

THE HUNTING SWAMP & FOREST PROPOSED TRAIL SYSTEM

Town of Loudon Property

By Martha Butterfield – April 16, 2019

Description of the Existing Property and Current Trail System

The Hunting Swamp and forest is the property of Town of Loudon, consisting of both wooded wetland and upland areas, and its most common access point is through a flat, 100' right of way off of Lovejoy Road. The parcel covers several hundred acres and includes a hillside in the southwest and western portions, as well as a second, uncut 100' right of way to the southeast on the hillside off of Batchelder Road. Located on the right side of Lovejoy Road about a mile northwest from North Village Road, the property is accessed through an opening in the stone wall on the right side of the road.



The Pine Island Brook, which begins within the Hunting Swamp and includes a small pond, lies to left of the Lovejoy Road right of way, as seen in the lower portion of this topographical map.

The lowland portion, mostly in the center of the property, has carried the name Hunting Swamp for many years, as it is identified that way on topographic maps, as well as Google Earth. The property was deeded to the Town of Loudon in 2005 by developer Alvin Davis as an open-space, undeveloped conservation parcel that allowed him to receive a variance through the Town's Planning and Zoning Boards to construct a clustered, single-family housing development of 14 homes on one-acre lots on Memory Lane,

which abuts the two Hunting Swamp rights of way, as shown on the southeast lower corner of this map. Davis bought the large parcel from Edgar Crete who had hired a logger to thin the forest in most of that area in the early 2000's, a few years before Davis had purchased it.



The map on the left was created through a "Map My Hike" app on my cellphone as I recently hiked 2.5 miles (shown in red) through the western area of the property, using the existing farm/logging trails and deer paths. I began at the green arrow entrance through the stone wall on the right side of Lovejoy Road, not far from my home, and walked northeast through the forest along the existing right-of-way path.

Early in my walk as the trail veered to the left, I came to the marshy Hunting Swamp, as shown in the light green area on the lower right side of the map. I then made my way slightly north for a short distance through the dense forest at the right edge of the wetland before hopping over the narrowest crossing of Pine Island Brook

(shown on the map as the bump in the trail), and I zigzagged carefully in a westerly direction over the uneven, wet areas, imagining the addition of a bog bridging system. Honestly, my least favorite time to hike in the Hunting Swamp is in the early spring because that area is mostly wet, up to about a foot deep in some areas due to the melted snow that flows from the northern portion of the swamp. But spring is also the perfect time to locate the best areas to add bog bridging.

While trying to avoid the wetter areas, I then headed along the raised edge of what looked like a man-made canal (as seen in the photo on the right) so I could access a break in a stone wall to follow what I would call the 'lower farm trail', just north of the Town's orange boundary marker behind the stone wall. That particular part of the trail is low-lying and tends to be wet in the spring (perhaps a reason for the dug canal), so I chose instead to use a drier, narrow path through the trees next to the stone wall which parallels the trail and headed north for a few feet. Further up, I made my way over some



fallen trees before connecting again with the 'lower farm trail' at a point where the ground was drier.

The trail heads gradually uphill until it reaches a junction where the hiker can turn left and follow the markings of a future path westward up the hill (which forms the left side of the larger loop shown on the map) or



remain on the 'lower farm trail' that continues in a northerly direction. Choosing the latter, I soon came to the first of two openings in stone walls that crossed the trail. Long ago, perhaps in the late 1700's, many stone walls were built on the property, which was once part of the former Batchelder farm. The old Georgian-style house that used to be known as the Lovejoy Bed & Breakfast was built by the Batchelder family in 1790.

After the second stone wall opening, a future side trail could be created on the left through a flat area of the forest and reach a stone wall that heads uphill, eventually connecting to the existing 'middle farm trail' toward the west. A short distance up the trail and off to the right, I've placed ribbons along a path of sorts to guide myself while snowshoeing through the forest toward the eastern side of the Hunting Swamp.

As the trail begins to veer off in a more northwesterly direction, a dense blueberry bush swamp can be seen off to the right where it is situated in much of the northern and east central region of the Town's land.



The 'lower farm trail' dwindles down to a path that heads slightly westerly uphill over a third, barely noticeable stone wall before it heads downhill a short way and reaches a



crossroad of sorts, shown here (it's about a mile in from the trail's entrance off of Lovejoy Road). The less-used path to the right leads out toward the Hunting Swamp's northwest boundary. The center trail leads westward toward a steeper, shortcut hike up the hillside to the highest region where a second 'highland loop trail' is proposed. The path on the left, marked by green ribbons, loops back to the



south as it gradually heads uphill, levels off slightly and connects with what I call the 'middle farm trail'. The trail continues most of the way near to a stone wall, and the hiker soon notices several other stone walls that cross what must have once been small pastures before the forest overtook the region, as noted in the photo to the left.

