

Hooksett Conservation Commission Presentation:

Merrimack Riverfront Trails Project

Monday, October 26, 2015, 6:00 PM

Hooksett Library

Meeting Summary

Member Attendance: Steve Couture, Chair; Cindy Robertson, Vice-Chair; David Hess, member; Deb Miville, Alternate

Consultants: Dan Tatem, Stantec

Staff: Carolyn Cronin, Assistant Planner

22 members of the public attended; many either direct abutters or Merrimack Street residents.

6:00pm – 7:00pm: Presentation by Steve Couture (See attached)

The trailhead and first 1,000 feet of trail are to be completed in 2016. There will be boardwalks over wetlands and access to the riverfront and fields. The total trail will be approximately 2 miles. The goal is public access to trails for people of all ages and abilities. Trails will be built with environmental sensitivity. (Out of 2 miles of trails, only 37 square feet of wetlands will be permanently impacted.) Project will go out to bid in early 2016 and groundbreaking will be in spring 2016.

7:00pm – 8:00pm: Public Input Session

1. How wide is the bridge at the trailhead going to be?

12 feet wide.

2. Will that be an emergency access point?

Yes.

3. Will there be ATV access and what time will the trails be open?

There will be no ATVs allowed. The property will have a curfew of dusk to dawn, which is the same as our other conservation properties.

4. Where is the parking going to be and how many vehicles will there be room for?

It will be the existing parking that's there for the dog park. Head's Pond at its busiest has about 15 cars. There are regularly about 10 cars there on the weekend. We will have ample parking between the dog park and court house. The furthest you would walk is $\frac{3}{4}$ of a football field to get from the court house parking to the trailhead.

5. You said no ATVs, what about snowmobiles?

Our intent is to allow abutting property owners to continue using it, but not to advertise or allow use by other snowmobilers. We thought that was fair.

6. Part of the trail goes behind houses. What about privacy? Will you keep some trees between the trail and houses or put up a fence?

We will not be removing any trees on the Merrimack Street side at all. We are moving very minimal trees, just for the trailhead. For everything else we are using existing trail. We will curve the trail in tight away from the properties.

7. Do have any intent to connect this to the Head's Pond Trail?

It's possible, but most likely you will need to use the street for some of it. We do have right of ways with access to Merrimack Street that could serve as a link between the two properties.

8. Do you see any plans in the future for access on other parts of Merrimack Street?

We thought the trailhead where we have proposed is the best investment for our money. Our intent is not to build any additional parking.

9. Where the trailhead is, at the first field, there is someone with a camper. Is that town property?

No, the camper is just beyond our property.

10. I believe part of the shoreline is on my property not yours.

We can get together and talk about that at later time. Note: Subsequent discussions with the property owner clarified the issue.

11. Who is this trail built for? Hooksett residents, Manchester residents, people from Massachusetts? Will you be publicizing this?

Our audience is the town of Hooksett. If other people learn about it then I'm sure they will use it. We aren't advertising the property out of state. We are trying to answer the Town's response for trails.

12. Why did the Commission purchase such a large property when there's so much of it that won't be used?

Our responsibility is to protect wildlife habitat, wetlands and natural resources. There is a prime wetland there identified by the Town. There are rare, threatened and endangered species on the property. There are enough characteristics there that are worth protecting.

13. I have a question about upkeep and vandalism. This will be bringing in people to our backyards. Who will monitor the property and clean it up?

We will work with the Town Public Works for upkeep. There will be annual clean-ups. A lot of monitoring happens by neighbors. If they see something, they call the town. It's self-monitoring by neighbors and regular users. We have a responsibility of stewardship to the property.

14. Is there a curfew now on the parking lot at the dog park?

I'm not sure but I think it's open dawn to dusk like the other Town properties.

15. Why does the trail have to loop behind our houses?

A lot of people are not going to be able to make this 2-mile trek. We have some features we want to make accessible to people. Most people like loop trails, not out and back. We wanted to minimize bisecting the fields so we tried to keep it to the edge as much as possible. We will have a bunch of bump-outs for people to sit and look at the wetlands. The reasoning was to give people a shorter option, a loop, and beautiful views. Hooksett residents have asked continually for access to the riverfront; this property has the most appeal of all our properties.

