

Geprags Park Management Plan

I. Introduction

The approximately 80 acres of Geprags Park is a matrix of forest, field, and wetland, providing outstanding opportunities for recreation, wildlife, and for maintaining the rural character of the town. As a public park, it is intended to accommodate a range of uses by the community, with the condition of this generous gift that it be limited to “*educational and recreational purposes*”. To guide this use, and in order to optimize opportunities and protect the resources that abound, the Hinesburg Conservation Commission (HCC) crafted a Park Management Plan in 1992. It was updated in 1999. This is the second update to the original plan.

This plan and subsequent park management has adopted a ‘Management Zone’ format. Management zones are displayed in the accompanying map. For each zone, the plan identifies Management Objectives, Allowed Uses, and Management Methods.

The Geprags Park Management Plan is intended as a dynamic document, to be updated by the HCC and endorsed by the Select Board every three to five years. It is the Commission’s hope/belief that this management philosophy will result in more comprehensive and efficient management that will enhance the park’s inherent value to the town and result in a higher level of use and enjoyment by the residents of Hinesburg.

While the Hinesburg Conservation Commission holds oversight responsibility, management of the park has been, and will continue to be a team effort. We particularly acknowledge the Hinesburg Trail Committee’s partnership and tireless efforts in maintaining the park trail system.

II. Park History

In 1991, approximately 80 acres was gifted to the Town of Hinesburg by the last survivor of the Geprags family. The Hinesburg Selectboard agreed that the Conservation Commission should have oversight and management of Geprags Community Park.

III. Management Units

Zone 1

Description: Zone 1 consists of 22 acres. It is adjacent to the parking area which serves as the only public access point to the park. As a result, it receives the highest levels of use. It hosts a number of destination facilities, including the restored Geprags Barn, Ted’s Hill (the town destination for family sledding), and trail access to scenic overlooks. Zone 1 includes a diverse array of topography, soils and plant cover. Much of zone 1 is maintained as open field and shrub dominated cover, to en-

hance view corridors and to acknowledge this land's agricultural history. The 4.5 acre field is located on a relatively flat terrace 250 ft from the parking area. The predominant soil is Georgia Stony Loam 3-8%, which is classified as a Prime Agricultural Soil. The adjacent areas that are not mowed are transitioning to young forest. Typical of transitional plant cover in the Champlain Valley, these areas are colonized by a high percentage of exotic/invasive plants. The trails in this zone are wide and usually grass-covered, offering relatively easy trail access. There are two scenic overlooks with benches, affording panoramic views to the south and west.

In the early 2010's, Audubon Vermont guided habitat restoration efforts to enhance Golden-winged and Blue-winged Warbler habitat in this zone. These efforts have been rewarded by numerous warbler sightings each year, and the park continues to be a focus for shrubland bird habitat restoration in the Champlain Valley (see Management Objective 1.3 below).

Management Objectives:

- 1.1 Accommodate a wide array of public uses
- 1.2 Continue to promote trail use, highlighting scenic overlooks
- 1.3 Continue management of shrubland bird habitat
- 1.4 Maintain winter access to Ted's Hill

Allowed Uses: hiking, dog walking, nature viewing, sledding

Potential/Permitted Uses: community agricultural/agroforestry enterprises, event hosting at barn

Management Methods:

1A. Maintain trails and overlook to optimize public access. Mow trails 2+ times per season. Mowing will be executed with volunteers, paid contractors, or a combination of the two, and will be timed to minimize impact upon nesting birds. Evaluate view corridors at overlooks 1 time per season and cut brush and saplings as needed to maintain both views and access. Employ volunteers, paid contractors, or a combination of the two.

1B. Evaluate entire trail network and public use areas for potential hazards including hazard trees and noxious weeds. Evaluate trails on steep grades for erosion and invest in trail enhancements as warranted.

1C. Inspect wooden structures (benches, bridges) for signs of wear and/or decay. Perform maintenance, repair, or replacement as required for proper use and public safety.

1D. Provide clear signage to inform park visitors of intended uses and policies.

1E. Work with Audubon Vermont to maintain and enhance bird habitat. Every three years, meet with Audubon Vermont and/or VT Fish & Wildlife to evaluate vegetation cover.

1F. Maintain bluebird houses in north end of field by cleaning each fall and repairing as needed.