At the brow of the hill, a broad opening through the stone wall on the right (see left photo below) leads westward to yet another proposed 'highland loop trail' that follows a stone wall further up the hillside, offering views of the rocky hillside below, and it eventually comes to the stone wall boundary between the Town's land and the Decato property to the west.



Just before that boundary, the trail seems to end at a break in the stone wall where the previously-mentioned, steep, short-cut hiking trail cuts in. That day I continued on my way, heading southward through the woods while keeping the distant stone wall boundary and one of DeCato's buildings to the west barely in view through the dense hemlock trees. As I walked, I imagined a trail could easily be cut through that pleasant area, forming a triangular 'highland loop trail', and it also happened to be the highest elevation on the property, according to Google Earth.



As I continued in the direction of another stone wall on the south that formed the Town's boundary, I could just barely see the distant barn on the property belonging to Jim McNeil. McNeil also owns the former Lovejoy Bed & Breakfast on Lovejoy Road, now an apartment house called Lovejoy Farm. Two properties in the field next to it on

Lovejoy Road with recently-built homes also form the southern boundary of the Town's land, and a third property belonging to Dena Rae abuts the Town's right of way access.

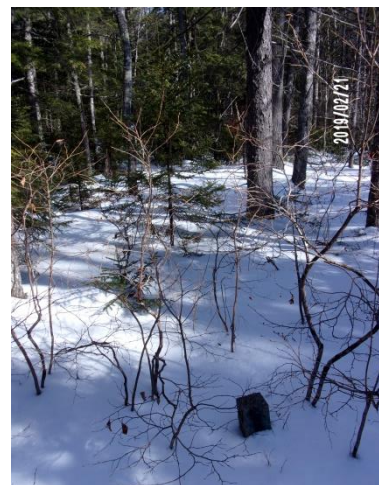


Upon completing the upper 'highland loop trail', I eventually came out through an opening in the stone wall, and I was once again on the 'middle farm trail'. I looked south down the way, admiring the two stone walls that bordered that farm road that led to the back of the Lovejoy Farm. Before the forest grew back in, there must have been open pastures with an excellent view of Oak Hill to the south. I was only able to follow that trail part way

before I encountered a barrier of large trees that had fallen across the way after a severe microburst had blown through that area years ago. With the hopes that section might be cleared someday, I could go no farther and had to cross over a low point in the wall to the left so I could head down the hill, marked with orange ribbons, amongst more trees which had fallen from the microburst. I eventually came out on the 'lower farm trail' and followed it back the same way I had come in, via the entrance on Lovejoy Road.

At different times when I've hiked in the western hilly region, I discovered some other high and dry areas along different stone walls where more side trails could be cut that could extend the entire hike to over three miles, but those possibilities can be pursued at a later date.

Most of the old farming/logging trails are still visible, and I've hiked them many times during the past 14 years since the Town acquired the property. As I walked or snowshoed through various areas within the Hunting Swamp and forest, I've tied ribbons along a number of spots, marking the way so I wouldn't get lost, particularly along the rougher, more densely forested eastern portion which had fewer logging trails, due to the normally wet conditions most of the year. Because of spring and summer wetness, the eastern region is best suited for wintertime activities, such as snowshoeing and cross-country skiing. Several years ago, I located the eastern boundary of the Town's property and marked it with orange ribbons, noting the hazardous, broken-down barbed wire fencing that had served as a boundary marker. I also found the base of an old granite boundary marker, as shown in the image on the right.



Refining the Existing Trail System

Phase I Work Already Completed as of 4/1/19



The existing trail system starts at the entrance through an opening in the stone wall next to Lovejoy Road. Some spindly trees were removed by the Loudon Trail Cutters on April 1, 2019, and they spent the morning forming the beginning of a parking area for several cars. After the parking lot is completed to the satisfaction of the Conservation Commission and the Loudon Board of Selectmen, a kiosk with a trail map and

general information about the area it covers will be added at the entrance. The remainder of the morning was spent refining the over long, narrow right of way.

