Puffer's Pond 2020—A Plan for the Future

Puffers Pond Planning Committee ("PPP" or the "Committee") Status Report to Town Committees

Draft 2/4/10

Overview

The eleven voting members of the PPP began meeting in July 2009 with a charge to "consider options for the use, restoration, beautification, and preservation of Puffer's Pond and surrounding conservation lands, including the Mill River/Cushman Brook Greenway . . . and to make recommendations to the Conservation Commission" who will make the final decision on which recommendations to implement for the pond's future. The initiative for the Committee comes from awareness that we are 'loving the pond to death' – that increases in use and impacts of use are creating an unsustainable situation for the ecology and aesthetics of the area. In addition, the lack of town funding for pond management creates significant challenges in channeling and controlling public use on hot summer days in particular, but other times of the year as well.

Our goal is to complete the PPP work by May. This will potentially allow the Conservation Department to use the resulting plan to apply for state grant funds that become available in June.

The Committee has met once a month since July, with various subcommittees meeting more often. PPP held two public workshops at the start of the process to identify key issues of concern to the public, and to get a sense of possible solutions that might have public support. In general, the main public sentiment was that we should minimize change to the uses and beauty of the pond and trails, but that we should also be open to solutions that might address key problems as long as they do not significantly change that shared experience of the pond and trails. Throughout the process, participation by Committee volunteers has been excellent and staff has been extremely responsive and helpful.

Key findings to date are that while the water quality and habitat value are strong, the trails and beaches are subject to an unacceptable level of erosion and compaction with vegetative loss that is impairing wildlife values. The Lester trail between Mill River and the pond is in terrible condition, and the trail around the pond is broken down and sloughing off into the pond. The beams put in place to hold beach sand in and the handrails etc that make the beach accessible must be replaced, and preferably be redesigned before rebuilding to better meet current needs. Finally, the pond has not been dredged in 20 years, and if it is not dredged fairly soon, more and more of it will become un-swimmable wetland rather than open water.

There are actions we have determined are '*non-contingent*' – they need to be taken to secure and stabilize the physical and ecological function of the pond based on the findings above. Without these baseline actions, quality of habitat and recreational experience will be significantly impaired. A preliminary list of these non-contingent items is included in the table at the end of the report. Beyond these, there are two clear policy choices to be made. The first is the *balance of recreation versus preservation* that physical design and use rules should promote. Many of the decisions are linked; for example, if the Conservation Commission chooses to encourage access by providing more parking, then different trail and beach design would be needed to support the greater numbers of visitors, more trash cans and toilets are necessary, etc. For this reason, rather than presenting individual recommendations, we have developed a set of recommendation clusters or *scenarios* that describe some of the choices that could be made along the preservation-access spectrum. We present these in the next section of this report.

The second key policy area is the *source of funding* for on-going management as well as capital improvements for the pond. We are continuing work on this, and will only present brief notes about directions the conversation has taken so far, without any particular claim that these are fully developed or well thought through yet. In particular, funding is wrapped up with town liability in case of accidents, so this area needs to be developed cautiously.

Scenarios for the Future

In the attached table, we have developed a fairly comprehensive but still DRAFT set of four possible levels of development that we believe would support a range of outcomes from a reduction of current visitation, to encouraging significantly more visitation. Each scenario choice is based on a strong correlation between ease of parking and the number of visitors – if we make parking less convenient or more expensive then fewer visitors are likely to come. The matrix describes a fairly comprehensive set of conditions that we believe go together to create each future. For quick review, the most significant (from a public perspective) recommendations are in parking, State Street, beach development, and management issues for the conservation land near the pond.

Parking and State Street: In all cases, we recommend either closing State Street from Sand Hill Road to the rail road overpass during the summer, or making that segment one-way with a dedicated bike and pedestrian way on the asphalt. Our vision is that this short segment of State Street will be a safe space for biking, walking, rollerblading, etc., which it currently is not. Parking recommendations vary from providing very few spots to adding lots at each end of the pond thereby accommodate 120 spaces.

