

**LAND USE AND MANAGEMENT PLAN FOR
NASON CONSERVATION LAND**

Boxford Conservation Commission

December 2014

Introduction

The Nason Conservation Land is located on Washington Street and Lake Shore Road in Boxford, Massachusetts (Figure 1). The land was purchased by the Town from Essex County Greenbelt for conservation on July 16, 2014. Essex County Greenbelt acquired the property from the Nason family in October, 2013, and acted as an intermediate holder of the property on behalf of the Town as a delegee of rights under Chapter 61A.

The 46 acre parcel includes approximately 2 acres of hay meadow, and 6 acres under a vegetation management program associated with a utility right-of-way corridor that includes underground gas transmission pipeline and overhead electrical transmission cables. The remainder of the site is forested.

The town received a \$250,000 grant from the Land and Water Conservation Fund Grant Program of the Massachusetts Department of Conservation Services towards the cost of the land. The Grant requires a management plan for the property, to identify management priorities and the parties responsible for implementation and monitoring. This management plan is intended to meet that requirement.

Priority management needs are to clearly mark the boundaries, establish a parking area, create additional trails and improve existing trails, and arrange for maintenance of the meadow. The Boxford Conservation Commission will be responsible for the management of Nason Conservation Land and may seek advice in executing this management role from BTA/BOLT, Inc., and/or the Boxford Agriculture Commission when appropriate.

Any stewardship plan for conservation land must follow an adaptive management approach. Ongoing monitoring of property usage and natural resources will inform future management needs and priorities, and those responsible for management will need to adapt to these changing needs.

Protected Status of Nason Conservation Land

The Town of Boxford received a grant of \$250,000 from the Land and Water Conservation Fund Grant Program of the Massachusetts Department of Conservation Services, a department of the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs toward the purchase price of the Nason Conservation Land. Program funding is contingent on the land being placed under permanent protection. It is the intent of the Town of Boxford that Nason Conservation Land be preserved as open space in perpetuity, and the town has taken the following steps to ensure that status:

- The deed grants the land to the Town of Boxford ‘acting by and through its Conservation Commission, pursuant to G.L. c.40, Section 8c.’ The deed is attached in Appendix A.
- The parcel was acquired for the express purposes of conservation. On May 15th, 2013, Boxford Town Meeting voted to appropriate funds to enable the Town of Boxford to acquire under the provisions of Massachusetts General Laws, Chapter 40, s. 8C . . . said land to be managed and controlled by the Boxford Conservation Commission.’ A certified copy of the Town Warrant vote is attached in Appendix A.

Participants

The Nason Conservation Land was sold to the Town of Boxford by Essex County Greenbelt on

July 16, 2014. Those active in land protection in Boxford, including members of the Boxford Land Committee (BLC) and the Boxford Trails Association/Boxford Open Land Trust (BTA/BOLT, Inc.), had long been aware of the Nason Conservation Land as a parcel of conservation interest due primarily to its location on Hovey's Pond and its location adjacent to Potters Farm open space owned and managed by BTA/BOLT, Inc. A long-term effort among the town and other land protection organizations has focused on the protection of a string of properties abutting and buffering Hovey's Pond and Alder Brook.

The Boxford Land Committee manages all land transactions for the Town of Boxford, for infrastructure needs as well as for agriculture, conservation, and recreation. Peter Delaney, Chair, and Natasha Grigg member of the Land Committee and President of BTA/BOLT, Inc., worked particularly closely on this project.

Mr. James Nason presented a Purchase and Sale Contract to the Town of Boxford as required by the provisions of Chapter 61A. The Town of Boxford delegated its right of first refusal under the statute to Essex County Greenbelt, in order to facilitate acquisition of the property within the statutory timeline. Essex County Greenbelt acquired the property in October of 2013 and held the property until the Town was able to make the necessary arrangements, including obtaining grant funding, to purchase the property from Essex County Greenbelt. The transfer of the property from Essex County Greenbelt to the Town occurred on July 16th, 2014, and is recorded at Essex South Registry of Deeds Book 33413, Page 523.