16. What's the projected time frame to complete the project?

It depends on bids, but I can see it being a 5-10 year effort.

17. Are there plans to have informational kiosks?

Yes, we have an Eagle Scout who is lined up to do that project. He is coming to our next Conservation Commission meeting.

18. My concern is parking. With people putting in boats at the boat ramp, are you going to have designated spots just for trails?

I don't know as of now. We could talk to DPW and Parks & Rec to see if they want to consider that. We will work with the DPW to ensure that boat trailer access is not impeded.

Conservation Commission Member Input:

When we acquired the Pinnacle, there were a lot of the same concerns among abutters about occupancy, activities, and vandalism. You will notice there is no sign advertising the park on Route 3A. Unless you know where it is, you don't know it's there. We make sure it's more locally used. The same activities and concerns that neighbors there were worried about have not materialized. These are common concerns by people who live near conservation properties. Generally, you find the opposite effect happens. With more visibility and awareness, there is

less likely to be people vandalizing the property. Generally, when there is formal access and people out there, it is less likely to have undesirable activities and users.

Thank you for your interest and questions.



Hooksett Conservation Commission

The Merrimack Riverfront Trails System Project

October 2015

Explore. Protect. Reconnect.

- What is the Hooksett Conservation Commission?
- Hooksett Priorities (2004 Master Plan, 2011 Open Space Plan, and 2014 Community Profile)
- Why is the Merrimack Riverfront Trails Project important to Hooksett?
- What is the vision for this project?
- Where are we now? And What's Next?
- Your ideas and suggestions



- Active commission with five full members and two alternates appointed by the Town Council
- Enrich the quality of life and land value in Hooksett by protecting its natural resources
- Research and catalog all open space, natural, ecological, wetland or aesthetic areas within the Town
- Obtain land through gift, purchase or grant for continued preservation
- Ensure public access to conservation land for recreational and educational opportunities
- Meetings: 2nd Monday of every month, 4:00 PM

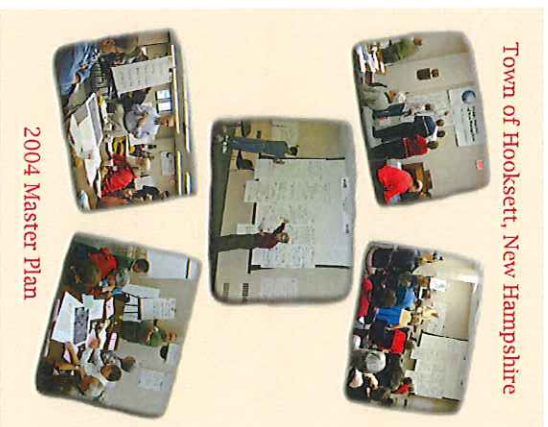


One of New Hampshire's oldest Conservation Commissions!

- Steve Couture, Chair
- Cindy Robertson,
Vice Chair
- Phil Fitanides
- David Hess
- JoCarol Woodburn
- Deborah Miville,
alternate
- Carolyn Cronin, Staff
support

- Todd Lizotte,
alternate
- Dave Ross , Town
Council Representative





Hooksett Community Profile

2014

November 7 & 8

Hooksett –
Our Town...
Our Future



Town of Hooksett Open Space Plan
Prepared For the Hooksett Planning
Board and Town Council

Prepared by the
Hooksett Open Space Plan Sub-
Committee

Funding and Technical Assistance provided through the
CTAP and the Southern New Hampshire Planning
Commission

Final Report July 2011

More than 10 years of Conservation efforts

Named in the Master Plan of 2004, the Open Space Plan of 2011 and the Community Profile of 2014 by Hooksett residents

“Expand Merrimack River Access”

“Develop plans for hiking and biking trails”

“Preserve the natural environment and wildlife habitats”



