

Management Plan
For
Great Pond Mountain Wildlands
Great Pond Mountain Conservation Trust

Orland, Maine
Draft May 28, 2009

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Reviewed by Great Pond Mountain Conservation Trust Stewardship Committee, and
adopted by the Board of Directors on June 8, 2009.

Preserve Background

Purpose of Preserve

The 4,300-acre Great Pond Mountain Wildlands (GPMW) property in East Orland fulfills our founders' vision of conserving existing wild land on and around Orland's Great Pond Mountain. It occupies 14% of the Town of Orland, and is likely one of the largest remaining undeveloped properties along rapidly-developing coastal Route 1. The property includes a wide diversity of wildlife habitats – from bald summits to mountain streams and beaver meadows – as well as 15 miles of gravel roads.

Purchased in 2005, GPMW became a natural area established to (1) Protect diverse fish and wildlife habitats and provide a sanctuary for species requiring large tracts to roam; (2) Protect water quality in the Hothole Pond/Alamoosook/Narramissic watershed; (3) Conserve a place where people of all ages can enjoy low-impact recreational activities in a scenic outdoor setting close to home; and (4) Conserve a place for scientific research and environmental and outdoor education for students of all ages, as well as to demonstrate best practices for resource management.

With a large contribution to the project from the Land for Maine's Future program, the State Dept. of Conservation has an interest in the Wildlands, detailed in the terms of the LMF Project Agreement (see appendices).

Description

The Great Pond Mountain Wildlands in Orland, Hancock County, Maine, totals 4,300 acres and consists of two large, separate parcels, one being Hothole Valley (3,420 acres) and the other on the east side of the Dead River (875 acres).

The Wildlands consist of forests, hilltops, valleys, nearly two miles of frontage on the Dead River (a northern arm of Alamoosook Lake), and 700 feet on pristine Hothole Pond, with numerous wetlands, streams (including the entirety of Hothole Brook) and shrub openings. Much of the property has been recently (1995-2002) and extensively harvested for timber. Few areas and habitats were not directly affected by harvest

activities. A 15-mile network of logging roads built with local gravel and sand deposits from the property offers extensive access for recreation, forestry, and other management activities. The roads vary in their condition; some are washed out but remain passable on foot.

Access

The Great Pond Mountain Wildlands can be accessed at three main gates. On the Hothole Valley parcel, the South Gate is located on US Route 1, just south (west) of the Route 176 intersection. The North Gate is located on Bald Mountain Road in North Orland, just 0.2 mile from the Winkumpaugh Road intersection. On the Dead River side, the property can be accessed at the Dead River Gate, about 0.5 mile up Don Fish Trail from Craig Brook National Fish Hatchery on Alamoosook Lake. A public boat launch at the Hatchery also allows access to the Dead River via a paddle of about one mile. In wintertime, snowmobilers can access the property via an ITS trail that enters the property from the north onto Hothole Pond Road, travels south down Valley Road, then exits the property near Craig Pond via Mead Mountain Road.

Natural Resource Information

A 2006 Natural Resource Inventory (NRI) by Alison Dibble and Catherine Rees found a large diversity of habitats, wildlife features, natural vegetation communities, vascular plants, and other noteworthy natural resource features. The diversity is due in part to the varied topography, especially in the Hothole Valley parcel, where mountains and hills near 1,000 feet high sweep down to a glacially-carved valley bisected by Hothole Brook. The topography, including exposed bedrock at the mountain summits, south- and north-facing exposures, drainages, and deeper soils on the upper side slopes, creates a variety of habitats. Wildlife habitats in the Wildlands are of exceptional quality, especially due to diverse wetland communities, and because of an abundance of huge boulders (granite talus and erratics) with overhangs and crevices that might serve as dens. The extent of such habitat is unusual in coastal Maine, except at Acadia National Park.

Dibble, Rees, Michael Good and volunteers located 79 species of birds, some featured in the federal Gulf of Maine Watershed Habitat Study. More birds continue to be identified in the Wildlands. Of the 14 vegetation communities found on the property and recognized by the Maine Natural Areas Program, the three-toothed cinquefoil–blueberry low summit bald (State rank S2) is especially at risk due to trampling. Dibble and Rees found more than 286 species of vascular plants, including two listed rare plants – smooth sandwort and swarthy sedge. Other sensitive features and species include bald eagle, woodcock and whippoorwill; legacy trees; vernal pools; and beaver flowages. A 2007 survey in Hothole Brook and tributaries by DIFW biologist Greg Burr and crew found a healthy population of native brook trout. Mammals common to the Wildlands include most species common to Maine, such as moose, white-tailed deer, black bear, bobcat, coyote, raccoon, beaver, snowshoe hare, etc.

