

VI. RECREATION AND OPEN SPACE LANDS

INTRODUCTION

Community recreation is available close to home. It improves the quality of life in a town and may include a wide range of activities, from passive pastimes, such as bird watching, to active ones, such as baseball, biking and hiking. Community recreation is inclusive, providing opportunities for everyone from the preschooler to the senior to the person with disabilities.

Most small, rural Upper Valley communities have limited funds for community recreation. Support for recreation occurs by providing outdoor opportunities rather than labor intensive programs and capital intensive facilities. In addition to the summer swimming, softball, baseball, soccer and tennis programs, most of the recreation activity in Plainfield is land-based, water-based or snow- and ice-based outdoor recreation that is dependent on publicly accessible open space. Fortunately, Plainfield's geographic location and topography combine to create many natural recreational opportunities for its inhabitants. The existing network of old roads and abandoned pastures, the natural brooks, ponds and streams, all combine to provide opportunities for hiking, bicycling, cross-country skiing, snowmobile, hunting, fishing and other outdoor pursuits. In addition, Plainfield is conveniently located close enough to recreation facilities in Lebanon, Hanover and Hartford so that residents can take advantage of some of the most capital-intensive facilities in those other communities.

Plainfield's townspeople can enjoy land protected by conservation easements that ensure their continued open space status in the future. Nearly 1700 acres within the Town are protected by such easements.

In the 2006 Master Plan Update Survey 96% of Plainfield's residents indicated that protecting the town's natural resources was important to them, and un-crowded, quiet conditions, scenic quality and outdoor recreation contribute in an important way toward making Plainfield a desirable place to live.

The Plainfield Trailblazers, a group that resulted from the 1996 Community Profile Exercise, has continued to work to improve and expand Plainfield's formal and informal trail network. For example, in December 2006, the Ira and Sara Townsend trail bridge was completed and dedicated. It embodied the best qualities of our community: cooperation, volunteerism and coordination, while providing access to the extensive Frenchs Ledges trail network. In addition to trail development and maintenance, the group has developed a Plainfield booklet titled "Guide to Class VI Roads, Trails and Boat Access" The work includes a map showing the various trails and public lands available within Plainfield, that connect various tracts of conserved public land via walking trails.

RECREATION RESOURCES

Land-based

Open Space Lands:

Plainfield's open space lands are among the Town's most significant assets. Open space lands usually lack buildings or complex manmade structures. They may be used for agriculture, forestry and outdoor recreation; or they may be left in their natural state to serve important environmental and aesthetic functions.

The pattern of open spaces between structures and between settlements is a key element in defining the character of Plainfield. Fortunately, residents in the past have been sensitive to maintaining and enhancing this character, as is evident in the appearance of the Town today. In spite of extensive residential and institutional development, open space lands with visual, environmental and recreational significance have been identified and progress has been made in protecting them.

As shown on Map VI-1, protected open space lands are scattered throughout Plainfield. The Blow-Me-Down Brook and Connecticut River Valley agricultural soils enjoy some focused protection efforts. Many of the parcels are open to the public for recreational use.

State Owned Open Spaces:

Annie Duncan State Forest: The forest consists of two separate parcels totaling 113 acres of land located off of Red Hill Road in East Plainfield.

Town Owned Open Spaces:

Spencer Lot: The Spencer Lot is a 104-acre parcel of land located on Columbus Jordan Road (off Stage Road). A self-guided nature trail was created in 1981. It is open to the public and may be reached by foot.

Farnum Lot: This 78-acre tract was purchased by abutting neighbors and gifted to the town. The Upper Valley Land Trust holds a conservation easement on the land. Several existing logging roads and a newly established trail on the property provide interesting walks. A small beaver pond on the western edge of the property is the most environmentally significant feature of the property. A "Farnum Trails" trailhead parking area was established in 2001 on the newly conserved Ira and Sara Townsend Land located on Columbus-Jordan Road. This trail head parking eliminates the need to use Farnum Road (Class VI) and the logging landing on the Farnum Lot for parking. Hunting, biking and hiking are allowed on this property. There are also several old cellar holes to be found.

Victor Hewes Memorial Field: This a 19.5 acre parcel of land off Stage Road. The land is mostly open and is available to local groups for outdoor recreation.

Other Land and Open Spaces:

Benson Town Forest: The Cole Brook Trail is a connector to the Moulton Trail, and is currently signed both at the Moulton Trail intersection and at the Cram Hill Road/Cole Brook Trail intersection. The trail was designed for hiking, snowshoeing, skiing and bicycling. Hunting is also allowed on this property.

Burnaps Island: The Town of Plainfield owns Burnap's Island, which is located in the Connecticut River at the north intersection of NH Rte. 12A and River Road. It is accessible by canoe, is large enough for camping, and offers a nice, sandy beach at the south end. The Board of Selectmen and Conservation Commission, working with the Upper Valley Land Trust, have established a "primitive" campsite on the Island.

