



Town of Simsbury

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SIMSBURY, CONNECTICUT 06070

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OPEN SPACE STEWARDSHIP AND POLICES WORK GROUP

Tuesday, September 15, 2020

9:00 A.M.

SPECIAL MEETING AGENDA

Call to Order

1. Natural Stewardship Policy
2. Other Open Space Policies
3. Next Steps

Adjournment

A Natural Forest Ecosystem: Best Practice for Natural Area Stewardship

This is an overview and a “best practice” primer on “Natural Area Stewardship” of a forest. Natural Area Stewardship is what most people want and expect in a forested nature preserve.

The goal of this document is to provide basic information and answers to frequently asked questions (FAQs) on Natural Area Stewardship – what it is, where it can be practiced, what are the benefits, how to monitor a property, and how to determine when and why to intervene.

A curated non-exhaustive list of open-access resources with supporting science, examples, protocols and more detailed plans and background information is provided below.

What is Natural Area Stewardship?

Natural Area Stewardship allows natural processes, rather than regular active management by people, to shape a forest. It is possible on a parcel of any size and any forest type. It is a largely hands-off approach, recognizing that forests evolved millions of years ago, and in the absence of humans. Forests are well-equipped to persist and endure without our help - even in the face of 21st century environmental change. A Natural Stewardship approach understands that ‘threats’ to forests (i.e., wind, insects, disease, fire, drought) are the very disturbances that often enhance their complexity, carbon sequestration, regeneration, and habitat diversity. It is practiced in what is often termed a “wildwood,” “wild forest,” or “wildland.”

Where Should Natural Area Stewardship be Practiced?

Natural Area Stewardship is *possible* for all or part of any forest that is not being managed actively for resources (such as wood), as part of an intervention-based research program, as a specific type of habitat, *unless* it is precluded legally by deed or easement restrictions. In general, Natural Area Stewardship does not prevent interventions as needed for public safety reasons.

Natural Area Stewardship is similar to the stewardship of National Parks in the United States. It may be *required* if a forest is protected by a “Forever Wild” or similar conservation easement; is designated as “wild,” “natural” or “intact;” or fulfills a landowner’s or donor’s intent.

Currently less than 5% of Southern New England is under Natural Area Stewardship, and only a small fraction (~1%) is legally protected as such. Meanwhile, the crises in biodiversity and species extinction are accelerating, and scientific consensus is that at least 30% of Earth’s land and water need strong protection (“*Protect the Best, Restore the Rest*”). This is an urgent gap in public policy.

What Are the Benefits of Natural Area Stewardship?

1. Maximize cumulative carbon storage above and below ground.
2. Maximize ecological and structural complexity over time.
3. Maximize purification of local air and water.
4. Protect molecular and genetic diversity, and the full spectrum of native biodiversity.
5. Generally minimize invasive plants and therefore their progression or remediation.
6. At broad scales, reduce the rate of species' extinction.
7. Connect people to nature with an opportunity to escape and experience a sense of awe.
8. Enable people to attach to a place that can be shared within and across generations.
9. Provide needed "control" areas and baselines to compare with managed areas.
10. Save time and money: no regular maintenance is required.

What Are Some Examples of Natural Area Stewardship?

Examples of areas in the United States under Natural Area Stewardship include National Parks, the Adirondack Forest Preserve, forests in the Old Growth Forest Network, some nature preserves, and USDA forest service wilderness areas. See links below for more information.

Globally, the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Protected Areas are dedicated to "*long term conservation of nature with its associated ecological services and cultural values.*" Most categories either *require* or *do not preclude* Natural Area Stewardship.

What is Public Opinion on Natural Area Stewardship?

Protecting public land has high bipartisan support (>80% nationally, higher in New England). Protection of public land *as nature preserves* in Southern New England was supported by 90% of respondents in a survey hosted by the Program for Public Values. Protecting old-growth forest was supported by 99% of respondents. Support did not differ among Southern New England states. Each response was validated and anonymous, and respondents matched the median income for the region. The public assumes 20% is under Natural Area Stewardship and want more protected as such (40%). The current area protected is less than 1%.

