

PLAINFIELD TOWN FOREST

Management Plan , Approved Sept.26, 2011

Background

Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Cutler gave the Town of Plainfield 22 acres of land in Calais in 1950 (*see Book 32, p. 34–35 of the Land Records, Town of Plainfield, for details*). The Town had made little use of the land, except for some timber harvesting, most recently in 1997. At the 2006 Town Meeting, the Town voted to swap the 22 acres of land in Calais for 28 acres of land, owned by Allen Soule, near the intersection of Maxfield and Gonyeau Roads in Plainfield. Discussion at the Town meeting focused on the area's natural attributes and on use of the land for passive recreation (see section 2) and forestry. This land exchange allowed for more convenient accessibility to Plainfield residents for low-impact recreation trails. It was expected that this land would be capable of supporting stands of Northern Hardwoods with at least as high a timber value as the Town Forest previously owned in Calais.

The following is the approved management plan for the Plainfield Town Forest. It was revised, as appropriate, after submitting to the Selectboard for review, holding a public hearing, modification and approval. Because of the relatively small size, the presence of wetlands and its hilly topography, the number of recreational uses is limited. If adjacent land becomes available, the Conservation Fund and other resources might be used to expand the Plainfield Town Forest.

The organization of the plan follows the general property management guidelines recommended by the Vermont Land Trust.

1. Property Description and Purposes of Conservation

The 28-acre parcel is located in the Southern part of Plainfield on the Class 4 section of Gonyeau Road. Year-round automobile access is available from Maxfield Road (off Brook Road). It can also be accessed seasonally (i.e. not in winter or mud season) via Gonyeau Road (off Middle/Upper Road). Limited parking and turn-around is available at both access points.

The property is hilly and has several old overgrown logging and access trails. The property (formerly known as "Goodrich Pasture") has been managed for forestry for at least 60 years and likely was used, in part, for agriculture/grazing for some time before that. The majority of the planted forest (about 1/3 of the land) is red pine (planted in 1960s), Scotch pine and Norway spruce (1930s/1940s) and currently has little commercial value. The rest of the land is primarily Northern hardwood forest (very little is useful for firewood or saw timber at this time) with some wetlands. Topographical and other map information is attached.

Members of the Plainfield Conservation Commission (PCC) have walked the forest with naturalists, county and state foresters, the former owner and some neighbors. Much of the neighboring land is under forest management plans.

The primary purposes proposed for use of this land are passive recreation and a long-term demonstration forestry project. Education and research opportunities may exist, as well as wildlife habitat, hunting and protection of wetlands. These uses are consistent with the Town Plan.

Horse and bicycle riders, walkers, cross-country skiers and snowshoers currently use the Class 4 Road that borders the property. Road management will not be addressed in this plan, other than with respect to water run-off from the forest that is eroding the road area.

2. Proposed Uses

- § Passive recreation (examples - wildlife observation, photography, bird watching, hiking/walking, snow shoeing and skiing (wetness of soils could result in sensitivity to overuse in some parts)),
- § A local demonstration project on land management and forestry (through signage, occasional guided tours, invasive and native plant management, Town web site information, and on-the-ground forest management practices),
- § Education (examples – studies by naturalists, visitation by science classes (K through 12 and college),
 - The Nature Conservancy recently used this property as one of several local sites for training naturalists from Plum Creek Timber on invasive plant identification and for discussion of management actions to control invasive shrubs.)
- § Research (examples - mapping of natural plant communities; monitoring changes over time; benchmarking for comparison to other managed properties; examining for species not previously noted; calculating the value of the property’s “environmental services” (contribution to clean air and water for instance); examining geologic history and soil types),
- § Wildlife habitat, and
- § Hunting (primarily deer). The Selectboard may want to address whether deer hunting should be the only permitted hunting use.

The Selectboard will eventually need to address funding for any interim forest management activity (thinning, etc.). Any harvesting profits might be used to defray management expenses and support Town conservation activities.