Townsend Lot: The property was provided to the Town under the LCHIP program in association with an easement on the Walker Farm. A portion of this land includes the rock outcroppings on the front face of "Lower French's Ledges" (between the primary recreational site and the old ski area for KUA). According to the deed, this property is to be managed in a wild state with no hunting allowed. However, the property provides scenic vistas when viewed from Meriden village.

Helen Woodruff Smith Bird Sanctuary: The Meriden Bird Club is the oldest bird club in the United States. The Club owns a 32.3-acre bird sanctuary off Main Street in Meriden Village. Trails are maintained for foot activities, such as walking or cross-country skiing. A natural theater glade exists that is ideal for picnicking and bird watching.

Corey Taber Field: This facility, owned by the Plainfield Community Church, provides a much needed recreation area for Plainfield residents. The field includes a picnic area, tennis courts, basketball courts, swings, and a softball field.

Morgan Hill (Goslovitch Easement) : Provides a walking trail to Poverty Lane in Lebanon and includes transitory (?what does this mean?)public use of the lands for recreation (including hunting). A "Bragg Trail" easement connects to the Morgan Hill property, adding additional public trail opportunities in this area of town.

Moulton Trail – This 100' trail corridor, with a 6' wide non-motorized trail provision, connects the Bird Sanctuary to Benson Forest. (Note, can this only be 100' long?should this be 1000'?)

Roads and Trails:

One of the primary recreational resources available to the people of Plainfield is the network of roads and trails. Map VI-1 shows all the roads and trails approved for public use. There are 75 maintained roads in Plainfield, and numerous Class VI roads in a variety of conditions. The most popular Class VI roads, from a recreational perspective, are found in East Plainfield at the end of Croydon Turnpike. Snowmobiles, cross-country skiers, runners, horseback riders and cyclists using mountain bikes are all frequent users of the Class VI roads and trails in all parts of Plainfield.

Bean Road, in Meriden, offers some off-street parking, thanks to an informal arrangement with private landowners. The following is a popular loop with skiers and snowmobiles:

Bean Road (class VI) to the intersection of Grantham Mountain Road; take Snow Road (private property) which starts directly across from the Bean Road/Grantham Mountain Road intersection, to the Blow-me-down Snow riders warming hut; turn right at the warming hut following the trail all the way to Croydon Turnpike (Class VI); turn right onto Croydon Turnpike and stay on the roadway all the way to the Grantham Mountain Road intersection passing Chase Pond on your right (note: at the only obvious fork in the road, Croydon Turnpike goes to the right); the Grantham "warming hut" should be visible on your left; turn right onto Grantham Mountain Road and follow it back to the Bean Road intersection. The total trip is approximately eight miles. Portions of this route follow along the Corbin Park Hunting Preserve owned by the Blue Mountain Forest Association.

Many other Town roads have been officially "discontinued" and, while many of these continue to be used for recreational purposes, no legal public right-of-way exists. There are a number of footpaths available; some are quite formally laid out and maintained and others are a little more than game trails in the woods. Most trails, including the very popular trails up French's Ledges and Snow Mountain, lie on private land and are not maintained in any formal way.

Trails to Picnic Spots with Great Views:

French's Ledges: Named for the family of Hezekiah French, these are 1300 foot high rock outcroppings overlooking Meriden Village. They are accessible from various points along Columbus Jordan Road or Colby Hill Road. The short hike from the trail head at the end of the maintained portion of Columbus Jordan Road makes French's Ledges a popular spot in the early fall and spring.

Snow Mountain: Starting from a trail head on the Croydon Turnpike in East Plainfield, a trail leads up 2100 foot high Snow Mountain, which over looks Chase Pond.

Home Hill Trail: Offers great seasonal views of the Connecticut River Valley and Green Mountains to the West, with potential year round views. *Work is planned with local property owners to assess potential for improved public view opportunity.*

Water-Based

Connecticut River:

Plainfield's largest recreational resource is the Connecticut River. The low water mark on the westerly bank forms the western boundary of the Town and the State. This waterway, stretching from the Canadian border to the Long Island Sound, offers some opportunities for fishing and water-related activities. Sumner's Falls in Plainfield is one of the only remaining undeveloped rapids in the River, and while caution is advised to users of the River due to the large fluctuations in water flow caused by the Wilder hydroelectric dam, these rapids offer challenging white water kayaking, but for experts only. Because of the strong river currents, swimming in the river is not advised.

Local birders have noticed an increase in viewing opportunities for Bald Eagles along the Connecticut River corridor, especially near Sumner's Falls and River Road.