Known threats to the property's natural resources include serious erosion where gravel roads cross streams, which could impact brook trout spawning habitat, and ten species of non-native invasive plants that require immediate control. (See Table 2, Potential Threats).

Human Context

Traditional Use and Land Use History

Richard A. Carlson, Bucksport, prepared some history notes for GPMCT based on archives at the Orland Historical Society and other sources.

Records found thus far indicate that the Wildlands was not settled or farmed except at the southern end of Hothole Valley at what is now Route 1, where Mrs. Armor had a residence (Colby 1881, map of Orland Figure 2). The cellar hole for that home can be found east of the South Gate, where lilac bushes and an apple tree persist. Both the Dead River and Hothole Valley parcels appear to have been managed for timber, and perhaps charcoal. During the 19th century, lumber mills existed nearby at Hothole Stream and Toddy Pond; and charcoal kilns operated on neighboring properties on Oak and Sabrinie Hills.

Many small logging camps have come and gone on the property over the last two centuries or more. As recently as the 1980s, 2,500 acres of what is now the Wildlands was owned by Diamond Occidental Forest Inc., known locally as "Diamond Match". Diamond sold the property to James River Timber, which sold it within a year or two in 1995 to Dale Henderson Logging. Henderson conducted a major timber harvest, replanted approx. 50 acres in red and white pine, and then offered the property for sale in 2000. Commercial logging ended on the Hothole Valley property by 1998, and on Dead River by 2002.

Hiking, hunting, fishing and trapping have been practiced in the Wildlands since time immemorial. Many small hunting camps existed in the Hothole Valley parcel over the past century, the ruins of which can still be located in some cases. Many hunters still remember the Great Meadow along Hothole Brook being set afire in autumn by deer hunters intent on driving out their quarry. One seasonal hunting camp on the Dead River remains, abutting but not legally accessed over the property, at Map 13 Lot 4.

Appendix III to the NRI offers information on the archaeological significance of the area, especially the Dead River. There is a rich heritage of nearby archaeological sites at Alamoosook Lake and Toddy Pond (Moorehead 1922).

GPMCT now owns portions of the Great Pond Mountain Trail, which has a very long history of access by the public over private land, both on foot and in 4WD vehicles.

Between 1995 and 2005, public access to the Wildlands was cut off by Dale Henderson Logging, which posted the land due to safety concerns.

Abutters and Stakeholders

See Table 1.

Management Plan*Management Objectives*

To fulfill the stated purposes of the Great Pond Mountain Wildlands, the following broad management objectives are proposed:

1. Management of the Wildlands shall be in accordance with the LMF Project Agreement and a Management Plan developed by GPMCT and submitted for review to the Dept. of Conservation. The plan must be revised and submitted for such review at least every ten years.
2. Consider natural resource management as the Wildlands' primary management goal. Low-impact recreation is the second most important management goal.
3. Practice sustainable and exemplary forest management. Any commercial forestry harvesting activities shall be conducted in accordance with a plan prepared by a licensed professional forester and consistent with sound silvicultural methods as well as then-present best management practices as set forth by the Maine Forest Service. Any pre-commercial thinning and management for forest products must be designed and implemented to assure a continuing, renewable and long-term source of forest products, to maintain a healthy and biologically diverse forest that supports a full range of native flora and fauna, and to limit adverse aesthetic and ecological impacts, particularly in riparian areas, high elevation areas, and scenic vistas. All forestry activities planned must be approved by the Stewardship Committee before work commences. Establish areas to demonstrate sustainable and sensitive forestry practices.
4. Retain certain areas (log landings, etc.) as early-successional habitat for woodcock, bluebirds, etc. Ideally, these areas should serve as both scenic viewsheds and habitat; some will of necessity be one or the other.
5. Protect water quality by mediating or preventing erosion problems caused by roads and trails, timber harvesting or gravel pits.
6. Minimize negative human and pet impacts to sensitive areas, such as shorelines, stream buffers, wetlands, bald summits, steep slopes and wildlife nesting or denning areas.
7. Work with the State and other agencies to evaluate opportunities for managing for woodcock, whippoorwill, turkey and other native species.
8. Continue to monitor and inventory native plant and wildlife populations and build on our knowledge base, as well as monitor changes over time, including those attributable to recreational uses. Establish indicators based on the idea of "limits of acceptable change" to determine if unacceptable conditions develop that would require future management actions. *Example: Establish indicators to ensure that the dog policy is not detrimental to wildlife, water quality, or visitor interactions.*

