



*Trailside Museum building from across Blue Hills Pond (Pressley Associates 2007).*

## **F. Massachusetts Audubon Society Interpretive Plan**

### **Trailside Museum**

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# **Interpretive Plan**

## **Trailside Museum**

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## Significance

In many ways, Trailside Museum is unique within the Mass Audubon sanctuary system. It is the most highly visited Mass Audubon education center in the Greater Boston and North Shore Region and one of the most highly visited Mass Audubon centers overall. The museum serves as a gateway for the Blue Hills Reservation, a park operated by the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation. Blue Hills Reservation attracts a million visitors each year. It is the most popular and most visited reservation in the DCR Urban park system. The museum resides on state land and is funded annually by the Commonwealth. This partnership with the Commonwealth provides great possibilities.

Located near Boston, Trailside Museum is accessible by public transportation and is easily accessed from a major highway. There is free parking and the building is universally accessible. Since 1959, the Trailside Museum has been a family-friendly, beloved institution with a great reputation and strong community ties. Locally, many visitors remember coming to Trailside Museum as children, and now, as parents, they bring their own children here. In the Boston area, Trailside Museum is an easy and inexpensive family outing that is close to home.

The Museum building houses an exhibit area, gift shop, auditorium with A.V. loft, rest rooms, animal care facility, and information area for visitors. The indoor exhibits include several animals on display, Native America Dioramas, bees, interactive exhibits, and much more. There are exhibits for all ages and many hand-on experiences. The Native American dioramas show how people used to live at this exact location. This is the best collection of native wildlife on display in Metro Boston, and it offers experiences like getting up close to a Great Horned Owl and hearing it hoot and looking closely into a honeybee hive. Seeing these animals up close would, ideally, help visitors understand more about these animals that are local (but not always easy to find), to understand more about the wildlife in our back yards, and to feel connected to wildlife and to nature. Ultimately, the experience could, at best, motivate visitors to take action to protect nature by increasing their awareness about local wildlife.

The museum's outdoor exhibit area includes local fauna, including otters. The animals are easily visible, giving visitors a chance to observe their behavior. The open-air setting of the outdoor exhibit area affords visitors the opportunity to experience the sights, smells, and sounds of the animals. A boardwalk allows visitors to get right into the middle of the pond. An active bird feeding area allows for close observation of many types of birds. A waterfowl feeding area invites visitors to purchase food to feed the waterfowl. The museum, in fact, offers visitors the only "legal" place to feed wild waterfowl in the Metro Boston area. While some may construe feeding wild waterfowl as inappropriate, we provide food for three reasons. First, visitors will feed the waterfowl, whether we provide food or not. We feel it is better for the waterfowl to get this food and not human food. Second, we look at this as an opportunity for visitor to observe wild waterfowl up close. And third, this gives us an opportunity to teach about feeding or not feeding waterfowl in the wild.

The museum is situated near a popular entrance to the Blue Hills and serves as a gateway for the reservation. The park road has now become a major commuting road. At the museum parking area, the red dot trail begins. It's the most highly traveled trail in the park, is steep and adventurous, and is very exciting for children who can follow it straight up to Great Blue Hill. A fantastic vista awards those who get to the top.

The Blue Hills Reservation, with 7000 acres and 23 hilltops, is the largest open space within 35 miles of Boston. An estimated 3 million people live and work near this reservation. There are many different experiences available at Blue Hills, from a wilderness outing to birding to blueberry picking. Many partners use the reservation regularly, including Boy scouts, Appalachian Mountain Club, and YMCA. An extensive trail system covers the reservation and invites visitors to take advantage of the great hiking opportunities available. There are scenic overlooks, picnic areas, a

stone observation tower, and a pavilion. The Skyline Trail, with its view of Boston, shows vividly how land has been developed and protected around Boston.

There is a rich history associated with the reservation. Archaeologists found sixteen prehistoric sites here. It was at one time a significant site for Native American trade and a cultural hub. The state of Massachusetts even got its name here. Massachusetts, translates as “people of the great hills” in the Algonquin language. The Massachusetts were the tribe of native people that were living in the area of the Blue Hills (and what is now known as Quincy shore) during the arrival of the Pilgrims in the 1600's. The Commonwealth takes its name from these people and they take their name from these hills. An extensive number of historic resources, including cellar holes, stonewalls, and quarries have also been found. It was the site of the first commercial railroad and the birthplace of large-scale granite quarrying. The Civilian Conservation Corps had a camp here, receiving honors for being one of the best-run camps in the country.

The reservation is an ecologically significant land area. A variety of habitats, including Ponkapog Bog, are filled with interesting and unique species of flora and fauna, including some endangered species. Wildlife research includes raptor banding and other ongoing projects. The reservation is a designated Important Bird Area (IBA) and has two Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) designations.

What makes the reservation truly unique is its juxtaposition. Blue Hills is a large wilderness area with significant wildlife habitat for rare species like the timber rattlesnake, yet it is also just off the highway, close to Boston and the large urban and suburban populations of Greater Boston.

## Issues

### Trail use

- Visitors do not always stay on the trails. There can be too much impact, resulting in erosion and trampled plants. We need to inform visitors about the importance of staying on trails, for their own safety and for the protection of the plants and animals living in the reservation.
- Trail etiquette is sometimes lacking. There should be more respect for place. Visitors leave litter.
- Some trail users could be more aware of their surroundings, understand the reservation better.
- Hikers, mountain bikers and horse riders all use the trails. Multiple trail use can pose potential conflicts.

