

# **Community Forest Plan For the Page Pond Community Forest, Meredith NH**

**Prepared for the US Forest Service  
By the Meredith Conservation Commission  
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## **Introduction**

This Community Forest Plan provides guidance for management and use of the Page Pond Community Forest. It applies to the entire 765 acre tract that was conserved in 2008 and 2018. Developed with community input, it describes the objectives, benefits, mechanisms, and implementation plans to provide public access and use, and to protect cultural and natural resources for the long term. The plan is divided into eight sections.

1. A description of the property, including acreage and county location, land use, forest type and vegetation cover;
2. Objectives for the community forest;
3. Community benefits to be achieved from the establishment of the community forest;
4. Mechanisms promoting community involvement in the development and implementation of the community forest plan;
5. Implementation strategies for achieving community forest plan objectives;
6. Plans for the utilization or demolition of existing structures and proposed needs for further improvements;
7. Planned public access, including proposed limitations to protect cultural or natural resources, or public health and safety. In addition, local governments and qualified nonprofits need to provide a rationale for any proposed limitations;
8. A description for the long-term use and management of the property.

## **1. Description of the property**

Page Pond Community Forest consists of 765 acres located on Meredith Neck in Belknap County. Located in the center of Meredith Neck in Meredith, New Hampshire, this unfragmented block of 4 parcels has over 500 acres of prime forestland, and nearly one half of Meredith's Page Pond Prime Wetland is contained within the Property. The Property includes a portion of Tier 1 lands (highest quality habitat in NH), identified in the 2015 Revised Edition of the NH State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP).

The Property consists of upland forest, young forest, fallow fields, and wetlands. A series of wetlands including 4,506 feet of shoreline on Page Pond, 2,800 feet of frontage on Bicknell

Brook, and over 2 miles of frontage on Page Brook, the largest perennial stream on Meredith Neck, provides critical habitat to a variety of species and natural communities, as well as important wildfowl habitat.

The Property contains four types of known and potential critical wildlife habitat types identified in the SWAP: peatlands, wet meadow-shrub wetland, hemlock-hardwood pine, and grasslands. The property also includes 160 acres of Important Agricultural Soils, 27 acres of fallow fields, and 34 acres of Tier 2 and 72 acres of Tier 3 habitat according to the Wildlife Action Plan. The property contains 160 acres of agricultural soils of statewide or local importance. Additionally, the property is within a 5-mile radius of Meredith's water intake (US EPA Public Water Supply ID# 1521010), and the expansion protects a portion of a prime wetland complex and an additional 20 acres of designated wetlands.

#### *Forest Type and vegetation cover:*

The 500 acres of upland forest that has been logged multiple times over the past 200 years, most recently in the early 2000's. The most common tree species on the property are white pine, red oak, hemlock and mixed hardwoods. Any future cutting of trees or vegetation on the Property shall be practiced primarily to enhance or protect wildlife habitat, maintain the health of the forestland, or reasonably provide for limited educational or non-commercial recreational opportunities. A forest management plan (Forest Management Plan for Page Pond Community Forest, Shaun<sup>1</sup> Lagueux, October 2018) was prepared in late 2018 and includes a detailed description of the forest, vegetation, and management plan. The property has been divided into 2 compartments of 7 areas each and a detailed timber management plan has defined for each area.

The recently protected property has a significant amount of invasive species including, but not limited, to autumn olive, oriental bittersweet, Japanese knotweed, multi-flora rose, and Japanese barberry. The most concerning of these is the autumn olive which had taken over some 30 acres of fallow fields. The Conservation Commission has already removed a large amount of the autumn olive and plans to mow these areas until native species have reestablished themselves.

#### *Land Use:*

The Page Pond Community Forest will be managed to maintain and protect wildlife habitat and natural resources, and to achieve recreational, educational, cultural, and agricultural goals. These goals are described in Section 2 below.

#### *Cultural Aspects:*

Important historical and cultural aspects of the property include the large stone dam and sluiceway from the Page Pond Sawmill, the Dudley Leavitt family cemetery, a smaller Leavitt cemetery, an old quarry, a homestead and cellar hole, a well, and abandoned farm equipment.

## **2. Objectives for Page Pond Community forest**

The Town of Meredith will steward this property for its wildlife habitat, water quality protection, education, cultural, and recreational attributes. Timber management will be performed for habitat diversity and forest health, with secondary benefits of timber revenue that will be applied exclusively to the benefit of their town forests. The Town already owns several town forests that are actively managed. As a result, the town is experienced in developing management plans that ensure long-term stewardship for many uses. In a community that is rapidly becoming a second-home and retirement residential area near the shores of Lake Winnepesaukee, this area could serve as an invaluable local resource for recreation, environmental education, agriculture, and tourism.

