



Department of Conservation and Recreation

Middlesex Fells Reservation Trail Planning Workshop  
Monday, February 8, 2010, 6:30 – 8:00 p.m.  
McGlynn School, 3002 Mystic Valley Parkway, Medford

## **Workshop Summary and Notes**

During the second half of the meeting, participants were asked to form small workgroups, and select a facilitator and recorder. Using large-scale maps provided by DCR, groups were asked to indicate on the map:

### **Access, Features, Special Places, Problem Areas**

- Special places
- Main access points
- Particularly species routes
- Potential new connections
- Problem areas on the trails
- Sensitive areas that should perhaps be avoided

Then they were asked to work together to suggest:

### **Potential Solutions to Some Existing Issues, Including**

- Reducing confusion and complexity of the system to enhance the user experience and reduce habitat impact
- Increasing positive/reduce negative user behaviors
- Reducing user tensions
- Meeting reasonable desired demands
- Improving conditions of trails

Each workgroup reported out to the full audience and provided their maps and notes to DCR. Each breakout group's notes are below, following the staff summary. DCR will be creating a composite map of the workshop input.

### **Staff Summary of Workgroup Reports:**

This summary reflects information captured both from workgroup notes and maps, and from the verbal presentations.

### **Special Places:**

A number of special places or destinations in the Middlesex Fells were noted by the workgroups, including:

- Towers and View Points
  - o Bear Hill Tower \*
  - o Wright's Tower \*
  - o Point Near the Fells Covered Reservoir
  - o Various Hilltops
- Special Trails
  - o Skyline Trail \*
  - o Reservoir Trail
  - o Rock Circuit Trail
  - o Crystal Springs Trails
- Special Woods
  - o Lawrence Woods
  - o Virginia Woods \*
- Ponds and Water
  - o Long Pond \*
  - o Spot Pond
  - o Winchester Reservoirs
- Features
  - o Panther Cove
  - o Quarries

(\* = indicates that multiple groups noted this feature.)

**Access Points and Parking Areas:**

Many access points and parking areas were noted, including:

- Sheepfold
- Bellview Pond
- Flynn Rink
- Long Pond
- Marjam Parking Area (Near Bear Hill)
- Various locations along South Border Road

**Problems, Issues and Sensitive Areas:**

Workgroups noted a number of problem areas, issues that could be addressed, and environmentally sensitive areas to avoid, including:

- Limited parking
- "Sketchy" or problem areas where unpleasant activity, trash, and/or fires occur
  - o North of Sheepfold
  - o Near Medford High School
  - o Crystal Springs area
  - o Around Wright's Tower
  - o Around the Stone Zoo
- Trail Issues
  - o Poor signage and trail marking
  - o Trail bottleneck in northwest corner near Highland Avenue
  - o Different uses can disrupt one's experience

- Many trails lead to posted reservoir areas
- No legal access across land between Winchester reservoirs
- General trail conditions
- Off-leash dogs interacting with users on trails
- Too many trails and dead end trails
- General Issues
  - Trash
  - Dog poop
  - User courtesy
  - Professional dog walkers
- Sensitive Areas to Avoid or Close Trails
  - Vernal pools
  - Wet areas
  - Wet areas east of Bear Hill
  - Special natural communities
  - Rare species habitats

**Potential Solutions:**

Workgroups offered many potential solutions to some of the existing problems with the Fells Trails System. Some solutions were suggested by multiple groups (noted with \*), some potential solutions represented a consensus of a group, and some represented different suggestions within a group. For this summary we have grouped suggestions.

- Enhance Trail Signage and Marking \*\*\*\*\*
  - Increase intersection signage \*
  - Enhance Trailhead signage
  - Add intersection numbers with corresponding map \*\*
  - Add difficulty rating \*
- Create better trail map(s) by DCR \*\*
  - Make maps more available and in stock at trailheads
  - Publish rules and guidelines on maps
  - Provide for free (or low cost)
  - Provide good maps on DCR web site
  - Provide different maps for different uses
  - Use maps to disperse use to other areas and access points
- Create or allow more trails open for mountain biking
  - Create more single-track trails \*\*
  - Allow equitable trail access for mountain bikers \*
  - Create options of different difficulties
  - Create a longer marked loop around the entire Fells
  - Allow a mountain bike trail through the Dark Hollow area \*
  - Better connect access points to trail system (i.e. Flynn Rink)
- Protect flora, fauna and other sensitive resources