### Conflicts and hazards with animals

- Some visitors want to feed the otters. It can be unhealthy for the otters to eat human food.
- When visitors bring pets, it can negatively impact the Reservation wildlife and it can be very distressing to the animals in the outdoor enclosures. Pets are not allowed on the museum grounds, but some visitors do not follow this rule.

### Visibility

- There's a lack of awareness that museum is here, that entire compound is here.
- Museum signs are hardly visible, compared to the large ski area signs. Our signs need to be improved.

### Public perception

- For some people, there is a perception that the Blue Hills Reservation is unsafe.
- Museum personnel sense mixed public sentiment about Trailside Museum. Some might think that Trailside never changes and never should change. Some visitors want to see the same individual animals, and they want their children to see them. Yet other visitors don't want to return because the museum is always the same, and there is nothing new to experience. How do we find the right balance?

### Aesthetics

- Law requires the perimeter fence, but it makes the museum grounds appear unattractive and unwelcoming.

### Multiple agencies and shared ownership

- Trailside is operated by two agencies – DCR and Mass Audubon. The reservation is operated by the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation. The museum resides on state land and is funded annually by the Commonwealth. Mass Audubon operates the museum. The owners are the citizens of the Commonwealth. This affords both benefits and challenges to making changes.

## Interpretive Themes

*Primary interpretive themes are those ideas or concepts that every visitor should understand. These themes provide the foundation for a sanctuary's interpretive programs and media. All interpretive efforts should relate to one or more of the themes, and each theme should be addressed in the overall interpretive program. Themes can help organize media, facility, and visitor experience discussions by considering the question, "Where and how will we interpret these themes??"*

*Themes should be complete thoughts; it is helpful to write them in complete sentences. Their emotional or evocative content can vary. However, themes do not have to be "grabbers" in order to be effective. Themes tell us **what** to interpret, not **how**. It is more the task of interpreters and media designers to make them compelling*

## Interpretive Themes for Blue Hills/Trailside Museum

**Blue Hills Reservation is protected yet the wealth of wildlife that live there, and the habitats they need, are not without threats.**

- Blue Hills has an amazing diversity of wildlife and habitats.
- Animals that migrate or with larger territories spend just some of their time in the Blue Hills Reservation. These species are at risk when the other habitats they need are developed or impacted.
- The Reservation, like all natural areas, must be ecologically managed to maintain a diversity of habitat types that support a greater diversity of species.
- The wildlife species on exhibit at Trailside Museum are representative of the wildlife in the reservation.
- Trailside offers a wonderful opportunity to view live wildlife and learn more about the native wildlife at the Blue Hills and in the state. For the people in Greater Boston, there are few places to see woodland animals. This museum provides an important opportunity to view the animals that live in our woods.
- All of us have a role in protecting the nature of Massachusetts.

**The Blue Hills Reservation is valuable public open space, rich in natural and human history, and recreational resources.**

- The Blue Hills has historically, and is currently, an important natural community to not only humans but also animals and plants.
- The Blue Hills Reservation is exceptional for being such a large contiguous area of open space in such close proximity to such a large population center. It provides a great education/recreation experience right in people's "backyards".
- Blue Hills is valuable ecologically and as an "island of nature" in a populous center.
- Blue Hills Reservation belongs to the people of Massachusetts and we all have a role in its protection.

## Visitor Profiles

Visitors to the Blue Hills Trailside Museum come year-round, in groups and individually, all ages, and from many different local communities. The diversity of museum visitors includes individuals with a wide range of physical abilities. The museum and its grounds are fully accessible. It is estimated that one million individuals visit the Blue Hills Reservation annually. A rough estimate for annual visitors to the museum would be 160,000 including school groups.

The current visitors to Blue Hills Trailside Museum can be grouped into these categories:

1. People who come to view the exhibits
2. People with a strong personal connection to the museum
3. First time museum visitors

The current visitors to Blue Hills Reservation can be grouped into four categories.

4. Visitors with a specific interest
5. Those who come for enjoyable, relaxed outings
6. Those seeking active outdoor recreation
7. Participants in special events

### Visitors to Blue Hills Trailside Museum

**People who come to view the exhibits** include family groups with children camps, school groups, and adults who come individually to see the wildlife on display. The wildlife exhibits offer a sensory experience for visitors, allowing them to see, hear, and even smell the animals close-up. Biofacts in the museum can also allow visitors a tactile experience. These visitors have a strong interest in how the animals got here, why they are here, and background information (age, history) on the individual animals. This information about the individual animals on exhibit could be added to the web page.

It would be opportune to build on this interest and broaden the visitors' perspective. For example, these exhibit animals represent species typically found in the Reservation, in Massachusetts, and in New England. Visitors can learn about wildlife populations, dynamics, and trends in the Reservation and the region. We could also provide visitors with clues about animal signs and how to look for them in the Reservation and elsewhere. Linking the animals on exhibit to the wildlife in the Reservation can teach visitors about local wildlife and the ecology of the Reservation and the region.

**People with a strong personal connection to the museum** visit regularly. They are very committed to supporting the museum in a variety of ways and are attached to the animals on display. These visitors get involved, as volunteers, supporters, and with events and fund raising. They have a sense of ownership and are generous with their time and energy. Mostly local and living in the Boston metro region, these visitors are seeking a connection to nature and to the museum community. They like what's here and are tied to the museum's traditions and rituals.