Due to the central location of the Property there is a high demand for recreation on the property which must be coordinated with the overriding conservation goals. Input received from the community to date include interest in: hiking trails, accessible walking trails, horseback riding, hunting, a dog park, frisbee course, wildflower garden, sledding hill, all terrain vehicle track, recreational and competitive nordic skiing trails, and a cross-country running course. Some of these will not be permitted (e.g. ATV use); a master plan will be developed to determine which of these activities can be accommodated consistent with the deed, easements, and conservation goals.

### Objectives

- a. To protect and enhance fish and wildlife habitats, rare and exemplary plants and natural communities, including deep water emergent marsh, short graminoid-forb emergent marsh, black ash-red maple seepage swamp community, and Appalachian oak-pine rocky ridge, and the ecological processes that sustain these natural heritage features
- b. To protect water quality by preserving and conserving waterfront, streams, riparian areas, wetlands, and the quality of aquifers, groundwater, and surface water resources on the Property
- c. To re-establish an agricultural use for local food since a portion of this property includes abandoned agricultural fields with good soils. The plan is to recruit a local farmer to utilize a portion of the property under a lease arrangement.
- d. To preserve cultural resources, including the historic mill site, a cemetery, and an old homestead
- e. To retain the Property in perpetuity as a sustainable tract of land for the production of timber, pulpwood and other forest products, although no management activities shall be undertaken with the primary purpose of income generation

- f. To provide public pedestrian access on the Property, which will allow the general public to hike, hunt, fish, cross-country ski, observe wildlife, and participate in other low-impact outdoor recreational activities, and snowmobile on designated trails

#### Wildlife Habitat and Natural Resource Goals

- Maintain and protect native biodiversity and ecological integrity;
- Conserve rare and exemplary natural communities;
- Preserve and conserve the quality and quantity of the groundwater and surface water resources;
- Protect or enhance water quality, forested and non-forested wetlands, riparian areas, shrub lands and aquatic habitats;
- Protect and enhance a variety of habitats for native species through uneven-aged management and retention of downed woody debris, snag trees, cavity trees, very large or old trees, and early successional habitats;
- Provide a healthy mix of natural communities throughout the Property (recognizing the value of neighboring landscapes);
- Protect existing and potential deer wintering areas; and
- To the extent possible, prevent the introduction or spread of invasive plant and animal species.

#### Recreation, Educational and Cultural Goals

- Promote and encourage traditional forest uses including low impact outdoor recreation for residents and visitors;
- Maintain the tradition of open access for non-motorized low impact recreation;
- Maintain public access for hunting and fishing;
- Educate the citizens of Meredith and the Lakes Region about natural communities, biodiversity, the working forest, and good stewardship practices;
- Preserve open space and maintain the traditional landscape;
- Develop and maintain a trail system connecting Quarry Rd, Blueberry Hill Rd, Barnard Ridge Rd, and the mill-site;
- Manage recreational uses so as to not negatively affect the wildlife and natural resource goals of this Stewardship Plan;
- Coordinate with the state to construct a sidewalk connecting the property to Inter-Lakes High School and the Meredith Middle and Elementary schools; and
- Conserve unique historic, archeological and cultural features.

#### Timber Management Goals

A Timber Management Plan has been prepared for the entire 765 acre property. For details, refer to Reference I, Page Pond Community Forest Management Plan, October 19, 2018.

- Any cutting of trees or vegetation on the Property shall be practiced primarily to enhance or protect wildlife habitat, maintain the health of the forestland, or reasonably provide for limited educational or non-commercial recreational opportunities;
- Maintain and protect biological diversity and integrity through the promotion of a forest that reflects a diversity of stand ages and naturally occurring forest types in a majority of the forest;
- Manage the timber resource in a sustainable manner with an emphasis on harvesting timber at its maturity, and production of high quality forest resources, such as sawlogs and veneer;
- Create the conditions to encourage regeneration of desirable timber species;
- Encourage desirable advanced regeneration that is already on site;
- Identify and protect special natural areas for their intrinsic values;
- Limit impact on sensitive riparian areas, wetlands, and sites with steep topography;
- Protect and/or enhance water quality;
- Augment, modify and renew wildlife habitat to encourage specific wildlife species;
- Support the region's rural economy;
- Maintain forest health through monitoring and control of fire, disease, and insect outbreaks; and
- Maintain long-term soil productivity.

