

WRENTHAM MASSACHUSETTS
GUIDE TO OPEN SPACES
AND
CONSERVATION LAND



Fourth Edition - 2020

RULES & REGULATIONS

That apply to Conservation Properties

1. No motorized vehicles are allowed outside of parking areas.
2. Fishing is allowed in season with proper licenses in accordance with applicable laws. **Hunting is not allowed.**
3. Intoxicating beverages and disorderly acts are prohibited.
4. Open fires require written permission from the Conservation Commission and a permit from the Fire Department.
5. All cans, bottles, and garbage are to be taken away.
6. Overnight camping is allowed with written permission from the Conservation Commission.
7. No plants, bushes, or flowers are to be defaced, cut, removed, nor paint applied.
8. New trails, marking of trails, or building any structure requires written permission from the Conservation Commission.
9. Permission to use the Open Space areas may be denied for any reason relating to health, safety, morals, fire danger, overcrowding, or prior violation of these regulations.
10. The Conservation Commission does not patrol, and cannot assume, for the Town of Wrentham, liability for injuries, damage to property, or other losses. Those persons using the conservation areas assume all risks involved.
11. Conservation areas are open at sunrise and close at sunset, except as noted in item 6 above.
12. Dogs must stay on leash. **Please pick up after your dog.**
13. Stay on marked paths and do not trespass onto neighboring, private property.
14. Regardless of the time of year – **ALWAYS** – check carefully for ticks as they can be as small as a period in this sentence. Tick bites can have serious, Life-Long, health consequences.

If you have any questions about the Open Spaces please contact the Conservation Commission at 508-384-5417 or on-line at: **wrentham.ma.us/conservation-commission** or Facebook.

**FOR EMERGENCIES CALL
WRENTHAM POLICE AT 508-384-2121.**

WRENTHAM GUIDE TO OPEN SPACES AND CONSERVATION LANDS

Fourth Edition, 2020

Wrentham Conservation Commission

Members: Richard Bassett, Delana Reardon, Maria Jomides, Seth Jensen, Clerk Dianne Demarais, Vice-Chairman Julie Garland, and Leo Immonen, Chairman. Heather Ledbetter, Secretary and Darryl Luce, Agent

This book was generously funded by a grant from the William H. Sweatt Trust Fund

William H. Sweatt established the Trust Fund in the 1930's. The fund annually awards the interest generated by its invested principal to support "luxuries" not provided by Town taxes. Over the years the Sweatt Trust Fund has funded many open space and recreation projects such as the former ski hill in the 1970's, several projects at the Athletic Fields, the enhancement of Conservation Areas, and four editions of this guide.

The Fourth Edition of the Wrentham Guide to Open Spaces and Conservation Lands is available in portable document format (PDF) at wrentham.ma.us/conservation-commission.

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Cover Photo: Trout Pond, photo courtesy of Matthew Meehan.

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Great Blue Herons nesting at Wollomonopoag, photo courtesy of CatPrints photography.

Letter to Wrentham Residents:

November 2019

We are pleased to offer you this fourth edition of the Wrentham Guide to Open Spaces and Conservation Lands, originally published in 1988. We encourage you to use the guide to explore the numerous open space properties in town.

This guide briefly describes 8,000 years of Wrentham's history. The guide also describes Wrentham's natural resources and current "public lands." These lands were purchased by or donated to the Town or State for conserving land, providing for outdoor recreation, or protecting public water supplies. Open space developments have also preserved more than 400 acres at no cost to the Town. These "public lands" are located throughout town—enabling citizens to have access to some unique parcels in close proximity to their homes.

The Wrentham Conservation Commission, the Recreation Commission, the Wrentham Department of Public Works, and the Massachusetts Division of Conservation and Recreation jointly manage the various properties. Birchwold Farm, Joe's Rock, Wollomonopoag, and the state forests are the most frequently visited properties.

So that everyone may have a safe and enjoyable experience, please follow the Rules and Regulations. We encourage you to explore our natural heritage and discover for yourself the wealth of resources available in our own neighborhoods.

Sincerely,
Leo Immonen
Chairman, Wrentham Conservation Commission

OPEN SPACE IN WRENTHAM

“Wrentham is a favored place, flattered by Nature and smiled upon by Man,” read the opening lines of the town's official history. The town’s history continues: “The town is set in an area that boasts the best of natural facilities: excellent ponds and thus a good natural supply of water, good level land and yet some gently rolling hills to relieve what otherwise might have been a monotonous landscape, good marshland which would attract all manner of animal and bird life and provide marsh hay, and plenty of woods, where game roamed and from which a good supply of lumber for construction and wood for fuel might be obtained...,” setting a scene that the Wrentham Conservation Commission seeks to preserve.

Those of us who live here now are but part of a long line of residents who were attracted by the area's natural attributes. After the glaciers retreated more than 13,000 years ago, the Native Americans recognized, appreciated, and depended on these resources as well.

Wrentham’s Open Spaces include several types of properties for public use. Among these are:

- Over 1,200 acres of State Forests for hunting and other permitted activities.
- Two large, athletic complexes, each with several athletic fields for organized sports.
- A Town beach, a boat ramp, and areas open to the public around Lake Pearl.
- Public tennis courts and a Town Center.

But the focus of this booklet are the eight natural open spaces, of more than 75 acres each, set aside and developed for passive recreation. They are open to the public for hiking, bike and horseback riding, wildlife viewing and, with permission, camping. This guide provides descriptions and maps of these areas for you to use.

There are several other properties that the Commission manages that are not developed such as the 32-acre Burnt Swamp area. The Conservation Commission's goals in setting aside all these natural open spaces are to protect our water resources, maintain wildlife habitat, and preserve Wrentham's rural appearance.

The Conservation Commission has used three means to meet these goals. The first method is by purchase such as Crocker Pond (1966), Joe's Rock (1970), Birchwold (1985) and Wollomonopoag (2001). Direct purchase is the best means to protect land from alteration but that has been increasingly difficult as land prices have soared since the 1980's. The Wrentham Conservation Commission and the Wrentham Open Space Committee have therefore focused on protecting natural areas through Conservation Restrictions and the Open Space Preservation Development Bylaw.

Conservation Restrictions permanently preserve land and prevent future development, but keep the land in private ownership. The Assetta Farm on East Street has permanently preserved 44 acres of open field and woods. The field is visible along East Street near Foxboro and is kept as a hay field. This property protects the upper watershed of Wrentham Well #4 and helps maintain the rural appearance of Wrentham. Edna Williams, Bill Marland, and Esther Anderson have also placed Conservation Restrictions on their properties, preserving the rural appearance of Wrentham, protecting our drinking water, and providing wildlife habitat.

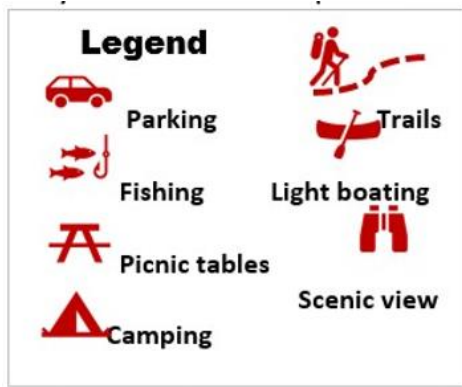
The Open Space Preservation Development Bylaw allows development but the altered area is restricted to a smaller area and part of the land is permanently protected as natural, open space for wildlife and the public. These Open Space Development properties will be discussed further in this Guide. Lastly, this guide will describe the History of Conservation in Wrentham and explain the need for protecting natural open spaces. The Conservation Commission welcomes any who would like to help monitor and maintain the open space areas. Please contact the Commission to volunteer to help.

MAPS AND DESCRIPTIONS

The map of Wrentham on the following page shows areas accessible and open to the public to enjoy. Detailed maps of each of the areas and short descriptions of those areas follow.

