

Executive Summary

In 2006, the Harpswell Conservation Commission (HCC) was asked to help with the execution of sections of the Town's *2005 Comprehensive Plan Update* that dealt with the conservation of open space and the direction of future growth. This was to be accomplished with an Open Space Plan for Harpswell.

In order to achieve the goals for open space expressed by residents in the 2005 Comprehensive Plan Update, the Conservation Commission prepared an Open Space Plan that suggests ways to protect a portion of undeveloped land, preserve the natural and scenic assets of the Town, and preserve the quality of living we enjoy in Harpswell. The Open Space Plan outlines approaches to provide for orderly residential development, enhance recreational opportunities and contribute to the health of Harpswell's critical marine economy.

As part of the development of the plan, community input was solicited from the townspeople by gathering information through a mailed questionnaire and by holding two open space planning workshops. Participants identified which natural, scenic and recreational resources were important to them and helped inventory lands that had these resources.

Using the residents' prioritizations, the HCC identified five (5) key resources in Harpswell that participants wanted to protect in the future. These resources include 1) fresh, salt and groundwater, 2) high value habitats, 3) scenic splendor, 4) recreational opportunities, and 5) cultural/historic/civic locations.

In order to identify the most important large uninhabited areas in Town which contained these resources, the HCC used a series of maps to determine the location of our most important water resources and habitat areas in Harpswell. The HCC also considered factors, such as proximity to a protected site, size of parcel, lineal opportunity for expansion of recreation, continuity for the benefit of wildlife and bird populations, and protection of lands draining into wetlands, ponds and mudflats.

The data was analyzed to determine which locations scored the highest resource ratings, and which were also designated as critical or endangered by the United States Fish and Wildlife Program. Next, all of the developed properties with buildings were identified on the maps, as well as, those that were already protected as a result of ownership by conservation, government or civic groups. As a result of this process, 12 Focus Areas were chosen for preservation.

These Focus Areas, and Harpswell's undeveloped islands over (1) acre, should be at the center of the Town's future open space protection efforts. Most of this land has limited development, high ecological value, and is privately owned by conservation-minded residents, living in the area, who have kept it in its current undeveloped condition. This is considered the most vital land to preserve.

A coordinated conservation strategy to protect the key natural resources includes:

- Identification of vernal pools and the updating of wetland protection,
- Education about the various methods of open space preservation,
- Continued preservation of our protected lands,
- Review of land-use ordinances to consider open space in development
- Strategic purchase or acquisition of Harpswell land from willing sellers or donors.

While these strategies are designed to protect the land in the high priority Focus Areas, they are also intended for use throughout Harpswell to preserve its high-value natural areas.

The Town recognizes that privately owned property may be the principal asset of its owners and that it may have significant historic value to families. This Plan respects such factors and does not include any proposal whose effect would have a harmful impact on the real or historic value of private property.

We are asking the residents of Harpswell for their approval of the final Plan when presented at Town Meeting in March, 2009. As we move forward in the implementation of this Open Space Plan, we hope to achieve our shared vision for the Town of Harpswell that includes:

- Preservation of open space for future generations to enjoy
- Preservation of water quality
- Preservation and stewardship of high value natural areas
- Preservation of community character that is defined by our seafaring and farming heritage
- Collaboration to plan for, protect, and manage the Town's open space resources