Land Acquisition Costs

2004-2015



Property	Acreage	Cost	HCC Cost	Year
Clay Pond I	530	\$ 898,192	\$ 4,024	2009
Pinnacle	36.5	\$ 360,000	\$ 360,000	2011
Clay Pond II	172	\$ 260,590	\$ 194,090	2012
Quimby (Hooksett land swap)	96.5	\$ 216,997	\$ 11,997	2012
Hinman Pond	471	\$ 1,095,040	\$ 0	2013
Merrimack Riverfront	126	\$ 480,693	\$ 114,692	2014
Clay Pond H-L	34	\$ 50,350	\$ 1,350	2014
Hinman Pond (Buxton)	105	\$ 120,157	\$ 0	2014
Great Marsh	584	\$ 584,000*	\$ 0	2015
Hooksett Total	2,155	\$ 4,066,019	\$ 686,153	6 years

* Estimate

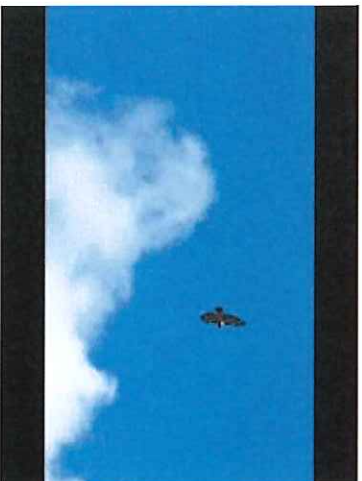
Hooksett Conservation

2004 – 2015

Explore. Protect. Reconnect.

Public Cost

\$318 per Acre



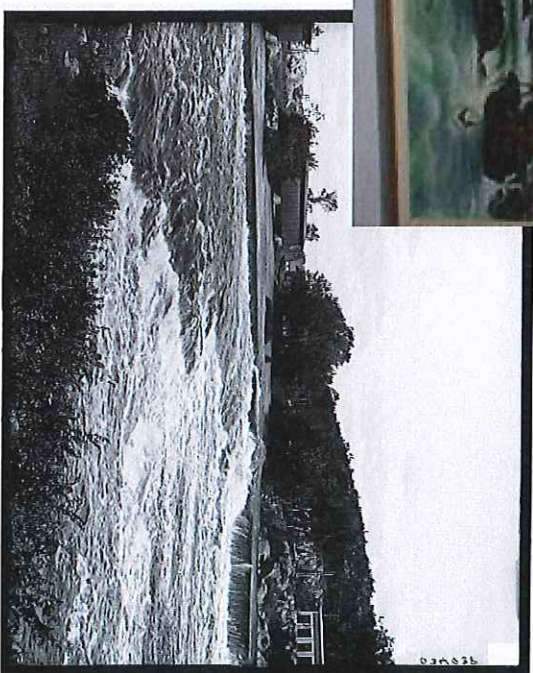
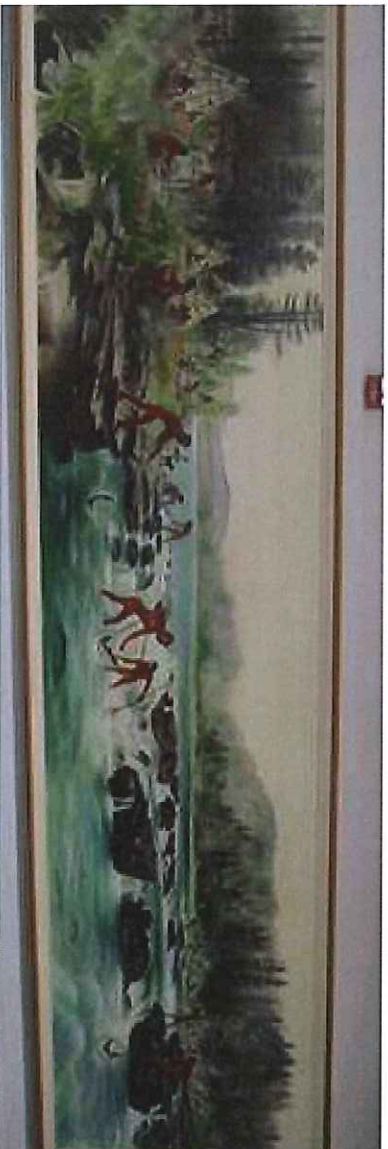
Merrimack Riverfront Project

*Largest tract of undeveloped river frontage in southern NH
Town has acquired and conserved 127 acres, including 3,900-feet
of prime riverfront*

- Provides an opportunity for residents, visitors, educators, and students to gain access to the river