1G. Solicit proposals to lease a portion of the land to agriculture/agroforestry interests. Proposals must not impact other allowed uses, must not degrade soils or water quality, and must comply with all applicable Vermont Agency of Agriculture Food & Markets and Department of Environmental Conservation regulations. Deference will be offered to those proposals that encourage viewing by

park visitors and enhance their understanding of these operations. Acceptance of proposals require a 75% approval rate by members of HCC. If approved, the applying party will enter into a contract with the town.

1H. Evaluate vegetation cover on Ted's Hill each fall; mow to keep clear for winter sledding.

Zone 2

Description: Zone 2 comprises the eastern portion of the park. It is primarily forested, northern hardwood forest community, with significant presence of woody exotic/invasives. The dominant soil is Farmington Extremely Rocky Loam, 20-60% slope. The aesthetics and habitat value are enhanced by steep slopes and prominent rock outcrops.

There are multiple trails which are used regularly by hikers, dog walkers, and birders.

Management Objectives:

- 2.1 Promote trail use
- 2.2 Monitor health of canopy and exotic/invasive plant burden

Allowed Uses: on-trail hiking, dog walking, nature viewing

Methods:

2A. Evaluate entire trail network and public use areas for potential hazards including hazard trees and noxious weeds. Evaluate trails on steep grades for erosion and invest in trail enhancements as warranted.

2B. Continue to perform trail maintenance annually with volunteer work crew.

2C. Visit forest with County Forester and seek recommendations for management

Zone 3

Description: Zone 3 is an 11 acre parcel in the center of the park, and is most visible to commuters on Shelburne Falls Road. Soils are classified as Hydric, dominated by Covington Silty Clay. Hydric soils are wet; they have a continuously high water table and in their natural state are associated with wetland plant communities. Covington has a 'Statewide' agricultural rating.

Traditionally, this unit has been managed as open field and mowed each fall. In 2016, a detailed wetland delineation was conducted in association with the Vermont Gas pipeline project. As a result, it was determined that the majority of Zone 3 is Class II wetland or wetland buffer, which falls under the jurisdiction of the Vermont DEC Wetlands Program. Mowing Class 2 wetlands in Vermont is not an accepted practice, and was ceased as a result. The Conservation Commission is working with DEC Wetlands Program to establish a sound management protocol for this zone.

Since cessation of mowing, there has been a robust response by plant community through natural recruitment. A diverse plant community is emerging. Key components include:

- Healthy population of *Carex trichocarpa*, or hairy sedge, designated by the Vermont Natural Heritage program as an uncommon species (S3 occurrence).

- Native dogwoods and viburnums
- Strong recruitment of green ash. This is a common component of a forested wetland. However, this will change the visual character of the park, and in light of the presence of emerald ash borer in Vermont, may justify some level of management.
- Exotic/Invasive Plants: there are emerging populations of buckthorn, honeysuckle, and poison parsnip, and established stands of reed canary grass and phragmites.

Zone 3 hosts a VELCO electric utility right of way (ROW). The VELCO Management Plan dictates management of the ROW which includes periodic brush hogging.

3A/3B designation: 3A, as indicated on the attached map, has traditionally been under park oversight. 3B, while clearly within the park boundaries, has been managed as a hay field by adjacent landowners.

Management Objectives:

- 3.1 Reestablish and maintain wetland and upland natural communities to support water quality and wildlife habitat.
- 3.2 Ensure jurisdictional and functional wetland buffers are intact, and management methods are in compliance with Vermont wetland regulations
- 3.3 Maintain existing trail route
- 3.4 Incorporate zone 3B into park oversight
- 3.5 Work to remove abandoned barbed wire fence
- 3.6 Maintain or remove bird houses along fence line

Allowed Uses: on-trail hiking without dogs, nature viewing

Potential Permitted Uses: snowmobile passage north-south in power line right of way.

Methods:

3A. Trails: evaluate trails for public hazards; instability, hazard trees, and noxious weeds. Annual trail maintenance; wet areas should be monitored, methods implemented to avoid pugging and erosion. Add bog bridges to trail segments that are persistently wet. Trails should be mowed a minimum of 2 times per season. Control noxious weeds that may pose a public health risk.

3B. Monitor for natural plant succession. Implement control of emerging woody invasives.

3C. Consult with VTDEC Wetlands Program and conservation partners to establish vegetation management plan.

