

**MANAGEMENT PLAN FOR THE
TOWN BEACH AND SOUTH BROOK
CONSERVATION AREAS**

SHUTESBURY, MA

MAY 2001

SHUTESBURY CONSERVATION COMMISSION

Table of Contents

1. Introduction	3
2. History of Acquisition and Grant Program Requirements	3
3. Description of the Parties involved in the Plan	4
4. Site Descriptions	4
5. Land Use- Statement of Purpose and Management Goals	5
6. Property Management Plan	6
7. Signatures	7
8. Maps of Property	8

1. Introduction

The Shutesbury Conservation Commission owns and manages two adjacent parcels off Locks Pond Road. The first, often called the Town Beach property, was acquired in 1965 with one of the first uses of Massachusetts Self-Help Program funding. It now consists of approximately 48 acres, mostly woodland, with a boat ramp and sandy beach area. The newer parcel, located directly south of the Town Beach property, has been named the "South Brook Conservation Area." It was purchased by the town in 2000, again with the help of Self-Help Program funding. It consists of approximately 49.5 acres of woodland. This management plan will pertain to both properties.

2. History of Acquisition and Grant Program Requirements

At a special Town Meeting in April of 1965 the Town of Shutesbury voted to expend \$5000 from its Conservation Fund for the purpose of enabling the Conservation Commission to purchase "certain lands at Lake Wyola for the purpose of developing the Town's natural resources." The Town received 50% reimbursement through the new Self-Help Grant Program. The Recreation Commission's report in 1965 mentions the new area at Lake Wyola was purchased "for the purpose of a swimming beach and recreation area." In 1967 the Conservation Commission Report mentions plans for the layout of the beach, a boat ramp and parking lot, and later a forest management plan. The property was clearly intended for recreation and conservation purposes, and falls under the same protection described below for the South Brook property.

The Town of Shutesbury acquired the South Brook Conservation Area for \$100,000 in April 2000 for conservation, watershed protection, and passive recreation purposes. The Commonwealth of Massachusetts' Executive Office of Environmental Affairs' Division of Conservation Services assisted in the project with a Self-Help grant for \$62,000. Additional funding was received from The Kestrel Trust, Valley Land Fund, and private donations. The town agreed to the following requirements as part of the Self-Help Program project agreement:

- a) As conservation land, the land is protected against conversion for other purposes or disposition by the recorded Self-Help Program Project Agreement and the force of Article 97 of the State Constitution.
- b) The Conservation Commission is authorized to manage, maintain, and operate the South Brook Conservation Area in accordance with the conditions described in the Self-Help Grant application. Any significant deviations will require advance approval by the Secretary of the Executive Office of Environmental Affairs.
- c) The facilities shall be open to the general public, and shall not be limited to the residents of Shutesbury. A sign shall be prominently displayed at the site indicating that the project received Self-Help funds.

3. Description of the Parties involved in the Plan

The Conservation Commission will be responsible for setting policy for the management of the two conservation areas, with input from the Recreation and Open Space Committees. Management will be carried out by the Conservation Commission, with additional help provided by volunteers, and labor obtained through state and private grant programs.

A Trails Committee will be created which will advise the Conservation Commission on the use and maintenance of the trails on the properties. This committee will consist of representatives from the Recreation and Open Space Committees, and from different interest groups, such as cross-country skiers, snowmobilers, horseback riders, runners, walkers, and neighbors.

4. Site Descriptions (see maps in Appendix)

The *Town Beach Conservation Area* is predominately woodland, with significant shoreline along the southernmost end of Lake Wyola. Only a small area of this shoreline is developed, at its western end, for a state boat ramp and small sandy town beach. There are some nice glacial features, such as the esker behind the beach, and significant wetlands along the flatter areas near the Lake and South Brook. The woodland is a mix of predominately northern hardwoods, hemlock and white pine.

A conservation management plan for the property was produced around 1974 with the assistance of the Franklin Conservation District. In 1975 Shutesbury was the first town in Franklin County to have the benefit of the CETA forestry crew, which performed some forest management thinning, created demonstration plots, an educational trail system and a scenic vista. The wood that was cut was harvested with horses, and the firewood sold to town residents at low cost. No cutting or thinning has taken place since that time. Part of the trail remains. The Commission is trying to locate a copy of this management plan in order to restore the trail, vista, and demonstration plots.

The *South Brook Conservation Area* is a 49.4-acre parcel that abuts the Town Beach Conservation Area to the north. It has frontage on both Locks Pond Road and Wendell Road. The preferred access is from the Town Beach Conservation Area on Randall Road, where a parking area is currently maintained, and a trail already connects directly to the South Brook Conservation Area. Several trails cross the South Brook property, stretching from the Town Beach conservation area on the north to Wendell Road on the east side. A telephone company right-of-way crosses the South Brook property in the southeast corner and connects to other trails in town. These trails are presently used by walkers, runners, cross-country skiers, snowmobilers, and mountain bikers.

South Brook flows through this property from the southeast to the north, joining Lake Wyola at its southern end. Another unnamed stream enters from the west and joins South Brook on the property. There are also several intermittent streams on the property. Along the northern end of the South Brook Conservation area is a hemlock ravine and coniferous wetland with sphagnum moss. There are a couple potential vernal pools on the property.

Several stone walls are located on the western side of the South Brook property. The cellar hole and barn foundation of the Luther Stowell homestead are on the east side of Locks Pond Road on the property.

The South Brook property is all forested, with different areas dominated by white pine, hemlock, and northern hardwoods. Most of the forest is second and third generation mixed stands (Forest Management Plan FR793). The western two-thirds of the property was harvested heavily in 1979. The parcel has been under Chapter 61 since 1992, but no further cutting has taken place since 1979.