“More river development (recreation and entertainment)”
Community Profile
2014





Historical Significance to Hooksett

From indigenous settlements to the industrial revolution
Former site of the Head & Son Brickyard (depicted on our Town Seal)
Agriculture and two historic rail beds



Socio-economic Benefits

Governor Hassan chose this site to celebrate Earth Day 2014

"Make the river part of our community" Community Profile 2014

- The property is ranked among the “highest” wildlife habitat in the state by the N.H. Wildlife Action Plan



- Land acquisition was possible through public and private grants and donations and the HCC fund



- Society for the Protection of NH Forests (easement holder)
 - Land and Community Heritage Program
 - NHDES Aquatic Resources Mitigation Fund
 - McIninch Foundation
 - Samuel P. Hunt Foundation
 - Hooksett Heritage Commission
- * Multiple private donations and a significant anonymous donor



**THE MCININCH
FOUNDATION**



Forest Notes, Spring 2014

Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests

NH Union Leader

The Hooksett Banner



Left: The Merrimack Riverfront project includes about 16,000 acres of riverfront property in Hooksett. The property also features a two-acre island, a diverse mix of wetlands, hay and corn fields, floodplain forests and former railroad beds. Photo by Kevin McKinnis.
Right: A bald eagle flies above the Merrimack River near the newly conserved Hooksett riverfront property. Photo by Carolyn Sorenson.

A Place to Soar

The Forest Society helps Hooksett save its riverfront 'jewel' for recreation and wildlife

By Brenda Guenther

Steve Couture had just finished across a field on snowshoes and come into full view of the Merrimack River in Hooksett when he stopped to look up, joking that it would be a perfect time for a bald eagle to fly over.

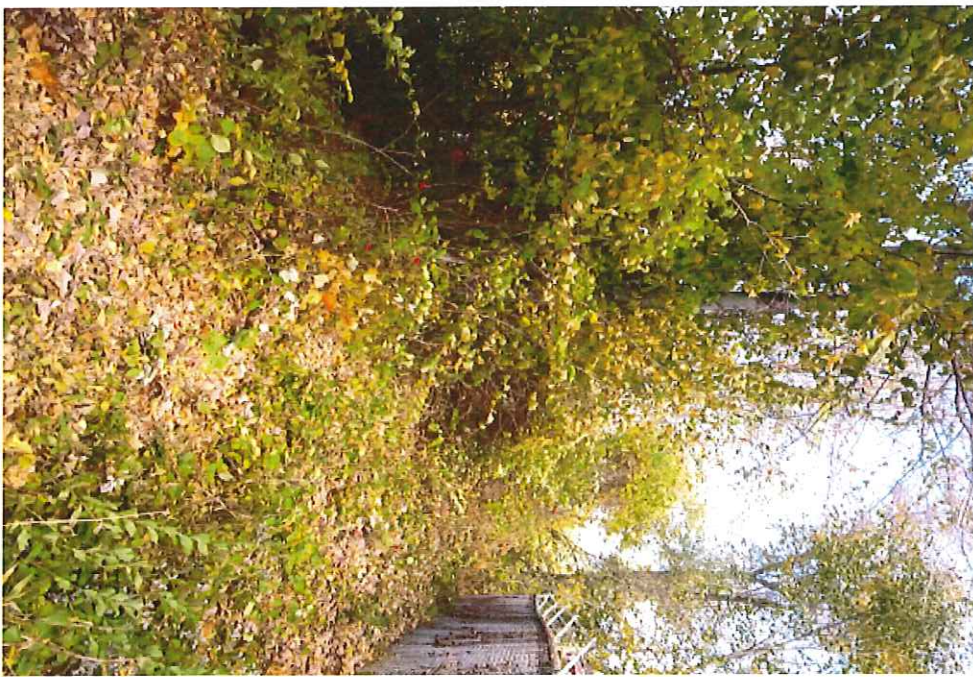
Not far about five minutes, anyway. The bald eagle did not appear. "I was probably overreacting at that time," he said. "There's its white tail!" Couture said, squinting up into the blue sky.