Summary: A major priority is ***protecting more natural areas*** and ***connecting them***.

Establishing a network of suitable areas for Natural Area Stewardship is urgent: the vast majority of our landscape is developed, managed routinely, and/or has no long-term protection. Natural Area Stewardship is practiced purposefully on less than 4% of New England, yet international scientific consensus recommends protecting at least 30% (or even 50% - "Nature Needs Half"). We to protect need high quality, connected habitat, and fund evidence-based restoration where possible. Connected, intact habitat is the backbone of a healthy landscape and is the foundation for additional areas for research and responsible resource production.

Natural Area Stewardship: Best Practice Guidelines

No routine maintenance is required - nature is in charge. Natural areas are “managed with restraint” and are “intended to be self-willed lands, both philosophically and practically.” This is true under both stable conditions and in the aftermath of major disturbances such as tropical storms, tornadoes, insect and pathogen outbreaks, and fire (www.wilderness.net). Downed, broken, and dead trees are all part of a natural forest and should not be cause for concern or result in a shift in management philosophy towards one of intervention.

If adverse conditions develop (progressive trail erosion, threats to public health, etc.) they should be addressed based on a precautionary principle and aligned with interdisciplinary science. For additional guidance, see National Park Service, Adirondack Park, or Wilderness Area guidelines and additional regional stewardship resources linked below. Principles include:

Let nature take its course. Leave dead trees and downed logs in place after a storm where possible, except where they block important trails. Trees may be removed from the trail but left in the forest. Allow insect and pathogen outbreaks to proceed as part of a natural processes. Natural forests thrive on and recover from natural disturbances.

Monitor major trails. If trails are present, regular monitoring (at least annually) can prevent progressive damage, remove hazards, address erosion, etc. Passive recreation is allowed.

Monitor ecological integrity, borders. Monitor borders to prevent encroachment, dumping, building, etc. Note that edges and trails are areas where invasives (especially invasive plants) can gain a foothold. If unchecked, some invasives can affect the regeneration or long-term integrity of the forest or increase the presence of disease vectors like ticks. How, when and if an invasive is removed or addressed should align with the precautionary principle and is a dynamic field of research. It should be considered in consultation with a local practitioner (i.e. forest ecologist, forester, forest scientist, field botanist, land steward, etc.) familiar with Natural Area Stewardship. Native trees, such as American beech, should not be treated as invasives.

Regular photopoints and data collection are scientifically valuable. This is optional, but it is important to emphasize that there is little long-term data on natural forests. Forests shaped primarily by natural processes rather than by management by people serve as valuable baselines and reference areas (scientific “controls”). Established monitoring plots and periodic measurements of the trees and other vegetation can quantify changes over time and provide a valuable reference area for other properties that are being actively managed for different values. It is important to collect more data going forward, but right now forests managed for many decades with Natural Area Stewardship (National Parks, Adirondacks) generally have more diversity, more carbon, and fewer invasive plants than managed areas.

Additional Resources on Natural Area Stewardship

US Forest Service Research Natural Areas

https://www.nrs.fs.fed.us/rna/local-resources/downloads/rna_fs_503.pdf

National Park Service Stewardship and Science Directorate:

<https://www.nps.gov/orgs/1778/whatwedo.htm>

Wildlands and Woodlands Stewardship Science Manual

<https://highstead.net/ecostudies/Stewardship-Science.shtml>

Northeast Wilderness Trust - dedicated to Natural Area Stewardship and Wild Carbon

("Wilderness Partnership") <http://northeastwildernesstrust.org/wilderness-conservation/wp/>

Adirondacks:

<https://wildadirondacks.org>

Eastern Wildways Network:

<https://wildlandsnetwork.org/wildways/eastern/>

Old-Growth Forest Network:

<https://www.oldgrowthforest.net/>

International Union of Conservation of Nature: www.iucn.org

Global Standard for Nature-based Solutions

<https://portals.iucn.org/library/sites/library/files/documents/2020-020-En.pdf>

Priority to Protect, then Restore

<https://www.iucn.org/crossroads-blog/202003/primary-forests-a-priority-nature-based-solution>

