

Appendix 11 History and Accomplishments 1987 - 2008

In 1987, the Town of Harpswell developed a Comprehensive Plan with the goals listed in the box below that relate to open space. The Harpswell Conservation Commission used this plan to do an analysis of our accomplishments as a town in the last 21 years in the preservation of open space.

From the 1987 Comprehensive Plan

Section V Community land use goals regarding open space:

- retain open space and natural areas throughout the community
- protect the scenic quality of the town along the shore front and main roads.
- encourage landowners with sensitive and critical habitats to practice good stewardship; limit uses of wetlands, floodplains, steep slopes, and critical habitat.
- acquire key areas of environmental concern.
- require that a portion of new subdivisions be set aside as permanent open space.

Section IX. Open space and environmental protection objectives:

- retain visual quality of the shorefront and along major highways in Town.
- assure that new development does not encroach on critical natural areas.
- preserve the rural character of the Town by assuring that significant amounts of open land are retained in an undeveloped state.
- control discharges of potential pollutants into the waters of the Town.
- maintain adequate public access to the shorefront

1. Preservation of Land

In the last 20 years, we have made significant strides in preserving land. The Harpswell Heritage Land Trust (HHLT) and other conservation groups have actively worked to preserve **1373 acres** of land through conservation easements and acquisition of land. In 1995, the Navy Fuel Depot was returned to the Town by the Defense Authorization Act. Later named Mitchell Field, it preserves a significant piece of open space (**117 acres**) with views as far as the White Mountains of New Hampshire. In 2002, the Town purchased the **77 acre** lot behind the Town Office lot with a Maine Municipal Bond supported by the tax payers. In 2004, Harpswell selectmen appointed a Town Lands Committee to inventory all Town properties, manage, and assess their current uses. The Committee identified 18 town landings, 15 pieces of town land and 6 town islands, a total of 389 acres. In addition, the State now owns 393 acres of conservation land in Harpswell.

2. Preservation of Scenic Views

In 1987, the town developed a map of scenic views which was used by the Planning Board to make decisions about the conservation of these views. (See **Map 1 in Part 1**) Some scenic areas, most notably Skolfield Shores and Mackerel Cove views, have been preserved. However, views from the water have been impacted by the many new homes and private wharves along our shoreline. Growth in housing is also clearly visible along the major town roads.

3. Preservation of Natural Habitat

A variety of natural habitats have been protected in Harpswell as the result of resource protection zoning and the preservation of land by HHLT, the Town, the State and other conservation and community groups. For example, key eagle habitat at Doughty Island, horseshoe crabs' breeding ground at Skolfield Shores, and shore bird habitat at Upper Goose Island have been preserved. Several Town islands have roseate tern nesting habitat and Whaleboat Island is the home to bald eagles and heron rookeries.

4. Development of Recreational Resources

The Town, HHLT, and Bowdoin College have developed a series of recreational trails in Harpswell. A description of the trails is available on the Town of Harpswell website at www.harpswell.maine.gov under the Town Departments: Recreation and on the Harpswell Heritage Land Trust website at www.hhlmaine.org. In addition, the Town Lands Committee has worked to identify and clarify ownership of 18 pieces of land which can be used as landings by the public for access to the water. Their locations are on display at the Town Office.

5. Preservation of Cultural and Historic Resources

Since 1987, the number of cultural and historic resources in Harpswell that have been preserved has increased. For example,

- The Harpswell Historical Society (HHS) acquired Centennial Hall and Community School House #2 and moved these to Harpswell Center.
- The HHS has acquired the Bailey Store, which has been transformed into the Harpswell Historical Museum. Many artifacts, as well as a fireproof vault to contain valuable pieces, have been added.
- The State has designated the Harpswell Historic Museum as an alternate repository for town records.
- By agreement with the Town, the HHS operates the Old Town Meeting House.
- The Society now owns the Memorial Statue of the lobsterman at Land's End on Bailey Island.
- HHLT has acquired easements protecting three historic buildings, in addition to the Tarr-Hackett House and the Old Union Hotel.

6. Changes in Land Use Regulations to Benefit Open Space

Changes in land regulations at the state and town level have affected the conservation of land in Harpswell. Some highlights include:

- In 1974, the **State of Maine Mandatory Shoreland Zoning Act** was adopted and the Town of Harpswell developed shoreland zoning ordinances and shoreline zoning maps. **Resource Protection Zones** were defined as “areas within 250 feet horizontal distance of the upland edge of freshwater wetlands, salt marshes, and salt meadows, and wetlands associated with rivers, which are rated high or moderate value by the Maine Dept of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife”.
- In 1975, the Town of Harpswell adopted its first **Shoreland Zoning Ordinance**. Harpswell went beyond the state minimum standard for Resource Protection Zones and protected a number of wetlands. This ordinance has amended over the years mainly to conform to changes in state law, and the shoreline zoning maps have been updated.
- In the 1970s, a **Subdivision Ordinance** was adopted by the Town and amended a number of times over the years. In 2002, an **Alternative Lot Size Amendment** was added to the Subdivision Ordinance to encourage conservation of land within subdivisions. Subdivision regulations also protect wetlands and steep slopes from development.
- In 1988, the **Maine Natural Resource Protection Act (NRPA)** consolidated and updated a number of natural resource protection laws. This Act provides for protection for natural resources, including coastal sand dune systems, coastal wetlands, significant wildlife habitat, fragile mountain areas, freshwater wetlands, great ponds and rivers, streams or brooks.
- In 1994, Harpswell adopted a **Basic Land Use Ordinance** to regulate development in the interior of the Town.
- In 1995, a Wetlands Study was carried out by Woodlot Alternatives, Inc. and the field analysis completed by the Harpswell Conservation Commission (HCC). In 1999, HCC prepared a classification of 27 wetlands in Harpswell based on a survey done by Woodlot Alternatives. Those of high priority were recommended to be added to the Resource Protection District overlay. No action was taken on the recommendations.
- In 1999, a definition of natural areas, natural communities and significant wildlife habitat was added to the **wetland regulations**.
- In 2001, the Town’s Land Use Committee recommended extended protection around wetlands. No action was taken on the recommendations.

- In 2002, the Town voted to amend the Land Use Ordinances to adopt a 75 feet setback restricting timber harvesting along the largest **tributary streams** in town. The Town also voted to reduce the required setback for a forested wetland from 75 feet to 25 feet in subdivisions.
- In 2005, the Town voted to accept the 2005 Comprehensive Plan Update which outlined a vision, goals and actions needed to protect open space.
- On September 1, 2007, the Maine Natural Resources Protection Act was amended to protect activities in, on or over a significant or potentially significant **vernal pool** habitat. This Act mandates but does not require towns to regulate vernal pools. Currently, the Town of Harpswell does not have zoning ordinances which protect vernal pools

Conclusion

Even with these strides toward Open Space protection goals as put forth in the 1987 Comprehensive Plan, much remains to be done. Although connectivity of open space is not specially mentioned, the 1997 and 2005 Comprehensive Plans recommends that an open space plan preserve and connect open spaces and identify and map critical natural areas, essential wildlife habitats and travel corridors. With the exception of one large forested area which has been preserved on Long Reach on Great Island, much of Harpswell's open space for habitat is fragmented, without connections. Scenic views are largely taken for granted until they are gone. Limits of the height of structures have been enacted, but there are still countless breathtaking views and unobstructed ridge lines that could be lost to poor planning.