- Identify important flora and fauna
  - Educate users about sensitive resources and habitats
  - Close trails through sensitive resources and habitats \*
  - Complete a full Resource Management Plan for the Fells
- Create official off-leash dog recreation areas
    - Establish an open off-leash dog area at the Sheepfold
    - Establish a large fenced off-leash area
    - Designate off-leash dog trails
    - Identify other potential off-leash areas to disperse use
- Increase volunteer trail stewardship
    - Create a joint trail stewardship group (i.e. Trail Watch) with representation from multiple stakeholders \*\*
    - Reach out to NEMBA to organize trail stewardship
    - Design and develop sustainable trails
    - Share and combine NEMBA and FOF resources (work together)
- Parking, create more and enhanced parking and enhance trailheads
    - Along South Border Road \*
    - Near Bear Hill
    - At Gutierrez Site
    - Southeast area of park near climbing areas \*
    - Lawrence Woods, perhaps near High School \*
    - Improve access following snow events
    - Spread out parking to under-used areas
- Equal access versus separated use to reduce user conflicts
    - Equal access by all users to all trails will reduce over use of current high traffic areas
    - Designating separate trails for certain uses will reduce conflict \*\*
    - Designate different hours for different uses
    - Dispersed use to lesser used areas will reduce user conflict
    - Need to reduce the need to “jump off trail” as another user passes
    - Need to balance the opportunity for quality “trail experience” among users
    - Create a shared “events calendar”
- Reduce confusion in trail system
    - Close dead end trails
    - Close redundant trails
    - Close trails that lead to posted watershed lands
    - Reduce number of intersections
    - Re-vegetate closed trails
    - Use fencing or barriers to close trails
    - Create a better loop structure
    - Reduce overlapping trails

- User education, behavior and enforcement
  - o Create a Trail Ambassador program with ambassadors from different user groups \*\*\*
  - o Expect user groups to self-educate and self-enforce their members
  - o Adopt trail user guidelines, code of respect
  - o Bikers yield to pedestrians, all yield to horses
  - o Enhance communication among and between stakeholder groups
  - o Establish a system for reporting negative behaviors
  - o Increase presence of Rangers to enforce rules \*
  
- Increase trail maintenance \*\*
  
- Establish a trail around Spot Pond \*
  
- Provide a separate opportunity for sledding at Sheepfold from off-leash dog area
  
- Establish an easy bike loop for children
  
- Put trash bins at Bellview parking area
  
- Establish a Trail Use Pass and use fee to support trails

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## **BREAKOUT GROUP A**

### **Access Points:**

Access of Stoneham side

Limited parking

Limited on Winchester side

Provide mixed-use access

### **Solutions:**

Reduce Confusion:

- Reduce number of trails
- Publish policy and make maps available
- Form a stacked – loop system
- Increase signage
- Distribute trails evenly
- Create a Trail Ambassador program
- RMP Inventory Needed
  - o Vernal pools
  - o Flora and Fauna Inventory
- Focus on encouraging use in satellite areas

Reduce Tension:

- Create a joint trail stewardship group – focus on commonalities
- Recognize changes in MTB behaviors
- Why do bikers not like flora and fauna

**Problem Areas:**

- Fix Sheepfold area
- Bottleneck for trail use in northwest area of western Fells
- Fires and trash at Route 38

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**BREAKOUT GROUP B**

**Solutions:**

- Clean up litter/fires/ partying in certain areas (Victory Park, behind Sheepfold), remove graffiti on tower.
- Mark intersections with numbers, better trail markers
- Close dead-end trails
- Identify redundant ‘fire roads’ and convert to single track.
- Identify sensitive areas
- Create a longer bike loop around entire park and mark as such
- Establish large, fenced area for off-leash dogs (Lower portion of sheepfold)
- Expand number and size of parking areas, enhance access points, better marking of parking
- Recruit volunteers to survey and mark trails
- Create a 4-pronged strategy:
  - o Education/Maps
  - o Communication between groups
  - o Ability to report
  - o Enforcement

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**BREAKOUT GROUP C**

**Comments:**

- Mountain Bikers (MTB) are tired of apologizing for riding in the woods we love.
- MTB’s are one of many different user groups, but desire more miles of trail per visit.
- MTB’s know and love the trails.
- MTB’s have a higher mile-per-person usage, and yet are limited to fewer trail miles.
- MTB’s have knowledge of sustainable trail design, use as resource.
- More parking along Fells, along 28. This will spread out usage and alleviate traffic.

