. Our plan is to prune the trees and remove the bittersweet.

Proceeding a few hundred yards, Winnick Trail intersects with Turtle Trail, in the area of the utility easement. The Trail follows an old farm road that lies alongside the stream bed. It skirts the edge of the Red Pine Grove.

The final leg of the Winnick Trail traverses over the old snowmobile trail, passing by a vernal pool area. Significantly, the trail skirts the area by 50 feet to protect this ecologically sensitive area. The trail continues through a forested area, where users will see evidence of previous logging activity.

The Winnick Trail then intersects the Dyer-Hutchinson trail. This link is particularly significant because users who enter from the Dyer-Hutchinson Trail access will need orientation to the Winnick Trail system. A trail map should be installed at this location to orient trail users from the Dyer-Hutchinson property. The Winnick Trail then continues in a southeasterly direction to connect with existing trails in abutting Cross Hill.

## 2. **Meadow Trail**

Meadow Trail extends through an old agricultural field and eventually reconnects to Winnick Trail. The field includes a high point in the meadow with the only distant views on the predominantly wooded parcel. From the end of the field, the trail continues into the woods and returns through the utility easement to a pond, where it connects to Turtle

Trail and continues back to Winnick Trail. The Meadow will be reclaimed as a field by cutting some of the small trees encroaching on the field and thereafter mowed annually.

**3. Turtle Trail**

Turtle Trail extends from a pond area, and traverses through a wet forested area to meet the Winnick Trail. Turtle Trail will need a bridge in the area adjacent to the pond, with the option of making the remainder of the trail which goes through a wet forest a 'seasonal trail'. Turtle Trail will explore an excavated vernal pool/wetland habitat. In the past this pool has been used for ice skating. Once the area is made known to users, it may be again. A bridge is necessary for a span of 20' or so. The remainder of the trail runs through a wet forested area.

**4. Red Pine Trail**

Red Pine Trail loops off the Winnick Trail in the area of the Red Pine Grove. The trail continues south to connect to the Cross Hill Trail and then rejoins the Winnick Trail. The Red Pine Trail crosses a stream at two points. The southerly crossing is sited next to an interesting old snag, adding to the scenic quality of the trail. The Red Pine Trail is important as it creates the link from the Winnick Woods Trail system to the extensive Cross Hill Trail system and the Spurwink Marsh.

**5. Cross Hill Connector**

This is a proposed trail, which may exist in some areas, that is intended to connect the Woods Trail to the Cross Hill Trail system. The exact alignment of the trail will need to be field located to avoid and minimize wetland areas and take advantage of casual trails that have been created to Cross Hill.

**6. Woods Trail**

This new proposed trail will extend from the southerly point of Turtle Trail and curve along the southeasterly corner of Winnick Woods to cross the Cross Hill connector and join the Winnick Trail. The trail should be field located to minimize wetland crossings and still provide controlled pedestrian access to this portion of the Winnick Woods. The trail will be located primarily in a northern hardwood forest community.

**7. Fields and Habitat Management**

The final component is the development of a Fields and Habitat Management plan. The Master Plan proposes to take action to preserve one former agricultural field, the Meadow and not allow it to convert to succession growth. This will involve cutting some of the smaller trees that have encroached on the field and thereafter annually mowing the field. Without periodic intervention, the Meadow will evolve into a woodland. Preservation of the Meadow promotes a variety of landscapes on the Winnick Woods property, enhancing both the pedestrian experience and the range of wildlife that can be supported on the parcel.

The second specific management plan is for the area west of Winnick Trail and north of the utility right-of-way. This plan recommends partnering with USFWS to cooperatively manage both parcels. Specifically, the area would be managed as a wildlife habitat for the New England Cottontail, including installation of interpretative signage.

The New England Cottontail has been identified as a declining species, primarily due to loss of habitat. The New England Cottontail is smaller than the Eastern Cottontail. It has eyes on the sides of the head and requires a dense scrub/shrub habitat to avoid predators. Overgrown agricultural fields are typical habitats. In the State of Maine, the abandonment of agricultural fields in the 1950's has resulted in suitable habitats for the New England Cottontail. As these fields are developed or taken over by successional growth that converts to the woodland stage, the shrub cover that the New England Cottontail needs to survive is disappearing.

Partnering with USFWS has several advantages. USFWS can increase the viability of New England Cottontail habitat by increasing the overall acreage in one location. The USFWS parcel is 12 acres and Winnick Woods habitat area is approximately 15 acres. For this reason, USFWS, represented by the Rachel Carson Wildlife Refuge, are willing to assume some of the management needs of the area by including this portion of Winnick Woods in their work program for the abutting parcel. They will also provide the Town with specialized technical advice on what is needed to maintain a New England Cottontail habitat. This partnership may also make USFWS more competitive in acquiring grants to fund some of the management efforts. USFWS staff have expressed interest in a joint management approach and may also want to explore a Memorandum of Agreement with the Town. This approach also protects the variety of landscapes on the Winnick Woods parcel as this shrubby area will revert to woodland without proactive management.

## **8. General trail design parameters**

In restoring and building the proposed trails, the trail construction parameters used at Gull Crest will also be employed here. Trails should be 6' wide, although narrower widths may be appropriate on steep side slopes. Boardwalks and bridges will be constructed to minimize impact and cost. Specific sleeper boardwalk and the more robust boardwalk designs in the Gull Crest Master Plan are also appropriate for Winnick Woods.

### **Implementation**

The first step to implement the Master Plan, after the public forum held by the Conservation Commission, is to present it to the Town Council for review, revision, and ultimately adoption. The Master Plan should then be submitted to the Planning Board, accompanied by any required additional materials, to obtain the necessary permits for wetland alterations. A similar process should be followed to obtain any necessary state and federal permits.

With adoption and permitting complete, the plan should be implemented incrementally and supervised by the Conservation Commission. The Commission will take advantage of volunteer labor and fund improvements within existing annual budget allocations for town greenbelt trails.

### **Conclusion**

The Conservation Commission recommends this Master Plan be adopted and implemented. It provides appropriate public access to Winnick Woods while still respecting the intentions of the donor to preserve the area for non-intensive use. The implementation includes minimal construction that can be accomplished, in many cases, by volunteers and within existing greenbelt funding. At the same time, the Master Plan protects Winnick Woods from haphazard use and unfortunate neglect by laying out a comprehensive management plan.

## APPENDIX

1. Master Plan
2. Wetland Map
3. Marker Details
4. New England Cottontail habitat Management paper

**Winnick Woods Master Plan**

**Prepared by the Conservation Commission**

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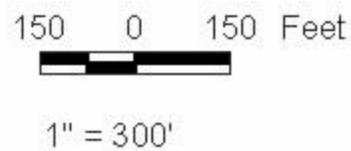
June, 2005

# Winnick Woods Master Plan



**Winnick Woods Trail System**

- Winnick Trail
- Old Meadow Loop Trail
- Turtle Trail
- Red Pine Trail
- Cross Hill Connector
- Woods Trail
- Winnick Woods Boundary



Prepared by the Planning Office 5/10/05