One possible area to develop with these visitors is to increase their awareness of Mass Audubon and to build their support and involvement beyond Blue Hills Trailside Museum to include Mass Audubon. Strategically, this group could be very willing to help deliver messages about protecting the nature of Massachusetts.

**First time museum visitors** include people with tour groups, senior citizens on a nursing home outing, and accidental visitors who simply show up and then decide to stay a while. These visitors should get a personal welcome and a strong introduction that includes information about what's here, why it's here, and a bit about it. They need picnic tables, clean bathrooms, benches, and drinking water.



We can increase their awareness about the place, and how much there is to discover and experience here, by somehow showing them the community of people who are part of the place - birders, people with a strong personal connection to the museum, and staff. Everything presented to them, through exhibits, publications, and other media, should contain conservation messages that are professionally prepared and well planned. It is important to send these visitors off with a good impression, an invitation to return again, and something to remember the place. Continuing to stock the gift shop with good take-home products that are connected to the exhibits and to local wildlife (books, bird calls, wildlife toys and figures, souvenir patches) could help serve this group.

Program participants and people who need assistance also regularly come to the museum. Campers, people attending education programs, school and scout groups, people bringing questions or injured wildlife or working on a research project, all walk in the door. These visitors are usually placed in the capable hands of the museum staff. For that reason, we will not include them as a visitor group for whom to develop self-guided experiences and materials.

There are several potential new visitor groups to Blue Hills Trailside Museum. One group is people who visit Mass Audubon's Boston Nature Center and/or Visual Arts Center. It would be ideal to link these Mass Audubon urban environmental education centers/museums so that visitors to any one discover there is a set of them and that each offers a unique and inviting experience. Another potential new visitor group is self-guided public school classes. A third potential new visitor group for the museum is the multitude of people who ride public transportation in the community, often going right by the museum. And finally, a fourth potential new visitor group is downhill skiers who already share the parking lot during the winter.

#### Visitors to Blue Hills Reservation

**Visitors with a specific interest** come to the Reservation to observe birds and other wildlife, including some unique species that are rare or endangered. They also come with an interest in geology, history, meteorology, and archaeology. These visitors bring a base of knowledge and strong interest in their preferred subject of study. They are looking for additional facts and information, locations for observation opportunities, a census of what they can see here, and biota checklists.

There are opportunities to get these visitors more involved. The wildlife watchers could participate in wildlife monitoring projects or they could add their observations to the Reservation's sighting records. To share their interest and enthusiasm in their chosen subject area, they might get involved in exhibitions or presentations. To help protect the reservation, they could become a "Friend of Blue Hills," an active advocacy organization."

When a visitor comes with an interest in one area of study, their experience could give them a broader, more ecological perspective and could even lead them to other interests. For example, in addition to a bird list, a birder could be given more information about threats to bird habitats in the region and what individuals can do to help birds. They can be informed and invited to take a more active role in protecting bird habitat. Also, if someone requests a bird list, we can inform him or her about other biota lists available.

It was discussed that it would be ideal to increase this visitor group. There are many areas of study taking place in the Reservation - wildlife studies, history, archeology, a weather station, etc. Attracting more individuals with interests in these areas would increase and diversify this group of visitors who could become very active in protecting the nature of Massachusetts.

**Those who come for enjoyable, relaxed outings** include people who hike, snowshoe, walk a dog, enjoy scenery including fall foliage, pick blueberries, go fishing, and take photographs. These

visitors come alone and in groups. Often, a parent will bring a child hiking. Many adults of all ages come here to hike, sometimes meeting a group for a planned outing together. These visitors come for very appropriate activities and have a gentle, minimal impact on the Reservation. They need maps, directional trail signs, drinking water, and resting spots. A good trail map and trail publications may enhance their visit. It was discussed that some of these visitors may want natural history and biota identification information as well. They need continuous, year-round access to the Reservation.

There is a disconnection between the outdoor visitors and those who come into the museum. Most Reservation visitors generally start outside and stay outside. They typically do not come into the museum at all, but they may look at the outdoor exhibits, which does not require paid admission. It was discussed that it would be advantageous to offer interpretive resources to these visitors outside, on the trails and around the outdoor exhibit area. The outdoor resources could provide natural history information and also invite them into the indoor part of the museum. Helping them understand what is available and reminding them that the museum is here might get more outdoor visitors to enter the museum. It was also suggested that improving the outside exhibit area would make it more inviting to continue the visit experience indoors. Updating the indoor exhibits is also critically important to increasing museum visitation. Providing visitor comforts such as air-conditioning and cold drinks on a hot day or hot drinks and a warm fireside on a cold day may also increase museum visitation. One suggestion was to create a flow of interpretive information that would ask questions outside and provide answers inside the museum. Getting more people to come inside could also help increase the annual admission income, which is currently estimated at \$30,000-50,000.

**Those seeking active outdoor recreation** include mountain bikers and road cyclists, cross-country skiers, horseback riders, and trail runners. It also includes people who participate in downhill skiing and orienteering. These active users need continued access to the Reservation, drinking water, good trails that are well-marked, good maps, bathrooms, and the bike rack. Many of these visitors network with others who participate in the same activity. They often meet at the trailhead, so that would be a good place to locate any communications targeted for them. They appreciate the setting and it's part of their lifestyle, so they may be willing to actively contribute their time or make monetary donations to keep the place available and useable for their chosen activity. And, being active outdoors people, they may be willing to become more active in protecting open space for active people to enjoy.

