

Cornish Recreation and Education Area Management Plan

C.R.E.A.

Purpose of the Management Plan

This management plan describes the purpose for the development of the Town's Cornish Recreation and Education Area (CREA). It outlines general and specific procedures for achieving that purpose, including developing maintenance plans, in order to protect CREA resources for future generations to enjoy. This plan will establish consistent management policies and procedures, so that practices instituted now will continue into the future. It assures that the history and the purpose of CREA will not be forgotten.

There are guidelines to support both the selectmen and the CREA Committee if decisions need to be made. Guidelines decrease the possibility for one person or group to hold more influence than another. Guidelines build in continuity as CREA Committee members and selectmen come and go over the years.

This management plan will not change much with time. It will be filed in the CREA file in the town office. It will be reviewed every ten years, and the public will be invited to provide input.

History and Purpose of CREA

The Cornish Conservation Commission wrote and received two grants from the State of NH Department of Resources and Economic Development (DRED)/ Division of Parks and Recreation. One grant was to help with purchasing the CREA property. The second grant was to help with developing it.

Other interests in CREA include:

- US Department of the Interior/National Park Service (NPS)
- NH Department of Resources and Economic Development/Division of Parks and Recreation (DRED)

The Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) is a federal matching grant assistance program for acquisition and/or development of state and municipal public recreational areas. Created by the LWCF Act of 1965, per section 6(f)(3) of the LWCF Act, project properties that receive LWCF assistance must be maintained by the project sponsor for public recreation in perpetuity. The act is administered on the national level by the NPS. DRED acts as state administrator and NPS liaison for the LWCF program.

The Town of Cornish as project sponsor obtained the following LWCF grants:

- Project #33-00481, Cornish Conservation Area (acquisition)
\$32,500.00 LWCF share approved 1/18/1984
- Project #33-00525, Cornish Recreation Area (development)
\$27,000.00 LWCF share approved 9/25/1985

Matching Share:

- Cornish Conservation Commission's Conservation Fund - \$14,500
- Direct Appropriation - \$3,500
- Cornish Fair Association - \$12,500
- Anne Davidson - \$10,000
- Donations & fundraising for development of CREA - \$56,562

Remaining funds raised by the Cornish Conservation Commission sit in the CREA Development Fund and are controlled by the commission.

Post grant project completion, the Town of Cornish is responsible for maintaining program compliance at CREA. The Land and Water Conservation Fund State Assistance Program Manual, written by The National Park Service/ Land Water Conservation Fund State Assistance Program has information to guide the Town with this responsibility.

DRED shall be consulted for any proposed changes in use, especially if not consistent with the original grant proposal. Protecting Places That Matter by the National Park Service and the Land Water Conservation Fund State Assistance Program explains the process that must be followed should the Town want to initiate a change of use for CREA.

DRED is responsible for monitoring the project site to ensure that the Town remains in compliance with program rules. Properties are typically inspected for compliance on a five-year cycle. Volunteers from the Cornish Conservation Commission assist with monitoring.

After walking the property monitors fill out a LWCF inspection form and send it to LWCF's office in Concord. A copy of the form is filed in the conservation commission's CREA file. Another copy of the form is sent to the selectmen's office to be stored in their CREA file. The last time a monitoring report was completed was in 2012.

The commission's vision was to create a park for the Cornish Elementary School children and other citizens of Cornish. Language in CREA's deed restriction, and in the grants determines that the main purpose of the area is to provide recreational opportunities. Both its land and structures must support that intent. That does not preclude using the area for other purposes, as long as those other purposes don't conflict with the main purpose of CREA's restricted deed

In addition to its recreational potential, the commission emphasized in its grant proposals CREA's environmental education potential, as well as the fact that the Cornish Conservation Commission, the Select Board, the Cornish Elementary School, and the Fair Association were collaborating on the project. Both its environmental education potential and the spirit of cooperation in the Town were noted by DRED as being positive factors that influenced their decision to award their grants.