9. Monitor and eradicate invasive species. Native species should be used whenever feasible for seeding or stabilization. Herbicides may be used as a method of last resort.
10. Provide public access via multi-use trails and footpaths for low-impact recreation compatible with conservation values. When various uses are allowed on a single path or trail, they should be compatible from a public safety perspective. Keep up multi-use trails and paths determined to be important to recreation, and retire those too expensive or underused to retain. Consider future forestry needs.
11. Footpaths will be unobtrusive, narrow and fit with the character of the Wildlands; fill a need for Wildlands visitors; and result in little to no impact on uncommon plant and wildlife habitats. Paths should be carefully planned, sited and marked to minimize disturbance to sensitive communities. Signs should be placed in sensitive areas to educate people on the importance of remaining on the trail. New recommended path routes will be reviewed by the Natural Resource & Forestry Committee.
12. Use the existing road network as the main system of multi-use trails, keeping gates mostly locked, and limit new multi-use trails or footpaths to a few well-chosen routes. Do not plan or build any permanent trails in the Trail-Free Zone (see NRI) from 2007 to 2011, then re-evaluate.
13. Promote the use of the Wildlands for environmental education and as an outdoor classroom, by offering public programs and seeking ways to get students and teachers involved.
14. Promote the Wildlands to local and regional audiences for low-impact uses; not as a tourist attraction.
15. Develop cooperative relationships with abutting landowners.
16. Acquire adjacent lands when possible to protect key resources, connect the two pieces of the Wildlands, and extend recreational opportunities.

Potential Threats

See Table 2.

Short-term Management Actions/Current Issues (1-2 years)

- I. Stewardship Committee work plan
 - a. Conduct road maintenance and erosion control projects:
 - i. New Hothole Brook Bridge
 - ii. Stabilize Valley, Flag, Mountain View Roads
 - iii. Rock ford, Hothole Pond Rd.
 - b. Expand or create parking lots at all gates.
 - c. Maintain Wildlands property boundaries, 2 miles per year.
 - d. Develop system for tracking tasks, expenses and volunteer time (*Organizational Assessment Priority #7*).
 - e. Develop/update policy, procedure and forms for monitoring our properties (*OA #8*).
 - f. Develop policy for calculating stewardship costs of fee lands.
 - g. Remove Wildlands junk – old camps, ice shack, dumps.
 - h. Maintain relationships and programs for hunting and snowmobiling.

II. Natural Resources/Forestry work plan

- a. Implement pre-commercial thinning plan; hire assistance for forest thinning.
- b. Boost Community Firewood program.
- c. Research and carry out viewshed & woodcock habitat management. Select and maintain some of the log landings as openings for woodcock and other wildlife by mowing, fire or brushcutting.
- d. Conduct invasive plant ID & eradication.
- e. Develop a plan for long-term monitoring of natural resources.
- f. Discuss Dead River water levels with Verso Paper and encourage Verso to establish a policy to manage water levels as needed by nesting loons.
- g. Continue improving fish passage at culverts.
- h. Plan and conduct educational programs & workshops – vernal pools, invasives.
- i. Nominate Linscott vernal pools as State Significant.
- j. Place some wood duck boxes in Hothole Pond Road beaver swamp.
- k. Wildlife monitoring
 - i. Woodcock Survey – April 17
 - ii. Whippoorwill Survey
 - iii. Winter Wildlife Tracking survey
 - iv. Vernal pools – get volunteers to monitor known ones and locate new ones.

III. Paths work plan

- a. Complete Esker Path.
- b. Work with MCC Crew on paths – July 7-11.
- c. Upgrade Oak Hill Path.
- d. Upgrade East Ridge Path.

Long-term Management Actions (2-5 years)

1. Finish Wildlands Roads/Trails Plan and stabilize or retire all Wildlands multi-use trails (gravel roads).
2. Use Pete Colman's recommendations for stabilizing Wildlands paths as guidance.
3. Map all culverts and bridges using GPS. Train volunteers to take data and create maps.
4. Record seasonal stream locations and name them.
5. Stabilize the Dead River gravel pit.
6. Study using the Limits of Acceptable Change model for monitoring trails.
7. Purchase the DePaolo, Jr. property abutting Dead River property.
8. Pilot an "adopt-a-trail" program.
9. Have all boundaries marked and blazed, and a plan for continued maintenance.

