

### Rationale for a Leash Ordinance on Town Conservation Properties

- Falmouth's conservation properties are managed for multiple uses, including wildlife habitat, passive recreation, watershed protection, wood products and their contribution to the town's rural character. The management challenge is to find a balance between and among conflicting uses.
- The presence of dogs has a negative impact on wildlife populations, especially during the breeding season. Their instinct to roam flushes animals from their nests or dens, exposing the eggs or young to weather or predators. In some cases, they may chase and even kill animals. As kin of wolves, foxes and coyotes, their odor is a red flag for wildlife that might live and breed in a particular area. This is why organizations that manage land for wildlife – Maine Audubon, Maine Coast Heritage Trust, The Nature Conservancy, Baxter State Park – all ban dogs entirely.
- The proposed ordinance requiring that dogs be leashed from 1 Apr to 30 Sep, the period when nesting when young animals are being raised, is a fair compromise that still allows dogs to roam in the colder months, or be used for bird or rabbit hunting, while protecting wildlife during the breeding season.

### Regarding Dogs in the Falmouth Nature Preserve

- FNP was the first designated conservation property in Falmouth, the bulk of which was donated to the town by the Brown family with the intent that it be what it's name says, a nature preserve, and that it be "kept entirely in [its] natural state, without any disturbance whatever of habitat, plant or animal populations." Dogs create disturbance and the more dogs, the greater the disturbance.
- The town has a moral and legal obligation to honor the wishes of the donor. To do otherwise would be a breach of trust and discourage similar donations in the future.
- FNP is the largest block of unfragmented habitat east of the Middle Road and thus has the potential to be as an important wildlife reservoir in this highly developed part of town. The general absence of ground nesting birds and mammals was noted by the forester who developed a forest management plan for the property in 2009. His report noted that, "This [forest] is used heavily only by a few species that mostly live in the canopy. Wildlife travels through and feeds...mostly on mast and mushrooms. Heavy use for exercising dogs off of leashes also likely limits the use of this property by wildlife." He also noted that "Use of the [forest] by deer is likely minimal due to the many dogs exercised in the preserve."
- Ergo, as a town-owned conservation property, it should be subject to the same user rules as other conservation properties.