These areas, managed by the Wrentham Conservation Commission, include Joe's Rock, Birchwold, Wollomonopoag, Eaglebrook, Crocker Pond, Trout Pond and Esker Trails.

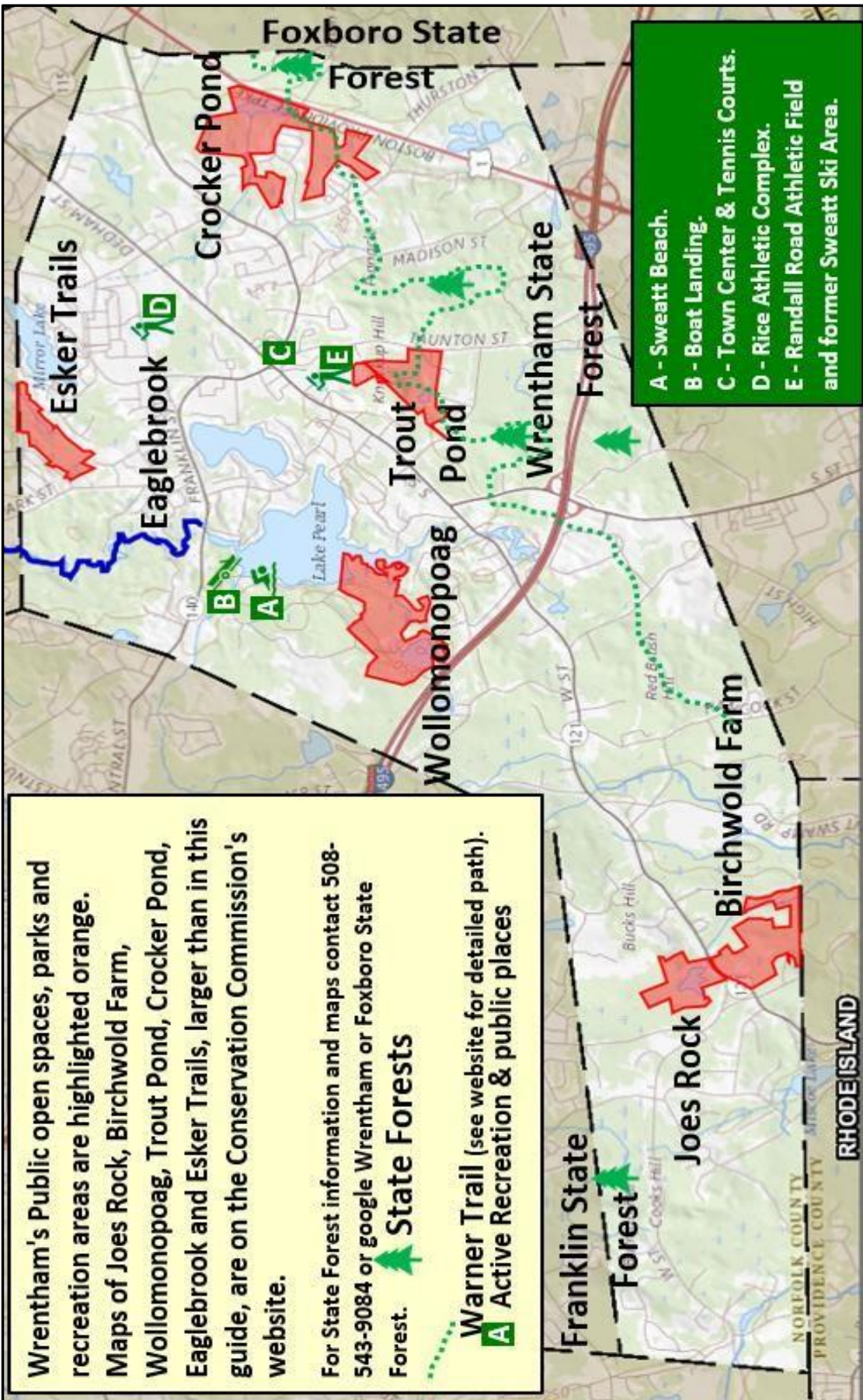
For each of the maps, the top of the map, as viewed, is north. The individual maps will use the symbols shown in the legend below and the subject Conservation Area will be highlighted with a bright green outline. Please respect the privacy of neighboring properties and do not trespass.



The active recreation areas do not have individual maps but are noted on the overall map of Wrentham. The Recreation Department manages the two athletic field complexes and the Town beach at Lake Pearl.

No maps are provided for the three State Forests as any changes in use or access are not in the Town's control. A short description of the State Forests begins on page 24 and references where maps and further information may be obtained.

The Conservation Commission manages and is responsible for several other properties in town that are not described in this Guide such as the Burnt Swamp area in Sheldonville. Burnt Swamp, and several other properties are accessible but have no off-street parking or developed trails. Contact the Conservation Commission if you wish to know more about these properties.





JOE'S ROCK

Parking: A prominent sign marks the off-street parking on the north side of West Street, (42.02675° N, -71.40523°W). The parking area is paved and can take several cars.

Features: Scenic views, climbing, picnic tables, and in winter, ice skating.

Cautions: Use caution in the area of the cliff, in addition to fall hazards, broken glass may be present. Report inappropriate behavior to the Wrentham Police 508-384-2121.

This 60.25-acre property combines the tranquility of a 5-acre bog pond with striking views of the countryside to the southwest. These views are visible from the dramatic cliffs that rise 150 feet from the pond. The rock's 490-foot elevation is the highest in Wrentham, yet is just a short, but steep, walk from the parking lot.

A trail leads from the small parking lot, past a beaver dam, to a fork, the left fork takes you to the bog pond. The pond, once a cranberry bog, is quite shallow and frequently dries up. Water overflows from the pond, southward to the Pawtucket Reservoir. In the warmer months, one can enjoy the area's abundant wildlife and wetlands flora. In the winter, the pond affords ice skating.

The right fork in the trail passes through woods and rises through a 35-acre hillside to the top of the massive rock outcropping which gives the area its name. Joe's Rock is said to come from a Native American legend dating back to the days of King Philip Sachem's encounters with the English settlers in the 1670s. The trail splits twice. The first, left split goes to the base of the Rock while the right fork leads to the top of the Rock. This trail splits again with the right trail winding gradually to the east while the left trail is a shorter, steeper route.

In 1992, Ms. Massie sold a 5-acre adjoining parcel to the Town. That purchase was made using funds donated by the Simeone Charitable Foundation, the Sweatt Fund and several private citizens.

BIRCHWOLD FARM

Parking: The entry for the parking area is a short distance west of the Joe's Rock parking lot (42.0261° N, -71.4057°W) and before West Street and Route 121 separate. The parking area is unpaved and can be rough. Although the separate entrance and exit may be narrow, the parking lot is large enough for small horse trailers and many cars. In winter this lot is not plowed, but Joes Rock, across the street, has paved parking and may be plowed. Exercise caution if you cross West Street, traffic moves quickly and it is a blind corner.