**People participating in special events.** For the past ten years, some 1200 kids and adults have participated in the annual New Year's Day "First Day Hike." Maple Sugaring programs attract approximately 2000 participants per weekend. These are great opportunities to provide a strong introduction to the museum and the Reservation, to inform all these people about what is available here, and to invite them back. Personal greeters, appropriate publications, and a great experience will be the best way to send people home with the desire to return.

One suggestion for reaching new visitors at these events was to have museum volunteers and members of "Friends of Blue Hills" available as greeters and to provide information. They could wear identification buttons that say "Ask me about Trailside Museum." It was also suggested that one of the museum staff could walk around with a live owl or other bird and interact with the event participants.

One potential new visitor group includes people spending a summer day at Houghton's Pond. An outdoor panel placed near the recreational area could inform and invite people to explore the museum. Another potential new visitor group includes people at the Appalachian Mountain Club lodge. A third potential new visitor group includes all the participants at Chickatawbet Hill programs. These children could be invited to bring their families to the museum.

## Interpretive Plan Summary

Imagine...

A family decides to venture to the Blue Hills Reservation for a day hike. They walk to the end of the Route 138 parking lot. Here, they have three choices – start up the red dot trail, walk around outdoor wildlife displays, or enter a trailside museum. An orientation panel shows a map of the immediate area and informs them that the ideal experience would include all three. Peering in the museum entrance, they see a Great Horned Owl looking directly back at them, and naturally are drawn there first. In the museum, they learn about the owls, foxes, snakes, and turtles of the Reservation through a variety of interactive exhibits and informative live animal displays. They take a “Family Exploration Booklet” which includes a scavenger hunt around the indoor and outdoor exhibits, and habitat hunts throughout the Reservation. Next, they check out the outdoor enclosures where the animals are easily visible and graphics panels provide information about these animals’ habitats and where to find those habitats in the Reservation. Next the family purchases a map and sets out on the Red Dot Trail, a fairly steep and adventurous climb. When they rest, they look for good nesting trees, standing dead trees with large holes, as explained on one of the exhibits and included in the Family Exploration Booklet. At the top of Blue Hill, they are rewarded by a great view of Boston and a newfound awareness that there is some pretty exciting nature close to home. On the drive home, they spot several more nesting trees. Looking through the Family Exploration Booklet, they see that there are several more DCR Reservations and Mass Audubon sanctuaries nearby. They decide to visit a different one next month.

A young man arrives for his weekly hike. Usually, he climbs the Red Dot Trail to the summit of Great Blue Hill where he enjoys the view and occasionally observes soaring hawks. He decides this time to check out the museum first. He spends time at an exhibit that compares the silhouettes of soaring raptors and tells how to distinguish them. He finds out that the Reservation has 23 hilltops and a trail system far more extensive than the trail he usually takes. He learns about ongoing research projects in the Reservation including archeology and raptor banding, two topics that interest him. He purchases a map to help him check out some new trails. He also signs up to attend an upcoming information night for individuals interested in volunteering to monitor migrating hawks.

An elderly couple is on their Sunday drive. They see signs leading to an inviting building called the Trailside Museum and decide to stop for a visit. They attend a live animal presentation featuring a falcon and a skunk, and they learn how these animals have adapted to make a living in the city. They also visit the outdoor exhibits, spending the most time at the bird feeders and duck pond. Before they leave, they visit the gift shop where they purchase a bird feeder and some bird food. They also become members of Mass Audubon so they can learn more about backyard birding.

A local elementary teacher comes to Trailside Museum for help planning a lesson on endangered species. Looking through curriculum materials in the teacher resource area, she is surprised to learn that there are endangered species nearby, and that the reservation is an ecologically significant land area with a variety of habitats, including Ponkapog Bog, filled with interesting and unique species of flora and fauna, including some endangered species. She is also pleased to find information on geology, meteorology, and local cultural history, all topics she is supposed to cover during the school year. Back at school, she shows the materials she borrowed to her co-teachers. The teachers decide to culminate the endangered species unit with a class field trip to the museum and Ponkapog Bog. The unit and the field trip are so successful they become an annual event. The next term, when it’s time to plan the unit on weather, another teacher volunteers to check the resources at the museum first. There she learns about the weather observatory.

Trailside Museum can be all these things – a teacher resource center, an exciting, enriching family destination, the place everyone stops before heading up the Red Dot Trail, the place to go

to find out all about the Reservation's history, current research, and activities. It can be a place where people see animals up close, learn about local wildlife and habitats, get introduced to the Blue Hills Reservation, and gain a better understanding of how to protect nature close to home.

Already, Trailside Museum has so much in place. It is a well-known institution hosting thousands of visitors annually. Its location is superb, accessible by public transportation and easily accessed from a major highway for millions of people. The museum is nestled alongside a popular entrance to Blue Hills Reservation, the largest open space (7000 acres) within 35 miles of Boston. Over 100 schools are located within a short drive of the Trailside Museum. An estimated 3 million people live and work near the reservation.

Even with all these impressive numbers, there is generally a lack of awareness that Trailside Museum exists or that it's worth the trip. Local schools go elsewhere for environmental education field trips. Each week, hundreds of hikers go up the Red Dot Trail with no knowledge that the museum entrance is just a few hundred feet away. Every day, thousands of people drive by, living or working nearby; not knowing the museum is there. Many of the people who do stop will peer into the museum and decide not to pay admission to enter.