The moment was particularly exciting to Couture, chair of the Hooksett Conservation Commission, because protecting bald eagle habitat is one of the priorities of the town's war with parliament with the forest society to conserve 54 of a mile of undeveloped riverfront property. The town has purchased 11 acres of land abutting the river including a two-acre island and has donated a conservation easement on it to the Forest Society. A similar arrangement on

about 15 more acres is still in the works. This project has engendered widespread public and private support for the abundance of conservation and cultural values inherent in the mix of fields, floodplain forests and—most importantly—floodplains on the magnificent Merrimack. "There's no other forest," Couture said. "There's nothing else like this in the area." The preservation of the land, situated through enough of Merrimack Street, rewards at least 10 years of often that started, as most successes do, with a targeted vision written into the town's master plan of 2004.

"We surveyed the entire town and found the specific areas deserving of conservation, and this was one of our top five priorities," Couture said. "The Forest Society has been a tremendous conservation commission who has been driving force behind the project. I see said the location of the land, within half a mile of both Hooksett Village and Suncook Village, is ideal for conserving a common open space for recreation as well as education. What first drew the attention of the conservation commission, however, were the fertile corn and hay fields with young forest—a rarity in this highly developed area neighboring Manchester. The thought of being able to see prime agricultural soils so close to the city was exciting. "The idea of the 'white tail' for getting on the property, Couture said. "This is agriculture's last stand in Hooksett," he said. "You people walk out here, they'll be able to see some agriculture and have that connection to their food." The vision for the land includes new habitat that would connect to regional floodplains and wetlands. The town can also offer to help the conservation commission create and maintain the trails much as it did at the popular Hooks Pond Trail previously. "For years, we wanted to link

Today: very little access to parking and trails



Vision – It's up to us!

- Almost 2 miles of trails along the riverfront



*Endorsed by: Hooksett Town Council, Conservation Commission, Planning Board,
Heritage Commission, Southern NH University, and Hooksett Kiwanis*

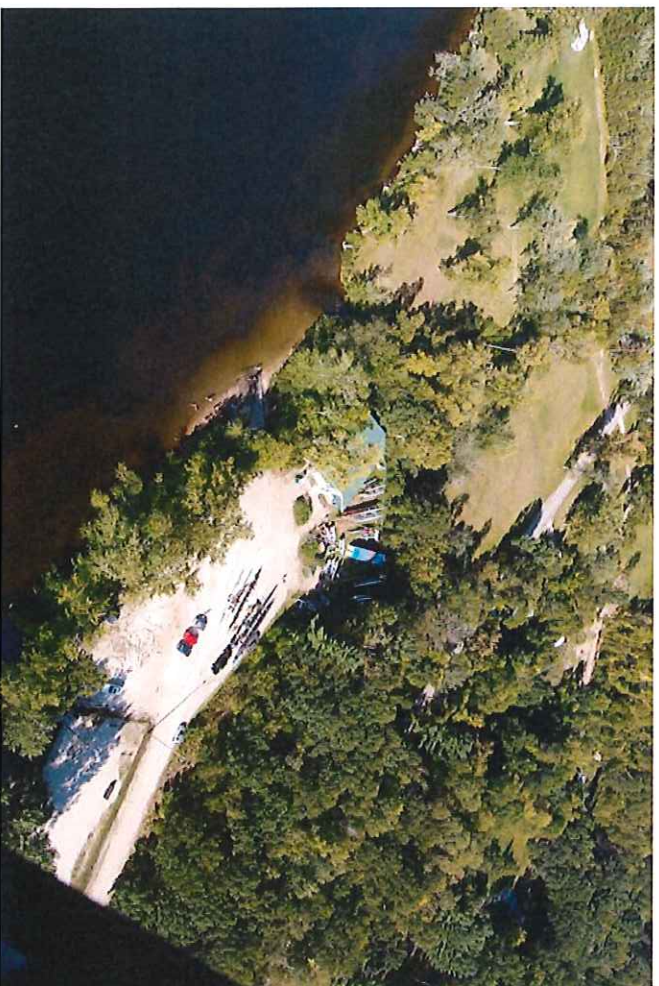
Vision – It's up to us!

- 1,000 feet of elevated walkway over wetlands



Vision – It's up to us!