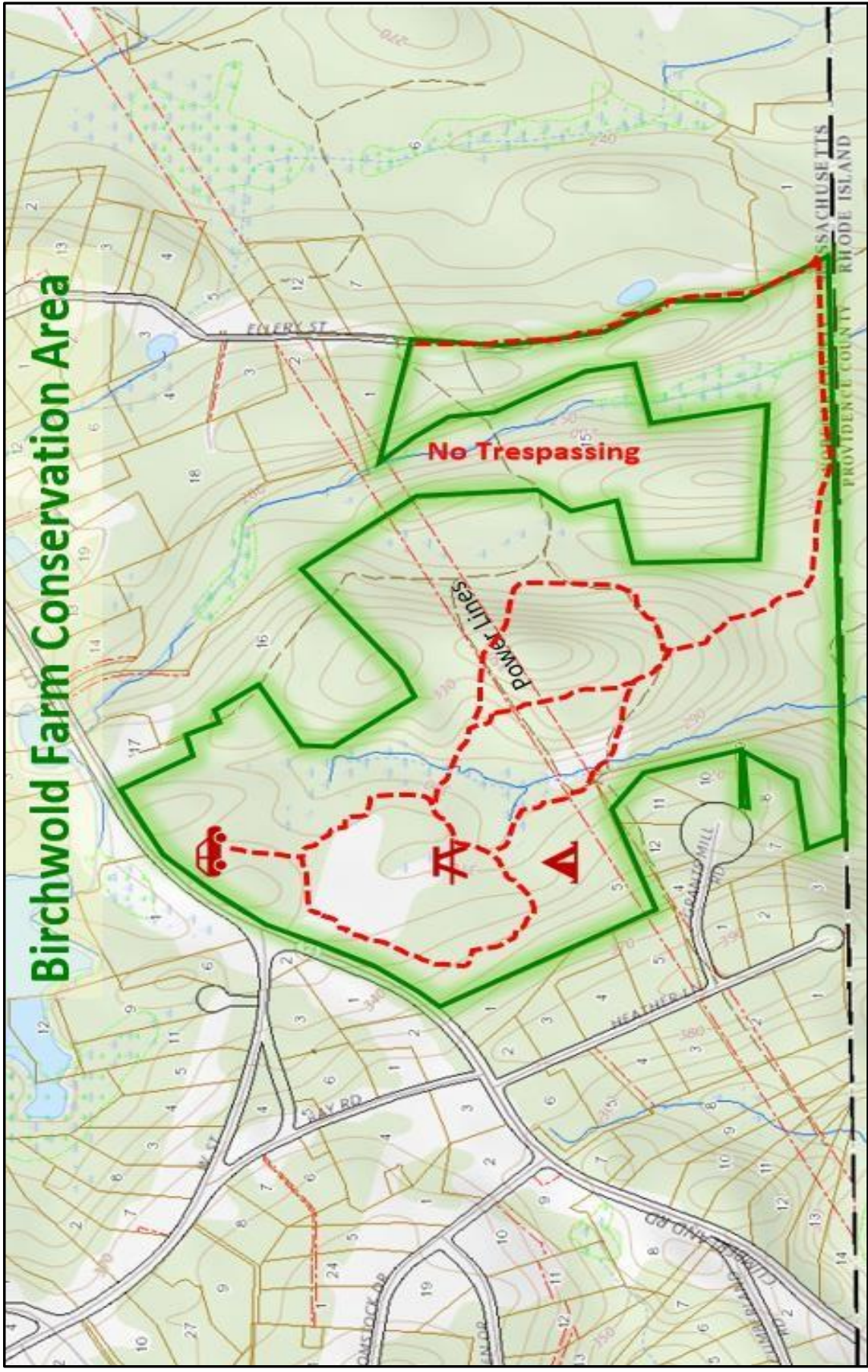
Features: A large open meadow and miles of trails over a variety of terrain for walking, horse riding and, in winter, cross-country skiing. Picnic tables are available in the field. Camping with permission.

Cautions: Stay on marked trails outside of the field area. Do not trespass onto private property nearby. Report the use of off-road vehicles to the Wrentham Police 508-384-2121.

Birchwold Farm, for many years a working dairy farm, was purchased by the town in 1985 from the heirs of its much-respected owner, Phillips Wheeler. Birchwold Farm now provides over 100 acres for wildlife viewing, hiking and horseback riding. Its features include the large open field visible from the road, as well as a small pond, wetlands, hardwood groves, and an abundance of flora and fauna.

Occasional mowing of Birchwold's field is done to control invasive plant growth and to maintain wildlife habitat. In late winter and early spring, the area is known for congregations of bluebirds and Woodcock courting flights. Back areas contain undisturbed woodlands and an old mill in the area of Ellery Street.

Please stay on marked trails and do not trespass onto neighboring properties. Regarding dogs: pickup your dog's mess, it is a hazard for people and wildlife in the quantities that occur out there. Also, take care while walking your dog - coyotes frequent this area.





WOLLOMONOPOAG

Parking: Elysium Street is off Route 140 a few hundred feet before entering Franklin. Ignore any “Private Road” signs and go to the end of Elysium Street where there is Off-street parking on an unpaved lot.

Features: Miles of hiking trails through wooded areas, wildlife viewing, and areas of interest for glacial geology.

Cautions: Report off-road vehicle use to the Wrentham Police 508-384-2121. Long trails that require some rigor in places.

“Wollomonopoag” means “Place of Shells,” it features miles of trails, large eskers, several beaver dams, extensive marshes, a large heron rookery, and a mature White Pine forest.

Eskers are the remnants of river beds which ran beneath glaciers more than 13,000 years ago. As the glaciers melted, flood waters ran beneath the ice in tunnels. The flood waters contained enormous loads of gravel and boulders that were laid down as steep, linear ridges. Because eskers are comprised of gravel they are typically mined and sold as fill. Therefore, eskers are becoming increasingly scarce in eastern Massachusetts. It is not hard to imagine that Native Americans found this area attractive: close to water and a natural defensive position that the eskers provided.

Wollomonopoag lies on the upper reaches of the Charles River watershed. The area is important to water quality on a regional level and is the keystone in over 600 acres of open space the Town maintains in this portion of the watershed. Downstream, the towns of Wrentham, Franklin, Norfolk, Millis and Medway have well fields that depend on this water. The mixed hardwood and pine forests of Wollomonopoag are home to scarlet tanager, deer, beaver, pine martin, Great Blue Heron, Osprey, and wild turkey. The Town acquired this property by eminent domain in 2001.

In two places the trails run off the property. The public may use these trails but stay on the trail and be respectful of those adjoining properties.

EAGLE BROOK

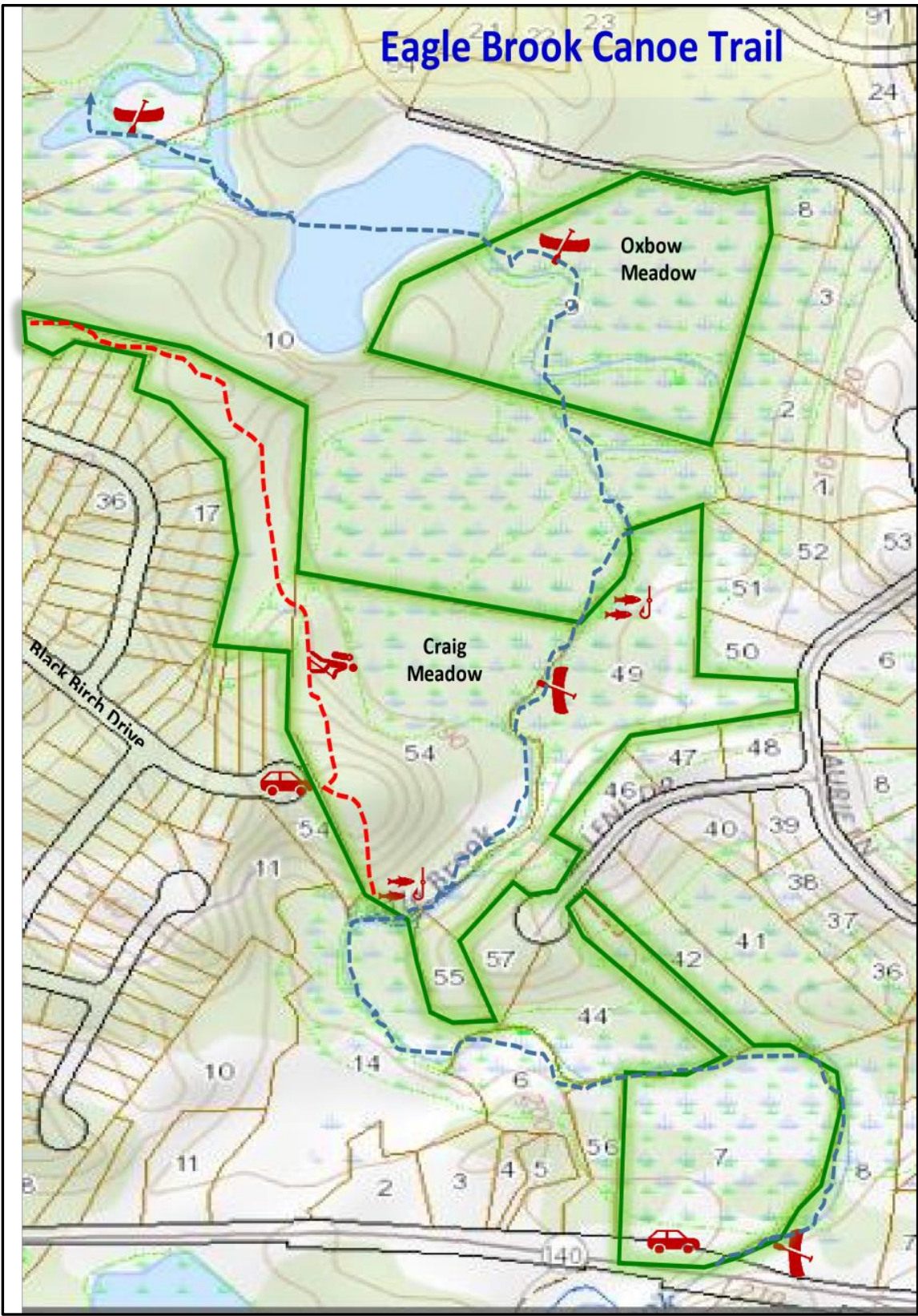
Parking: Off-street parking on Franklin Street adjacent to Eagle Brook, 42.0730° N, -71.3492°. The parking area is paved and can take several cars. There is a smaller parking area at the east end of Black Birch Drive.