The Boxford Agriculture Commission has been interested in this project throughout its history. The Agriculture Commission works to preserve Boxford's agricultural landscape by recognizing the value of working agriculture lands and supporting the use of town-owned lands for agriculture where appropriate. The Agriculture Commission is particularly interested in the existing hayfields being actively managed for agriculture and the existing wooded area managed for silviculture.

The Boxford Conservation Commission will have ultimate responsibility for managing the property.

The Boxford Trails Association/Boxford Open Land Trust is a volunteer, private, non-profit, tax-exempt organization dedicated to preserving and protecting natural and aesthetically important land and wildlife habitat, including fields, wetlands, and trails to preserve the nature of Boxford. Founded in 1978, BTA/BOLT, Inc. has helped protect over 100 miles of trails and over 1,200 acres of land and is supported by membership and contributions. BTA/BOLT, Inc. will assist in maintaining trails.

Site Description

Topography – The property is rolling, with some areas of steeper slopes and rock outcrops falling to the shores of Hovey's Pond.

Soil – Portions of the property include farmland soils (see figure). The central and eastern portions of the property consists primarily of Rock Outcrop-Charlton Hollis complex, with small inclusions of Canton and Paxton soil areas. Western portions of the site contain a mix of Canton, Sutton and Hinckley soils in the upland areas and Sudbury soils and mediprists in the wetland areas (see Figure – and soil descriptions in Appendix).

Water and Wetlands – Hovey’s Pond is located adjacent to the property along a portion of its northern boundary. The shoreline of Hovey’s Pond in this area is steep and would not easily accommodate boating. A boat ramp and parking area is located across the pond at Mill Brook Farm Field.

An intermittent stream and associated wetland system flows in a northerly direction close to and parallel to Washington Street.

Cover Types – The property includes three major cover types – grassland, upland forest, and red maple swamp – with several variants and secondary cover types (Figure 5).

- Cultural Grassland (2 acres) – The field may be described as cultural, that is grasslands maintained by human intervention as opposed to grasslands which are self-sustaining as a result of soil and climatic factors. These fields have been maintained through mowing for a period of at least decades. The dominant plant species are likely those common in hayfields, including orchard grass, timothy, and smooth brome as well as Queen Anne’s lace, clovers and various mustards. The southern end of the upper meadow and the center of the lower meadow include herbaceous species indicating wet soil conditions such as rushes.
- Red Maple Swamp (x acres) – This wetland community appears to hold water throughout the year and was observed to flood in periods of high water. Red maples dominate the canopy with dogwoods and viburnum species in the shrub layer and mosses the most abundant visible ground cover in early Spring. Skunk cabbage is also abundant.
- White Pine-Mixed Hardwood Forest (x acres) – The upland forest canopy includes large white pines with red maple, white ash, black oak, white oak, pignut hickory, and shagbark hickory. The shrub layer includes musclewood, witch hazel, American hazelnut, and saplings of the canopy species. Sweet pepperbush becomes the most common shrub in areas adjacent to Fish Brook and Howe’s Pond and catbrier is common in these areas. Ground cover includes ferns, winterberry, partridgeberry, and Lycopodium species. A small area of this cover type on the west side of the lower meadow has been kept clear of shrubs and groundcover.
- Hedgerows, Meadow Margin, and Stonewalls (< 0.75 acre) – The stone wall along Washington Street and Lake Shore Road is overgrown with a narrow strip of vegetation including apple, black cherry, pignut and shagbark hickory, red maple, and Norway maple in a low canopy with multiflora rose, honeysuckle, and dogwoods growing densely underneath. This strip of vegetation, ranging from 20 feet to 40 feet wide, runs between the meadows and Middleton Road, then arcs southeast along the southern margin of the upper field where the vegetation is dominated by a row of speckled alder with multiflora rose mixed in. These shrubby edges are the only significant locations of invasive plant species. Common buckthorn, glossy buckthorn, winged euonymus, and honeysuckles grow in addition to the multiflorarose.