10. Follow NRI recommendations for building an invasive species removal team. (See Table 7 for list of plants.) Provide GPS training for all GPMCT volunteers as part of team training.
11. Do not plan or build any permanent trails in the Trail-Free Zone for five years (until 2011). This will give us time to assess the trails that we have already built, our ability to maintain them, and the impact of the trails, and will give us time to reconsider the costs and benefits of a trail-free area.
12. Work with another group such as Scouts to develop low-impact, primitive camping.
13. Create a brochure or letterbox stations to identify interesting species, features, or ecological concerns as a way of educating visitors.
14. Limit any trails or paths to Wildlands peaks to those existing on Great Pond Mountain and Flag and Oak Hills for the next five years (until 2011). The use and impact of these trails should then be evaluated before planning any additional peak trails.
15. Bird and bat boxes should be set up, monitored and maintained; a good project for community groups. Bird and bat house plans and sites should be approved by the Natural Resources/Forestry Committee; plans can be posted on our website.
16. Plan for regular disturbance activities that would retain early successional habitat for the State endangered swarthy sedge as well as for woodcock and other species. The Orland fire department should be contacted about conducting controlled burns on selected sites.
17. Work with the State and other agencies to evaluate opportunities for managing for woodcock, whippoorwills, turkeys and other species.
18. Identify whippoorwill nesting areas.
19. Send a list of research needs (as identified by A. Dibble and C. Rees) to the University of Maine, Unity College and College of the Atlantic encouraging the use of the property as a research site. The Natural Resource/Forestry Committee should coordinate volunteer research on the property.
20. Research eco-cemeteries and/or memorial plantings for their potential to support reforestation and fundraising efforts.
21. Continue to pursue harvest and marketing of additional forest products that can be harvested sustainably. Example: wreath tipping, maple syrup, wood crafts.
22. Improve the viability of our buffers through thinning of overcrowded stands. We should remove some trees damaged by the previous two harvests, speed up the progression to old-growth forest, and create legacy trees.
23. Evaluate and update policies and plans as needed, such as the Hunting Policy and Emergency Action Plan.

Really Long-term Management Actions – 10-20 years

1. Harvest some of the red pine plantation trees at 12” dbh: possibly starting in 20 years.
2. Potential development of such amenities as a visitor center, caretaker’s cabin, bunkhouse and maintenance garage, as detailed in terms of LMF Project Agreement.
3. Recognize that although some income can be earned from forest products in the first forty years, it will be awhile after that before the Wildlands can produce a significant forest income.
4. Recognize that there is a possibility of a catastrophic disaster that will of necessity change our management strategy, and that GPMCT will need to respond accordingly. For example, forest fires, disease or insect outbreaks may require salvage cutting.

Public Use Rules. The following are in place as of the date of this plan, subject to revision. These appear in our Wildlands brochure, in kiosks and on the website:

1. Use of the Wildlands is free, but donations are welcome.
2. Day use only. Camping and fires only by special permission.
3. No overnight parking in lots.
4. Carry out all trash
5. No unauthorized vehicles beyond cedar barricades.
6. Do not block gates or barricades.
7. No ATVs or off-road vehicles allowed.
8. Leave plants and animals undisturbed.
9. An outhouse is available at the main inner parking lot located at Valley Road and Hothole Brook Trail junction. Please help keep it clean!
10. Dogs are welcome **on leash at all times**, for the safety of wildlife, people and pets. Please remove feces from paths.
11. Horses and bicycles are welcome on multi-use gravel trails. Foot traffic only on hiking paths. Please stay on marked trails.
12. Snowmobiles are welcome on designated trails. Go to www.familysnowmobileclub.com for a Bucksport Family Snowmobile Club trail map.
13. Hunting, Fishing and Trapping is permitted – please register with GPMCT and fill out survey when season is over.

Access Information

Hothole Valley South Gate, located on Route 1 near the Route 176 intersection, will be open weekends mid-June through September, and Sundays in October from 8 am to SUNSET. Weekend visitors may park in the inner lot at the Valley Road and Hothole Brook Trail junction. Allow ample time to return to your car and leave before sunset; South Gate will be locked at sundown! Please do not park on Valley Road. Weekday visitors use outer parking lot.

Hothole Valley North Gate on Bald Mountain Road will remain locked. Please park outside of gate without blocking access.

Dead River Gate will remain locked (private road). Public access to Dead River land is via gate on Don Fish Road, 0.5 mile from Craig Brook National Fish Hatchery. Land is also accessible via public boat launch at Craig Brook National Fish Hatchery on Alamoosook Lake.

Appendices:

Table 1: Abutters and Stakeholders

Table 2: Potential threats

Emergency Action Plan, rev. 2009

Hunting Policy, rev. 2009

Special Use Policy, 2008

Wildlands Safety Checklist for Work Parties, 2008

References:

LMF Project Agreement, 2008

Natural Resource Inventory, 2006, Dibble & Rees

Forestry Plan, 2007, Jake Maier

Wildlands Survey, 2007, Plisga & Day

Focus Group Recommendations, 2007

Pete Colman's Road & Trail recommendations, 2007