Description and Uses of CREA

CREA is 77 acres located on South Parsonage Road and Townhouse Road across from the Cornish Elementary School. Its close proximity to the Cornish School and the Cornish Fairgrounds makes it a valuable resource for the Town of Cornish. (See attached map.)

CREA's many habitats include hemlock/hardwood/pine forests, meadows/hay fields, streams, and one of the largest wetlands in Cornish. The wetland includes areas of Freshwater Emergent, Freshwater Forested/Shrub, and Freshwater Pond. Beavers are very active in this area, so the ratio of these habitats can vary from year to year. Many of the shrubs on the edges of the fields and wetland provide berries for birds and other wildlife. Apple trees have been released to provide food for deer.

In addition to the beaver, there have been sightings and/or tracks for raccoon, porcupine, otter, gray and red fox, coyote, and deer. A weasel, either an ermine (short-tailed weasel) or a long-tailed weasel, in its winter-white camouflage, has been seen along the footbridge over the stream. The largest field in the southeast corner of the property has an extensive series of holes and tunnels made by woodchucks. Ground nesting birds also use this grassland. Fortunately this field is not hayed until the fledglings have left their nests. Red-winged blackbirds, kingfishers, great blue herons, swallows, geese, and a bittern have all been seen at the wetland. Ducks use the pond to raise their ducklings. A neighbor reports frequently hearing an owl, and tracks have been seen in the snow in the meadow, where a bird of prey snatched his or her meal.

CREA's varied habitats are ideal for many other birds. On a two-hour bird walk, conducted on June of 2013, thirty different species of birds were seen or heard.

There are baseball and soccer fields that are used primarily by the school for their sports programs. Trails have been developed for light recreation such as walking, snowshoeing, x-country skiing and wildlife viewing. The entire area is used for environmental studies by the school. A footbridge on one of the trails, and a viewing platform and blind on the edge of the wetland, allow for close up observation of the stream and wetland. The trails have not been built for motorized vehicles. Attempts will be made to modify some areas to allow for power driven mobility devices per the American Disabilities Act (ADA).

CREA's 1912 Elmhurst Barn has been preserved, due to the efforts of a Barn Committee, which was formed to raise funds and oversee the project. It is ready to support recreational and educational activities.

There may be an existing well just east of the barn. Boy Scouts of America Troop 332 frequently use CREA for many of its projects.

The Cornish Fair Association uses CREA for parking and other activities during its annual Cornish Fair held in August.

Hunting policy for the CREA Property:

At the March 10, 2015 Town Meeting, the voters approved the following warrant article regarding hunting. Article 16: "By petition to see if the Town will vote to direct the Selectmen to prohibit hunting or trapping, by the general public, on the town land known as the Cornish Recreation & Education Area (CREA).

The Select Board's' Role

Since CREA is on town property, the Select Board has the responsibility for maintaining the area. They answer questions, make decisions, and resolve conflicts related to CREA on a day-to-day basis at their Select Board meetings held twice a week at the town office.

The CREA Committee's Role

The CREA Committee acts in an advisory capacity to the selectmen. They are available to assist the selectmen with questions and/or issues that might arise. They also assist with the planning and carrying out of maintenance plans.

Its 4-8 members must include a representative from the Select Board, the Cornish Conservation Commission, the Cornish Elementary School and the Fair Association. Other organizations that use CREA, like the Boy Scouts, may also be represented. Members of the community-at-large may also serve, one of whom could represent the interests of the former Barn Committee and the barn.

The committee is appointed by the Selectmen.

The committee meets 2 times a year in the spring and fall.

The CREA Committee Chairman is selected by the committee to serve for no more than three years. The Select Board representative will serve as chairman if none of the members of the committee wish to serve.

Procedures/ Communications

A member of the CREA Committee will write a report after each CREA Committee meeting. It will include what was discussed including any recommendations made to the Select Board. The report will be sent to the other CREA Committee members and the town office secretary. The secretary will pass it on to the Select Board and file a copy in the CREA file in the town office.

If recommendations are made in the report, the Select Board will inform the CREA Committee once they have made their decisions, or once something has been done regarding those recommendations.