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**BREAKOUT GROUP D**

**Solutions:**

- Create a trail committee
- Complete a DCR Resource Management Plan
- Enhance signage and produce DCR map
  - o Add trail rules to signage
- Implement sustainable trail maintenance / construction
- Create a Park/Trail Use Permit program (with fees)
- Authorized hours for dogs/bikers/walkers
- Close trails in sensitive areas
- Use local volunteer groups for park wide trail maintenance
  - o NEMBA, Boy/Girl Scouts, Explorers, Non-profits, High School

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## **BREAKOUT GROUP E**

### **Solutions:**

- More and better marked trails
  - o More accurate marking
- Create a loop trail all the way around Spot Pond Reservoir
- Create both easy and more challenging MTB trails
- Open Orange Trail to MTB
- Open all trails to MTB: Let nature not neighbors determine where they go
- Open after dusk
- Lots of trail options that link to MTB loop
- Carry-in/carry-out for trash (bottles, dog poop, trash)
- MTB can be a resource for trail building and maintenance

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## **BREAKOUT GROUP F (4B)**

### **Special Places:**

- Viewpoints
  - o Wrights Tower
  - o Bear Hill Tower
- Butterfly area – Lawrence Woods (rare plants and flowers)
- Vernal Pools – Pinnacle Rock
- Winchester Reservoir Roads (X-Country Skiing and snowshoeing)
- Wildlife habitat
- Sheepfold

### **Access Points:**

- Flynn Rink

### **Issues:**

- Lack of enforcements
- Signage/regulations for different areas
- More understanding/less enforcement and signage
- Education – rare plants and facility use
- Separate incompatible activities (separate hiking and biking and dog run areas)

- Safety: close 'cruising area', open area to more positive use
- Professional dog walkers

**Solutions:**

- Improve trail conditions to encourage compliant use
- Encourage volunteer maintenance efforts
- Spread out activity to underused areas (use trail marking and parking areas)

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**BREAKOUT GROUP G**

**Solutions:**

- Increase MTB opportunities of different difficulties
- Enhance signage
- Create off-leash dog area
- Create off-leash dog trails
- Encourage multi-use courtesy
- Respect planning – environment/vernal pools
- Enforce existing rules
- Equal access for all users
- Balance the experiences of all users

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**BREAKOUT GROUP H**

**Question:**

- Who owns the Fells?  
DCR – Gov agency – Taxpayer – Fully public

**Issues:**

- Off-leash dogs
- Not enough trail education
- Limited access to MBT singletrack
- Enhance Signage
- Sketchy activity
- Too many trails/dead ends

**Solutions:**

- Establish a Code of Respect
- Winter use change to condition closure
- Dogs: Concentrate dogs, and have an off-leash area for dogs
- Trail signs: shared responsibility/unified trails
- Limited Access: Open existing trails to MTB, maintained by NEMBA, different difficulties
- Sketchy Activity: Open trails to MTB in this area to bring positive traffic.

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**BREAKOUT GROUP I**

**Special Places:**

- Bench on far side Long Pond
- Reservoir Trail and views of Reservoirs

**Solutions:**

- Gates need better markings with numbers
- Easier/more available maps
- Sign in and sign out at trailheads
- Ask Ranger Matt at Breakheart about ideas to change behavior in a positive way

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**BREAKOUT GROUP J****Solutions:**

- Increase parking
  - o Parking on north side confusing
- Create loop around Spot Pond
- Create longer MTB outer loop
- Allow legal swimming
- Free boating
- Clear MTB Signage

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**BREAKOUT GROUP K (4)****Solutions:**

- Make Use of Bryan Hamlin, New England Botanical
- Signage: Better signage, intersection numbers, in conjunction with maps
- Create good maps at DCR web site
- More staff/volunteers for trail rule enforcement – Create a “Trail Watch”
- Address issue of ‘Cruising’
- Create system of reporting transgressions
- Professional Dog Walkers should not be allowed, rule against business use of park
- Spread usage out away from Sheepfold to other designated areas
- More equal access for everyone
- Resource Management Plan needed
- Create more parking
- More Rangers, less bureaucracy
- Create pedestrian crossings and reduce speeds at Pond St. and Ravine Rd.
- Make MTB Loop more challenging so people won’t deviate from marked trail

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**BREAKOUT GROUP L****Solutions:**

- More access will reduce overuse
- More clearly marked trails will reduce illegitimate trails

- More multi-use trails
- More variety of biking trails
  - o More challenging trails
  - o Not through sensitive areas
- Better connect and sign parking areas, i.e. Flynn Rink
- Expand parking at Sheepfold
- Create positive and legitimate options through “Cruising” areas to increase safety
- More trash cans – volunteers help?