### **3. Community Benefits**

The expected benefits of the forest are listed in accordance with the objectives described in the previous section:

- a. **Wildlife Habitat:** Maintaining a diverse habitat will encourage the establishment of a wide variety of plants and animals, critical to a healthy ecosystem
- b. **Water Quality:** Preserving water quality is important not only for the health of the ecosystem and the local population, but also for the economic health of the recreation and tourism-based economy of Meredith and the Lakes Region
- c. **Agriculture:** Locally grown and sourced food is an increasingly important aspect of society for a multitude of reasons. Restoring agricultural lands will provide a much needed resource in central New Hampshire for employment opportunities as well as food
- d. **Culture:** Protecting cultural resources and making history palpable to residents, instilling a connection to our past, and reinforcing interest in protecting resources for future generations

- e. Timber Products: Forest management for habitat diversity and resulting timbering activities supports jobs for local residents and a revenue stream for future conservation actions on town forests
- f. Public Access: Utilization of the property by residents and visitors allows them to experience first-hand the benefits of Community Forests, building support for conservation efforts. Public support is essential for successful conservation of future land. It also supports the local tourism economy. Accessible, high quality recreational options also provide physical and mental health benefits for people.

#### **4. Community Involvement**

In the summer of 2018 Meredith held a ceremony for the grand opening of the newly expanded Page Pond Community Forest to which the public was invited. Attendees included many of the people that supported protecting the Forest including New Hampshire Governor Chris Sununu. After the celebration tours of the property were provided. Activities such as this will be held in the future to continue community involvement and solicit community input. Other mechanism to encourage community involvement include:

- Trails on the property with trail maps and trail descriptions and trail heads
- Guided trail walks offered during the year
- A Master Plan will be generated with community input
- Public participation and input is encouraged at the monthly Conservation Commission meetings
- A design charrette is being considered to engage the public in the Community Forest
- The Meredith Conservation Commission has trail-work events every Tuesday from late spring to late fall which are attended by members of the community
- An social media presence stimulates community participation, including
  - The Meredith Town Website with a direct link to on-line descriptions of all of Meredith's accessible town forests
  - The Meredith Conservation Commission website with information on town properties
  - The Meredith Conservation Commission Facebook page provides regular updates on current events and actions

Experts have already been engaged to provide input in their area of expertise including

- Natural resources (Rick Van de Poll, Ecosystem Management Consultants)
- Agriculture (Bill Hoey, NRCS; John Moulton, Moulton Farm)
- Wildlife habitat (Matt Tarr, University of New Hampshire)

- Forestry (Shaun Lagueux, New England Forestry Consultants, Inc.) and
- Accessible trails (Josh Ryan, Timber and Stone).

Each of these experts have already visited the property to assess and provide guidance on stewardship of the land. These consults will continue to help guide the master plan for the forest.

## **5. Implementation strategies**

The town of Meredith currently has four “developed” Town Forests totally approximately 1900 acres that are successfully achieving their goals. The existing Page Pond is one of these, and the new expanded Page Pond Town Forest will follow the same, proven implementation strategy, as outlined below (steps may be repeated and done concurrently)

1. Assess the property through an abundance of on-property study including experts in various subjects including wildlife, vegetation, habitats, agriculture, invasive species, and history.
2. Gather public input via guided walks, attendees at Conservation Commission Meetings, soliciting input from users on the property, and a possible design charrette.
3. Review proposed uses against the property restrictions and conservation goals.
4. Develop a master plan outlining approved uses, locations, and restrictions.
5. Prioritize and time-phase approved actions.
6. Identify and secure funding if required.
7. Implement plan to achieve goals over time

The Conservation Commission has very active members that are committed to the careful implementation of any actions, and the town has many volunteers that participate in projects on our Town Forests. The Commission also has an annual operating budget generously approved by the town, as well as a revenue stream from timber products resulting from habitat management on Town Forests. Finally, the Page Pond Town Forest has an endowment of \$100,000 to be used specifically for management of this property.

## **6. Plans for the utilization or demolition of existing structures and proposed needs for further improvements**

There are no structures on the property other than the mill dam. The dam is in remarkably good condition considering its age and neglect, but there are issues. Sink holes had developed in the dam and some of the stones have been pushed out of position over time. Prior work has included rehabilitation of the east side of the dam. A sink hole on that side has been repaired, stones that had been displaced have been corrected, and trees on the dam removed to prevent their roots from further damaging the dam. Remaining work includes repairing a large sink hole on the west side and repairing leaks around the sluiceway - this work is expected to be

performed in the next two years once access is gained. The Commission is currently assessing various paths to bring materials to the dam to minimize impact to the property.