The River offers excellent fishing for small-mouth bass and walleye. Opportunities also exist to catch trout, pike and large-mouth bass.

Plainfield does not have a public access to the River at this time. There is a State-owned boat landing on NH Rte. 12A in Cornish just below Plainfield's southern boundary, and access for canoes and fishing on NH Rte. 12A just north of the Lebanon boundary.

Streams and Ponds:

Plainfield has additional recreation opportunities on its two major streams, Willow Brook and Blow-Me-Down Brook. Both brooks contain numerous unsupervised swimming holes and provide trout fishing opportunities in the spring and early summer.

There are four major ponds in Plainfield: Moses, Chase, Mud and Sky Ranch Pond. Fish species such as perch, pickerel and horned pout may be found in these ponds. There are no public access points to Moses, Mud and Sky Ranch ponds, as all but Chase Pond are surrounded by private property.

TOWN ORGANIZED PROGRAMS

Recreation Commission Activities: Each year, the Town appropriates funds to be used by the Recreation Commission to offer programs for school age children. Currently, swimming, softball, baseball, soccer, and tennis programs are held each summer. Basketball clinics are held in the winter. In recognition of the expanding demand for

programs, in the year 2000 the town began providing a small stipend to its Recreation Director.

PRIVATE FACILITIES

Kimball Union Academy: Kimball Union Academy, a private school located in Meriden Village, makes some of its facilities available for school programs and town programs, and to Plainfield residents, in general. These facilities include the ice rink, swimming pool, cross-country ski trails and the outdoor track and tennis courts.

RECREATION AND OPEN SPACE NEEDS

The State of New Hampshire has developed a generic set of standards for outdoor recreation facilities (as of 1993), which are included in an appendix to this chapter. The State standards are not used to measure the adequacy of Plainfield's recreation opportunities, because the Master Plan Survey (1993) has assessed the interest in Plainfield residents for additional recreation facilities. Most respondents (48.7%) to the Survey rate recreation services in Town highly. Thirty-one percent give recreation a fair or poor rating. Most significantly, 20% of respondents were uncertain. This means that one in five of the respondents were unfamiliar enough with the recreation services in Town to be uncertain as to its rating from their perspective. The existing programs and outdoor recreation opportunities should be better advertised in Town so that this rather large segment of the community is knowledgeable about the recreation opportunities that do exist. Open space and recreational were frequently cited by survey respondents as community cornerstones, resources that should be preserved into the next century. The favorites were:

- French's Ledges
- Connecticut River/Sumner's Falls
- Mill Covered Bridge swimming hole
- Snow Mountain area

French's Ledges, Mill Covered Bridge swimming hole and much of Snow Mountain are all KUA properties. Arranging for long-term public use of these properties should be undertaken.

GOALS

1. Preserve Plainfield's scenic beauty and significant natural resources for present and future generations.
2. Provide adequate access opportunities to public waters.
3. Continue to provide an adequate level of funding, support and technical assistance to help community outdoor recreation providers meet existing and future needs

- for outdoor recreation programs and facilities.
4. Create a network of greenways, trails, pedestrian paths and bikeways that provide access to, and connection between Town-owned lands, conserved lands and community facilities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. New Hampshire Outdoors 2008-2013 is New Hampshire's Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP). It serves as the State's official plan for outdoor recreation for the ensuing five years. The SCORP identifies major issues and challenges concerning the state's recreation and natural resources and offers a series of recommendations to address those issues. Conservation Commission should review and implement applicable recommendations in this plan.
2. Plainfield should encourage the donation of conservation easements that include the right of public access.
3. The Conservation Commission should continue to protect and enhance the public's right of access to the existing roads and trails by planning and implementing a system of trails which connect publicly accessible open spaces and community facilities.
4. The Town should not "throw up" or "discontinue" any additional Class VI roads, so that the public's present right of access to these areas will remain intact. Conversion of some Class VI Roads to Class A or B Trails should be considered.
5. The Town should attempt to discourage development along Class VI roads. Returning roads to a maintained status increases costs to the Town and, at the same time, reduces the recreational value of the road. To this end, the Town's ordinances prohibiting development on Class VI roads and restricting seasonal use of Class VI roads should be kept in effect.
6. The Town should work to provide parking near existing trailheads and Class VI roads to assist in utilization of these resources.
7. The Town should attempt to reacquire some of the rights to roads which were once in the public domain, but which have been "discontinued."
8. Plainfield should continue to work with the Upper Valley Lake Sunapee Regional Planning Commission and other governmental agencies to develop a bicycle network for the Region.

9. The Conservation Commission should undertake a Natural Resources inventory as well as that of open space lands and prioritize them to focus conservation efforts.
10. The Conservation Commission should continue to monitor conservation lands and easements, and work with the Selectmen to enforce the conservation easements held by the Town.