The existing cleared path continues on level ground through the forest for about 700 +/- feet within the 100-foot wide right of way before coming to the edge of the Hunting Swamp where the Town's property then widens out. The following six images show the cleaned up trail along the right of way, just before it reaches the marshy Hunting Swamp where work ended on April 1st:





The ground dips downward a bit before reaching the wetter areas where some trail improvement will need to be done during Phase II to make it more easily passable. Somewhere in that area, there should have been a boundary marker separating the Town's property from Dena Rae's land, but I have never located it. However, Craig Tufts of the Concord Planning Commission mapped our earlier walk on March 20th, and we concluded the boundary must be at the edge of where the ground drops down slightly and the Hunting Swamp begins. But we would still need to have someone with a professional quality GPS device find the exact location so a stake could be set into the ground.

Phase II - Possible Crossings Around the Pine Island Brook Wetland

The most challenging aspect of the entire trail system involves the area around the open wetland where the Pine Island Brook flows, and springtime when the area is at its wettest is the best time to view and work on its most challenging areas. That particular lowland region would require the most attention of the entire trail system, as it is the wettest area, and much of the remaining trail system would be on higher ground to the northwest. The map below gives a Google Earth sky view of the wetland in April, while the pretty autumn image on the right shows the southern part of the wetland, looking northward, while the brook is partially obscured and off to the left.



The partially-obscured area on the lower left side of the open wetland in the above map falls partly on the adjacent private property of Dena Rae and has a mostly solid old



abandoned beaver dam crossing that forms a natural bridge across the brook. It's a shorter route and provides relatively easy access through the forest with some bog bridging of logs and boards required for the wetter areas. But to use that route would require permission by the landowner, and even if such permission were granted, the beaver dam 'bridge' should be reinforced with dirt in some areas to allow stability and safety for common and frequent usage.

If the goal is to avoid crossing on a neighbor's private property, the right side of the wetland area which belongs to the Town will result in a longer and more challenging trail, but it would be the only other practical choice to create a way through the woods along the wetland's east and north edges. The path would be behind and to the right of the tall maple tree shown in the image to the right. From there, the path would continue



northward until the narrowest spot could be located to build a short bridge across the shallow Pine Island Brook to reach the opposite side. Even there, the somewhat higher ground is still marshy, as shown in the images below, and will need several bog bridges made of logs and boards heading toward the west over a distance of about 400 feet to where the 'lower farm trail' begins and eventually leads to higher ground.



A Plan of Action

With the approval of the Loudon Conservation Commission, following are some suggestions for making the trail on the right side of the wetland safer and easier to follow:

1. After the existing trail through the right of way meets the edge of the Hunting Swamp is where the Trail Cutters' work ought to resume, as some logs would need to be placed across the trail in some of the wetter areas, as shown in the two photos below:



2. The trail would continue through the trees along the right side of the open wetland area, and some of the smaller trees, branches and fallen trees would need to be removed if they are in the way of the path. It should be noted that after a heavy rain or in the early springtime when the area is at its wettest, the crossing may still become flooded for a while. An idea of what that dense, uneven area looks like is shown in the next two photos:



3. The following images show two possibilities for brook crossings:



The left image affords the advantage of using the fallen tree as a bracing for a bridge and is somewhat closer to the direction the trail will be going, whereas the right image shows a narrower area to cross. In either case, the depth of the brook isn't much deeper than a foot in most places.

4. Once the bridge is completed, the task of laying down bog bridges would come next.

An excellent video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EJGjUDCv9ak> shows a good example of how it's done.

An online article on the biology of bog bridges by Nature Groupie is also very informative: <https://naturegroupie.org/story/biology-bog-bridges>

Summary of Phase Two: To avoid crossing over an old beaver dam located further west on the adjacent private property owned by Dena Ray and to reach the higher and drier land to the west and northwest, a short, newly-cut trail would need to head north through the dense woods near the right edge of Pine Island Brook. At the narrowest and most easily-accessible spot, a small wooden bridge or a row of logs would need to be placed over the brook to access the other side. That woodland area contains uneven ground with puddles in some areas, necessitating a series of simple bog bridges made up of cut up logs and boards so as to avoid walking through any wet areas. It would need to extend westerly over a distance of about 400 feet until it reaches the 'lower farm trail', a little north of the orange boundary pin at the stone wall that separates Dena Rae's and Carl Savage's properties from the Town's property.

Phase Three: Most of the two miles of 'lower farm trail' and 'middle farm trail', along with their connecting paths, already exist pretty much intact. But the trail system needs to be widened in some places by using loppers and handsaws, and some larger trees that have fallen across the way will need to be cut up with a chain saw and moved out off of the trail. There are a couple of areas within the proposed triangular

half-mile 'highland trail loop' region where a trail can follow along the stone wall, and some large trees that have fallen across the proposed path, plus a few smaller trees may need to be removed, depending on the best route to follow between the moderately-spaced trees.