**Open Space and Recreation Areas
2015**

Site	Acreage	Classification	Description
Holcomb St./Windham St. subdivision	18.54	A	Open space wooded area with bike path
County Rd. subdivision open space	9.93	C	Sand pit area, Brook along eastern boundary
Munnisunk Dr subdivision open space	28.56	A	Narrow open fields w/ trail overlooking Culbro Pond
Hampshire Lane subdivision open space	12.5	C	Extensive dumping by neighbors Adjacent to Culbro property
Saxton Brook Dr subdivision open space	93	C	
Governor's Bridge subdivision	29	C	Trail along river
Case Circle/Harvest Hill	14.84	A	Open field, extensive dumping
Short Lane subdivision open space	2.27	C	Grown in with small pond
Clifdon Dr subdivision open space	14.85	A	Large field area, some wetlands
North Road subdivision open space	10.7	C	
Access through Simsbury Landing		C	
Wardell-St. John's	23.3	C	Open Space on Farmington River
Curtiss Park (east section);	10	A	
Metacomet subdivision	9.7	C	Pond, access to trails along ridge
Grimes Brook subdivision open space	15.39	C	Entrance off Owens Brook; Wooded area
Michael Road/Owens Brook	5.28	C	Wooded/Banked area
Oxyoke/Buttonwood open space	12	C	

**Open Space and Recreation Areas
2015**

Musket Trail/Winterset subdivision	11.06	C	Wooded area
Owens Brook Rd/Oxford Court	13.29	C	Wooded with brookside trail
North Saddle Ridge open space	12.79	B	Trails, access to ridge
Open space/no access	8.62	C	Wooded area
Beldenwood open space area	40.2	C	Wooded swamp
Belden Forest	40.2	B	Forest; Trail system
Drake Hill Field area	91	A	Sewer plant, open space
Nimrod/Tootin' Hills open space	15	C	
Banks Road/Woodside	11.16	C	Hilltop trail runs into Stratton Brook State Park
Stratton Brook/Bushy Hill	47.59	A	Wooded, open field area
Pinchot Sycamore Tree area	2.7	A	
Nod Brook	0.23	C	Canoe launch/parking area
Canal Place	8.15	A	Open space/bike path
Merrywood open space	6.36	C	Wetlands
Chestnut Hill open space	24.4	A	Wooded w/ trails
Mt. Farms open space	15	A	Wooded w/trails
Neal Drive open space	10.1	C	Field, wooded area, some wetlands
Redstone Dr. open space	12	A	Bike path, wetland area
Oakhurst Knoll subdivision open space	10.08	C	Natural area with small pond, swamp

**Open Space and Recreation Areas
2015**

Timberidge I & II subdivision open space	15.6	C	Wooded area
Sand Hill Pines subdivision open space	10.04	C	Wooded
Simsbury Landing subdivision open space	15	C	Access to Farmington River and town property
Oxford Court subdivision open space	1.96	C	Adjacent to Owens Brook with trail
Roskear Farms subdivision open space	32	C	Trail by power lines & one through wetland area Access from Highwood
Stafford Estates subdivision open space	2.23	C	Wooded area w/ drainage pool, access to ridge
Currier subdivision open space	0.22	C	Along Farmington River with no access
Hartwell subdivision open space	0.8	C	Behind Old Farms Rd, adjacent to Meadow Pond
Canal Place subdivision open space.	28.8	B	Wooded, bike path to canal. Access from Latimer Lane
Saddle Ridge subdivision open space	38.06	B	Wooded area with pond, wetlands, trails
Metacomet Heights subdivision open space	32.07	B	Wooded, trail
Hallview subdivision open space (2 parcels)	18.1	C	Adjacent to Darling "natural" area, wetlands, brook
Whitman Pond subdivision open space	23.7	C	Adjacent to Hopbrook, Simsbury Farms; Wetlands
Great Pond Road	1.7	C	Wooded buffer area near Great Pond State Park
Walker Glen subdivision open space	10.9	C	Adjacent to Latimer Lane School; Wooded area with some wetlands
Wildflower Lane subdivision open space	2.24	B	Wooded area off Camille Drive with no wetlands
Hallview II	3.147	C	
24 Firetown Road	0.5	C	

