

DESIGNATION OF THE GOLDEN HILLS AREA OF AS AN AREA OF CRITICAL ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERN

Following an extensive review in compliance with regulations governing Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (301 CMR 12.00), including nomination, research, informal meetings with local groups, public hearings, on-site visits and evaluation of all public comments and assembled data, I, the Secretary of Environmental Affairs, hereby designate a portion of the Golden Hills Area Watershed in the Towns of Wakefield and Saugus as an Area of Critical Environmental Concern. This action is taken pursuant to the authority granted to me by Massachusetts General Laws, chapter 21A, section 7.

I. Boundary of the Golden Hills ACEC

The boundary of the nominated area is shown on the attached map. The power lines that form the boundaries to the east and southeast are not included in the ACEC, but are only meant to mark the boundary of the area.

II. Description of the Resources of the Golden Hill ACEC

The Golden Hills has an unusual blend of residential and ecological resources within the heavily urbanized Boston Metropolitan area. The area was popular for summer cottages, and later for year-round residences. The area contains approximately 450 acres, of which about 300 is open space. It contains varied terrain: both flat and hilly areas with rocky outer openings, forested areas, and wetlands and three ponds - First, Griswold, and Spring ponds. The area has an abundance of wildlife.

Most of the Golden Hills has been subdivided. The Town of Wakefield owns some 50 acres (mostly Town forest). Saugus owns several acres under the jurisdiction of the Conservation Commission and also owns the three ponds.

The site clearly meets the regulatory criterion that an area proposed for designation must contain features from four or more specified resources groups.

III. Procedures Leading to ACEC Designation

The Golden Hills Association, a group of concerned citizens, initiated the nomination of the Golden Hills area as an ACEC. The nomination was filed with the Secretary of Environmental Affairs on March 24, 1987.

On May 20, 1987, Secretary Hoyte accepted the nomination of the Golden Hills area. A public hearing was scheduled for June 26, 1987, at 9:00 a.m. at the Laurel Gardens Meeting Room in Saugus.

Notice of the public hearing was published in the Environmental Monitor on May 26, 1987, and in the Boston Globe on June 17, 1987. Official Town boards in Wakefield and Saugus were notified of

the meeting. The hearing was held on June 26, 1987 at the Laurel Gardens Meeting Room.

In addition to the testimony at the public hearing, written comments in favor of the designation were received from MA Representative Steven Angelo, MA Representative Richard Tisei, the Wakefield Conservation Commission, and the Metropolitan District Commission's Director of Reservations and Interpretive Services, Garret VanWart. Letters of concern for potential affects on operations (transmission lines and substations) were received from both Boston Edison and New England Power Service. All comments are on file at the MEPA office.

IV. Discussion of Factors Specified in Section 12.09 of the ACEC Regulations

In the review process leading to the decision on a nominated area, the Secretary must consider the factors specified in Section 12.09 of the MEPA Regulations. As stated in these regulations, the factors need not be weighed equally, nor must all these factors be present for an area to be designated. While the more factors an area contains, the more likely its designation, the strong presence of even a single factor may be sufficient.

Based on information in the nomination letter, at the public hearing, in written comments and from research and site inspections by my staff, I find the following factors applicable to the designated ACEC:

I. Quality of Natural Characteristics:

The area has many undeveloped vistas and promontories that set it apart from the surrounding landscape. Hikers, joggers, bird watchers, and cross country skiers often pass through the Golden Hills Area enroute to the Breakheart Reservation.

2. Productivity:

The area supports a large diversity of plant and animal life. It is a stop-over location for migratory birds and provides an important open space corridor for mammals, including the white tail deer that have been sighted recently in the area.

3. Irreversibility of Impact:

This area is a documented habitat for several predatory mammals. This indicates that it supports a more complex ecosystem than is common in urban areas.

4. Imminence of Threat to the Resource:

Although much of the land in Golden Hills is currently owned by development interests, plans are not immediately known. Given the tremendous development pressure on land in this, the Metropolitan Boston area, development proposals are likely to be forthcoming.

5. Magnitude of Impact:

Development in the area will affect the hydrology of the Golden Hills, thus potentially impacting the three ponds.

6. Supporting Factors:

The MDC's Breakheart Reservation is within 200 yards of the Golden Hills. A new thrust of the MDC's program will be to incorporate an awareness and appreciation for open space preservation in surrounding communities. Preservation of open space areas is fostered by adding protection, such as an ACEC designation, to these areas that are geographically close to areas already preserved or protected. Further, both Wakefield and Saugus own land and/or water bodies. There is clear local support for building on the environmental assets that already exist.

(signed) James S. Hoyte
Secretary of Environmental Affairs

August 26, 1987

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