

Community Forest Management Plan

Proposed Implementation Strategy

1. Introduction

Falmouth currently owns nearly 1,000 acres of forestland, spread across eight major parcels. An inventory of these properties has determined that they are generally in rather poor condition. Many are overstocked (too many small trees per acre), have a disproportionate number of old, diseased or dying trees, and are even aged (are not very diverse in age, height, etc.). As a result, their wildlife habitat value is also less productive than it might otherwise be. Most also have extensive invasive species infestation.

The Open Space Sub-Committee of the Falmouth Conservation Commission recommends that the town actively manage these properties for wood products, wildlife, their watershed value, and recreation, thus improving their overall condition and their value to the community. What follows is our proposed implementation plan for conducting that process.

2. Certification

Any and all management operations need to be conducted according to current best management practices in the forestry industry. The Sub-Committee proposes that the town enroll all of its forest properties into the American Tree Farm System. ATFM, in turn, will impose certification requirements regarding the management of these properties and conduct inspections of each property to verify that these standards are being met. Additionally, the town will contract with a licensed professional forester to oversee all operations, who will in turn only contract with certified professional loggers to manage any cutting operations.

3. Where & When to Start

All eight properties need treatment, but we propose starting with the Hadlock Community Forest. Access to the property from both the western and eastern borders is good, it is a large area (275 acres), and it is remote enough that it should not generate concern from area residents. Weather permitting, harvesting operations will be conducted this winter (approximately from 15 Dec to 15 Feb) while the ground is thoroughly frozen.

4. Public Information & Safety

We will actively inform the public about this work, both to keep them apprised of our plans and to educate them about the process. These activities will include media coverage; use of the town's email alert system and website; pre-treatment field trips (perhaps videoed and broadcast on the FTV system); and educational activities for school children. We will also post signs advising the public to avoid active forestry operations (i.e. – closing trails during the harvesting period, etc.) when such operations might pose a safety threat to recreational users of the properties.

5. Wildlife Management

A major goal of our work will be to improve the quality of wildlife habitat on these properties. We have existing U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service habitat survey information regarding the presence of 191 species of special concern on each of these properties. We will work with the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries & Wildlife to more accurately determine the kind of mammal, bird and herptile species likely to be found in each property (by cross referencing the vegetation types to extant data about wildlife populations in Maine). We will work with volunteer birders to conduct seasonal songbird inventories on each property and conduct winter tracking surveys to determine mammalian populations. We may conduct intensive "Bio-Blitz" activities on select properties to get an in-depth inventory of the flora and fauna found on each. Summaries of our findings will be included among the other information we make public on the town website and at the information kiosks located on properties that have them.

Finally, on properties with information kiosks, we will have a system for observers to record what wildlife species they may have seen when out on the property.

6. Wetlands & Vernal Pools

Some properties, particularly the Hadlock Community Forest contain significant wetlands and a number of vernal pools. We will minimize the impact of forest operations on these habitats in several ways. First, we will simply avoid vernal pools whenever possible. Second, we will comply with all state laws and local ordinances regarding cutting within wetland areas. Third, by operating in the winter months when the ground is frozen, no real impact will be made on these resources. And fourth, the shelterwood and selective cutting approaches we will use on all properties will leave enough large trees (canopy) to provide needed shade to vernal pools (but by opening up these pools to some additional light, we will likely improve their productivity as temperature is a key factor determining their use by amphibians.). The primary management objective in these areas will be improving wildlife habitat.

7. Trails

Several of these properties already have recreational trails on them, motorized (snowmobile) and non-motorized. Trails will be established on additional properties as well, particularly those that can be easily accessed. Existing trails will be connected to other extant trails whenever possible, including connections to Portland Trails links wherever possible to help create and inter-connected regional trail network. Trails will be designed for pedestrian use only (hiking, snowshoeing, etc.) given that we already have an extensive network of snowmobile trails (which we will help preserve). Currently, other motorized trail uses are prohibited on these properties.

8. Invasive Species Control

Invasive species are a major problem on six of the eight properties, most often on a scale that exceeds the capacity of our volunteers to eradicate them. Harvesting activities are likely to increase the problem as now dormant seeds sprout in response to increase sunlight reaching the forest floor.

We believe the best solution to this problem is to contract with a commercial firm that specializes in this kind of work. They could provide first stage treatment, focusing on eliminating a large percentage the mature plants found on each property using various chemical, mechanical and natural control methods. A second round of treatment by such a firm would likely be necessary as well, since in usually takes several treatments to reduce the problem to manageable size. Once we have reached the “manageable” threshold, the Falmouth Conservation Corps, with the help of available volunteer groups, can take over from there.

There will be a cost to this approach. We recommend that the Council dedicate part of the revenue from the harvesting operations to pay for this control effort. This work would also make the most sense if done in the context of a broader, community wide effort to address the invasives problem, an effort that would be best led by the conservation commission.

9. Stewardship

Monitoring of these properties, trail creation and maintenance, wildlife management work (e.g. – nest box placement, vegetation management), and other stewardship activities will be done primarily by Falmouth Conservation Corps teams assigned to each property. Additional help is anticipated from Scouting groups, the Maine Youth Conservation Corps, and other organizations with an interest in such work.