~~*Beach and trail development:* If we move toward the recreation end of the policy choice, we will need to develop North Beach more fully and provide other protections to reduce the pressure along the non-beach areas of the pond.~~

Beaches: Beaches of course are the primary access to the Pond and will need to be more or less stabilization depending on their planned level of use – from no stabilization of new sand in the no-dredge scenario with increasingly significant infrastructure improvements as planned use goes up.

Nearby non-pond environment: Puffers Pond is the most important element among other environmentally sensitive areas. The hillsides around the Pond and the trails that follow the river upstream and down, as well as the river itself also are degrading from overuse. The recommendations all recognize that some greater regulation of their use is necessary to preserve them at all – the recommendations are more stringent as the level of planned use increases.

Funding: There are capital costs associated with the following recommendations, and it is our sense that these would need to be funded through grants and potentially CPA money. For on-going management, the committee has imagined a variety of ways that we could better fund the pond. Some are fairly easy but still require staff time to coordinate – better outreach through the Friends group and community fundraising, volunteer trail maintenance, etc. We do not believe this will resolve the fundamental issues of need for paid crew during the summer and much more investment in trail upkeep. As a result, the committee is investigating the opportunities and liability issues of charging for parking near the pond. We view this as the most equitable way to charge for use, since it allows less well-resourced people to come for free if they walk, bike, come by bus, or park at Mill River recreation area.

Request to Town Committees

In general we request feedback as to whether the various committees in town that make up our government see that PPP is generally moving in the right direction, and welcome feedback on the appropriate level of balance between access and preservation. This feedback will be incorporated into our final report, which will be presented to the Conservation Commission. The Conservation Commission will ultimately be the group that holds hearings and votes on a management and improvement plan for the pond greenway area. Because of the opportunity for state grants beginning in June, we are hopeful that a general consensus can emerge fairly quickly.

Respectfully, the Puffer's Pond 2020 Committee

Chair: Elisabeth Hamin

Members: Briony Angus, Meg Gage, Aaron Hayden, Emlen Jones, Paris Muska, Jim Patulak, Jim Pistrang, Mary Sharma, David Webber.

Staff: Dave Ziomek, Nate Malloy, Dave McKinnon

	Scenarios				
Items	**Non-contingent**	**Maximum Conservation**	**Mostly Conservation**	**Current Levels**	**Mostly Recreation**
Beavers	Manage population	Wrap trees	Wrap trees and plant deterrent vegetation	Wrap trees, plant deterrent vegetation, and trap beavers	Wrap trees, plant deterrent vegetation, and trap beavers
Dredge		No. Significant eutrophication occurs causing the pond to become a wetland over time, beaches eventually disappear and would require no further maintenance.	Yes. Install and maintain silt trap.	Yes. Install and maintain silt trap. Clean spit.	Yes. Maximum amount of dredging. Install and maintain silt trap. Clean spit.
Perimeter Trail and Lester Trail	Remove illegal trails Control access Control erosion Repair/reroute current trail	Redirect trail in most fragile areas, natural barriers, native vegetation, sparsely posted informational signage	Redirect trail in most fragile areas, natural looking fencing and natural barriers, native vegetation, informational signage	Natural looking fencing, native vegetation, highly visible informational signage	Natural looking fencing on wider trails, native vegetation, highly visible informational signage
Mill River above Pond		Tree plantings etc to minimize access			Encourage access to swimming holes