3D. Restrict dogs from zone 3A. Restoration of the plant community within this wetland complex will encourage breeding of birds on or near ground level, which will be vulnerable to dog activity. Establish educational signage to further this goal.

Zone 4

Description: Zone 4 is 22 acres, and is a matrix of riparian, wetland, and upland plant communities. An unnamed tributary to the LaPlatte River runs north to south through this unit. The land generally slopes west to east (high to low) as it approaches the stream corridor. Soils are dominated by Covington Silty Clay, which is poorly drained and has a high capacity for run-off. Much of the plant cover is transitioning from shrub to forest. It provides good habitat for numerous species, and currently is well-suited for warblers.

The plant communities are comprised of a diverse mix of native shrubs (dogwood, viburnum, alder) and young trees (white pine, red cedar, red maple) with a notably low incidence of woody exotic/invasive species.

An existing 600 ft Hill Spur trail links the 'main' trail in zone 3 with the woods trail in zone 5.

Management Objectives:

- 4.1 Monitor plant communities and treat exotic/invasive plant infestations
- 4.2 Consider management to maintain transitional scrub-shrub habitat
- 4.3 Maintain existing trail
- 4.4 Restrict/discourage dog use, especially in spring and early summer

Allowed Uses: on-trail hiking without dogs, nature viewing

Methods:

4A. Evaluate trails for public hazards; instability, hazard trees, and noxious weeds. Annual trail maintenance; wet areas should be monitored, methods implemented to avoid pugging and erosion. Add bog bridges to trail segments that are persistently wet. Trails should be mowed 2 times minimum per season. Control noxious weeds that may pose a public health risk.

4B. Every three years, meet with Audubon Vermont and/or VT ANR to evaluate vegetation cover. Manage vegetation through selective cutting to attain agreed upon objectives. Look to employ a range of methods and access available funding sources.

Zone 5

Description: Zone 5 is small, at under 5 acres, but hosts the best example of Rich Northern Hardwood Forest Community in the park. The canopy contains large sugar maples, bitternut hickory, black cherry. The forest floor supports a diverse plant community with numerous ferns, sedges and wildflowers. The topography is dominated by steep slopes with many rock outcrops.

There is a 1500 ft loop trail which is a wooded trail, narrower than most in the park with steep sections. There is also a spur trail that extends to the northern border of the park.

Management Objectives:

- 5.1 Maintain forested natural communities to support water quality and wildlife habitat
- 5.2 Improve trails for better recreational access and reduced erosion

Allowed Uses: on-trail hiking *without dogs*, nature viewing

Methods:

5A. Evaluate trails for public hazards; instability, hazard trees, and noxious weeds. Annual trail maintenance; clear fallen trees and debris. Address steep areas and attendant erosion. Improve trail blazing/markings. The trail loop does not require mowing.

5B. Monitor for exotic invasive plant infestations. Undertake control as warranted.

5C. Evaluate canopy for forest health, including large ash trees. Consider implementing mast tree release for improved wildlife habitat.

Zone 6

Description: Zone 6 contains the access road, parking area, shed, and information kiosk.

Management Objectives:

- 6.1 Maintain roadway and parking area surfaces
- 6.2 Ensure park information and notices are visible to park visitors

Methods:

- 6A. Work with town road crew to ensure surfaces are maintained at regular intervals throughout all seasons
- 6B. Add sign at main trailhead north of parking lot with key information, and to direct visitors to kiosk for trail maps and park policies
- 6C. Monitor parking area for trash and items that could pose hazards to visitors

IV. Park Regulations

The Commission adopts the following regulations to encourage passive recreational activities while preserving and protecting the Park in a natural state for everyone to enjoy. Violation of any of the foregoing regulations shall be punishable by a fine. Any violation continuing beyond a single day may be considered a separate offense hereunder. The alleged violator may request, in writing, a hearing to discuss the misuse of the Park. Enforcement of the regulations for the Park will be undertaken by the Hinesburg Police.

Please help us maintain and protect the wildlife, vegetation, beauty, and serenity of Geprags Community Park by observing these rules:

- 1) No motorized vehicles are permitted with the exception of public safety vehicles such as Police and Fire department vehicles for emergency purposes and for enforcement of these Rules, and vehicles on the premises for maintenance or similar purposes under the supervision of the Conservation Commission.
- 2) No fires permitted without written approval of the Conservation Commission.
- 3) No overnight camping without written approval of the Conservation Commission.
- 4) No use of power tools is permitted unless authorized by the Conservation Commission.
- 5) No hunting or discharge of firearms is permitted.