At Trailside Museum, we have the opportunity to provide a very close-up and hands-on learning experience about the wildlife in the Reservation and the region. Several points have been discussed about the use of the museum in conveying the interpretive themes.

- Learning about nature close-up and hands-on teaches us about wildlife in their natural habitats and the environment on a larger scale.
- Seeing wildlife close-up and personal invites one to learn about habitats and nature.
- A friendly museum experience gives families an opportunity to see wildlife close-up, to learn about habitats and nature, the Blue Hills, and the nature of Massachusetts.
- A hands-on museum environment introduces families, in a comfortable setting, to the much larger Blue Hills area and invites them to explore a fascinating, comfortable and accessible adventure into the natural and cultural history of the Blue Hills Reservation.
- A hands-on museum experience teaches about the locality and history of the Blue Hills.
- The museum is the interpretive center/intro of the Blue Hills
- On every visit, there can be something new to experience and to learn.
- The museum can stimulate interest in the Blue Hills, protecting the nature of Massachusetts, and beyond.
- Visitors should start at Trailside, but the real museum is outdoors.

Several areas of improvement have been discussed:

1. Getting people to the museum
2. Increasing the visibility of the museum building
3. Changing the entrance to the museum grounds and Red Dot Trail
4. Renovating the entrance to the museum building
5. Renovating the indoor exhibits
6. Renovating the outdoor exhibits
7. Developing interpretive resources for exploring the museum grounds and the Reservation
8. Creating a community resource center – for teachers and for people interested in the Reservation

### **Getting people to the museum**

Improved signage is needed to help people know about and locate the museum. The following sequence of signage has been suggested:

- Highway signs

- Road signs in town

- A large identification sign, visible from Route 138 (current one is too far from the road)

- A welcoming sign in the parking lot, the same size as the ski area sign

### **Increasing the visibility of the museum building**

The museum building is not very visible or inviting. Thousands of people drive by every day, having no idea that the building is a museum. One suggestion is to paint the roadside of the building with a large graphical image – possibly an owl found in the Reservation or a red fox, to coordinate with the familiar logo. Another idea is to display colorful banners that highlight seasonal events, exhibits, or activities. It was also suggested that the fences, buildings, and grounds be made more noticeable for drivers-by and for skiers who already use the parking lot. And another suggestion was to add a tagline to the building signs – “Trailside Museum-Your gateway to the Blue Hills Reservation” or something like that.

### **Changing the entrance to the museum grounds and Red Dot Trail**

One of the biggest challenges is getting people to come into the museum. Many hikers go up the Red Dot Trail; not knowing the museum entrance is just a few hundred feet away. It was suggested that the entrance to the Red Dot Trail be moved so that it is shared with the entrance to the museum. At this new entrance, people would see they have three choices – to head up the Red Dot Trail, to walk around the outdoor animal displays, or to go into the museum. Each option would be clearly identified at this well-planned entrance. In addition, this new entrance area could include a gathering area for starting ranger walks, a bike rack, and perhaps a picnic table or benches. DCR is planning entrance renovations.

### **Renovating the entrance and lobby**

The museum needs an entrance that is more attractive and inviting to visitors. The door could be moved so that it is a straight line from the parking lot to the entrance or it could be landscaped to invite visitors to the door. The architecture could be greener and more inviting, landscaped so that visitors know they are entering a nature museum. Installing an exciting first attraction, such as a live animal exhibit visible from the front door, would captivate people and draw them in. The lobby needs to be updated so that it can better accomplish its job – invite people in to stay briefly, learn something, and then go explore the real museum – the Reservation.

### **Renovating the indoor exhibits**

Trailside Museum needs to get out of the rut of being a museum that never changes. The exhibit room, hallway, and reception areas need to be renovated to include indoor exhibits introducing the habitats of the Reservation, possibly mini-habitat models that also show visitors where on the Reservation to go experience these habitats. It has been discussed that the museum has too much dead space that the staff cannot do anything with. Ideally, there would be a combination of updated permanent exhibits, exhibits with interactive and audio elements, and exhibits that the staff could change seasonally. The staff would also like exhibits that allow them to offer an interesting fact for the day and current plant and animal sightings lists for the Reservation. Ideally, live animal exhibits should be experiential, sequential, and interactive. For example, a visitor could walk through a dark hallway to get to the nocturnal animals.

### **Renovating the outdoor exhibits**

New interpretive signs are needed for the outdoor animal displays. The signs should be of a consistent design, should include natural history and conservation messages, and should invite visitors to come into

the museum to learn more, and to go explore the Reservation to experience more in the animals' habitats. Ideally, the signs would have some changeable elements so that the staff can update them as individual animals change. Signs on animal enclosures need to be professional and changeable, and should include information on the specific animals and their habitats. Around the museum grounds, and on nearby Reservation trails, signs could include tree labels, identification, and information geared for those visitors interested in geology, outdoor recreation, the arts, and cultural history. An outdoor changeable display board could offer a daily natural history feature to look for. One suggestion was to design a life-size animal mascot and place it in several locations throughout the outdoor animal display area. Another suggestion was to put a larger, more charismatic mammal (perhaps a deer) nearest the entrance, just inside the perimeter fencing, to draw people in.

#### **Developing interpretive resources for exploring the Reservation**

To help people explore and understand the Reservation, resources could include a self-guided interpretive brochure for the Red Dot Trail. The current map could be used for interpretation as well as wayfinding.