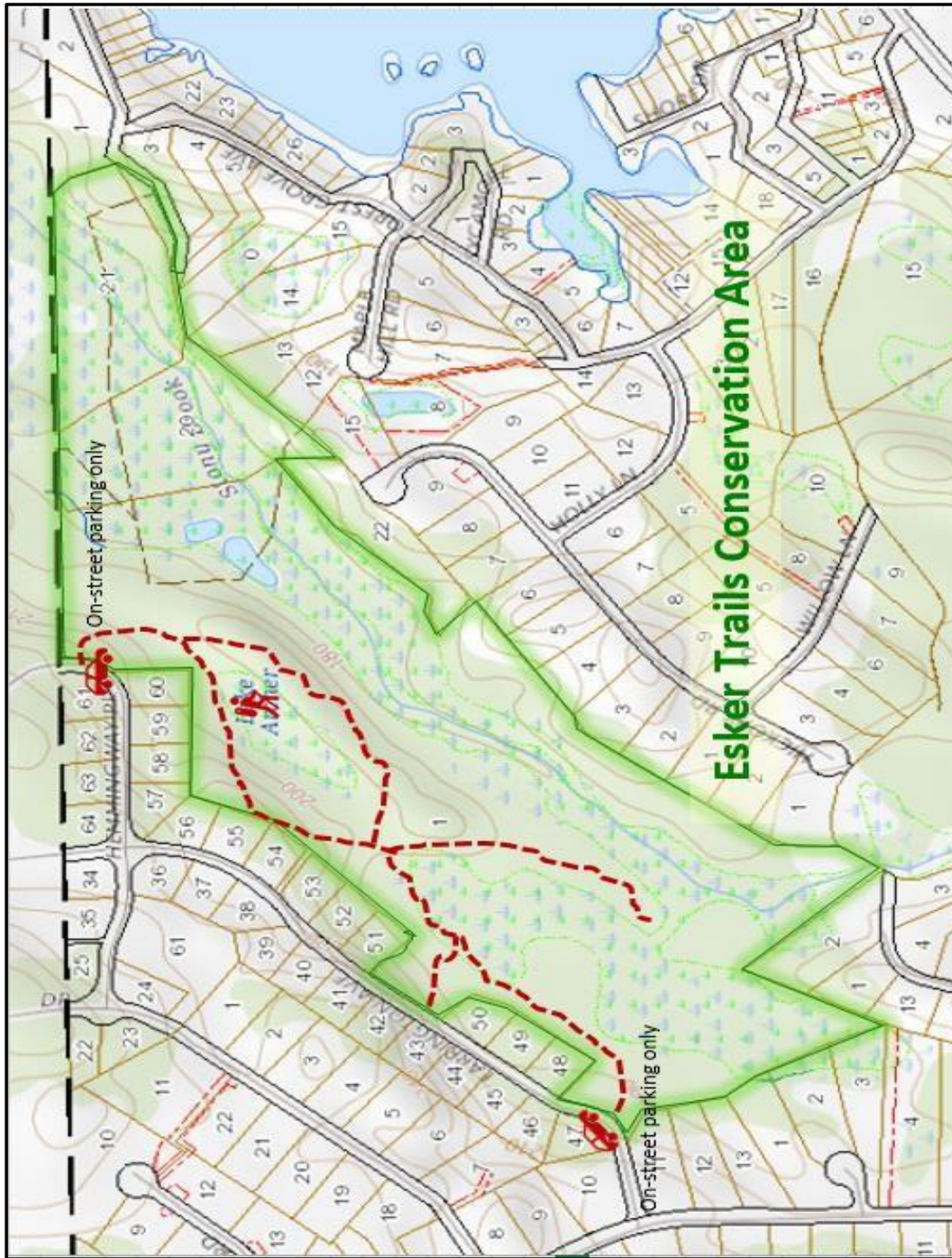
Features: Canoeing, kayaking, hiking and fishing. Some areas are child-friendly fishing areas. Please, bring a trash bag to take out your litter.

Eagle Brook runs northward from Lake Pearl and ultimately to the Charles River. The Conservation Commission manages more than 100 acres scattered along the brook that consists mostly of wetlands and a few trails. However, the entire brook may be canoed from the parking lot on Route 140 southward to, and through, Lake Pearl to Wollomonopoag, and northward to Norfolk. With research and grit, it is possible to canoe or kayak northward to Boston Harbor. Canoeists may pass through the Anglers' Club Pond (just no fishing) and the Cranberry Bog. The Chapter 91 law allows boating traffic on all navigable waterways – just be respectful of neighboring property.

The key parcels in this corridor are the 15-acre Oxbow Meadow and the 10-acre Craig Meadow. The Oxbow Meadow parcel was purchased in 1964 from Joseph A. and Margaret L. Hunchard and Frederick C. and Lois M. Hyldberg for \$1,000. It is a wet meadow accessible by water. Craig Meadow, which is primarily wetland, was acquired shortly after Oxbow, in 1964, from Harry J. Webb for \$350.

Craig Meadow has a child-friendly fishing point, a short walk from a small, public parking area at the east end of Black Birch Drive in the Eagle Brook Subdivision. Please take only pictures, maybe a few fish, and leave only footprints here. Keep it nice for the next person.





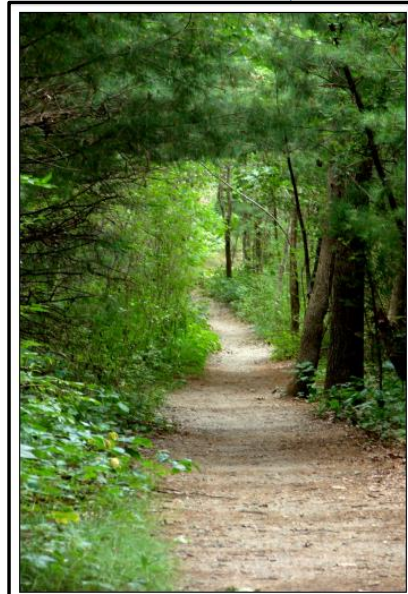
ESKER Trails is located off Park Street. Parking is only along Farrington Drive but there are short, lovely trails running along wetlands and the ridges of eskers. This area is part of an Open Space Subdivision with developed trails and public access. Please be mindful of the residents and treat the open space as you would any of the Conservation land. The rules to Conservation areas apply to this property as well.