- 6) No re-routing, maintaining or altering trails without permission of the Conservation Commission and Trails Committee.
- 7) Do not litter. Carry out what you bring in – no trash receptacles are provided.
- 8) No person shall cut, break, remove, deface, defile or ill-use any object/structure (natural or man-made), fence, or sign or have possession of any part thereof.
- 9) No consumption of alcoholic beverages is permitted.
- 10) There shall be no disturbance or alteration of waterways, including of the banks, bed and vegetation thereon and therein, without the written permission of the Conservation Commission. Alterations include erection of anything that acts to dam the flow in any way.
- 11) Use of paintballs, pellet guns and sling shots is prohibited.
- 12) No structure of any type (such as, but not limited to, a lean-to, bridge, handrail or bench) may, or shall be constructed without the written permission of the Conservation Commission.
- 13) Pets must be under the owner's control at all times, and must comply with all relevant town ordinances. It shall be the duty of each person who owns, possesses, or controls a pet to remove and dispose of any feces left by the pet.
- 14) No landscape debris, grass clippings, tree cuttings or other similar material shall be dumped at the Park.
- 15) Installation of memorials or displays is prohibited without the written permission of the Conservation Commission.
- 16) No personal property shall be left at the Park without written authorization from the Conservation Commission.
- 17) Parking shall only be in designated areas.
- 18) Do not remove, cut, pick or damage any trees, shrubs, flowers, grass or other flora.

Anyone who observes any violation of these rules is asked to assist the Hinesburg Conservation Commission by notifying the Town Administrator, members of the Hinesburg Conservation Commission, or the Hinesburg Police.

V. Park-wide Policies

- **Wild Parsnip** *Pastinaca sativa* is an exotic/invasive plant found throughout the park and the Champlain Valley. For many, skin contact with the plant can result in persistent, painful burns. The Hinesburg Conservation Commission will take measures to alert visitors to the presence of parsnip in high-use areas (primarily zone 1). Eradication with currently available management options would require years of persistence and labor. HCC may undertake management practices to reduce the presence of the plant.

- **Dogs 1** - Dogs are allowed in zones 1, 2, and 6. They must be leashed and restricted to marked trails. Dogs must be under the complete control of the owner at all times.
- **Dogs 2** - Dog feces does not belong in the park. It diminishes the enjoyment by other park visitors and serves as a potential health hazard to other dogs and wildlife. While such an ordinance would be near impossible to enforce, it is our hope that park users will enthusiastically adopt this practice. Picking up after your dog not only reduces the burden, it sets a positive example for other dog owners as well.
- **Harvesting of plants and animals** is not permitted without written approval of HCC, and must comply with all state and federal laws as applicable.
- **Education Initiatives** and other activities that require increased park access are subject to written approval by HCC
- **Utility Rights of Way** - The Park is subject to two utility ROWs. These agreements were negotiated by the utilities (Vermont Gas and VELCO), the state of Vermont, and the Hinesburg Select Board. Accordingly, HCC has no official role in the management activities that occur within the ROW.



LEGEND

- Parcels (Standardized)
- Roads**
 - Interstate
 - Principal Arterial
 - Minor Arterial
 - Major Collector
 - Minor Collector
 - Local
 - Not part of function Classification S
- Waterbody
- Stream
- Parcels (Non-Standardized)
- Town Boundary



1: 7,383

September 3, 2018



NOTES

Zone 1 - multiuse
 Zones 2,5 - forested trails
 Zones 3a, 3b, 4 - wetland restoration
 Zone 6 - access and parking
 Created by Hinesburg Cons. Comm.

375.0 0 188.00 375.0 Meters

WGS_1984_Web_Mercator_Auxiliary_Sphere

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1" = 615 Ft. 1cm = 74 Meters

THIS MAP IS NOT TO BE USED FOR NAVIGATION

DISCLAIMER: This map is for general reference only. Data layers that appear on this map may or may not be accurate, current, or otherwise reliable. ANR and the State of Vermont make no representations of any kind, including but not limited to, the warranties of merchantability, or fitness for a particular use, nor are any such warranties to be implied with respect to the data on this map.

Geprags Park Public Trail Map



hinesburg area recreation trails

www.hinesburg.org/hart.html
map date 11/22/2017



0 150 300 Feet