



Town of Swampscott
OFFICE OF THE
Conservation Commission
Elihu Thomson Administrative Building
22 Monument Avenue
Swampscott, Massachusetts 01907

MEMBERS
Tonia Bandrowicz, Chair
Colleen Hitchcock, Vice Chair
Jonathan Grabowski
Monica Lagerquist
Richard Simmons
Randall Hughes
Scott Saunders

STAFF
Marissa Meaney, Conservation Agent

SWAMPSCOTT CONSERVATION COMMISSION

VOLUNTEER TRAIL MAINTENANCE POLICY

While not having extensive conservation land, Swampscott does have several parcels that have been protected in perpetuity and have been placed in the care of the Conservation Commission. These include: Harold King Forest, Charles Ewing Woods, Palmer Pond, Muskrat Pond, Linscott Park, and the Blythswood Easement (off Littles Point Road).

Protection of these areas does not end at simply safeguarding the property from development, rather there is a continuing need involving maintenance, monitoring, and care of those properties. Recognizing that "[g]ood public access to conservation properties enhances recreational and educational opportunities for children and adults, while building public support for land conservation," the Massachusetts Association of Conservation Commissions Handbook notes that some communities have organized trail committees that work closely with the conservation commissions in maintaining conservation properties, while others rely heavily on groups of dedicated citizens.

As many communities have done, the Swampscott Conservation Commission is interested in working closely with volunteer organizations to carry out stewardship activities on town-owned conservation land and to work with other partners, such as the DPW, to steward other open space that is not under the town's Conservation Commission.

In recent years, the Conservation Commission has worked with organizations such as the Girl and Boy Scouts and the Swampscott Conservancy in conducting trail maintenance. In order to assist these groups, as well as other groups that may be interested in acting as stewards, the Commission has put together this Volunteer Trail Maintenance Policy.

What can Volunteer Stewards do to help?

- Visit conservation areas to monitor for potential issues and notifying the Conservation Commission of issues that are too big for the volunteer stewards to handle, such as downed trees over trails, illegal dumping, and encroachment.
- Picking up and properly disposing of trash.
- Volunteering on scheduled workdays.
- Organize and/or lead a workday project.

- Pruning back branches and removing other blockages to established trails.
- Propose ideas to the Town to existing conservation land (e.g., a new trail, invasive species removal).
- Lead a walk to introduce people to conservation land.

GUIDELINES

Volunteer stewards can help care for conservation lands by performing low-key maintenance on a frequent basis. Much of this maintenance can be done individually during casual walks while other work can be dealt with during organized workdays. Some common efforts that volunteer stewards can perform are listed below.

Authorization to Participate in Trail Maintenance Program

Individual wishing to participate in the Trail Maintenance Program need to sign a "RELEASE AND ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF LIABILITY IN CONNECTION WITH TRAIL MAINTENANCE PROGRAM" form (see below).

Permission

For light pruning/trimming and removal of downed limbs or trees across trails, volunteer stewards can proceed without seeking approval from the Conservation Commission as long as the trail is on conservation property (if questionable, please contact the Commission). For larger projects, such as creating new trails or removal of downed trees, volunteer stewards should contact the Commission to discuss the project.

1. TRASH CLEAN-UP

Regular clean-ups by individuals or organized work groups is an important activity that stewards can perform. The Conservation Commission and DPW staff can work with volunteer stewards in organizing regularly scheduled or specially designated workdays for trash clean-up of trails. (Note, that if volunteer stewards encounter hazardous materials they should mark and record the location and contact the Conservation Commission and/or DPW.)

***Helpful tools for trash clean up:** work gloves, trash bags, clothing that covers arms and legs, water proof boots / old shoes (if wet areas), old backpack for carrying litter.*

2. ROUTINE TRAIL MAINTENANCE

Volunteer stewards can assist with routine trail maintenance including the following:

- Clearing downed trees and limbs that block established trails or pose a safety hazard.
- Pruning/trimming vegetation that overhands trails.
- Trimming vegetation around signs and kiosks so that they are clearly visible.
- Removing invasive species.

Some **don'ts** to keep in mind:

- Don't rake the trails as leaves, pine needles, and other organic matter build forest soil, absorb water and prevent erosion.
- Don' apply herbicides or pesticides as they must be applied by a certified applicator and only with appropriate approvals.
- Don't mark or blaze trails unless approved by the Conservation Commission.
- Contact the Conservation Commission before creating new trails.

***Helpful tools:** Folding hand saw and pocket pruners, heavy duty loppers, rake to remove cut stems from the trail, old hand saw to cut saplings close to the ground without dulling a new one with soil/sand, pole pruner to cut overhead branches, work gloves, clothing that covers arms and legs to protect again thorns and poison ivy.*

Trail Appearance

A well-maintained trail should look natural, with few visible cuts on bordering vegetation. All cut branches and brush should be moved well off the trail with the cut end pointing away from the trail.

Trail Width and Weight

Trails should generally be trimmed to the following widths from ground level to the highest overhead reach while standing on the ground:

- Single-track with normal trailside vegetation: 4 feet (both elbows outstretched).
- Single-track if trailside vegetation is thorny, allergenic (poison ivy), rapidly growing, or invasive: 6 feet (both arms outstretched).
- Double-track minimum: 8 feet.

