

CONCEPTUAL MANAGEMENT PLAN #13

COBURN WOODS

LOCATION: Skowhegan (Town Map 4 Lot 33). The Coburn Woods holding covered by this plan originally consisted of five parcels, all of which have been combined into one lot on Skowhegan Tax Map 4. Three lots were originally owned by SWT and two, formerly owned by Bruce Obert, were purchased by SWT on February 22, 2007. The Coburn Woods borders the Russell Road and the end of Coburn Ave. A CMP power line at the end of Coburn Ave. is at its easterly and southerly boundaries. The five parcels collectively are called the Coburn Woods in honor of Louise Helen Coburn, founder and first president of the Somerset Woods Trustees. Parcel #13 on SWT map.

SIZE: About 300 acres.

LAND COVER: Mostly wooded; some open (power line; woods roads; skidder trails; log landings).

FEATURES /PUBLIC VALUES:

1. Historic values: Louise Helen Coburn donated the original parcel to SWT in 1927 and the entire holding is named in her honor.
2. SWT commitment never to develop property.
3. Outstanding scenic resource highly visible to public from a number of highly traveled and visited locations, including the Skowhegan Fairgrounds and adjacent shopping center.
4. Whitten Brook has a population of native brook trout in its lower portion downstream of Coburn Woods.
5. Holding helps protect water quality and brook trout habitat, but these have been degraded downstream as noted in the Whitten Brook Restoration Project report.
6. Significant vernal pool present with good surrounding wooded habitat for juveniles and adults of vernal pool species.
7. The Coburn Woods was accepted by Maine Audubon in its Community Forest Focus Species Program and a report regarding focus species and forest management was published in June 2008 (Reference 2 in Appendix F).
8. Informal trails and woods roads are present that could be developed into a more formal non-motorized public trail system off of the power line.
9. Potential exists for linking a trail system to the Yankee Woodlot trail system if permission can be obtained from adjacent landowners to do so.
10. A major snowmobile trail (ITS 87) is present on the power line portion that is heavily used and that could be retained for continued use by the public.
11. Snowmobile trail #27 is nearby and is linked to ITS 87.
12. Despite the lack of a formal trail system, good access, or publicity, Coburn Woods is used by walkers, cross-country skiers, snowshoers, and mountain bikers.
13. Functions as green space and public recreational system adjacent to urban residential area.
14. Has a diversity of wildlife species present.
15. Open to hunting.
16. Harvestable timber resources present.

17. Mast crop species present (e.g., beech).
18. IF&W Beginning with Habitat Maps indicate parcel as containing Riparian buffer, Undeveloped Habitat Blocks, Wetlands, Large Areas of Interior Forest, and top 25% Valuable Habitat for USFWS Priority Trust Species.
19. Adjacent to an IF&W mapped Deer Wintering Area (DWA #060043).
20. Whitten Brook Conservation Area (Town of Skowhegan) present downstream.
21. Yankee Woodlot (Maine Department of Conservation) nearby.
22. Private wildlife sanctuary nearby.
23. Abuts Northwood University property.
24. Tree farm.
25. Part of holding has not been cut in a long time and is an example of old forest.
26. Educational opportunities.
27. Wooded edge between power line and Northwood University field contains plants used by wildlife (e.g., Bohemian Waxwings, White-tailed Deer, Turkeys).

FOCUS SPECIES BY HABITAT (MAINE AUDUBON REPORT):

1. Early Succession: Ruffed Grouse & Snowshoe Hare.
2. Mature: Fisher, Pileated Woodpecker, Barred Owl, Northern Goshawk, & Hermit Thrush.
3. Riparian: Northern Dusky Salamander & Brook Trout.
4. Vernal Pool: Wood Frog & Spotted Salamander.

