

Whipple Hill Project

Lexington Conservation Stewards

Background

- 116 acre conservation parcel, 2nd largest in Lexington.
- Bordered by two adjacent towns with adjoining conservation land.
- Hilly wooded terrain, pond, streams, drainage, and erosion issues.
- High volume of users; walkers, dog walkers, mountain bikes.
- Unimproved trail network including old cart paths with minimal prior attempts at improvement structures such as boardwalks, unsanctioned trail creation by users.

History

2005 Creation of detailed map proposing recommended trail improvements created by skilled volunteer some years prior but never enacted.

Fall 2010 Small group of Stewards revisited the area using the map as guide and began work preparing for filing RTP application.

- Several site visits to review locations calling for either structures or trail realignments.
- Site visit with Fire Department personnel to confirm needs for utilization of cart path for FD equipment access.
- Informal site visit and meeting with Conservation Commission to obtain support for initial recommendations and to request support from Conservation Department as RTP applicant.
- Location of several potential vernal pool sites noted.
- Decision to file as RDA or NOI deferred until after approval obtained from RTP program.
- Building materials budget based on prior experience with similar projects.
- Consulted with Town Conservation Department staff to determine if sites located within:
 - Priority area for endangered or rare species as defined by the Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program, MA Fisheries and Wildlife's Natural Heritage Atlas.
 - MA Area of Critical Environmental Concern.
 - Superfund site(s).
- Commission issued letter of support for overall project to protect wetland resource from deteriorating trail conditions and heavy user volume.

Fall 2011 RTP application completed and filed.

- Boardwalk design protected wetland resource by minimizing the environmental impact from materials chosen (recycled plastic in direct contact with ground), project design (sleeper/stringer design reduced surface impact to minimum), techniques employed (minimal surface disturbance, processing of materials off site to reduce sawdust, etc.).
- Project fulfilled recreational/social need by improving access to and amongst open space parcels in two adjoining towns, Winchester and Arlington.
- Project addressed the existing problem of trail access in wetlands, erosion in wet areas and seasonal access to existing unimproved trails.

- Project met social and community needs by building on partnerships developed over many years by engaging participation a wide array of community groups including schools, scouts, other town committees and departments, local conservation/recreation groups.

Fall 2012 Notice of approval received from RTP program, application to Conservation Commission commences.

- Determination made to file as an NOI application because:
 - Potential vernal pool sites.
 - Creation of new trail improvement structures, not replacement of existing structures.
 - Structures crossing permanent streams.
- Consultation with Conservation Department as to perennial or seasonal definition of existing streams.
- Photo documentation of site locations requiring structures.
- Formal site visit with Commission members following application filing. Commission chose to defer final decisions re vernal pool sites and pond outlet site until Year 2.
- Public hearing, approval granted.

Spring 2013 First season construction.

- Logistical planning for multiple sites.
- Lumber delivery/processing by Stewards.
- Lumber carry in with high school track and field team (60 participants).
- Individual site construction, combination of Eagle scout and adult Steward projects.

Fall 2013 Revisions to original plans for pond outlet site.

- Individual steward concern with large proposed structure overwhelming natural beauty of site.
- Structure redesigned.
- Commission review of deferred sites from Year 1 (vernal pool and pond outlet sites).
- Site visit and 2nd public meeting. Approval secured.

2014 Construction of remaining sites on same model as 2013.

2015 Complete trail realignment portion of project (not part of RTP grant application).