

## FISKE POND CONSERVATION AREA

The Fiske Pond Conservation Area is located in the southwest corner of Wendell, Massachusetts. This area represents a significant conservation opportunity for the Town of Wendell. The major feature of the 125-acre parcel is Fiske Pond, a 10-acre pond formed when Fiske Brook was dammed in the 19th century. Remnants of a sawmill and an intact stone dam are located at the south end of Fiske Pond. Fiske Brook and Skerry Brook also run through the property, and several unique habitats contribute to a wide range of ecosystems and biodiversity on the property.

The Fiske Pond Conservation Area contains species found both on the Atlantic Coastal Plain and on the Midwest Prairies. Several unique ecosystems exist, including oak and pine forest, meadow, a spruce bog, as well as a hemlock swamp. A variety of plant species exist around Fiske Pond and a study by wildlife biologist Sara Griesemer identified potential habitats for four-toed salamander, a species of Special Concern, as well as habitats for a wide range of other amphibian, avian, and mammalian species, including moose, kingfisher, spotted turtle, common snipe and great blue heron. These features, along with an undeveloped pond, make the Fiske Pond property an extraordinary conservation project.

The protection of Fiske Pond builds upon a corridor of permanently protected forest in and around Wendell, and contributes to the larger conservation area envisioned by the North Quabbin Regional Landscape Partnership to create a protected corridor between the Quabbin Reservoir and Wendell State Forest. The Fiske Pond Conservation Area expands an already contiguous forest network consisting of temporary protected open space (Chapter 61) and permanently protected open space within Wendell, including two blocks of DCR protected land and Wendell State Forest, town-owned land recently placed into permanent protection by town vote, as well as permanently protected State Forest lands in surrounding municipalities.

The Town of Wendell purchased the Fiske Pond property with funds from the Division of Conservation Services Self-help grant, for the purpose of passive recreation on the property. The Fiske Pond Conservation Area is accessible publicly via an entrance on West Street, which contains an area for parking. The Fiske Pond Conservation Area is intended to be used for swimming, hiking, cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, nature study, and other compatible passive recreation uses. The Town of Wendell conveyed a conservation restriction to Department of Conservation and Recreation that prohibits hunting, fishing, motorized vehicle use and commercial logging on the property.

## II. Legal Status of the Fiske Pond Conservation Area

The Town of Wendell purchased the Fiske Pond Conservation Area from Chickadees Retreat, Inc. in 2005, with partial reimbursement from the Division of Conservation Services Self-help Program. As a requirement of the Self-help Program, the Town placed the property into the care, custody, and control of the Conservation Commission under MGL Chapter 40, Section 8C. The Town of Wendell also conveyed a conservation restriction on the property to the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR). As such, the Fiske Pond Conservation Area is permanently protected open space, and any conversion in use or disposal of the property, or alteration of the conservation restriction, will trigger Article 97. This process requires approval of such conversion, disposal, or CR alteration by the Wendell Selectboard and Conservation Commission, a two-thirds Town vote, a two-thirds vote of the Massachusetts Legislature, and review by the Executive Office of Environmental Affairs (EOEA). In the event that such conversion, disposal or CR alteration occurs, EOEA may require the Town to place land of equal or greater conservation value into conservation.

## III. Site Description and Resource Inventory

The Fiske Pond Conservation Area is both and ecologically diverse and rich in floral and faunal diversity. Fiske Pond is located in the USGS topographic map Millers Falls quadrangle and it is located within the Connecticut River (Sawmill) Watershed, as are Fiske and Skerry Brooks. Fiske Brook is an important water input for Lake Wyola, and Fiske Pond represents a significant aquifer for the Town of Wendell. Fiske Pond was identified by the U.S. Department of Agriculture in 1975 as a potential water resource and it is one of six (6) potential or existing reservoirs located within the Sawmill River Watershed.

Historically, the Fiske Pond property was farmland. A dam on Fiske Brook led to the formation of Fiske Pond, and the remnants of a sawmill remain on the property adjacent to the dam structure. A farmhouse was also located on the property until destroyed by a fire in the 1960's. There is also evidence of an old gravel pit on the south end of the pond. The Fiske Pond property was under private ownership for over 40 years. The property was used for a variety of authorized and unauthorized purposes, including swimming, hiking, hunting, ATV and snowmobile use, and nature study. The property was most notably an unofficial swimming hole for Town residents.

## Land Use Goals

The Town of Wendell purchased the Fiske Pond Conservation Area to provide passive recreation opportunities for Wendell residents, while preserving and protecting the ecological integrity and biodiversity that make the area a place of special conservation interest. A conservation restriction conveyed to DCR allows passive recreation, however it contains prohibitions on hunting, fishing, commercial logging, overnight camping, and motorized vehicle use (except for emergency access or to maintain the property). The following land use goals were summarized in the conservation restriction:

- To retain the Premises predominantly in its natural, scenic and open condition while perpetuating low-impact passive recreation
- To protect the ecological integrity of Fiske Pond, a sand plain pond of statewide significance, and its uncommon plant communities
- To protect and conserve the natural resources of the Premises including Fiske Brook and Skerry Brook
- To protect, and promote the conservation of, forests, wetlands, soils, watercourses, ponds, scenic vistas, aquifers and water supplies, and wildlife
- To protect, maintain and increase biodiversity and natural communities by protecting and conserving core habitats and their supporting natural landscapes and waters
- To preserve and enhance surrounding conservation areas and un-fragmented open space, including: the Quabbin Reservoir lands, the Greater Wendell State Forest, Lake Wyola State Park, the Wendell Wildlife Management Area, and the Ames Hill and Ames Pond state-held conservation restriction protected lands
- To promote fish and wildlife conservation, native habitat protection and other conservation uses
- To provide passive recreation access to the general public for swimming and for pedestrian passage through designated portions of the premises and the quiet enjoyment and contemplation of its natural and scenic qualities
- To utilize the land for conservation and passive recreation purposes, such as hiking, walking, cross-country skiing, snowshoeing on designated nature trails, and unsupervised "at own risk" swimming in designated areas

### Pedestrian Opportunities

Hiking, snowshoeing, and cross-country skiing are likely recreational activities that vary depending on the season. The existing trail surrounding Fiske Pond facilitates these activities. The possibility of new trail construction could provide greater pedestrian access, if designed so as not to encroach on sensitive habitat or cause degradation of wetland area.

### Swimming and Boating

“At own risk” swimming is allowed in Fiske Pond. Opportunities for the use of non-motorized boats such as kayaks and canoes could provide excellent opportunities for wildlife viewing and recreation.

### Nature Study and Educational Programs

Since the Fiske Pond Conservation Area is unique in that it contains several habitats in a relatively small area, opportunities exist for individual or group nature study and educational programs. Such programs could include:

- birdwatching
- edible plant and/or mushroom identification walks
- tracking courses
- snowshoeing/cross-country skiing classes
- interpretive programs
- vernal pool study

### *Trails*

- “West Street Entrance”- this trail leads from the parking area, past an early succession field which offers birdwatching opportunities, to the “Loop Trail”.
- “Loop Trail”- This is the major trail on the property, and it forms a mile loop around and allows access to Fiske Pond, and intersects Fiske and Skerry Brooks.
- “Old Egypt Road Connector” provides entrance and exit through Old Egypt Road from western portion of property