If individuals or organizations would like to utilize CREA, or develop something new on CREA, they should go to a Select Board meeting to make their request. The Select Board will ask for CREA Committee input before making a decision about the request. If this input cannot adequately be obtained by mail, phone, or email, it may require the selectmen to call a special CREA Committee meeting.

The selectmen have the authority to restrict specific forms of use on CREA as outlined in the Land and Water Conservation Fund State Assistance Program Manual. It states” Project sponsors may impose reasonable limits on the type of use of areas and facilities acquired and/or developed with Fund assistance when such a limitation is necessary for maintenance or preservation. Thus limitations may be imposed on the numbers of persons using an area or facility or the type of users, such as “hunters only” or “hikers only”. All limitations shall be in accord with the application agreements and amendments.”

A link for CREA on the Town’s web site will include this Management Plan, updates and schedules.

The person at the school in charge of scheduling athletic games will send all updated schedules to the school and town web sites. If there are last minute changes to the schedule that person will also contact the contracted mower of the ball fields.

If coaches have problems concerning the athletic fields they will bring them to the AD. If needed the AD will bring them to the principal. If needed the principal will contact the selectmen. Likewise, if the selectmen need assistance with problems, they will contact the principal. The principal will contact the AD. The AD will contact the coaches.

Contracts and Maintenance Plans

Procedures and Funding

Individuals who carry out signed maintenance contracts on CREA will make their own arrangements with the Select Board.

Maintenance plans will have specific, written information about who has the responsibility for maintaining what and when on CREA. They will state whether volunteers, paid individuals or both, will carry out the jobs.

Maintenance plans will be written and reviewed annually by the selectmen with the assistance of the CREA Committee, the School Athletic Director and the Road Agent. Once maintenance plans are written, it will be relatively easy to review and update them each year at the CREA Committee meeting held in January.

Maintenance plans will include any costs for contracts or purchasing of materials. If funds are needed they will state the potential source for those funds.

The selectmen and the principal of the school will review the maintenance plans for the athletic fields, annually before town and school district budgets are finalized. If there is a dispute about the funding source for the athletic fields, the principal and the selectmen will work out a solution before town and school budgets are finalized.

The School Athletic Director (AD) consults with the principal and will bring any fund requests for the athletic fields to him or her. If the principal and School Board approve of the request, it will be included in the athletics line item in the school district budget or placed as a separate warrant article.

The Road Agent consults with the selectmen concerning any jobs to be carried out by the Highway Department. Agreed upon requests for funding by the town will be included in the CREA line item in the town budget or be placed as a separate warrant article.

The Select Board and the CREA Committee will work together to find ways to generate funds to offset and reduce the maintenance costs otherwise raised by taxes. Due to the fact that CREA was developed with DRED money, fees cannot be charged to use the area. Donations to help defray the cost of maintenance, made by groups who use CREA, will be encouraged. In addition, every effort will be made to continue to use volunteers, and to raise money through donations and grant writing.

CREA Development Fund

The Conservation Commission raised private funds to assist with developing the area. Money that was not spent sits in the CREA Development Fund and is to be used for further development and improvements to the area, not maintenance. The fund is held and controlled by the Cornish Conservation Commission. Anyone with an idea for improving or further developing CREA may come to a conservation commission meeting to make a request for monies from this CREA Development Fund.

Maintenance Plans

1. Athletic Fields

Assisted by the Cornish School representative on the CREA Committee, Cornish School Athletic Director, and the Cornish Fair representative on the CREA Committee

2. Natural Habitats, Trails, Bridge, Boardwalk and Viewing Area

Assisted by the Cornish Conservation Commission representative on the CREA Committee

3. Hayfields, Drainage Ditches, and Parking

Assisted by the Road Agent and the Cornish Fair Representative on the CREA Committee

4. Wetlands/ Beaver Habitat

Assisted by the Conservation Commission representative on the CREA Committee and the Wetlands Wildlife Committee

5. Barn

Assisted by the community-at large member on the CREA Committee, who represents the interests of the former Barn Committee.