#### **Creating a community resource center – for teachers and others interested in the Reservation**

Trailside Museum could be a repository for data, information, and research projects on the Blue Hills. It was suggested that Trailside Museum be considered as one of the regional environmental education resource centers for S.A.G.E.E. (Secretary's Advisory Committee on Environmental Education.) It could serve as a teacher resource center with curriculum planning and local natural history resources. Teachers could borrow discovery backpacks for exploring with their students. Ideally, Trailside Museum would have a formal connection to the Milton Schools. As this would take significant commitment of space and resources, much more discussion is needed on this idea.

#### **Getting the word out**

Publicity is needed to let people know about the museum. There could be information about the museum posted at the Reservation trailheads to reach hikers and other outdoor recreation enthusiasts. Information about the museum could be provided to local outdoor retailers and clubs. Museum special events could be publicized through town events. Colorful banners could be used to advertise special events and activities, as long as they were designed to be as vandal-resistant as possible.

## **Funding**

Currently, Mass Audubon funding is available for some of the visitor resources included in the Visitor Services Core Package. This package includes road signage, a large main identification sign, a set of outdoor orientation panels, an outdoor bulletin case, a new illustrated map of the museum grounds, trail signage, and printed visitor guides. These products are standardized statewide for use at Mass Audubon sanctuaries. In order to develop materials that represent Mass Audubon and DCR, this package, and how much of it Mass Audubon can fund, may change.

The Milton Garden Club has expressed a desire to fund signs around the pond.

It is expected that additional funding may be available through NStar mitigation funds. Also, DCR is requesting \$150,000 in FY06 for planning renovations to the outdoor exhibits.

There are three levels of improvement possible, depending on the funds available.

### **Fewest funds - sprucing up, rearranging museum and lobby**

- Painting a graphical mural on the road side of the building
- New signage and outdoor orientation materials
- Moving the Red Dot Trail entrance so it starts at the entrance as the museum, improved landscaping, gathering spot for groups, etc.
- Add to the existing exhibits – additional graphics with habitat and conservation messages, installing a freshwater aquarium with a frog in the pond area, etc.

### **Rearranging museum and lobby with some construction**

- Install a live animal display near the door, one that you could possibly see from outside
- Move the reception area to the front entry
- Move the gift shop?
- Add more to the exhibits – graphics, new animals, etc.
- Create a more unfolding experience. Don't let the visitors see the entire exhibit room at first glance. Use partitions to require visitors to travel through smaller exhibit areas, one at a time.
- "Earning" the view of the live animals – how to make each exhibit a whole experience

### **Most funding - Gut the museum and lobby and start over**

- Hire a design firm to completely renovate the museum, inside and out
- Fill the museum and grounds with updated, attractive, and meaningful exhibits
- Make some of the exhibits interactive and/or changeable

## **Priorities**

The delivery focus group listed the following priorities:

- 1<sup>st</sup> Improving the entrance, lobby, and first view of the museum
- 2<sup>nd</sup> Improve the indoor exhibits
- 3<sup>rd</sup> Update the outdoor signage
- 4<sup>th</sup> Renovate the outdoor exhibits
- 5<sup>th</sup> Improve visibility of building
- 6<sup>th</sup> Do a better job with publicity
- 7<sup>th</sup> Look into the possibility of establishing the museum as a community and teacher resource center

## Interpretive Resources Chart for Blue Hills/Trailside

- All the possible ways to convey the messages to the visitor groups

### Visitor categories

The current visitors to Blue Hills Trailside Museum can be grouped into these categories:

1. People who come to view the exhibits
2. People with a strong personal connection to the museum
3. First time museum visitors

The current visitors to Blue Hills Reservation can be grouped into four categories.

4. Visitors with a specific interest
5. Those who come for enjoyable, relaxed outings
6. Those seeking active outdoor recreation
7. Participants in special events

THEME/MESSAGE	
AUDIENCES	Blue Hills Reservation is protected yet the wealth of wildlife that live there is not without threats.
People who come to view the exhibits	<p>#1. An outdoor orientation panel that welcomes visitors, shows a map of the area, and informs them that there are three choices – the museum, the outdoor animals displays, and the Reservation – and that the ideal experience would include all three.</p> <p>#2. Updated and interactive indoor exhibits showing wildlife species of the Reservation, their habitats, conservation status, and how the Reservation is ecologically managed to support native species.</p> <p>#3. Indoor exhibit on the current activities and research projects in the Reservation and how individuals can be involved.</p> <p>#5. Updated, changeable outdoor wildlife displays with information on the individual animals, their habitats, and conservation.</p> <p>#6. Interpretive trail map for museum grounds and Red Dot Trail</p>
People with a strong personal connection to the museum	#1, 2, 3, 5



First time museum visitors	#1, 2, 3, 5, 6 #7. Biota lists – species found in the Reservation, including habitat and conservation info, and how individuals can help
Reservation visitors with a specific interest	#1, 2, 3, 5, 7 #4. A publication on the current activities and research projects in the Reservation and how individuals can be involved. This can be available to visitors at the entrance to the Red Dot Trail and other trail entrances.
Those who come for enjoyable, relaxed outings in the Reservation	#1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7
Those seeking active outdoor recreation in the Reservation	#1, 2, 3, 4, 6
Participants in special events	#1, 2, 3, 4, 5