The view from Joe's Rock.

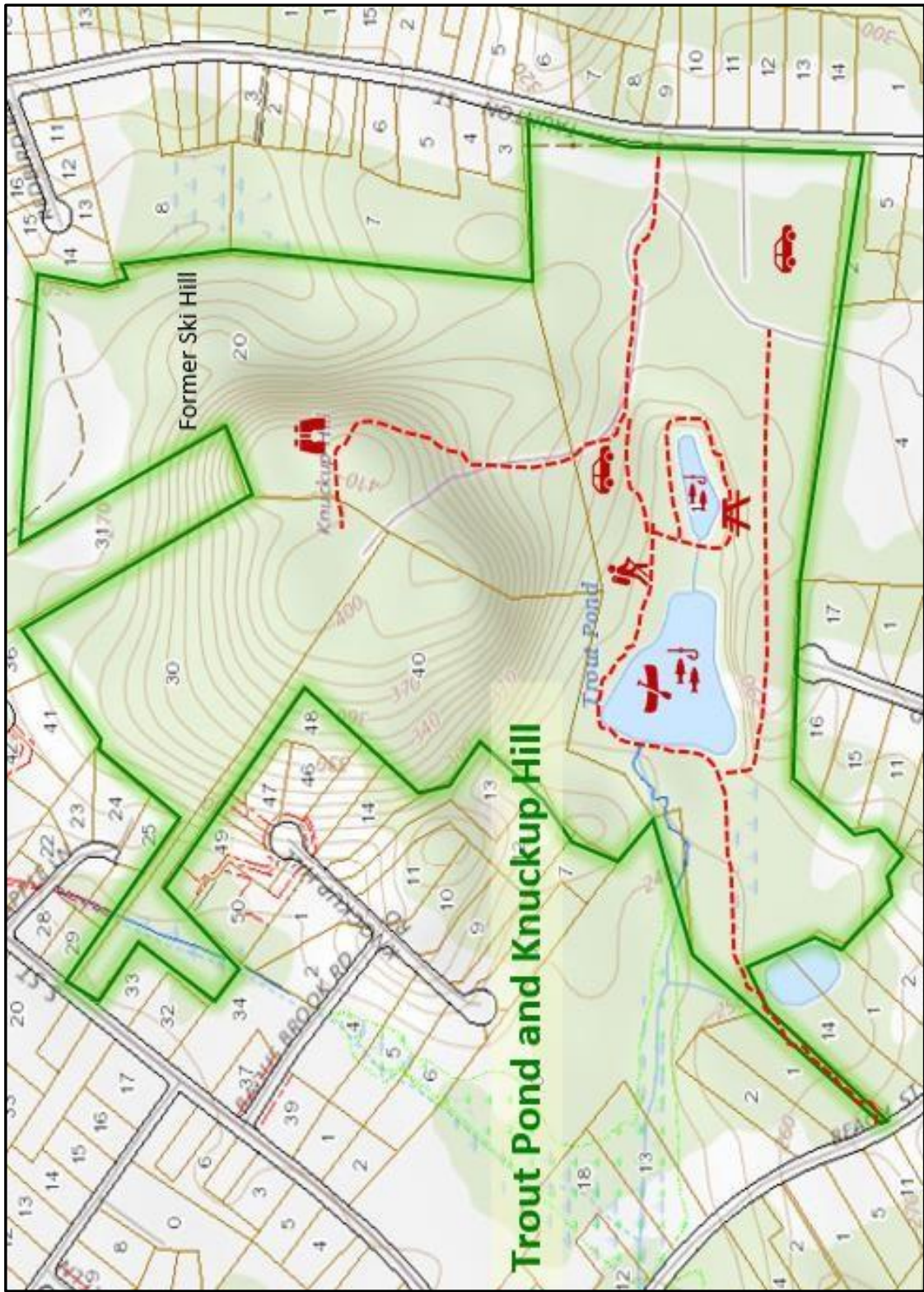


The trail leading to the top (the easy part, it gets much steeper).



The former Sweatt Ski Hill at Knuckup Hill. It had a J-bar tow to the top and a commanding view to the north and Town Center. The old ski lift still sits there abandoned. A great place to go in the fall at the foliage change.





TROUT POND and KNUCKUP HILL

Parking: Off-street parking is available at the Wrentham Senior Center and Building Inspectors Office off Taunton Street.

Features: Scenic views, fishing (with small child-friendly fishing spots), hiking and scenic views.

Trout Pond and Knuckup Hill are located off Taunton Street and offer trails that run through forests and varied terrain on approximately 100 acres within a mile of the Town Center. This area consists of a chain of Town properties: Town Hall, the Town Library, Sweatt Ball Fields, Knuckup Hill and the Trout Ponds.

Two ponds lie at the center of the Trout Pond area and have long been used for fishing and skating. The Trout Pond area began with a 42.5-acre gift to the town in 1908, when the state authorized the taking of the ponds and surrounding land for the town's water supply. The donors were Ellen F. Mason, Mary A. and Maria F. Smith, Fred E. Gilmore, George W. Porter, and Daniel Brown. Trout Pond was the site of the original Town well #1 which was exhausted in the 1960s.

Knuckup Hill lies on the north side of the Trout Pond area and has trails running to the top of the Hill. The top of the former ski hill, abandoned in 1980, offers a sweeping vista to the northwest to the Town Center and is quite beautiful at the foliage change. At one time Sweatt Ski Hill offered local skiing for 50¢ per day after school. A short, very steep walk downhill to the ballfields demonstrates the challenge this small hill offered skiers.

West of Knuckup Hill and north of Trout Pond are 19 acres of open space obtained from the Badus Brook subdivision in the early 2000's. This area has several trails that wind over interesting terrain but need to be marked and mapped. Knuckup Hill is also the site of one of the Town's water towers and is crossed by the Warner Trail. Knuckup Hill was put together from small properties purchased with town Conservation Funds in 1964 for recreational use.

HOMER CROCKER POND

Parking: Two unpaved off-street parking spaces are at the east end of Myrtle Street near Route 1.

Features: Hiking, scenic views, small boating and canoeing, fishing (easily accessible), and picnic tables.