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## **BREAKOUT GROUP M**

### **Special Places:**

- Bike loop
- “Island” (off limits)
- MWRA Watershed areas
- Fire lanes – nice and level
- Blue, orange, white trails
- Long pond
- Sheepfold
- Towers
- Ecological resources should be defined

### **Problems:**

- Fires and bottles
- Wright’s Tower
- Sheepfold – Cruising
- Trails lead to Restricted Watershed Areas

### **Sensitive Areas:**

- Vernal pools and wetlands

### **Solutions:**

- Provide good DCR map
- Educate users
  - o Rules
- Trash Cans
- Recruit users for self-enforcement
- Mark trails for specific use
  - o Restricted
  - o Yield signs (triangle)
  - o Single use
- Separate by seasons and hours
- Equal access for everyone
- NEMBA and FOF collaborate together to improve trails
- Reroute damage
- Reduce trails and redundancy

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## **BREAKOUT GROUP N**

### **Solutions:**

- Close sensitive areas
- Change season closure to condition closure for all
- Improve trail markings and system
- Groups work together
- Close dead end and redundant trails
- Find common ground

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## **BREAKOUT GROUP O (3)**

### **Question:**

- What do we want the fells to look like in the future?

### **Solutions:**

- Most wanted mixed / equal use
- Preserve endangered species, flora, fauna, habitats
- Problem of professional dog walkers
- Separate uses on trails
- Signage and education will help reduce conflicts
- Open Orange Trail to bikes, maybe two-year trial
- Disperse use with more/enhanced parking
- Sheepfold, create large fenced dog area with amenities.
  - o Reroute trails around dog area
- Create a user shared events calendar
- Parking: Enhance Bear Hill, hospital and other parking satellite areas

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## **BREAKOUT GROUP P (4A)**

### **Special Places:**

- Bear Hill, Wright's
- Virginia Woods
- Shaw (sp) Point
- Quarries / Panther Cave
- East side – underused

### **Problems:**

- Access from Governor's Ave.
- Interactions with off-leash dogs
- Motorized near Wright's Tower
- Trail sabotage
- Drinking parties
- Lack of enforcement
- Lack of courtesy

- Illegal access across Middle Reservoir
- Bottleneck in northwest
- Winter / Post snow access

**Solutions:**

- Disperse use to reduce conflicts
- Allow after dark access – adjust for seasons
- Improve intersection signage
- Create clearer and fewer trails

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**BREAKOUT GROUP Q (1)**

**Access Points:**

- Add / enhance parking at South Border Rd
  - o Sheepfold
  - o Bear Hill
  - o Suggest cameras

**Special Places:**

- Pine Hill
- Virginia Woods
- Skyline Trail (rugged and rare terrain)
- Winchester Reservoir (damage threatens access)
- Sheepfold (dog play area)
- Rock Circuit Loop
- Reservoir Trail

**Vernal Pools habitat**

- Near Long Pond Trail
- Behind High School

**Problem Areas:**

- Trail design
- Drainage
- Markings
- Party sites

**Solutions:**

- Reduce number of trails
  - o Close dead end
  - o Close redundant trails
- Better signage
  - o Better designate use
- More MTB Trails to disperse
- Add advanced, moderate, and easy loops
- Separate uses on different trails

- Create Trail Ambassadors Program
- Create DCR maps for hiking and biking
- Fence/barriers to keep folks off closed trails
- Trail Use Fee for all (don't we already pay taxes?)
  - o Sleeve passes
- DCR should be able to issue fines
- Trash bins for trash and dog poop
- Involve MTB in trail maintenance

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## **BREAKOUT GROUP R (2A)**

### **Parking:**

- Improve/enhance Marjam parking
- Increase Sheepfold parking
- Secure parking at Gutierrez

### **Solutions:**

- Provide free boating
- Better mark trails
  - o MTB signage
  - o Highlight special areas
- Fewer trails may be better
- Sustainable trail design
- Protect flora and fauna as trails re-developed
  - o Signage around viewing areas?
- Trail around Spot Pond
- Create off-leash area