CONCERNS:

1. Before purchase of lots in February 2007, proposed cutting and residential subdivision threatened the holding (upper watershed).
2. As part of fund drive to acquire additional lots to protect them, SWT pledged never to develop any portion of the Coburn Woods but has not yet made this commitment part of any official record that will be known to all in the future.
3. Whitten Brook is on the DEP list of Urban Impaired Streams.
4. Unauthorized use of ATVs, dirt bikes and 4WDs has severely damaged Coburn Brook and Whitten Brook on the power line (SWT property) and also downstream on Whitten Brook.
5. The lower portion (downstream of the SWT property) is undergoing development, including a major culverted road crossing, which threatens water quality and the brook trout population as noted in the Whitten Brook Restoration Project Report.
6. More funding is needed to pay for the two parcels purchased.
7. Funding is needed to acquire property or easements downstream to protect the brook from future damage as noted in the Whitten Brook Restoration Project Report.
8. Some invasive plants present, mostly on power line.
9. CMP has cut some trees along the power line without communicating with SWT first.
10. Other than a "Tree Farm" sign at the Russell Rd. access point, there are no signs identifying SWT as the owner of the property.
11. The access point at the end of Coburn Ave. is limited and unsigned with no adequate parking available.
12. There is little publicity regarding this resource.
13. There is no public trail linkage of the Coburn Woods with the Yankee Woodlot or Whitten Brook Conservation Area.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Primary Goal: Maintain the land in its natural, scenic and open character to insure that the natural resources present will remain substantially unaltered except for ecologically sustainable timber harvesting, enhancement of wildlife habitat, creation and maintenance of a non-motorized trail system, prevention or control of spread of fires or disease, nature observation and study, and low-impact recreation (e.g., hiking, snowshoeing, cross-country skiing, horseback riding, mountain biking).
2. Make the commitment never to develop any portion of the Coburn Woods part of an appropriate official record that will be known to all in the future (e.g., add language to deeds and record in Registry of Deeds).
3. Manage property in accordance with the recommendations in the Maine Audubon report (which was accepted by the SWT directors in September 2008).
4. Allow ITS 87 to remain in use for snowmobiling in winter conditions only in partnership with the Skowhegan Sno-Hawks, providing that erosion problems are solved and illegal uses of trail (e.g., ATVs, 4WDs, trail bikes) are stopped. As of this revision, the Skowhegan Sno-Hawks have recently rewrote the crossing of Coburn Brook and illegal uses and resultant damage have decreased.
5. Allow no building development, agriculture, or mining, or sale of any of the property for any purposes other than those expressed in this plan or as allowed in accordance with the conditions of the deeds conveying the lots from B. Obert to SWT.
5. Manage to preserve and enhance scenic values for public viewing.
14. Work with MATC to develop a low impact public trail system for non-motorized uses, including formal public access locations with some parking space.
15. Explore linkage of the trail system with that of the Yankee Woodlot.
16. Explore linkage of the Whitten Brook Conservation Area with the Coburn Woods.
17. Identify and develop educational opportunities, especially for children (e.g., vernal pool monitoring; bird walks; winter tracking trips; old forest ecosystem).
18. Develop a brochure and map for the property similar to what has been produced for the Yankee Woodlot.
19. Sign the property as to ownership, trail directions, and permitted/prohibited uses.
20. Prohibit use of property by operators of ATVs, dirt bikes, and 4WD vehicles and pursue enforcement by Skowhegan Police Department and MDIFW.
21. Develop partnerships for enhancing, managing and using the property (e.g., with Town of Skowhegan, school programs, Kennebec Valley Trails, Maine Appalachian Trail Club, Trout Unlimited, Skowhegan Sno-Hawks, Big Indian ATV Riders, Boy Scouts, Northwood University, Department of Conservation, abutting and nearby landowners, trail users).
22. Continue to seek funding to help pay for the two parcels purchased.
23. Continue to participate on the Funding Committee of the Whitten Brook Restoration Project to see funding to protect the watershed below the Coburn Woods.
24. Contact CMP to try to establish a partnership regarding use and maintenance of power line and possible control of invasive plants.
25. Do not allow significant disturbance of the ground without prior review and approval by the Maine Historic Preservation Commission or other accepted archaeological (prehistoric/historic) authority.