

2010 TOWN FOREST REPORT

The following are highlights from the town forest this year:

A massive wind storm with straight line east winds occurring at the end of February dropped individual large trees in scattered locations throughout the town forest and cause a ¼ acre blow down on the east side of Root Hill Road near the lower parking area. Many hardworking volunteers participated in a workday on April 11 to clear large trees from trails in 14 places. Many thanks to Mike Meeks, Bill Lipfert, Bill Palmer, Doug Freeland, Jim Fitch, Ed Woodbury, Mike Fuerst and Ginny Prince, all from Cornish, and Jeremy Merrit of Canaan, Dan Burnett and Nate Pierson of Plainfield, Gary Macia of Reading, VT, Connor Rowan of Windsor, Jason Oulette of Claremont, Phil and Kim Tsiaras of New London, and Rob Walker of Newport for so much hard work. The extent of help coming from residents of other towns reflects the interest of mountain bikers enjoying the town forest trails.

An April 29th about a dozen Stevens high school students donated time working in the town forest, guided by Jim Fitch. They moved a lot of large and small log debris off the trails and woods roads that was cut on the trail workday earlier in the month. They also cleaned up log remnants from a past project harvesting trees and sawing boards for the recycling shed.

Light trail maintenance was performed though out the year by hikers and mountain bikers as they frequently visited the forest. As a result the trails were in really excellent shape again this year.

A timber harvest is planned when conditions and wood prices allow. The harvest would include clean up of the blow down along Root Hill Rd and thinning of the neighboring areas, which are designated for commercial timber management in the management plan.

Doug Freeland, Ed Woodbury and Ginny Prince performed the annual trash pick up along Tandy Brook on May 27.

On June 5th the Cornish Library sponsored a very well attended talk by Tom Wessels, author of "Reading the Forested Landscape." After the indoor slide show Mr. Wessels continued his discussion on an information packed guided walk in the town forest. For practical reasons the tour was limited to 30 people who learned about "forest forensics" which Mr. Wessels described as "figuring out a forest's history while wandering through it. Using evidence such as the shape of trees, scars on their trunks, the pattern of decay in stumps, the construction of stone walls, and the lay of the land, it is possible to unravel complex stories etched into our forested landscape." Participants had a fascinating glimpse of what the natural history of the town forest through the eons, as well as what the land must have been like 200 years ago when it was open farmland.

Remarking of the trails continued but is not yet complete. Ginny Prince put up the new plastic markers on the yellow and orange trails. She hopes to complete the blue and white trails in 2011. Meanwhile the paint blazes are still visible.

Mowing of the loop road and associated open areas is called for every 3 years in the management plan. Ginny mowed last year and did not mow this year since dry conditions led to little growth of brush. Attempts to control buckthorn continue, with hand pulling, some girdling and covering cut stumps with recycled plastic plant pots. Also release of apple, spruce and other desirable individual trees is being done as called for in the management plan, mostly in conjunction with trail maintenance work.

Doug Miller, Ed Woodbury, Jim Fitch and Ginny Prince attended the workday on November 6th. Doug cleaned leaves and debris from water bars on the loop road and the others constructed pole gates to more effectively close the loop road to ATV's when the soil is wet. Motor vehicle damage and ATVs blazing trails through the woods continues to be an intermittent problem

Frank Parks has taken Mike Meeks place as the conservation commission representative on the town forest committee.

The forest committee is conducting a survey to determine how the forest is used and to identify ways to enhance its value to residents of Cornish. Surveys are available at the town office and at boxes made by Ed Woodbury are located at the Tandy Brook Road trailhead and the north and south Root Hill Road entrances to the town forest. Information gathered will be important in planning short-term projects as well as the review of the management plan, which will occur in 2012.

The town forest continues to be very popular for hunting. There were many deer hunter visits during bow, muzzleloader and rifle season and the deer population appears very active. The town forest is open to all licensed hunters in season.

The committee would like to encourage visits by nature viewers, hikers, skiers, snowshoers and cyclists. There are maps posted on all the trails a short distance in from their starting points, and there is a container of paper maps at the posted map on the trail from Tandy Brook Rd. Maps are also available at the town office or by contacting Ginny Prince. In addition the comfortable, picturesque Eagles Ledge lean-to is available for anyone to use, just be sure to keep the area clean and carry out what you carry in. During dry seasons, a 4-wheel drive vehicle can drive south on Root Hill Road to within 50 yards of the shelter. Please stop in!

From time to time there is interest in scout or other youth or community projects; the current To Do list follows. If interested in working on any of these items contact any of the committee members.

To Do List:

1. Continue to Improve and maintain erosion control structures on Root Hill Road, the loop road, and power line.
2. Burn the brush at the lookout to tidy up and revitalize existing blueberry patches
3. Inventory the flora and fauna of the town forest, ideally with photographs, and document tree growth over time.
5. Make and install more signs - directional signs for the trails, no motor vehicle signs where needed, possibly more detailed signs at the forest entrances explaining permitted activities, same as on the back of the trail maps.
6. Archeology study - find and map the foundations, stone walls, etc., find the privy and trash pits and excavate, research the history of residence and land use, etc.,
7. Create an interactive guide to the town forest for school age kids.
10. Design and at least begin a way to quantify and then monitor the growth of buckthorn, and other invasive plants.
11. Finish placing new trail markers.

As in past years, the town forest budget includes no tax money. Because state law requires that any funds, donation or payment or otherwise, must be authorized in the warrant, the forest management committee is requesting permission to spend up to \$1500 for trail marking materials and other miscellaneous items for repair and construction of signs, bridges, gates etc.

For more information or to share thoughts about the town forest contact any committee member:

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