The two properties are bounded on the north by Lake Wyola and on the remaining sides by private property. Many of the private properties on the southern end are in Chapter 61. There are only a few houses in this southern area, but quite a number to the north.

5. Land Use: Statement of Purpose and Management Goals

The intention of the Conservation Commission is to maintain both properties in forest, for watershed protection, passive recreation, and wildlife habitat enhancement. Careful forest management will maintain a healthy forest and support good wildlife habitat. Watershed protection will maintain the quality of Lake Wyola and South Brook, and prevent siltation or other contamination of the lake, and streams and wetlands on the properties. Passive recreation will include hiking, walking, cross-country skiing and nature study throughout the trail system. Other forms of outdoor recreation such as mountain biking, horseback riding and snowmobiling will be allowed only on designated trails, which will avoid sensitive areas such as vernal pools, streams, wetlands, and the hemlock ravine.

In addition, the Town Beach Conservation Area will continue to provide boat access to Lake Wyola from the state boat ramp, and fishing from the shoreline. With the new Carroll Holmes State Park with its beach facility at the north end of Lake Wyola, the Conservation Commission has decided to discontinue maintenance of the Town Beach as a sandy beach. This small beach required annual loads of sand deposited and graded on the site, which washed down into the lake, filling in the shallow swimming area. The Conservation Commission has decided to regrade and then seed the area with an appropriate conservation grass mix to stabilize it. They will then allow this site to be used informally as a beach, fishing area, picnic area, and canoe or kayak launch area, as residents determine through use.

Although these properties will serve primarily the residents of Shutesbury, they will be open to the public, and will probably attract a regional group of users because of the boat ramp, excellent fishing, and trail connections.

Part of the Purchase and Sales Agreement with the seller of the South Brook property included the provision that the property remain "under forest management and the continual use for forest products." The Conservation Commission will develop a forest management plan for the property that will abide by this provision, but also include the following interests: protection of wetlands, sensitive areas, and threatened, rare or endangered species habitat; promotion of

biodiversity, soil and water quality, and forest health; enhancement of wildlife habitat and recreation: and consideration of aesthetic interests. Any forestry practices performed on the property will be under the direct supervision of the Conservation Commission. A forest management plan will be prepared jointly for the South Brook and Town Beach Conservation Areas.

6. Property Management Plan

Management of the Town Beach and South Brook Conservation Areas will be divided into three phases: a) provision of signage and public access, b) property inventory and management preparation, and c) ongoing management and maintenance.

a) **Provision of Signage and Public Access.** These first items will be done during the first year to provide public access and parking, and acquaint users with the regulations and trails system:

- installation of signs indicating that this property received Self-Help funds, that it is open to the public, hours of operation, a trails map, and rules and regulations.
- signage to direct parking to the boat ramp parking areas on Randall Road, and clear marking of the trail heads from that location.
- clear marking of the present trails system

b) **Property Inventory and Management Preparation.** The following will be done during the first two years of ownership to assemble baseline information and begin management of the property:

Inventory

- marking of boundary lines that abut private property
- inventory and mapping of general forest community types on the properties, noting any unusual, rare, or special species or areas.
- listing of birds, mammals, amphibians, reptiles and invertebrates observed on the properties. This could be done as a volunteer effort, where a logbook is left for visitors to record observations.

Trails

- mapping of existing trails, and creation of a property map, showing the existing trails, and other features such as streams, wetlands, vernal pools, and stone walls.
- formation of a Trails Committee to consider and advise on trail use, maintenance and new trail creation.
- completion of the interior trails system, including markings indicating permitted uses and trail junction signs; creation of new trails to connect areas; and water bars, bridging or other improvements as needed to prevent erosion and damage to vegetation and land.

Management

- creation of a forest management plan.
- discussions with the trails committee, and the Recreation and Open Space committees, regarding issues such as the impact of increased trail use by pedestrians, horses, and motorized vehicles; forest and wildlife management practices; parking problems, and hunting policy.

c) **Ongoing Management and Maintenance** The following will be regular elements of the long-range management and maintenance of the Town Beach and South Brook properties:

Trails

- maintenance or improvement of existing trails.
- possible expansion of existing trails to connect to new areas or a larger trail network.

Management

- assessment of the impact of various types of use on the property, especially to sensitive areas such as the streams, wetlands, and hemlock ravine, and appropriate response
- regular trash removal from roadside and parking areas
- maintenance of the access road and parking areas in the boat ramp area
- continued provision and upkeep of a portable toilet at the boat ramp area
- removal of the old bathhouse, and removal or sealing of the tank
- maintenance and replacement of signs, as necessary
- monitoring of the former town beach area for erosion and inappropriate use
- performance of activities listed in the forest management plan. Any work conducted shall be by contract and under close supervision of the Conservation Commission. Any profits from timber or cordwood sales will be placed in the Conservation Commission's land trust fund, for maintenance, improvement, and acquisition of conservation land
- reestablish the forestry demonstration plots and educational trail, if the original management plans for the Town Beach Conservation Area are found
- formation of a corps of local volunteers to help monitor the condition of the trails and property, and report any problems to the Conservation Commission
- coordination with the DEM state park staff on issues of common concern
- coordination with the Shutesbury Elementary School, to encourage use of the property for nature studies
- consider developing a handicapped accessible trail or fishing access
- consider acquisition of adjacent properties that would expand and complement the present conservation area

7. Signatures

Shutesbury Conservation Commission

James J. Brady Jr

Barbara J. Walsh

Alice P. Jaques

Shutesbury Selectboard

David C. Day

Paul J. Keller

R. J. Sturtevant

Department of Environmental Management

-see attached letter from F. Buntin-