

Announcing Conservation Commission's Campaign to Protect a New Town Forest



Overview:

Over the past year, the Stoddard Conservation Commission and a number of interested town residents have learned about the sale of 40 acres of ecologically significant, undeveloped land with 4,000 feet of shoreline at the southern end of Highland Lake. The Conservation Commission has investigated what could be done to acquire, protect and manage this land for the benefit of the residents and camp owners of the Town, and to preserve the land's outstanding wildlife habitat and other natural resource values. The asking price for this property is \$1.3 million. In recent weeks, the Conservation Commission has obtained a signed Option Agreement from the landowner to purchase the property by June 2023, with funds to be raised by grants and contributions in the coming months.

With the full support of the Town of Stoddard Selectmen, the faculty and board of the James Faulkner Elementary School, the Davis Public Library, the Stoddard Historical Society, the Highland Lake Unified Association and interested townspeople, the Conservation Commission has drafted a proposed Management Plan for "The Little Big Forest" that would provide outstanding opportunities for (JFES) outdoor educational and nature based studies, accessible walking trails, public access to the lake for canoes and kayaks, fishing dock and other recreational activities that could be managed in ways that protect the unique character and ecological values of the land. Multiple grant proposals are being developed to acquire needed financing for the purchase of this property, including a request to the US Forest Service for \$600,000 and a proposed LCHIP grant of \$500,000, as well as funding requests to foundations and individuals. Below is a summary of important facts:

Option Agreement:

- Purchase price: \$1,300,000 (justified by a preliminary appraisal report). Goal is to fund-raise the entire amount (plus stewardship costs) ***at no cost to taxpayers!***
- 1st Option Fee (May 9-December 31, 2022) requires a \$25,000 non-refundable fee, applicable towards the purchase price; 75% of the funds must be raised or received commitments for by Dec. 1st or owner could terminate the agreement;
- 2nd Option Fee (January 1, 2023-May 29, 2023) requires a 2nd \$25,000 fee non-refundable BUT applicable towards the purchase price;

- If we are short of the fundraising goal, at the May 2023 town meeting voters can discuss course of action to close funding shortage (for example: appropriate the difference; offer a bridge loan or a repayable loan with terms and rates, giving the conservation commission additional time to repay through continued fundraising);
- Close on June 30th 2023.

Location of Forest: Between Walker Rd. and Eva Lane (both on West side of Shedd Hill). It is readily accessible by foot, boat, and car.

Forest Features:

- ❖ Contains 4,000 feet of *rare* undeveloped shoreline which is approximately 4% of the Highland Lake shoreline: when combined with the nearby Pickerel Cove, 10% of Highland Lake shoreline will be protected;
- ❖ Three lots totaling 40-acres; existing forest appears to never have been cut, pastured, or plowed; dozens of white pine trees are 150-200 years ranging in size from 24" to 40"-inches in diameter and 100+ feet tall; one 40"-inch red maple estimated to be 250+/- years old;
- ❖ Undisturbed soils are rich in biota and mycorrhizal fungi, typically found in old-growth forests;
- ❖ Property provides important wildlife habitat and is a wildlife corridor that connects protected lands on both sides of Highland Lake;
- ❖ Sheltered coves provide safe refuge for several species of ducks, geese, loons, blue herons, moose, deer, fish, otter, and beaver frequent these waters;
- ❖ Bald eagles and osprey use super canopy white pines to perch in;

The Objective:

- ❖ To protect the unique character and ecological values of the land and undeveloped shore;
- ❖ Provide opportunities for JFES to expand their existing nature based curriculum in stimulating new ways;
- ❖ A well-built rustic cabin could readily be transformed into a community center for outdoor education and public field trips to talk about a variety of natural resource issues;
- ❖ Forest would be an excellent demonstration forest.