# THEME/MESSAGE

AUDIENCES	THEME/MESSAGE
	<p><b>The Blue Hills Reservation is valuable public open space, rich in natural and human history, and recreational resources.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Blue Hills has historically, and is currently, an important natural community to not only humans but also animals and plants.</li> <li>• Here is the incredible outdoors—a great education/recreation experience right in your own backyard.</li> <li>• Blue Hills is valuable ecologically and as an “island of nature” in a populous center.</li> <li>• Blue Hills Reservation belongs to the people of Massachusetts and we all have a role in its protection.</li> </ul>
People who come to view the exhibits	#1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7
People with a strong personal connection to the museum	#1, 2, 3, 5, 6
First time museum visitors	#1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7
Reservation visitors with a specific interest	#1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7
Those who come for enjoyable, relaxed outings in the Reservation	#1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7
Those seeking active outdoor recreation in the Reservation	#1, 3, 4, 6
Participants in special events	#1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6

## Interpretive Resources List

– All the suggested interpretive products, which audience they are intended to reach, their status, and how the staff prioritizes them

Visitor Groups:

The current visitors to Blue Hills Trailside Museum can be grouped into these categories:

1. People who come to view the exhibits
2. People with a strong personal connection to the museum
3. First time museum visitors

The current visitors to Blue Hills Reservation can be grouped into four categories.

4. Visitors with a specific interest
5. Those who come for enjoyable, relaxed outings
6. Those seeking active outdoor recreation
7. Participants in special events

Product	Priority Ranking	Status	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
#1. An outdoor orientation panel that welcomes visitors, shows a map of the area, and informs them that there are three choices – the museum, the outdoor animals displays, and the Reservation – and that the ideal experience would include all three.	Not ranked	Planned as part of Mass Audubon's core visitor package	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
#2. Updated and interactive indoor exhibits showing wildlife species of the Reservation	2		X	X	X	X	X		X
#3. Indoor exhibit on the current activities and research projects in the Reservation and how individuals can be involved.	8		X	X	X	X	X		X
#4. A publication on current activities and research projects in the Reservation and how individuals can be involved. This can be available to visitors at the entrance to the Red Dot Trail and other trail entrances.	14					X	X	X	
#5. Updated, changeable outdoor wildlife displays with information on the individual animals, their habitats, and conservation.	1		X	X	X	X	X		X
#6. Interpretive trail map for museum grounds and Red Dot Trail.	5		X		X	X	X	X	X
#7. Biota lists – species found in the Reservation, including habitat and conservation info, and how individuals can help	Not ranked	Planned as part of Mass Audubon's publications for all sanctuaries			X	X	X		
#8. Seasonal natural history publications – booklets or info sheets for exploring the museum grounds and nearby trails with a specific focus on season highlights.	12				X	X	X		
#9. Family exploration booklet, including scavenger hunts around the indoor and outdoor exhibits, and habitat hunts throughout the Reservation.	13	Already have scavenger hunts for indoor/outdoors of Trailside Museum	X	X	X		X	X	
#10. Guidebook to the Blue Hills. Could include information on history, geology, and current resources	6				X	X	X	X	

and activities.									
#11. A "Friends of Blue Hills" ambassador – to walk around the museum grounds at times of highest visitation greeting visitors and providing information. They could wear a badge that says, "Ask me about Trailside Museum."	N/A	Already being done	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
#12. Live animals brought outdoors. Museum staff could walk around with a live owl or other bird and interact with visitors.	N/A	Already being done. Proven to be successful in getting visitors to come into the museum.	X	X	X				X
#13. Trailside Museum rack card offered to people using nearby recreational areas like Houghton's Pond, the AMC lodge, and the ski area. This small, attractive, card would be an invitation with the hours, directions, and reasons to come visit. It could go home with all Chickatawbet Hill program participants and school field trip students. It could also be placed in local outdoor recreation retail businesses and clubs, and at town events. It could include a coupon for a free first visit to the museum or for an upcoming special event.	4	Already being developed for several other Mass Audubon sanctuaries.				X	X	X	X
#14. A new, inviting map of the museum grounds including the animal displays, duck pond, nearby trails, and Reservation features.	Not ranked	Planned as part of Mass Audubon Core Package	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
#15. Interpretive trail with tree labels and other signs around the museum grounds, within the perimeter fence, and on nearby Reservation trails. Signs could include identification, and information geared for those visitors interested in geology, outdoor recreation, the arts, and cultural history. The Milton Garden Club has expressed a desire to fund signs around the pond.	3								
#16. An outdoor changeable display board for a daily natural history feature to look for.	15	Already in the works	X		X	X	X		
#17. A large, charismatic mammal (perhaps a deer) displayed nearest the entrance, just inside the perimeter fencing, to draw people in.	11		X		X		X		
#18. Discovery backpacks available for loan.	10	Should be completed May 05.				X	X	X	
#19. A graphical mural painted on the building. (Staff suggests placing just the name on the side of the building.)	Not ranked		X	X	X				X
#20. A new entrance – shared by the museum building, the outdoor display walkway, the start of the Red Dot Trail, the orientation panels, and a gathering spot.	9		X	X	X	X	X	X	X
#21. Live animal displays installed near the front door.	7		X	X	X			X	X

## Prioritized Interpretive Resources

### Products planned for all sites as part of Mass Audubon Core Visitor Services Package

- Roadside signs
- A main identification sign
- A set of outdoor orientation panels
- An illustrated map of the museum grounds and the eastern side of Great Blue Hill
- An outdoor bulletin case
- Wayfinding signs for the museum grounds
- Color and black/white printed visitor guides to the museum and nearby trails