Better visibility around curves reassures users about what is ahead and reduces conflicts between visitors. By selectively pruning growth on the insides of curves, good visibility can be maintained without overly widening trails.

Intersections are a common stopping point and should be trimmed wider than trails to accommodate visitors stopping to rest, navigate, or socialize at such intersections.

In order that trails remain passable all winter, overhead clearance should be as high as can be achieved by workers standing on the ground (approximately 8 feet) to allow for deep snow cover and branches weighted down with snow and ice.

Removing Blowdowns

Blown down trees and limbs should be removed as soon as possible from trails where they present a hazard of falling on visitors or block the trail in such a way that would encourage visitors to create new trails around them. Cut deadwood should be left to decompose near where it fell but off the trail. Blowdowns that are not hazardous and do not completely obstruct very rugged trails can be left in place if they contribute to the character of the trail.

Safety During Trail Maintenance

While working on trails, the following guidelines should be followed:

- Thorny cuttings should be scrupulously removed from the trail to protect dogs, small children and bicycle tires.
- Saplings should be cut as close to the ground as possible to avoid creating tripping hazards.
- Limbs should be cut back to the main trunk or branch wherever possible to reduce the risk to visitors injuring themselves on protrusions.
- When not in use, sharp tools should be kept away from the trail, in a visible location, and with the sharp edges covered to safeguard against accidents.
- **Use of power equipment is not approved under this policy.**

Invasive Species Removal

Invasive species pose a significant threat to the natural habitat. Invasive species are plants, animals, or other organisms that (1) are non-native (or alien) to the ecosystem under consideration; and (2) whose introduction causes or is likely to cause economic or environmental harm or harm to human health (see National Species Information Center at www.invasivespeciesinfo.gov and Massachusetts Prohibited Plant List at <https://www.mass.gov/massachusetts-prohibited-plant-list>

Invasive species should be eliminated where possible or, at a minimum, their expansion prevented, which often is a labor-intensive effort and requires repeated attempts over several years. Removal should be followed up by monitoring and, in some cases, planting of native species or other forms of restoration.

Some areas where invasive species are present on Swampscott conservation land include: Palmer Pond (Phragmites); Ewing Woods (Burning Bush); the entrance to Harold King Forest (Japanese Knotweed). Other common invasives throughout town

owned properties include Garlic mustard, Oriental Bittersweet, Multiflora Rose, European and Glossy buckthorn. (See chart below for common invasive species in Massachusetts)

3. MONITORING AND REPORTING

On normal visits to conservation areas, volunteer stewards should take note of any observations, include a precise location description, and submit them to the appropriate office.

What Volunteers Should Look for When Monitoring

- Unusual changes in natural or human-made features.
- Unusual wildlife, plants, or other notable natural features.
- Evidence of illegal or illicit activities, such as underage drinking, fires, unauthorized motor vehicles, hunting or trapping, shooting, or disposal of pollutants.
- Improper cutting or destroying of vegetation.
- Large deposits of trash or landscaping debris.
- Vandalism.
- Digging of Holes.
- Any type of construction.
- Encroachment onto conservation land by neighboring properties.
- Overgrown trails that the volunteers cannot trim.
- Trails that are chronically wet or muddy outside of the spring wet season.
- Other issues that you consider worth reporting.

For Emergency situation, such as personal injuries or crimes in action – report immediately to 911.

How to Report:

Conservation Commission:

SwampscottConservancy@gmail.com

Swampscott Conservancy, PO Box 637, Swampscott, MA 01907

Swampscott Department of Public Works:

22 Monument Ave, Swampscott, MA 01907

(781) 596-8860

Invasive Plants in Massachusetts

Black Swallow-wort *Cynanchum lundatum*



Black Locust *Robinia pseudoacacia*



Garlic Mustard *Alliaria petiolata*



Common Buckthorn *Rhamnus cathartica*



Asiatic Bittersweet *Celastrus orbiculatus*



Common Reed *Phragmites australis*



Japanese Barberry *Barberis thunbergii*



Morone's Honeysuckle *Lonicera moroniifolia*



Japanese Knotweed *Polygonum cuspidatum*



Glossy Buckthorn *Fraxinus alba*



Multiflora Rose *Rosa multiflora*



Autumn Olive *Elaeagnus umbellata*



Species in the FALL

Species in the SPRING



To learn more about these invasive plants visit <http://www.MassInvaders.com>

**RELEASE
AND ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF LIABILITY
IN CONNECTION WITH TRAIL MAINTENANCE PROGRAM**

I, _____, acknowledge that there are certain risks of injury associated with the maintenance and improvement of trails. I further acknowledge and agree that my participation in the trail maintenance program is my free and voluntary act and, and that I assume full responsibility for my own safety during my participation.

In consideration of my being allowed to participate in the trail maintenance program, I, on behalf of myself and my agents, predecessors, successors, insurers, heirs and assigns, hereby release, forever discharge and agree to hold harmless the Town of Swampscott, its officers, employees, and agents from any liability for any and all loss, damage, costs, claims, expenses and compensation arising out of any bodily injury or property damage I receive or incur in connection with my participation in the trail maintenance program.

Signature: _____

Print Name: _____

Date: _____