Town Benefits

- Existing well-built rustic cabin could be converted into classroom enabling JFES to expand their outdoor, nature based curriculum surrounded by a 40-acre living forest laboratory;
- Easily accessible to residents from both land and water with options for a small parking lot(s) and waterfront dock (for shallow draft boats);

- Public access to Highland Lake: A launch site for canoe/kayak field trips to Pickerel Cove and the town forest of Pioneer Lake/Stoddard Rocks/Williams Old-Growth forest; A destination for canoeists and kayakers as a way to stretch their legs;
- Well suited for ADA friendly trail to scenic outlooks;
- Could host a primitive/low-impact overnight campsite for youth groups, JFES outings, and other area groups like Kroka;
- Dock available for fishing.
- **UNFORTUNATELY**, the property does not lend itself to swimming or a public beach (because of shallow coves, riddled with stumps; lake has a very organic, mucky bottom)

The Name: “The Little Big Forest”. While little in size (“only 40 acres”), it has BIG trees; BIG undeveloped shoreline (4,000 feet); it has BIG potential; we have BIG plans for it; and it has a BIG price tag!

Community Support

- ✓ **BOS September 27, 2021:** “The Selectmen applaud your efforts and offer our support in any capacity within our scope”;
- ✓ **Island Pond Assn November 23, 2021:** “It is with great enthusiasm that our board supports your intended purchase of the 40 acres of land off Walker Road”;
- ✓ **Highland Lake Unified Assn November 29, 2021:** “It is in the HLUA opinion that this parcel of land and its associated waterfront would be very beneficial to remain as open space for the health of the surrounding environment and watershed”;
- ✓ **Eva Lane Assn January 6, 2022:** “Protecting this property represents and extraordinary natural, recreational, and educational resource for the current and future residents of Stoddard....a treasure that is literally on our doorstep”;
- ✓ **Davis Library January 7, 2022:** “This forest will provide a wonderful extension of the library’s facilities, enabling it to offer outdoor programs such as animal tracking, identification of trees and mushrooms, photography and astronomy while increasing environmental awareness and responsibility”;
- ✓ **JFES School Board February 22, 2022:** “JFES has had a long-standing commitment to outdoor education.... the Board is very excited at the prospect of adding this forest to the list of local resources that can support the educational mission and values of JFES”;
- ✓ **Stoddard Historical Society February 28, 2022:** “This property, as one of the few large undeveloped and not formally conserved pieces of land on the Highland Lake, could be used educationally to illustrate important elements of Stoddard history”.
- ✓ **UNH Cooperative Extension January 6, 2022:** “This forest, right in the heart of town, would serve as a wonderful resource to demonstrate natural systems uninterrupted by agricultural clearing or extensive timber harvesting. Our Forestry & Wildlife Program, at the University of NH Cooperative Extension, is excited to work with the Town to provide educational opportunities... this forest is truly a hidden gem.

Source of Funding

- On January 6th a \$600,000 grant application was submitted to the USFS Community Forest Project. Results of grant will be announced in June 2022;
- LCHIP invited the town to apply for a \$500,000 grant due June 22, 2022. Results of the grant application to be announced in November 2022;
- Seek funding NHDES ARM grant;
- Seek funding from other foundations: on-going

Private Fundraising Effort: An unexpected, upfront cost of a \$25,000 option fee became a requirement to obtain a signed option agreement. An email sent on March 10th requesting donations for the deposit generated over \$32,000. We would NOT have an agreement without this amazing response.

We need to continue an aggressive local fundraising effort to generate additional revenue for the following associated on-going (unbudgeted) expenses:

- A second \$25,000 deposit due January 1, 2022;
- Appraisal~\$8,000 (due this June/July) ;
- Surveying~\$5,000 (field work conducted in May);
- Title Work~\$300 (due this June);
- Continued legal expenses~\$5,000+
- PR, Administrative~\$5,000
- Stewardship fund (\$50,000??? To be determined)

Future Fundraising Events

- JFES Movie Night scheduled for Friday, May 20th, 7:30 pm at JFES (student initiated);
- Planning on several "Wine & Cheese" gatherings hosted by interested lake camp owners;
- Presentations to lake and road Associations and other groups, as identified and requested;
- Mail campaign to lake residents;
- GoFundMe site is activated; Social Media (FB) posts