**Open Space and Recreation Areas
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Pheasant Farms	5.07	C	
Nila's Way	2.2	C	
Walker Glen	10	C	
Whitman Corners	8.445	C	
Grant Estate	16.94	C	
Colby Court	1	C	
Still Brook	47.8	C	
Perkins	0.96	C	
Ethel Walker Woods	287	B	
Barndoor Hills	75	A	
210 Old Farms Road	0.96	C	
Old Meadow Way	0.45	C	
Grouse Glen (Joshua Drive)	28.9	C	
Lake View Estates (Rebecca Lane)	13.22	C	
Five Gates Farm (Old Farms Road)	2.43	C	
Heather Lane	2.62	C	
237 Old Farms Road	0.83	C	
Latimer Farms (Latimer Road)	11.6	C	

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Valley View (Ruthie's Way)	12.72	C	
Ardsley Way	12.16	C	
133 Holcomb Street	1.21	C	
Whitman Farms	21.89	C	Hop Brook Rd & Great Pond Road
Harding Drive & Blue Ridge Drive	1.91	C	
Brownstone Turn	10.69	C	
Red Gate Homes (Kilbourn Lane)	0.41	C	
24 Ferry Lane	4.78	C	
Onion Mountain Park	147.7	B	Wooded, hiking trails
Farms Village area	22.6	C	Passive recreation, hiking trails
Town Garage and Sand Bank	43.7	C	Sand pit and open space; Town Forest Road
Area from Ethel Walker School	65	B	Conservation, hiking trails
Old Meadow Road area	60.8	C	Conservation, passive recreation
Darling-Hilles, Ensign Memorial Forest	40	C	Conservation, passive recreation
Talcott Ridge/Stafford Road area	43.1	C	Conservation, natural area
Town Farm	91.9	C	Conservation, agriculture
Farmington River, near Tariffville	23.3	B	Conservation, natural area
Pharos Farm, Pattison Estate	52.1	C	Conservation, agriculture, play fields
Darling Wildlife Sanctuary	35.5	C	Conservation, natural area

**Open Space and Recreation Areas
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Laurel Hill (Gersten)	63	C	Conservation
Stoddard Reservoir Area	18	B	Conservation, wetlands, water body
Baker Property - Iron Horse Blvd.	154	C	Conservation, floodplain, recreation
Dewey Property - Terry's Plain Road	13.6	C	Conservation, river frontage, agriculture
Dorset Crossing	16.36	C	
Main St. Extension (Rice)	1.54	C	
Reifenheiser (Hopmeadow St./Granby line)	7.8	C	
Frieswick (288 Firetown Rd.)	1.5	C	
Old Stone Crossing	32.91	C	
Shaw Drive	7.82	C	
Woodhaven Dr.	4	C	
Sugar Loaf Mt.	22	B	House on property
Wyngate	13.12	C	
Anja/Pia/Great Pond	16.57	C	
Pinnacle Mt. Rd.	13	C	
Echo La./Great Pond Rd.	25.37	C	
Firetown Rd./Owens Brook Blvd.	1	A	
Old Farms Rd./Farms Village Rd.	2	A	

**Open Space and Recreation Areas
2015**

Great Pond Rd./Laurel Lane	4	A	Open Field Area
Sand Hill Rd.	2	A	Open Field Area
	350.69	A	
	717.6	B	
	1,485.49	C	
TOTAL	2,553.78		
Open Space Classification		A	Mowed and/or maintained on a regularly scheduled basis
		B	Regular public use - periodic maintenance
		C	Maintenance only as needed

David Bush

I do not have any particular comment on the natural stewardship document. Two properties that I do believe are good candidates for this initiative are Belden Forest and Onion Mountain. There are portions of the Ethel Walker Woods property that may also be a good fit but there are also more established areas, especially trails, that I do not believe necessarily fit into the natural stewardship approach. We can discuss it further at the upcoming meeting.

David Bush

Member of the Open Space Committee and Chairman of Cultural, Parks and Recreation Commission