- Public access to the riverfront for people of all ages and abilities



Endorsed by: Hooksett Town Council, Conservation Commission, Planning Board, Heritage Commission, Southern NH University, and Hooksett Kiwanis

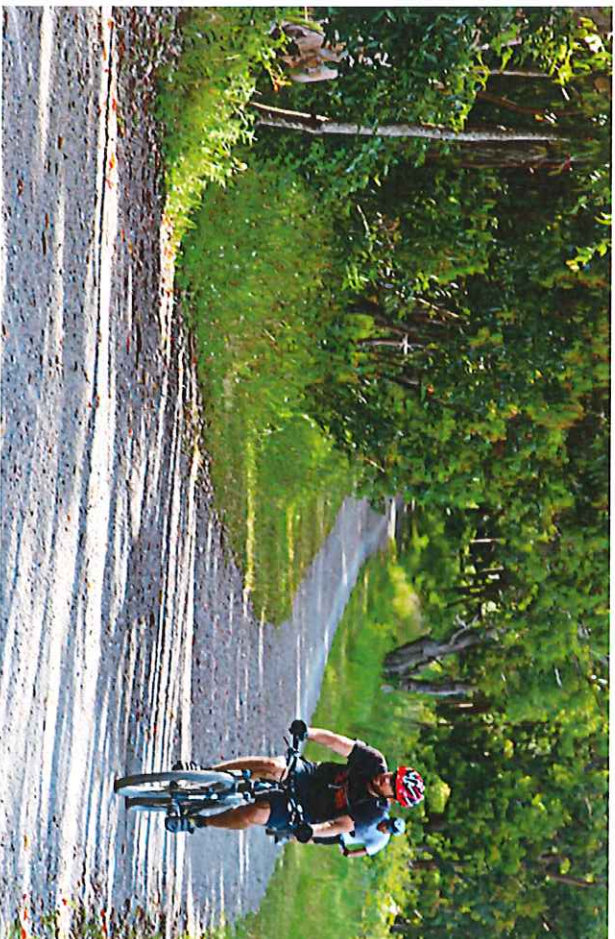
Vision – It's up to us!

- Cultivation of the last producing farmlands in Hooksett



Vision – It's up to us!

- Essential connectors for pedestrian and bike transportation



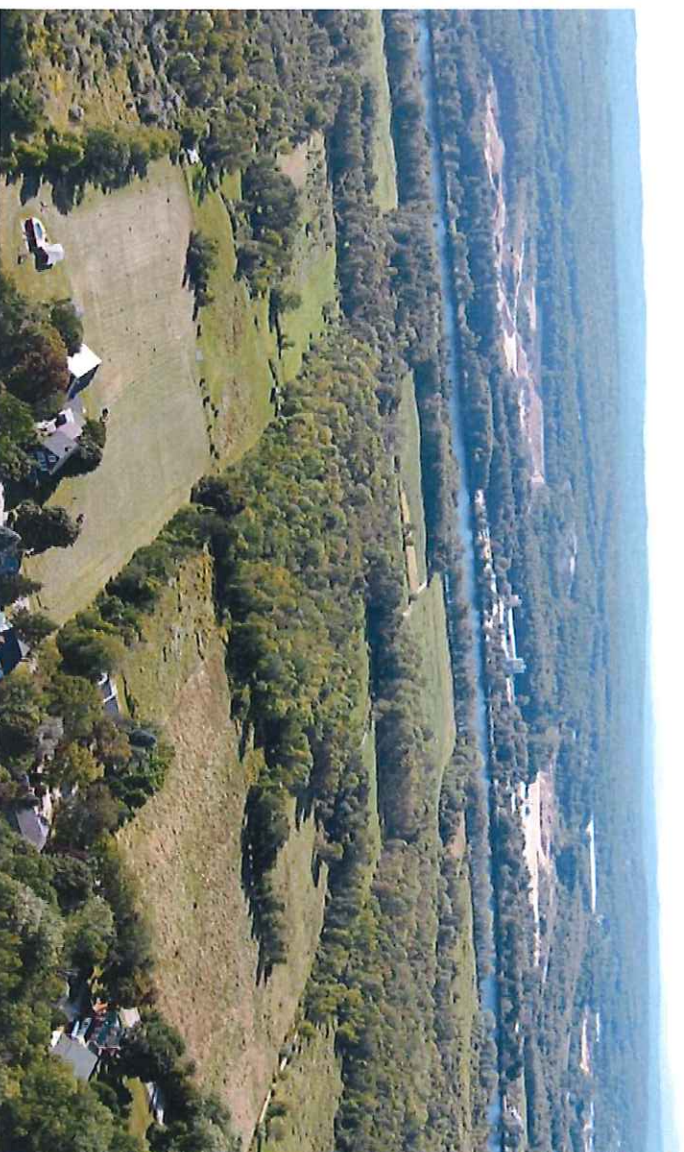
Vision- It's up to us!