### Products planned for all sanctuaries by Mass Audubon Education Dept.

- Biota lists
- Rack card

### Interpretive products prioritized by staff 1/05

Priority Ranking by staff	Item #	Item description
1	#5	Updated, changeable outdoor wildlife displays with information on the individual animals, their habitats, and conservation
2	#2	Updated and interactive indoor exhibits showing wildlife species of the Reservation
3	#15	Interpretive trail with tree labels and other signs around the museum grounds, within the perimeter fence, and on nearby Reservation trails. Signs could include identification, and information geared for those visitors interested in geology, outdoor recreation, the arts, and cultural history. The Milton Garden Club has expressed a desire to fund signs around the pond.
4	#13	Trailside Museum rack card offered to people using nearby recreational areas like Houghton's Pond, the AMC lodge, and the ski area. This small, attractive, card would be an invitation with the hours, directions, and reasons to come visit. It could go home with all Chickatawbet Hill program participants and school field trip students. It could also be placed in local outdoor recreation retail businesses and clubs, and at town events. It could include a coupon for a free first visit to the museum or for an upcoming special event.
5	#6	Interpretive trail map for museum grounds and Red Dot Trail
6	#10	Guidebook to the Blue Hills including info on history, geology, and current resources and activities
7	#21	Live animal displays installed near the front door
8	#3	Indoor exhibit on the current activities and research projects in the Reservation and how individuals can be involved
9	#20	#20. A new entrance – shared by the museum building, the outdoor display walkway, the start of the Red Dot Trail, the orientation panels, and a gathering spot

10	#18	Discovery backpacks available for loan
11	#17	A large, charismatic mammal (perhaps a deer) displayed nearest the entrance, just inside the perimeter fencing, to draw people in
12	#8	Seasonal natural history publications – booklets or info sheets for exploring the museum grounds and nearby trails with a specific focus on season highlights
13	#9	Family exploration booklet, including scavenger hunts around the indoor and outdoor exhibits, and habitat hunts throughout the Reservation
14	#4	A publication on current activities and research projects in the Reservation and how individuals can be involved. This can be available to visitors at the entrance to the Red Dot Trail and other trail entrances.
15	#16	An outdoor changeable display board for a daily natural history feature

## Overview of the Interpretive Planning Process

The interpretive planning process involves four phases.

**Phase 1 is to create a set of messages and desired understandings for visitors to the sanctuary.** These messages should answer the questions, "What is so special about this place?" and "What do we want visitors to understand at the end of their visit?" A focus group of individuals, who know the sanctuary well, help create the list of possibilities and then prioritize and refine the list together. The list is then refined down to one core theme and three to five supporting messages by the interpretive planner with input from the sanctuary staff. This content should emphasize one set of messages presented to sanctuary visitors in ways that are effective, reinforced, and long-term. Ideally, a year after their visit, the visitor should remember the one thing (or set of things) they grew to understand during their visit to the sanctuary.

**Phase 2 is to identify the audiences visiting the sanctuary.** The goal of this phase is to identify a sanctuary visitor profile and to establish the needs of those visitors. A focus group of individuals who represent the various visitors help profile these groups. After all the possible types of visitor groups are listed, the focus group refines the lists, and then clumps them into sets, where appropriate. Each visitor group, or set of groups, is looked at for the services, information, and resources they need.

**Phase 3 involves planning how best to convey the core messages to the identified audiences.** A third focus group, representing writers, photographers, exhibit designers, graphic artists, video or audio professionals, and other "information presenters" are asked to review the core messages, the identified audiences, and suggest possible ways to convey the messages to the audiences.

**Phase 4 is to draft the interpretive plan.** The sanctuary staff, and other key individuals, are asked to review the findings of the focus groups and a summary by the interpretive planner. The interpretive plan is then drafted with this group's input.

## Focus Groups

Facilitator: Lucy Gertz

12/02/03

### Focus Group #1 - Message

Participants:	Norman Smith	Richard Moore
	Nathan Compton	Pat Flynn
	Henry Putnam	Jon Sachs
	Carol Blute	Natalie Alders
	Kent Harrison	Laurie Bennett
	Patty O'Neill	Maggi Brown
	Paul Emond	Haiale Albers

2/12/04

### Focus Group #2 - Audience

Participants:	Norman Smith	Richard Moore
	Nathan Compton	Kent Harrison
	Henry Putnam	Jon Sachs
	Carol Blute	Jane Howe
	Patty O'Neill	Maggi Brown
	Paul Emond	Stephen Hutchinson
	Elizabeth Mozek	Fred Brink

4/29/04

### Staff Meeting - to complete the interpretive themes and audience profiles

Participants:	Norman Smith	Nathan Compton
	Stephen Hutchinson	Alanna Morreale
	Julie Breheny	Ken Nowell
	Laura Liptak	Bronwyn Foley

12/6/04

### Focus Group #3 - Delivery

Participants:	Norman Smith	Jon Sachs
	Stephen Hutchinson	Paul Emond
	Lisa Cohen	Maggi Brown
	Andy Lantz	Janet McClaire
	Joe Green	Jill Hayes
	Fred Brink	Elizabeth Mozek
	Mary Keally	Pat Flynn
	Dana Green	

Reviewers: Norman Smith  
Lou Wagner  
Laurie Bennett  
Maggi Brown  
Tabitha Hobbs  
Emily Carreiro