



HAROLD A. KING FOREST

LAND USE AND MANAGEMENT PLAN

DEVELOPED BY

Swampscott Open Space &
Recreation Plan Committee

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APPROVED BY

Swampscott Conservation Commission

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INTRODUCTION

The Harold A. King Forest (also known as the Oscar Short Conservation Land) is 47 acres of wild and rugged forested land that has been dedicated as public conservation land and is managed by the Conservation Commission. Thickly wooded uplands are rare in Swampscott, and the Harold A. King Forest serves as habitat for both birds and mammals.



Site Location & Description

The Harold A. King Forest is located in northwestern corner of Swampscott. "From its highest point, commanding a view of Nahant and Boston, the land slopes down to an extensive swamp with its unique plant life. The area's outstanding feature is a terminal moraine, which coupled with a diverse growth of deciduous trees and shrubs, makes it an ideal are for nature study."¹

The most prominent species are second growth oak and beech trees, with witch hazel, sweet peppercorn, low and high bush blueberry,

¹ Swampscott Open Space and Recreation Master Plan, August 1983

PURPOSE

This document sets forth how best to manage the Town Forest and what actions will be taken to maintain the property. A Conservation Land Maintenance checklist is also included. This plan is intended to be a working document; experience may reveal that adaptations and changes are necessary.

catbrier, and bayberry among a variety of other shrubs and vines occurring in the understory. In the wetland area, duck weed, cat tail, phragmites, yellow birch, a variety of ferns, prince's' pine, and striped wintergreen flourish.

Primary access to the forest is down an uneven slope from a small paved parking area at the end of Nichols Street. The condition of the forest is very good, with little litter or other signs of human impact. Invasive species of plants is evident in certain areas, for instance, there is Japanese knotweed and Norway maple bordering the parking area, and multiflora rose around the swamp at the star of the loop trail off Nichols Street and again at the far end of the loop trail near the Lynn line. Other areas may also contain invasive species.

At present, there is a one-way paint-blazed loop trail, created some years ago by the Boy Scouts, which starts at the parking area off Nichols Street and winds its way through the forest. Passage at the end of the loop trail is more difficult because of the large boulders scattered throughout the area.

Currently the forest is used for passive outdoor recreational such as bird watching, nature study, dog walking and hiking.

Acquisition

The Harold A. King Forest, originally 22 acres, was later expanded by a number of conservation land actions. In 1971, the Town purchased additional lands to bring it to its current size of 47 acres², partly funded by an award of \$10,700 from the Massachusetts Department of Natural Resources Self-Help Program.³ A Superior Court ruling in 1976 increased the cost of the land taking⁴ but the cost was defrayed by money from the Conservation Fund as well as \$48,628 in a court award in 1978.⁵

PROPERTY MANAGEMENT

Management Objectives & Oversight

As Harold A. King Forest is one of the few natural undeveloped areas in town, the management objective is to maintain the woods essentially in its present natural state -- healthy, clean, undamaged and as free as practicable from invasive vegetative species -- and to provide public access for passive outdoor recreational and educational opportunities.

Greater use of the woods should be generated for nature study and, to that end, better trail markings need to be added identifying the main trail which starts at Nichols Street entrance and loops through the Forest. In addition, the possibility of an alternative trail path around the boulder field toward the end of the loop needs to be explored.

As discussed below, new signage identifying the Forest is needed as the one existing sign by the Nichols Street entrance to the Forest is badly damaged.

² 1971 Town of Swampscott Annual Town Report, Conservation Commission, p169

³ 1971 Town of Swampscott Annual Town Report, Conservation Commission, p172

⁴ 1971 Town of Swampscott Annual Town Report, Conservation Commission, p158

⁵ 1971 Town of Swampscott Annual Town Report, Conservation Commission, p114

Steps should be taken to avoid encroachment by neighbors that abut the property, including installation of small conservation land signs identifying the property's borders. Moreover, the property should be formally surveyed in order to determine if encroachment is currently taking place.

The Conservation Commission is responsible for the Forest's care and supervision and will exercise management oversight, with assistance from the Open Space & Recreation Plan Committee and the Department of Public Works, and volunteer citizen groups that may be formed to provide maintenance and cleanup activities.

Permitted Uses

Passive outdoor recreational activities such as hiking, on-leash dog walking, and wildlife observation is permitted, along with educational and nature study.

Prohibited Uses

Per the Town of Swampscott General Bylaws Section 19⁶, possession and consumption of alcohol in public parks is prohibited. Other prohibited uses and actions include: fires, camping, hunting, trapping, motorized and motor-assisted vehicles and other powered equipment or motorized wheelchairs, littering, placement of refuse or waste of any kind (including yard waste), damaging or removal of vegetation or of public-posted signs. Visitors must carry out all articles carried in, including trash.

Precautions & Warnings

Ticks, with the accompanying risk of contracting Lyme Disease, are present in all vegetated areas in the region, including Harold A. King Forest. Mosquitoes are also infectious disease carrying insects and are common in this region and on the property. Simple preventive measure can be taken to protect against potential harm from these insects and users of the Forest should acquaint themselves with those methods through internet research or via contacting Swampscott Board of Health. Poison Ivy is also present on the property, as well as other brambles and vegetation that can cause injury and unpleasantness. Users should be familiar with what plants look like in various stages and take precaution to avoid contact.

Public Parking

Parking is available on the small paved parking area at the end of Nichols Street.

Signage

New signs identifying Harold A. King Forest, as well as small conservation land boundary signs along the property's perimeter, are needed as discussed in more detail below.