- Educational opportunities for students and teachers



Vision– It's up to us!

- A foundation for future regional trail development



- Funding through warrant article (\$100,000), recreation impact fees (\$100,000), DRED Trail grant (\$50,000) and pending Mooseplate grant (\$20,000)
- Stattec: Project plan and construction estimates
- Trail design, bridges and boardwalks
- Permitting
- Construction bids out in January – February 2016
- Groundbreaking in Spring 2016!

What's next? Bridges and Boardwalks

- Pedestrian Bridge with hand rails at the trailhead, southern end of property leading to almost two miles of trails



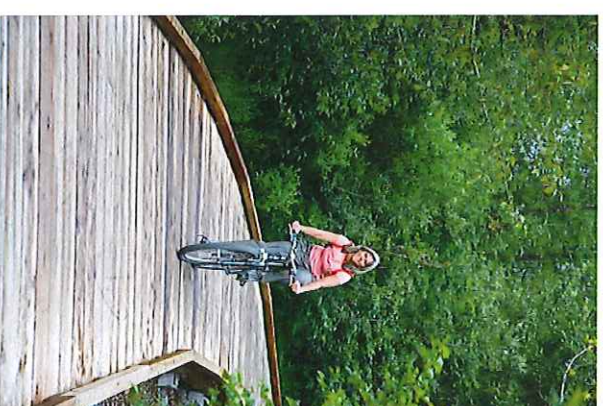
What's Next? Bridges and Boardwalks

- Agriculture Bridge with hand rails (54") and guardrails (30") at northern end of property allows for farming and vehicles



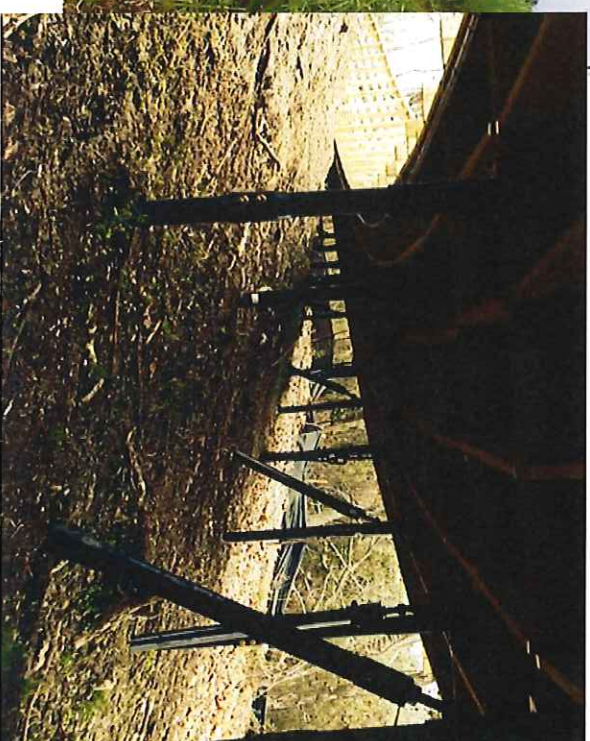
What's Next? Bridges and Boardwalks

- Boardwalks over wetlands minimize environmental impact
- High enough to accommodate wetland vegetation and small animals
- Low enough to allow deer and other mammals to cross over



What's Next? Bridges and Boardwalks

- Boardwalk design with helical pilings reduce both temporary and permanent environmental impact on wetlands



Your ideas and suggestions
make the Merrimack Riverfront Trails Project
a success for
future generations!



Thank you for being here!

Explore. Protect. Reconnect.