3. Public Access

The public is welcome and encouraged to use the land as noted above for passive recreation, hunting, research, and education. Because of the fragile and steep nature of much of the property and the desire to conserve forest health and minimize erosion, use by wheeled vehicles, except for forestry purposes using AMPs (Acceptable Management Practices), is not permitted.

Horses are not allowed because of erosion issues on this relatively hilly property and their potential contribution to the introduction of invasive plants. An exception may be made for horse logging if weed free feed has been used prior to logging. Dogs are allowed per the Town’s Animal Control Ordinance.

ATVs, 4WD vehicles and bicycles are not allowed because of their potential contribution to erosion and because they might serve as a starting point to non-permitted uses. It may be necessary to restrict access in “mud season”, as is done for many trails in Vermont, to protect against erosion.

Signage (such as description of the ecosystem and information on approved uses as well as boundary markings and trails information/maps) may be developed over time to assist the public in appreciating and enjoying the land. This Management Plan and other information will be placed on the Town web site.

4. Special Considerations

Due to the relatively fragile and steep nature of much of this small parcel, camping or campfires, agriculture, horses (except as previously noted) or other riding or pack animals, and motorized or mechanical vehicles (such as bicycles, ATVs, snowmobiles, or motorbikes) are not allowed. Note that there are alternative snowmobile routes in the area and there is some horse and bicycle use of the adjacent Class 4 road. Management may include signage, monitoring for intrusive activities and legal action if necessary.

This is a small parcel and has been used for hunting. Deer hunting continues to be allowed, subject to any limitation by the Selectboard. Just as hikers must use extra caution in hunting season, hunters must be aware that hikers and others could be present. Deer management through hunting is desirable because deer can browse heavily on the understory and inhibit natural reforestation.

PCC will assist in coordinating management/removal of trash. Removal of trash will occur at least once per year (most likely in coordination with “Green-up Day”), or as needed in the event of unlawful trash dumping. There is a backlog of trash to be removed, primarily along the site of the overgrown Class 4 Road near Maxfield Road, so it may take several years before most of it has been removed, depending on volunteer availability.

It is anticipated that neighbors and users will notify the Town or appropriate law enforcement about any abuse of the property or inappropriate activities that they observe. In addition, the PCC or Selectboard will occasionally monitor the property for illegal activities such as trash dumping, prohibited activities, or damage.

In the event of severe or chronic misuse of the property, citizens should request an appropriate response by the Selectboard or law enforcement agencies. In the event of misuse that does not immediately merit law enforcement action, remediation may include improved signage and, if appropriate, increased monitoring.

5. Structures and Trails

PCC is authorized to develop signage (such as an interpretive kiosk, boundary and trail marking, and the labeling of some plants). PCC may review the potential need for management of water run-off into and out of the land and taking corrective action, if practical. At present, a culvert that exits the property and goes across the Class 4 road needs work to prevent water run-off from bypassing the culvert and causing extensive erosion.

A number of potential trails have been flagged by members of the PCC and local naturalists, but have not been finalized. A low boardwalk (known as a “puncheon”) was constructed using volunteer labor, to cross a small wetland and improve walking access from Maxfield Road to the uplands. Any formal trails will be in the less sensitive areas of the property or developed with an eye toward minimizing environmental damage. Off-trail hiking is allowed unless this results in erosion or other problems. There are no current plans for handicap access, but there is potential for limited access at the NW corner entrance that interested parties might evaluate. It may be necessary to add signage where trails lead to neighboring properties.

Initially, easiest to maintain trails will be developed and marked (those trails not requiring water bars and other management). Uphill from an old well/spring is a small stream – a short bridge would improve crossing of this stream and would join other potential trails. Trail maps may be developed as trails are finalized and resources allow.

There are several locations where limited cutting of trees or shrubs would improve views. The Selectboard will approve such cutting, on a case-by-case basis, when resources are available (such as during harvesting).

6. Gates, Boundary Marking and Posting

The property is basically rectangular in shape. Three corner survey pins have been identified and the location of the fourth is approximately known. Note, the SW survey pin is the corner of Plainfield, Orange and Barre.