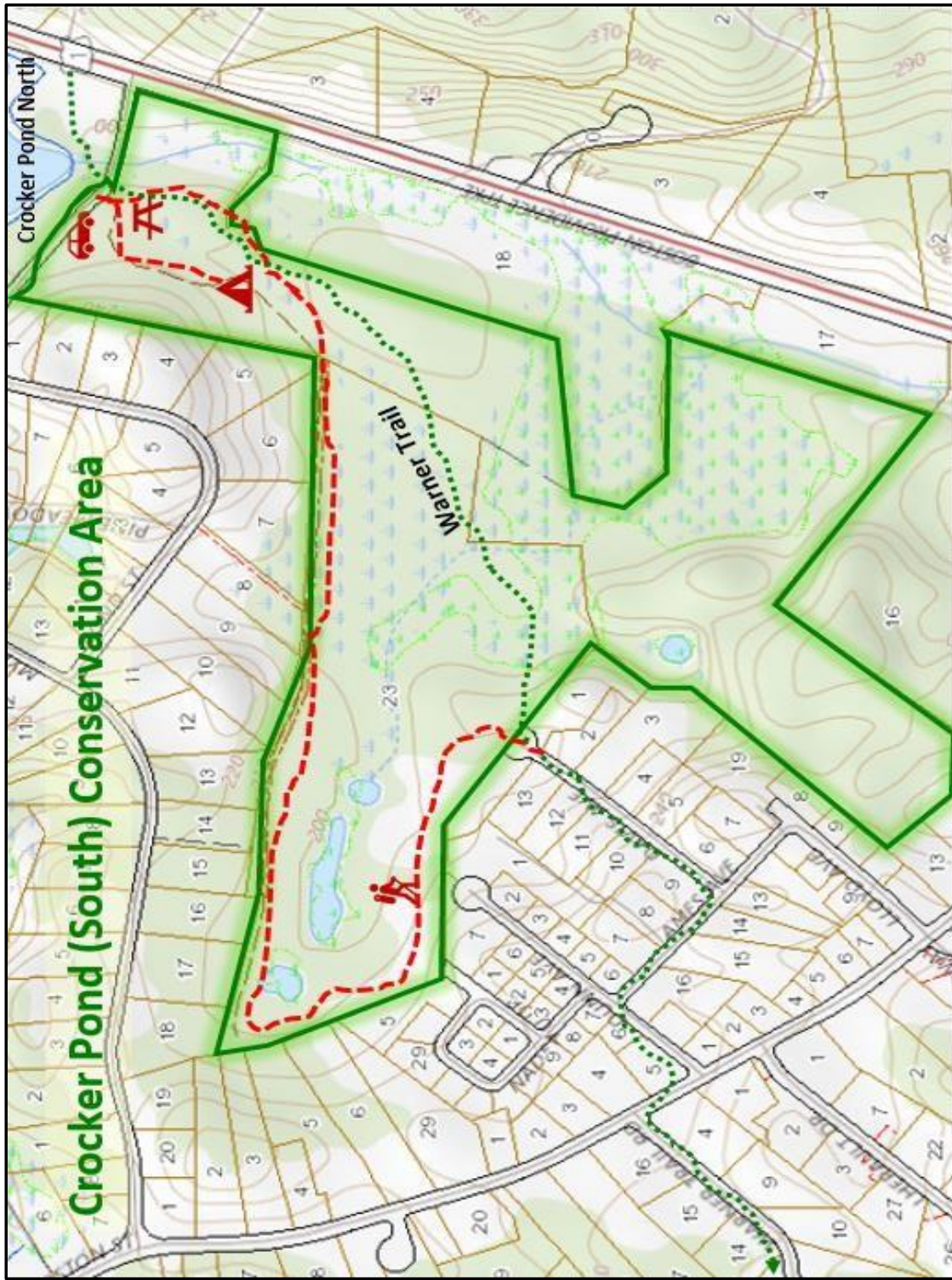
Originally, this 122-acre property was the summer home and campground of the Crocker family of Brookline. The pond area, originally the site of a historic grist and saw mill, had reverted to meadow when the Crocker family first leased it in 1924. They restored the pond and subsequently ran a summer camp on the property during the 1920s and 1930s.

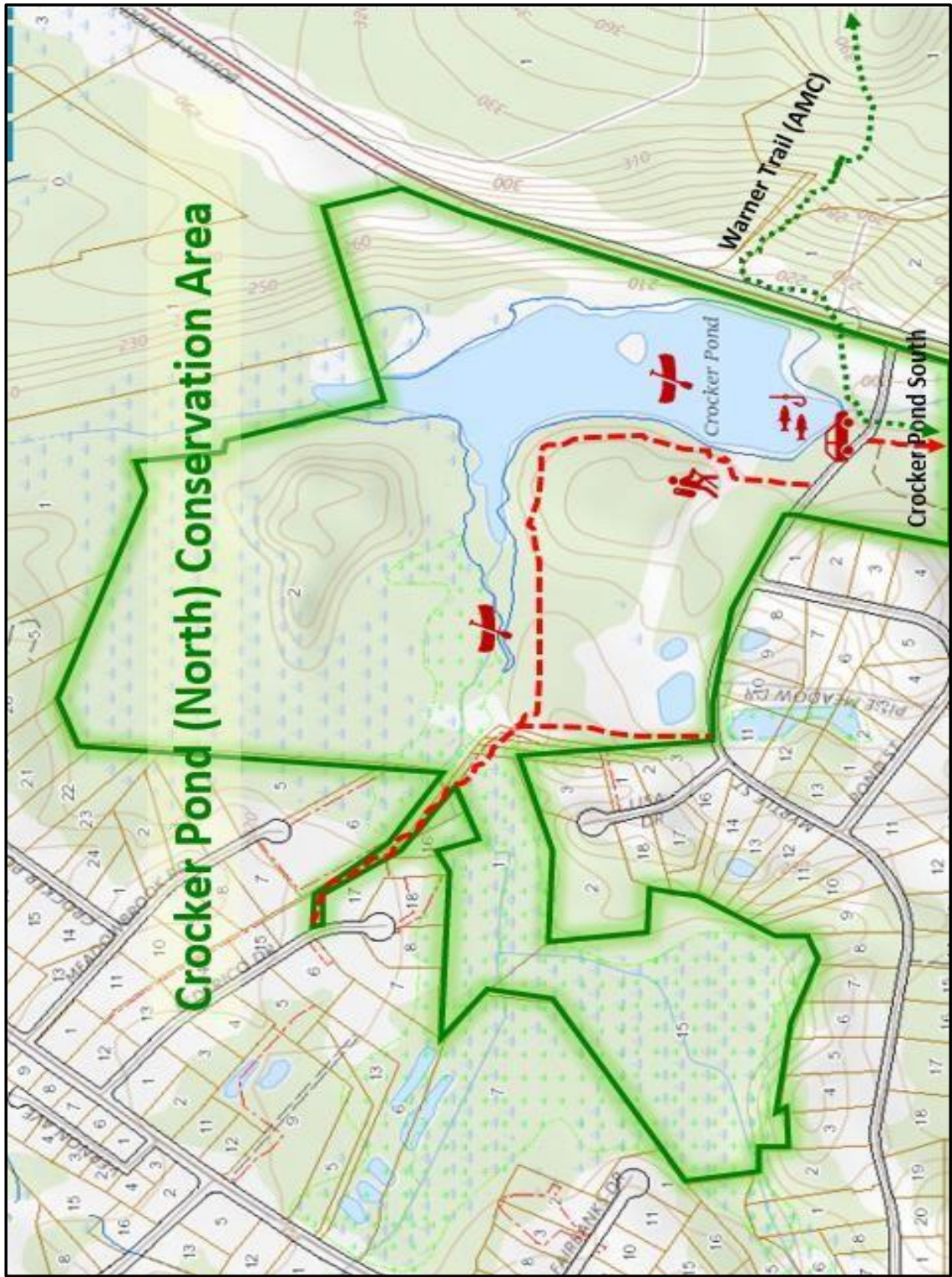
The pond, meadows, and original camp building, which was destroyed by a fire, were purchased jointly by the Town of Wrentham and the City of Attleboro in 1966 from Constance and Richard Crocker. Crocker Pond protects the headwaters of Lake Mirimichi, a major Attleboro water supply. Wrentham's drinking water well number 4 lies on the Southern portion of the property and a back-up well was installed near the Pond in the 1990's.

The pond and walking trails provide opportunities for canoeing, fishing, hiking, picnicking, and enjoying nature. In 1988, a picnic and hiking area on the south side of Myrtle Street was developed in memory of the late Lionel Schensnol, a founding and long-time member of the Conversation Commission who was instrumental in acquiring this property.

The Warner Trail enters Wrentham and Crocker Pond after Crossing Route 1 and continues southward through to Dunn Avenue before entering the Wrentham State Forest. Foot access to the Crocker Pond area is also possible from Federico Drive via a marked easement granted to the town by the developer of the property and graciously maintained by the neighbor.

Below are two maps of the Crocker Pond area, one portion north of Myrtle Street and the other south.





CROCKER POND, Continued

Additional parcels have been added to Crocker Pond over the years. Among these are 15.81 acres that were acquired from Frank E. and Virginia A. Dicks in 1975, which include a 20-foot right-of-way along the northeast side of Myrtle Street. In 1978, the town transferred to the Commission an 11.2-acre parcel west of Crocker Pond along Meadow Brook, which flows into the north end of the pond. The area is generally marshy, with a small pond near Myrtle Street, originally part of the estate of Mrs. Jesse Jenson.