Rare Species Habitat

The property is recognized as important wildlife habitat by the Massachusetts Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program (NHESP) (Figure x). The entire site is mapped as Priority Habitat for Rare Wildlife and Estimated Habitat for Rare Species, as well as BioMap2 Core Habitat. Hovey’s Pond is mapped as Living Waters Core Habitat and the entire site is mapped as Living Waters Critical Supporting Watershed. These designations are described below:

- Priority Habitat for Rare Wildlife -- The Priority Habitats of Rare Species datalayer contains polygons representing the geographic extent of Habitat of state-listed rare species in Massachusetts based on observations documented within the last 25 years in the database of the Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Program (NHESP). Priority Habitats are the filing trigger for proponents, municipalities, and other stakeholders for determining whether or not a proposed project must be reviewed by the NHESP for compliance with the Massachusetts Endangered Species Act (MESA).
- Estimated Habitat for Rare Species -- Estimated Habitats are for use with the Wetlands Protection Act regulations (310 CMR 10.00). The Estimated Habitats of Rare Wildlife datalayer contains polygons that are a subset of the Priority Habitats of Rare Species. They are based on occurrences of rare wetland wildlife observed within the last 25 years and documented in the Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Program (NHESP) database. They do not include those areas delineated for rare plants or for rare wildlife with strictly upland habitat requirements. For projects or activities that fall within Estimated Habitats of Rare Wildlife and that require a Notice of Intent (NOI) to be filed under the Wetlands Protection Act, proponents are required to send a copy of the NOI to the NHESP.
- BioMap Core Habitat -- The Core Habitat layer depicts the most viable habitat for rare species and natural communities in Massachusetts..

A list of rare species known to occur in Boxford and a report on Boxford's BioMap Core Habitat areas are attached as Appendix B.

Structures

There are no buildings located on the property. An underground gas transmission pipeline and overhead electrical transmission cables traverse the property within designated right-of-way corridors. There are a number of utility towers associated with the electrical transmission cables.

Historic Features

The property has been identified by the Massachusetts Historical Commission as being highly archeologically sensitive, and includes an ancient archeological site (the "Nason Site," 19-ES-159/847) as well as a Native American archeological site (the "Hovey's Pond Site," 19-ES-810).

Easements & Restrictions

The Scenic Roads Act – The following is excerpted from the Planning Board pages of the Town of Boxford website (accessed 18 March 2008):

This act applies to all roads (except numbered roads such as Route 95, 133, 97) in the Town of Boxford and prohibits the disturbance of any existing stone wall or the construction of a new stone wall located adjacent to a road and within the Town's right-of-way without the written consent of the Boxford Planning Board. The Scenic Roads Act also prohibits the removal of trees located within the road dedication without the written consent of the Boxford Planning Board.

Stone walls running along Washington Street and Lake Shore Road on the property would presumably be subject to restrictions and review under this act.

Town of Boxford Wetlands Protection Bylaw (Town Code Ch. 192) – The town wetlands bylaw and the Massachusetts Wetlands Protection Act together protect wetlands and their buffer areas.

As excerpted from the bylaw:

The purpose of this bylaw is to protect the wetlands, water resources and adjoining land areas in the Town of Boxford by controlling activities deemed by its Conservation Commission likely to have a significant or cumulative effect upon resource area values, including public or private water supply, groundwater, flood control, erosion and sedimentation control, storm damage prevention, water quality, water pollution control, fisheries, wildlife habitat, rare species habitat including rare plant species, agriculture, recreation values deemed important to the community and riverfront area values.