**7. Planned public access, including proposed limitations to protect cultural or natural resources, or public health and safety, and rationale for proposed limitations**

Public access via non-motorized methods to the entire property is planned, though travel will be encouraged only on designated trails. Trails will be designed and constructed to avoid sensitive areas, wildlife breeding/nesting sites, wetlands, and other sensitive natural resources. The following public uses are under consideration with each allowed only in designated areas:

- Walking/hiking/running including accessible trails
- Nordic skiing
- Snowshoeing
- Horseback riding
- Hunting
- Snow machines
- Bird watching
- Education

Each use will be allowed only after assessment of its potential impact on natural resources including wildlife, vegetation, and habitat. Resources to be utilized in making these assessments and how to minimize their impact on the property include the Page Pond Stewardship Plan<sup>2</sup> (Wanner, 2018), the Page Pond Forest Management Plan<sup>1</sup> (Lagueux, 2018) the Page Pond History and Guide<sup>3</sup> (Heyduk, 2010) and the Meredith Natural Resource Inventory<sup>4</sup> (Van de Poll, 2005).

The town of Meredith envisions guided walks on the property including bird watching, historical tours, and simple appreciation of nature.

The Conservation Commission is in discussion with the Interlakes School District on using the property as an outdoor educational resource.

The most significant cultural resources on the property are detailed in the Page Pond History and Guide by Daniel Heyduk. These include the Leavitt Family Cemetery, the quarry and work shop ruins, and the mill dam. Cultural resources on the newly conserved property include a small cemetery, a cellar hole, a piece of farm equipment, and a well. Of course there are many stone walls throughout the property as well. All of these will be monitored on a continuous basis by Meredith Conservation Commissioners to ensure they are properly protected and maintained.



There are two possible limitations that will be considered. One is to restrict visitors from the small cemetery on the western portion of the property, as this is small site with minimal markers. A low, perhaps 18-24" high fence constructed around the cemetery with unobtrusive signage asking visitors to respect the cemetery would not interfere with viewing and appreciating the cemetery while protecting it from all but flagrant vandalism. The possible second limitation would be around the mill dam. Due to the height of the dam, it is a safety concern that may require either restricting visitors from the top of the dam, or constructing fencing along the dam to prevent falls. The tradeoff between public safety and preserving this important historical artifact will be analyzed. Any limitation will be in conjunction with the local government and relevant nonprofits, which will provide rationale.

In addition to the previously mentioned weekly maintenance events, the property has a steward that walks the property on a regular basis including the boundaries at least once a year. Any adverse impacts to natural or cultural resources will be observed and corrected promptly.

The only unusual public safety concern is related to the mill dam which has a rise of 18 feet. The Commission is currently assessing how to best address this, taking into account public safety, historical accuracy, and preservation of the dam. Options under consideration include allowing access on the top of the dam but installing fencing along both sides of the dam; marking the dam as a Keep Out zone; or excluding access to the top of the dam via fencing.

Typical public safety concerns are addressed by common practices including providing trail maps (large maps mounted on kiosks as well as paper maps to be taken with the hiker), well-marked trails, and regular maintenance such as trail brushing and removal of blowdowns and dead trees at risk of falling on a trail. Water crossings of significance are facilitated by bridges.

## **8. Description for long-term use and management of the property**

Much of this has been described above and all uses will be implemented with the expectation of long-term use and designed to prevent damage to the property. For example, the public access described in section 7, if implemented, is expected to continue into the long term pending any negative impacts to the property. Likewise, agricultural use, if permitted, is expected to be a long-term use.

The town of Meredith has a well-established record of conserving and protecting land, dating from the Hamlin Conservation Area that was protected over 40 years ago. All of the experience gained over the years will ensure the Page Pond Community Forest is properly managed in perpetuity for benefit of the environment and the flora and fauna that depend upon it.

## **References:**

<sup>1</sup> Page Pond Forest Management Plan (Lagueux, 2018)

<sup>2</sup> Page Pond Stewardship Plan (Wanner, Powell, 2018)

<sup>3</sup> Page Pond History and Guide (Heyduk, 2010)

<sup>4</sup> Meredith Natural Resource Inventory (Van de Poll, 2005)