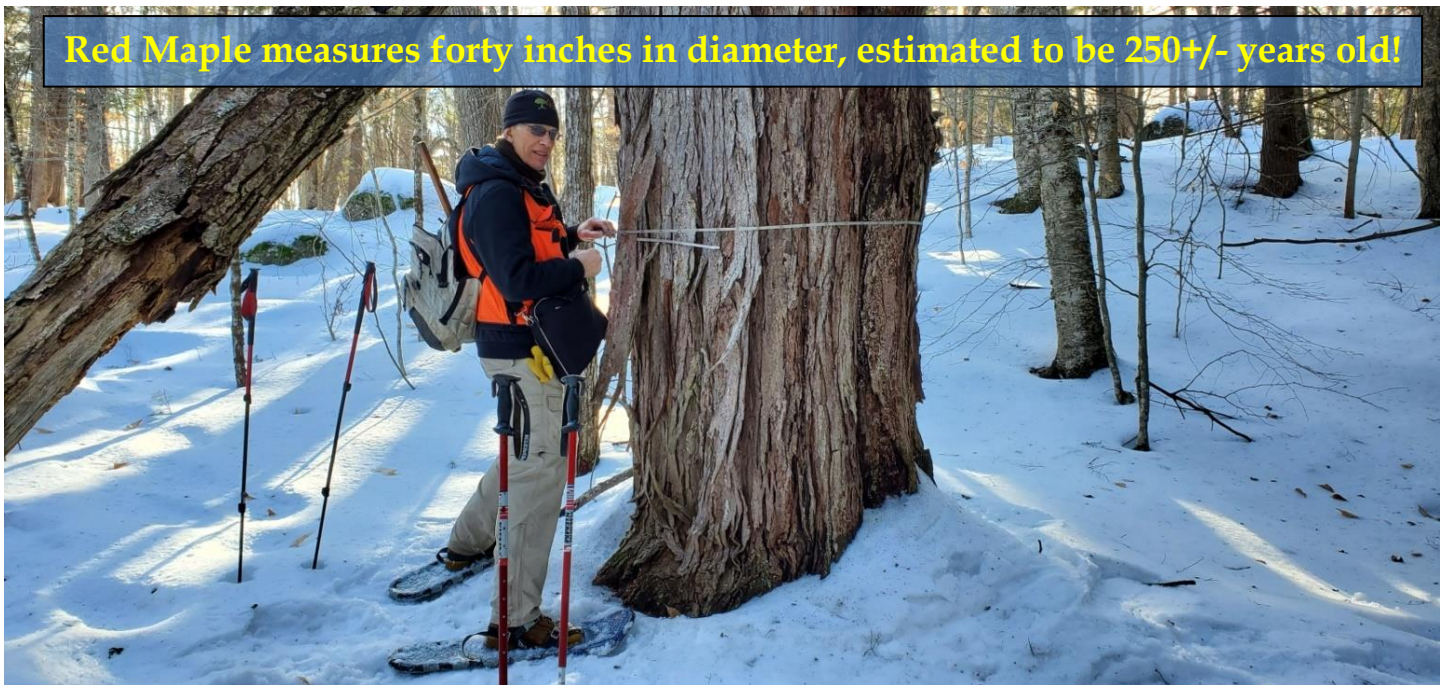
Tax-deductible donations can be made to:

Town of Stoddard,
Attn: Conservation Commission ~ Treasurer,
1450 Route 123 North, Stoddard, NH 03464-4153

For further information **OR to be included on the email list**, contact Geoff Jones, chair Stoddard conservation commission at:

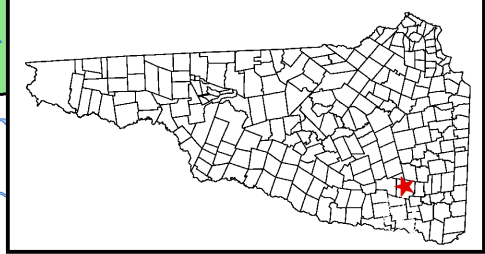
geoffreytjones@gmail.com

Tel. 603-446-3439



Red Maple measures forty inches in diameter, estimated to be 250+/- years old!

The Little Big Forest Ecological Reserve & Education Center Stoddard, NH



- The Little Big Forest
- Decade Land Was Protected
- 1980
- 1990
- 2000
- 2010
- OTHER Conslands
- Non-Conservation Land
- JF Elementary School
- Lake/Pond/Reservoir
- Public Boat Launch
- Wilson Dock
- Peirce woods roads
- Peirce & Town Forest Trails
- M-S Greenway
- Andorra Hiking Trails
- Cahill Trails
- State Roads
- Stoddard Boundary Line