Except as permitted by the Commission or as provided by this bylaw, no person shall commence to remove, fill, dredge, build upon, degrade, discharge into or otherwise alter the following resource areas: any freshwater wetlands; marshes; wet meadows; bogs; swamps; lakes; ponds; rivers; streams; creeks; banks; beaches; vernal pools; large isolated wetlands; lands within 100 feet of any of the aforesaid resource areas; lands under water bodies; lands subject to flooding or inundation by groundwater or surface waters; land within 100 feet of said land subject to flooding or inundation; riverfront area as stated in the Wetlands Protection Act Regulations 310 CMR 10.58(2), as they may be amended; (collectively the 'resource areas protected by this bylaw'). Said resource areas shall be protected whether or not they border surface waters.

The application and permit required by this bylaw shall not be required for agricultural activities that comply in all respects with the definitions and requirements in Wetlands Protection Act Regulations 310 CMR 10.04 Agriculture (a) Land in agricultural use; and one or more of the following: 310 CMR 10.04 Agriculture (b) Normal maintenance of land in agricultural use 1 through 12; or 310 CMR 10.04 Agriculture (c) Normal improvement of land in agricultural use, as they may be from time to time amended.

New England Power Company Easements – Easements are recorded at Essex South Registry of Deeds Book 4035, 6304 and 6856, pages 276, 406 and 538, respectively, which grant to New England Power (now National Grid) certain rights to pass across the property and to construct and maintain high voltage electric lines (see attached).

Maritimes Northeast Pipeline Company Easement – Easements are recorded at Essex South Registry of Deeds Book 18943, pages 221 and 225, which grant to Maritimes Northeast Pipeline Company certain rights to pass across the property and to construct and maintain underground gas transmission pipelines.

Intended Uses & Existing Uses

The purpose of acquiring the Nason Conservation Land is to preserve open space and associated social and environmental benefits, preserve historic resources, and create public recreational resources. There are multiple uses proposed for the property including use as open space, water supply protection, wildlife protection area, scenic historic area, walking trails, fishing, enjoyment of nature and other forms of passive recreation, as well as use as a hayfield. Agricultural use of the existing field, compatible with public access to the site, will be permitted and controlled by the Boxford Conservation Commission.

An existing wood road provides ready access through the site from Washington Street for hiking. The road continues to Main Street, however in doing so it passes through private property. The road passes close to the trail system for the adjacent Potter's Farm open space area maintained by BTA/BOLT, Inc.

Other existing uses of the site include haying of the meadow, and as a transmission corridor for gas and electric power. The meadow has been mown for hay for many years. It is the intention of the Conservation Commission that agriculture be encouraged on the current meadow portion of the site.

Priority Management Needs

Boundary Delineation and Definition – The property boundary along Washington Street includes a couple of inholdings. The main access to the property is obtained across an easement through one of these inholdings. In other areas of the site, the boundary is located in dense woods. Permanent markers, such as iron stakes or low granite or concrete posts, should be installed at the property corners at the points shown in Figure 8.

Refining the boundary definition along this property line is in the mutual interest of the town, BTA/BOLT, Inc., and the neighboring property owners: a clearly defined line will reduce the likelihood of the either land use creeping onto the adjacent property, as well as steer public access away from the private property.

Signage – A sign for the property is located at the main entrance on Washington Street. Additional signage will eventually be needed at the entrance to the hay meadow, where future parking is planned.

Public Access – The primary public access point is via a driveway constructed on an easement within one of the inholdings along Washington Street. There is space on the side of this driveway to accommodate several cars. A gate is located across the woods road several hundred feet in from Washington Street to discourage vehicles from accessing the interior portions of the property and the power line right-of-way. Key Boxford officials, including the Fire Chief, have a copy of the key needed to open the gate.

A parking area is proposed to be constructed in the corner of the hay meadow to serve as an alternative entry point onto the property from Lake Shore Road and to facilitate management of the hay meadow.