The southern portion of the Crocker Pond area was enlarged by a gift of 32.91 acres from the Salvatore B. Simeone family in 1988. The southern parcel includes 57.8 acres managed by the Department of Public Works for Wrentham's Drinking Water Well #4.

ATHLETIC FIELDS

SWEATT FIELD COMPLEX

This area is immediately adjacent to the elementary school and Town Library at the end of Randall Road. It consists of several baseball fields, picnic tables, a concession stand, and batting cages located at the bottom of Knuckup Hill.

WILLIAM A. RICE ATHLETIC COMPLEX

Wrentham purchased this 88-acre parcel for active recreational use in 2001. There are several multipurpose athletic fields as well as fields dedicated to specific sports. This area is on Emerald Street, which is off Shears Street west of the Town Center. There is ample public parking.

SWEATT BEACH & BOAT LANDING

Parking: Sweatt Beach and the Boat Landing are accessed from Elysium Street off Franklin Street, Route 140. The beach and swimming area is staffed with lifeguards during summer hours. A canoe & kayak launching point, accessed from the beach parking lot, was installed as part of Eagle Scout project. There are also

kayaks for rent from a private party. Permits for launching larger boats are available at the Selectmen's office.

Approximately 2500 feet of the western shoreline and dam of Lake Pearl are open for walking and shore fishing. Access is from the boat landing. Any licensed fisherman may fish on the lake which is stocked regularly with trout and salmon. During winter, ice-fishing is popular with the local lunatics on ponds in Wrentham.

WRENTHAM CENTER

Parking: Town-owned, off-street parking is available across from the Congregational Church.

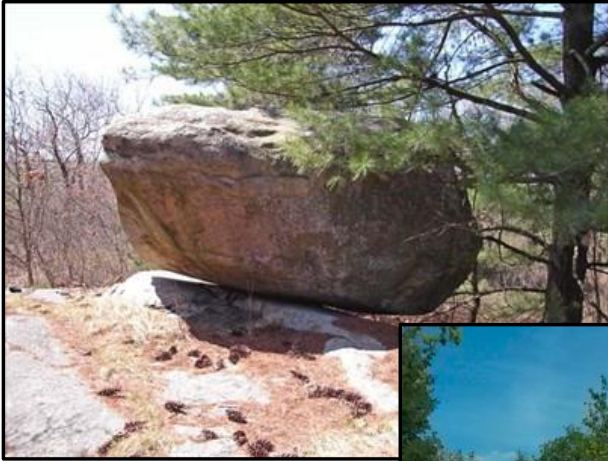
Features: Bandstand, common area, park and tennis courts.

TOWN COMMON

Wrentham's two-acre Town Common has long provided a tranquil focal point for the town center, having been among the first properties set aside for public use in 1685. With its benches, bandstand, gazebo, and tall shade trees, it provides a daily oasis as well as a convenient and scenic location for many civic activities throughout the year.

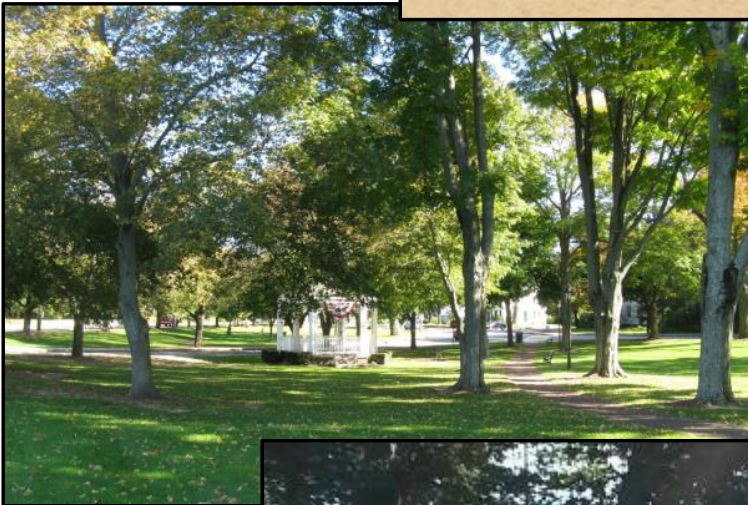
SWEATT MEMORIAL PARK AND TENNIS COURTS

This three-quarter acre park has two tennis courts and is set in a grove of Sycamore trees across the street from the Town Common. The tennis courts are available to all Wrentham residents without a permit and are lighted for evening use. The courts were built by the Works Project Administration in 1932-1933, utilizing Sweatt Fund money.



Tilting Rock, Wrentham State Forest

Sweatt Beach



Town Common

Tennis Courts near the Town Common



A portion of the
campsite at
Wollomonopoag,
constructed by
an Eagle Scout.



Lower Trout
Pond, a great
place for
beginner
fishermen.



Picnic tables at Birchwold – fun even in the snow!



Trail entry at
the Eagle
Brook
Subdivision.
Easy walking
in a natural
area.

THE WARNER TRAIL

Wrentham is familiar to New Englander hikers as host to 14 miles of the 34-mile Warner Trail, stretching from Canton, Massachusetts to Diamond Hill State Park in Rhode Island. The Trail was established in 1939 by the Appalachian Mountain Club and passes through several of Wrentham's open space areas and the State Forests. The trail offers many fine views and interesting features. For a copy of the Warner Trail map, or to join a group hike, contact the friends of Warner Trail www.warnertrail.org or the F. Gilbert Hills State Forest at (508) 543-5850.

STATE FORESTS

Wrentham State Forest, F. Gilbert Hills and Franklin State Forests cover more than 1,200 acres in Wrentham. The 60 acres of Franklin State Forest in Wrentham are inaccessible, used primarily for flood control on the Charles River. Wrentham State Forest and F. Gilbert Hills offer many outdoor activities including hunting in season and ATV use in dedicated areas. The State Forests offer miles of trails and scenic vistas. There are great views from Pinnacle Rock (430 feet above sea level) and Balanced Rock (440 feet). The properties were purchased in the 1930's for \$5 an acre. At the time these areas were abandoned farmland and had been extensively cut for firewood.

Detailed information and maps for these properties is available from the State Forest Headquarters in Foxboro. Trail maps and information are also available on-line via a web search for Foxboro or Wrentham State Forest.

Details of use in the State Forests may change, please check with the State Forest Headquarters for information on hunting, fishing, and ATV use.

OPEN SPACE SUBDIVISION OPEN SPACE PROPERTIES

Permanently protected, unaltered, natural, areas of varying sizes are part of open space subdivisions. These areas will contain some wetlands but also significant upland areas. Other than Eagle Brook and Esker Trails, shown in this guide, none of these areas have trails or features that would invite casual use. They are intended to protect water quality, preserve wildlife habitat, and provide a natural buffer for the residents. If you are interested in helping steward one of these areas contact the Conservation Commission. The natural, unaltered areas protected by the Open Space Preservation Bylaw include:

<u>Parcel</u>	<u>Acres preserved</u>
Whipple Estates, off Luke Street	48
Wampanoag, off Riverside & Eastside Road	44
Badus Brook, off South Street	19
Preserve at Oak Hill, off Jenks Street	109
Toils End, aka Fox Run, off Park Street	59
Heaton Place, off Ash Street	7
Grants Mill, off Cumberland Road	5
Wamsutta Way, off West Street	7
Blackberry Hill, off West Street	17
Chestnut Hollow, off Chestnut Street	13
Wolloff Estates, off West Street	22
Pond Home, off East Street	12
John Tate Place, off West Street	12
Eaglebrook Subdivision, off Franklin Street	35

This is over 400 acres of land that did not need to be purchased and does not diminish the amount of tax dollars contributed. Open Space Subdivisions contributes more in taxes than conventional subdivisions. Without the Open Space Preservation Bylaw these areas would have the same number of houses but larger lawns, more pavement, and no natural areas to enjoy. The Open Space Preservation Bylaw limits the damage done to water resources and provides a natural buffer for residents.