There are no current plans for gates or barrier posts, but they may be installed if needed. The Class 4 Road is not part of the Town Forest and is not addressed in this plan.

Any posting will focus on explanatory signs, boundary and trail marking, and hunting information signs, as needed. Other posting may be necessary and will be carried out as the need arises.

Trail maps will be developed as trails are finalized and as resources allow.

7. Parking Areas and Access

There is limited parking and turn-around capability at the snowplow turn-around at the Maxfield Road corner of the property. There is also limited parking and turn-around capability at the Gonyeau Road (NW) corner of the property.

The Class 4 section of Gonyeau Road is not plowed and is furthermore closed to automobile traffic in the winter due to its use as a VAST trail. Outside of winter, e.g. mud season, it is not always passable and it may be necessary to walk in from a greater distance. For parking in the winter at the end of the Class 3 Gonyeau Road and at the Maxfield Road entrance, signage will be needed to protect efficient snowplow access. Signage should also indicate that parking is not allowed from 1 hour after sunset through 1 hour before sunrise.

8. Managing Natural Resources

The natural resources of the Plainfield Town Forest include wildlife, numerous plant species, the forest, wetlands, and wildlife habitat. Most land in this area has been heavily logged or grazed for many years and some active management is necessary to restore or enhance native plant biodiversity.

Planting of a limited number of native plant species obtained from other local sites will be allowed if the PCC, based on scientific input, determines that certain species are “missing” and that it would enhance biodiversity, natural communities or forest resiliency to add these species. Limited removal of native plants (with permission through a vote of the PCC and acquisition of any state or federal permits that may be required) will be allowed for research purposes or to aid in establishing certain desirable species more broadly in the region. Longer term, such practices may be desirable as climate change occurs.

Over time this property will increasingly allow visitors to experience the aesthetic sense of a small “older growth” forested system managed to maintain and utilize the natural hardwood forest character of the area. Feedback from the County Forester indicates that, due to current market conditions, there is no marketable timber at this time (2010). Future plans will include marking timber for harvesting (lumber, firewood, chips, etc.) and preservation (exceptional quality trees, snags, coarse woody debris, etc.), if and when any

timber harvesting is feasible. The previous property owner has indicated that, in the past, products from logging for stand improvement basically covered the cost of the logging operation.

Invasive species compete heavily with natural forest regrowth and reduce natural biodiversity. Some marking and removal of non-native invasive species has occurred. Marking will continue and removal or management will be active when resources are available. Ongoing removal/control of invasive species, including limited use of herbicides (generally “stump treatment”), as needed, is anticipated.

Species identification will continue with the assistance of local naturalists.

Acceptable Forest Management Practices will be used for management. Motorized tools such as chain saws can be used, preferably using biodegradable 2-cycle engine oil and chain saw bar oil.

9. Plainfield Contact

Town Clerk’s office (454-8461)

10. Management Plan Update and Amendment Process

The Plainfield Selectboard is responsible for approving the Management Plan and any future amendments.

The Plainfield Conservation Commission is responsible for:

- Proposing amendments to the Plan as necessary
- Administering the Plan
- Recruiting volunteers as needed
- Applying for grant funding
- Interacting with educational, naturalist, and forestry personnel

The Management Plan and information about the Town Forest will be posted on the Town web site.

This Management Plan will be reviewed and amended to reflect any relevant changes to the Town Plan (normally on a five year cycle). It may also be modified/amended to reflect major changes to the property such as from weather, fire, roadwork, run-off, new information on species present, or changes to best forest management practices. Results of research activities will be incorporated into the Management Plan as appropriate.

Plainfield residents may make recommendations for changes to the management plan to the Conservation Commission or Selectboard.

Brief updates about the property will be presented to the Town by the PCC in the Plainfield Annual report and on the Town website.

Attachments:

- Maps
- Photos (TBD)
- Species list (in preparation)