Enforcement & Public Safety

The Conservation Commission with assistance from the Open Space & Recreation Plan Committee will coordinate with, and rely on, the Swampscott Police Department to provide surveillance of the property and enforce the regulations applying to the property. If visitors or neighbors to the property observe a violation of the regulations, which may or may not pose a hazard, they are encouraged to contact the Swampscott Police Department to report a potential violation. In the instance of conditions that do not

⁶ Town of Swampscott, "General By-Laws," as amended May 4, 2015

require immediate response, or that require maintenance attention, the public should contact the Conservation Commission or the Open Space & Recreation Plan Committee. Contact information for either committee can be obtained on the Town website: <http://www.town.swampscott.ma.us/>

PROPERTY MAINTENANCE

Maintenance Tasks

Initial Necessary Tasks: New signs identifying the Harold A. King Forest are needed, especially to replace the existing sign off Nichols Street that is badly damaged. The Swampscott Conservation Commission and Swampscott Open Space & Recreation Plan Committee intends to work with the Municipal Design Committee and/or others on creation of signage. (Due to an agreement by the Town, any such signage must also state that the property is “Oscar Short Conservation Land”).

As with other conservation land in the Town, small conservation land signs (approximately 4” in diameter) need to be placed along perimeter of property identifying it as conservation land. Some such signage has been put up near the Nichols Street entrance to the Forest, but additional signs along the property’s perimeter should be installed.

The Town should also consider an interpretive sign or signs that provide information on the characteristics (flora and fauna, etc.) of the Forest as well as other conservation property.

Signs should also be installed stating the permitted and prohibited uses (such as the prohibition against access to the property after dark and the possession or consumption alcohol) and that dogs need to be leashed.

In addition to signage, the Swampscott Conservation Commission and Swampscott Open Space & Recreation Plan Committee should coordinate action, either by volunteer groups or private contractor, to improve the access point to the trail off Nichols Street, clear the main loop trail of debris (such as fallen trees), and remove the invasive species present on the property. One potential opportunity is having an Eagle Scout improve the trails and create a information kiosk at the trail entrance off Nichols Street.

Ongoing Routine Maintenance: No improvements other than minimal litter and vegetation clearing and trail maintenance is anticipated.

The fire hydrant located at the end of Nichols Street next to the forest entrance must be clear of vegetation and properly maintained for both firefighting and training activities.

Although the Town no longer has a “carry-in, carry-out” policy, visitors to the Town parks and forests are encouraged to take trash away with them when they leave. Periodic maintenance is also necessary to remove litter and the dumping of lawn and garden wastes that may wrongfully occur.

Seasonally, all the trails should be checked for fallen trees and erosion. Vegetation should be pruned from the sides of the trails and dead trees or branches that have fallen on the trails removed.

The property should be examined periodically for the reintroduction of invasive species and, if found, action taken to have it removed.

Ongoing routine maintenance will be coordinated through the Swampscott Conservation Commission and Swampscott Open Space & Recreation Plan Committee soliciting assistance from the Department of Public Works and/or volunteer individuals and groups. To assist in implementation of routine maintenance, attached is a Conservation Land Maintenance Checklist.

Maintenance Funding

The Town has the responsibility for maintenance of the property, and the Conservation Commission will exercise oversight in coordination with the Open Space & Recreation Plan Committee. As noted, voluntary contributions and/or services of individuals, groups, and/or landscapers or other businesses in support of routine maintenance activities may be solicited. For long-term ongoing maintenance, it may be possible to promote the creation of a “Friends of the Harold A. King Forest” organization and/or have local group(s) “adopt” the Forest similar to the “Adopt-an-Island” programs instituted by many towns like Swampscott to beautify roadways and islands.

Any maintenance that goes beyond routine upkeep (e.g., restoration of paths, remediation of erosion, replacement or repair of signs, and removal of invasive species) will be the responsibility of the Conservation Commission. The Conservation Commission will seek out the assistance of the Department of Public Works, and/or outside contractors in order to undertake these improvements, using available monies and/or grant funds as needed, or any other funds generated in other ways. Solicitation of in-kind services and/or materials from outside entities will also be considered as options of supporting extraordinary maintenance projects as well.

Conformance with Existing Regulations

Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 266 Section 120, 120d and 122, and Chapter 40 Section 8C contain further details on prohibited uses on public parkland and property and applicable fines for violating these regulations.

Plan Participants

The Open Space & Recreation Plan Committee initiated the development of this management plan and solicited the following stakeholders for feedback and input on the plan:

- » Conservation Commission
- » Board of Selectmen
- » Fire Department
- » Open Space & Recreation Plan Committee
- » Planning Department
- » Police Department
- » Department of Public Works
- » Residents of Harold A. King Forest neighborhood and other interested Town residents

In preparing this plan, the following documents were reviewed: 1970 “Swampscott Environment: Now or Never”; 1983 “Open Space & Recreation Master Plan;” and the “Open Space & Recreation Plan 2013-2020.”



CONSERVATION LAND MAINTENANCE CHECKLIST

TOWN OF SWAMPSCOTT

LOCATION: _____

INSPECTED BY: _____ DATE: _____

INSTRUCTIONS

Place the following beside each item in each category provided below.

“Y” indicates maintenance needs to be done

“X” indicates item is acceptable

“N/A” indicates not applicable to this location

PARKING LOTS

	Does litter need to be picked up?
	Do the trash receptacles and/or recycling bins need to be emptied?
	Do the trash receptacles and/or recycling bins need maintenance?
	Are the signs readable and free from graffiti or damage?
Further explanation of above issues:	

TRAILS

	Does litter need to be picked up on the trails?
	Do the trails need trimming of branches or groundcover?
	Are trail markers easy to see and follow?
Further explanation of above issues:	