Old Dump – There are a couple of small areas off the old wood road where household appliances and other trash has been dumped. This trash must be removed and properly disposed of. Care will be taken not to disturb any soil areas except as necessary to remove items from the surface. No excavation will be allowed without prior consultation with the Massachusetts Historical Commission to ensure no impacts to archeological sites.

Management of Areas Currently in Meadow – The meadow has long been maintained by mowing. Anecdotal information indicates that the meadows were usually mown only in late Summer, as moist conditions limited access earlier in the season. Grazing or hay production will prevent woody species from invading the meadows. Areas not used for crops should be mown at least once each year in order to maintain their viewshed quality. A late season mow would also accommodate bird nesting activity and early- and mid-season invertebrate activity. If mowing occurs less frequently, on the order of every two or three years, the meadows will tend toward a heavier component of wildflowers such as goldenrods and asters rather than grasses. While this community type is excellent wildlife habitat, it becomes lower quality for hay. If mowing is delayed longer than two or three years, the meadows will begin to revert to shrubby cover and eventually to young forest. Provisions of this paragraph are not to be interpreted that crops other than hay are prohibited.

Management of Power Line Right-of-Way – The power line right-of-way is currently maintained by National Grid and Maritimes Northeast Pipeline companies in accordance with approved statewide vegetation management protocols. This management is expected to continue unchanged.

Implementation Plan

Boundary Delineation – The boundary corners illustrated in Figure 8 will be monumented with permanent markers (e.g., granite or concrete blocks) either as part of the required property survey or by separate contract. Conservation Commission will assume the associated costs.

Timeline: Spring 2015

Cost: \$5,000

Signage – The Conservation Commission will eventually design, order, and purchase the signage required for the proposed accessory parking area in the corner of the hay meadow. The sign will be mounted and installed using volunteer effort. The commission and BTA/BOLT, Inc. will collaborate on planning for, designing, building, and installing any additional information signage such as a kiosk.

Timeline: Fall 2016

Cost: \$300

Public Access – The Conservation Commission will work with the Boxford Police Department and Department of Public Works to design the parking lot and will seek bids and hire a contractor to install the parking area.

Timeline: Fall 2016

Cost: \$5,000

BTA/BOLT, Inc. will work with the Conservation Commission and Agricultural Commission to locate, design, and install new trails and trail improvements.

Timeline: On-going

Cost: largely volunteer effort

Old Dump – The existing trash will be removed and properly disposed of by the Boxford Department of Public Works or its contractor.

Timeline: Spring 2015

Cost: \$2000 (estimated)

Meadow Management – The Conservation Commission and Agriculture Commission will collaborate on a plan to implement agricultural use of the meadows. The intention is for agricultural use to maintain the meadows in their open state. In the event that the land is not leased for an agricultural use, the Conservation Commission and Agriculture Commission will devise a plan for maintaining the meadows in their open condition. Applications of fertilizers, herbicides, and pesticides should only be made pursuant to labeling.

Timeline: Spring 2015

Cost: Licenses for haying the hay meadow will be revenue neutral

Monitoring Plan

Boundaries – BTA/BOLT, Inc. will assist the Conservation Commission in monitoring the boundaries annually. Any disturbance of property boundary markers or activities by neighbors that cross the boundaries (such as dumping, mowing, etc.) will be reported to the Conservation Commission.

Parking Area – The conservation commission will be responsible for monitoring and maintaining the parking area. Director of Conservation will inspect the parking area and trail heads at least quarterly and report to the commission on any maintenance needs.

Trail Conditions – BTA/BOLT, Inc. will take lead responsibility for monitoring trail conditions and proposing improvements. A BTA/BOLT, Inc. representative should perform an annual monitoring visit to document any issues regarding trail location, conditions, and use and provide a brief written update to the Boxford Director of Conservation.

Litter – The Conservation Commission will have lead responsibility for monitoring for litter on the property. BTA/BOLT, Inc. and the agriculture lessee will share this responsibility by reporting instances of large amounts of litter to the conservation commission. Roadsides and the parking area should be monitored for litter weekly.