HISTORY OF CONSERVATION IN WRENTHAM

Soon after the glaciers retreated from our town more than 13,000 years ago, the Native Americans occupied the area of Wrentham. Evidence exists of at least three primitive civilizations living near Eagle Brook, in the town's northeastern corner, as far back as 6500 B.C. Local historian Stephen Keighley described this area as a good source of spring water for drinking and cooking, clay beds nearby for the manufacture of utensils, and having abundant game in the woodlands. It was the descendants of the last of these indigenous groups who gave this area the name Wollomonopoag, or "Place of Shells," and who were living here when the first European settlers came in the 1640s.

The colonists were attracted by the rich meadows around the lakes, which they needed to feed the growing herds of cattle that formed the basis of the Puritan economy in the early 1600s. The land was purchased in 1660 from the local Native American leader, King Philip Sachem, for a total of 41 pounds, 10 shillings and 8 pence. When the town was officially established in 1673, separating itself from Dedham, it was renamed "Wrentham," after a small village near the coast in East Suffolk, England.

Conserving natural resources was one of the first concerns of the new residents. In 1671 one of the earliest measures passed by Town meeting was to regulate the felling of cedar trees, the use of lumber, and levying penalties for wasting lumber and fuel wood.

All but two of the young town's homes were burned during King Philip's War in 1675 and 1676. Both homes were saved because both were believed to be infected with smallpox. The colonists returned to Wrentham in 1680, with the men drawing lots for the land, choosing timberland, meadowland, home lots, and wood lots with care. In 1685 the first lots of land, one of which is now the Town Common, was set aside for common use. Not surprisingly, one of the parcels was the fertile "land between the two ponds,"

what is now Lakes Pearl and Archer. Also preserved were four acres near the meeting house in the village center along with miscellaneous land for the "encouragement of a school."

In the late 1700s, Wrentham's abundant water supplies supported many water-powered mills for the small-scale manufacture of cotton and wool cloth. The meadows provided agricultural space for growing straw, fueling a successful straw hat manufacturing center. Farming of poultry, hay, corn, and pastured livestock were also important to the Town's economy.

Beginning in the 1870's, the aesthetic and recreational values of Wrentham encouraged the first influx of summer folk, who built cottages on the lakes or boarded with local families. Many of the visitors were upper middle-class families from Rhode Island or elsewhere in Massachusetts who enjoyed the swimming and boating opportunities offered by the lakes. It was about this time that the town set aside land between Creek Street and Lake Pearl and called it George's Park. In addition to water activities, it was used as a picnic area and was popular for outdoor meetings in the summer. Late in the 19th century, the Enegren family, headed by William L. Enegren, a local baker who lived on Creek Street, began the development and expansion of the George's Park area.

Advertisements encouraged people to "avail [themselves] ...of the cool breezes and charming scenery" from the high bluff overlooking the lake. Numerous activities from boating to carousels to evening dancing attracted people from miles around for a family day at Lake Pearl. Count Basie, Benny Goodman and Frank Sinatra performed at the park. Today, Lake Pearl Park continues to be one of the town's best-known attractions.

The towns of Norfolk, Franklin, and Plainville, formerly part of Wrentham, separated from the Town in the late 17th to early 20th centuries and became their own communities. While some of these spinoffs developed into bustling municipalities, Wrentham itself maintained a more rural character.

After World War II the town's attributes were discovered, sparking a faster pace of development. At the May 1962 Town meeting, the Conservation Commission was established to provide for a broad program of conservation, including the preservation, promotion and development of natural resources. Members of the first Commission were Lionel Schensol, George E. Reynolds, Charles S. Canning, Jr., Lawrence C. Perkins, Marjorie E. Taylor, chairman, Louis A. Maguire, vice-chairman, and Edna K. Williams, secretary.

In the Annual Report for 1962, the fledgling Conservation Commission asked for public support of their efforts, warning that without such a program, "the town has no way to prevent the development into areas that should be kept green and would result in the spoilage of the lakes, ponds and streams and ultimately to the pollution of same." The Commission held its first meeting September 19, 1962 and reported having met with Commissions from other towns as well as seeking input from state and county conservation officials and professionals. Maps were prepared showing possible greenbelt areas, surface water features, and forest areas. Master Plan formats were distributed, and a public education meeting was held January 9, 1963.

The new Conservation Commission recognized the need for the town to protect natural areas and began acquiring property through bargain sales and outright purchase. During the 1960's and 1970's the Town acquired several properties for open space preservation including Knuckup Hill, Burnt Swamp, Craig and Oxbow Meadows, Joe's Rock and Crocker Pond.

In colonial days, Wrentham was the mid-point on the Post Road, now Route 1, between Boston and Providence. Interstate 95 and then the construction of Interstate 495 through Wrentham in the late 1970's, caused rapid residential growth in the 1980s and increased the cost of land. Because of the growth the Town realized the need for a new well and took the Wollomonopoag property by eminent domain with \$250,000 of that purchase funded by the National Park Service.

With the increasing land values and tighter municipal finances in the late 20th and early 21st century, the Conservation Commission has shifted the focus of land preservation to voluntary conservation restrictions, open space subdivisions, donations, and tax takings.

The Conservation Commission produced the Open Space and Recreation Plan in 1985, 1995 and 2002. This plan is required by the State for grants and gifts of land. The last edition of the Open Space Plan, in 2002, was instrumental in obtaining the William Rice Athletic Complex and the 200-acre Wollomonopog Conservation Area property.

WHY WRENTHAM NEEDS NATURAL OPEN SPACES

The primary focus on preserving land in its natural, unaltered state is to protect and preserve water. Unaltered, natural areas allow rain and snow to gradually soak into the ground. The water interacts with the natural organic material to filter the few contaminants present. Our future drinking water is then slowly filtered through the sands and gravels laid down by the glaciers 13,000 years ago. The slow flow of groundwater feeds streams and wetlands gradually, maintaining habitat for fish and other mosquito-predators.

Developed land, rooftops, lawns, and roadways, are designed to shed water quickly. That water goes into streams that rapidly flow out of Wrentham. The loss of this water has at least three consequences:

- Reduces the amount of water to replenish our aquifers, causing more watering bans.
- Streams will alternate between flooding during storms and then drying-up. Streams that dry-up are poor habitat for fish but great for mosquitos that breed in the puddles.

- The small amount of water that does soak in, will contact little organic material and be poorly filtered. This water will also contain more contaminants and is more likely to need treatment prior to drinking. Treated water is costly.

The result costs us more in water bills, causes more water bans and localized flooding, and produces more mosquitos.

Open space preservation is also important for wildlife habitat. The 21st century has seen Wrentham repopulated with wild turkey, pine martin, beaver, osprey, Bald Eagles, and even a rumor of bears. The Blue Heron rookery at Wollomonopoag is one of the largest and best in the State. The presence of all these animals indicates that the overall health of our natural environment is stable. These animals depend on a diversity of habitat and animals below them. Without smaller animals, not only can the larger not exist, but pest species such as mice and rats become more common. Open space and wildlife habitat it provides, protects public health by minimizing pest species such as mice, ticks and mosquitos.

The Conservation Commission's work since its founding in 1962 has protected our drinking water, preserved natural areas for wildlife and people to live-in and enjoy, supported and provided for active recreation, and maintained some of the original charm and atmosphere of the Town.

Today, the Conservation Commission, Open Space Committee, and Planning Board work to minimize the effects of development on our water and wildlife. Public support for the purchase of open space such as Birchwold Conservation Area has been critical in protecting and preserving our resources. Please support future land acquisition efforts as well as other means to protect open space. Above all, enjoy the areas described in this Guide. Thank-you.



The King Philip Oak where King Philip reputedly held meetings, formerly at Oak Point, on Lake Archer. Creek Street was originally an Indian trail between the “two ponds.”

**Fourth Edition of the Wrentham Guide to
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