	Scenarios				
Items	**Non-contingent**	**Maximum Conservation**	**Mostly Conservation**	**Current Levels**	**Mostly Recreation**
Shoreline	Replant stripped areas Erosion control Designate non-beach/trail access	Plant native vegetation along eroded shoreline. Non-beach access should be clearly designated with signage, and areas where access is not encouraged should be blocked by natural looking fencing or natural barriers.	Plant native vegetation along eroded shoreline. Non-beach access should be clearly designated with signage, and areas where access is not encouraged should be blocked by natural looking fencing or natural barriers.	Focus on replacing the vegetation lost due to beaver and human activity.	Focus on replacing the vegetation lost due to beaver and human activity, but allow an increased number of access points to the pond.
Parking	Formalized parking Sediments controls	Approximate number of Parking Spaces ~20 Add storm scepters along State St. Limit parking to one area. Reduce nearby parking.	Approximate number of Parking Spaces ~60 Add storm scepters along State St. More controlled and formalized North beach parking.	Approximate number of Parking Spaces ~100 Add storm scepters along State St. More controlled and formalized North beach parking.	Approximate number of Parking Spaces ~120 Add storm scepters along State St. Expand North beach parking. Mill St. bridge made one-way, with a designated path for pedestrians on existing roadway.
State Street	Fix current parking State St. one way, at	Block off State St. to vehicular traffic altogether. Roadway becomes a	Block off State St. to vehicular traffic seasonally or year round.	Make State St. one way with entry from Sand Hill Road. Establish a biking and	Make State St. one way with entry from Sand Hill Road. Establish a biking and

	least	biking and walking throughway. Add parking at the upper end of State St. (Maintain pavement where vehicular access will support conservation.)	Roadway becomes a biking and walking throughway. Add formalized parking at the upper end of State St. Users should be able to easily locate access points and trails from State St.	pedestrian throughway on North side of roadway. No parking from Sand Hill Road to the bridge. Formalize upper State St. parking. Widen Sand Hill Rd. for pedestrian traffic. Formalize a drop off area for South Beach.	pedestrian throughway on North side of roadway Parallel parking moved to the North Side. Formalize upper State St. parking. Establish pedestrian access on roadway. Widen Sand Hill Rd. for pedestrian traffic. Formalize a drop off area for South Beach.
Parking Fees	yes				

	Scenarios				
Items	**Non-contingent**	**Maximum Conservation**	**Mostly Conservation**	**Current Levels**	**Mostly Recreation**
Bicycle access	Better bike racks				
Bus access	Explore opportunities for improving service in summer				
Lifeguards	no				
South Beach	Remains as primary beach.		Repair/replace degraded erosion control structures on beach. The edges of the trails to access beach areas should be lined with stones or wooden edging, and potentially lined with wood chips to clearly define the areas where users can access the water.	Create some pavement access to beach area, from formalized drop off area. Repair/replace degraded erosion control structures on beach. Replace sand in areas where sand has been lost.	Develop beach area. Create pavement access to beach area, from formalized drop off area. Repair/replace degraded erosion control structures on beach. Replace sand in areas where sand has been lost.
North Beach			Repair/replace degraded erosion control structures on beach. The edges of the trails to access beach areas should be lined with stones or wooden edging, and potentially lined with wood chips to clearly define the areas where users can access the water.	Repair/replace degraded erosion control structures on beach. Restore beach area, make it more attractive. The edges of the trails to access beach areas should be lined with stones or wooden edging, and potentially lined with wood chips to	Develop beach area. Locate/Replace sand in areas where sand has been lost. Create pavement access to beach area, from formalized parking.

	Scenarios				
Items	**Non-contingent**	**Maximum Conservation**	**Mostly Conservation**	**Current Levels**	**Mostly Recreation**
				clearly define the areas where users can access the water.	
Dam Safety	Install buoys				
Bathrooms	Yes.	Continue use of porta-potties and maintain them more frequently.	Continue use of porta-potties and maintain them more frequently.	Porta-potties larger and cleaner, relocated to parking areas	Build a permanent restroom (potentially a composting toilet) in the North Beach area, and remove the porta-potties from both beach areas.
Trash/ recycling bins	yes	Remove trash and recycling bins from beach and field areas.	Strategically place trash/recycling bins in high use areas, especially near parking lots.	Strategically place trash/recycling bins in high use areas, especially near parking lots.	Strategically place trash/recycling bins in high use areas, especially near parking lots.
Picnicking	No formalized picnic areas				
Commercial enterprises	Need permission from the Conservation Department.				
Invasive Species	yes	Strong effort to remove invasives	Effort to remove invasives	Effort to remove invasives	Effort to remove invasives
Regulation Enforcement	yes	Enforce rules by staffing trails.			
General Maintenance	yes				