

# PRATT'S BROOK PARK

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## 2017 MANAGEMENT PLAN

Town of Yarmouth, Maine

9.1.2017 DRAFT

With support from  
Yarmouth Parks & Lands Committee,  
Yarmouth Community Services, &  
and various friends & residents of Yarmouth.

## Table of Contents

Executive Summary.....	3
Town Open Space Mission.....	4
Parks & Lands Committee.....	5
I. Introduction.....	6
II. Background and Objectives of Management Plan.....	6
A. Background	
B. 2017 Management Objectives	
III. Location of Pratt's Brook Park.....	8
IV. Description of Land.....	9
A. Historic Land Use	
V. Natural Resource Inventory.....	10
A. Soils	
B. Hydrology	
C. Bedrock Geology	
D. Surficial Geology	
E. Vegetation	
F. Wildlife	
G. Topography	
VI. Legal and Regulatory Issues.....	12
A. Deed restrictions	
B. Yarmouth Zoning Ordinance	
C. Town Council Action	
D. State and Federal Regulations	
E. Utility Easements	
VII. Current Use.....	13
A. Park Facilities	
B. Park Activities	
VIII. Future Acquisitions.....	18
IX. Management Approaches and Guidelines.....	19
A. Overview	
B. Access Improvements	
C. Forest Management	
D. Design and Construction Oversight	
X. Summary of Management Approaches.....	21
A. Recreational / Educational Activities	
B. Management Activities	
XI. Management Strategies.....	22
A. Recreational / Educational Activities	
B. Resource Management Strategies	
C. Park Maintenance Activities	
D. Physical Development	
XII. Appendix.....	27

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This 2017 Management Plan provides an updated vision for the future management of Pratt's Brook Park. The recommendations are based on an understanding of historic land uses, natural resources, and current use patterns. The plan recognizes the need to provide recreational opportunities for the citizens of Yarmouth, and explores conflicts, evaluates options, and recommends strategies to deal with these conflicts. This plan addresses Pratt's Brook Park as configured in 2017 and recognizes new uses and user-groups for Pratt's Brook Park. Other parcels may be acquired and added to Pratt's Brook Park that may have other uses or purposes; however, this plan is not meant to constrain how those parcels are used.

Most of Pratt's Brook Park is underlain by heavy clay soils in low lying areas that are susceptible to erosion. Trail construction and use must continue to be thoughtfully and carefully managed. The combination of soils and gently rolling landscape creates a regularly branching pattern of streams and tributaries. This dendritic pattern of stream valleys presents inherent challenges and opportunities for maintaining and developing the trail system.

Pratt's Brook Park is dominated by hemlock forest, along with mixed hardwoods and mixed hardwood/hemlock. There are portions of open field although if they are not managed, this vegetation type will likely succeed to White Pine. Eastern Hemlock is the primary tree species found in Pratt's Brook Park, with varying quantities of White Pine, Red Maple, Grey and Paper Birch, Green Ash, and Quaking Aspen.

Pratt's Brook Park supports a fairly typical assemblage of wildlife species for the patchwork of forests, current and abandoned fields, and wetlands of southern Maine. Pratt's Brook Park supports populations of many forest birds (hawks, owls, grouse, warbler and flycatcher species) and mid-sized carnivores (mink, weasels, fisher, and coyote). It provides habitat for animal species that take advantage of forest edges such as whitetail deer, raccoon, skunk, fox, and opossum. Moose have occasionally been seen in and around this park.

Pratt's Brook Park is used for a variety of recreational activities such as hiking, dog-walking, disc golf, cross-country skiing, and cross-country running. Pratt's Brook Park is also enjoyed by a wide range of users from various age groups. Facilities have been developed over the last few years to accommodate more people and to provide access to Pratt's Brook Park's woods and streams. One portion of Pratt's Brook Park was donated with deed restrictions regarding motorized and non-motorized vehicles; however, the remainder of the land is not restricted.

This plan recommends that the Town Council take the following actions:

- Continue to add parcels to Pratt's Brook Park through land acquisition or conservation easements.
- Continue to recognize the recommendations of Pratt's Brook Parks & Lands Committee to advise the Town on Park issues and its management.

- Continue to maintain and develop trails on the newly acquired pieces of Pratt's Brook Park.
- Continue to manage Pratt's Brook Park for Town recreational use.
- Improve access to Pratt's Brook Park in the following ways:
  - Add signage for wayfinding and general regulations regarding dog waste, leash laws, etc.
  - Consider the role of Pratt's Brook Park and its existing trails as part of a town-wide system that encourages connectivity to other Town open spaces and adjacent communities.
  - Consider the enhancement and development of additional trails within Pratt's Brook Park.
  - Explore the idea of connecting Pratt's Brook Park with adjacent lands and Frank Knight Forest.
  - Bridges, signs, trails, rest areas, etc. should be designed with a sense of permanence, consistency, and sensitivity to the natural environment.
  - Portions of Pratt's Brook Park should comply with the requirements and recommendations of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).
- Proposed or permitted activities taking place in Pratt's Brook Park may include biking, while hunting is limited, and paintball prohibited.
- To minimize the maintenance responsibilities for Pratt's Brook Park, a 'carry-in / carry-out' trash policy is recommended.
- A primary goal of forest management activities at Pratt's Brook Park should be to maximize habitat diversity for wildlife and the enjoyment of residents.
- The development of further facilities should be guided by a desire to create a high quality, enjoyable visitor experience.

Pratt's Brook Park is a valuable asset for Yarmouth residents. Proper management of Pratt's Brook Park ensures there will be a place for Town residents to enjoy a range of recreation, leisure, and natural environment. The Parks and Lands Committee recommends the Town take advantage of every opportunity to expand and manage Pratt's Brook Park.

### **TOWN OPEN SPACE MISSION**

Currently, Pratt's Brook Parks & Lands Committee's task is to act on the Town of Yarmouth's behalf to fulfill the following objectives:

*To advise the Town Council, staff, boards, committees, and the public concerning the funding, acquisition, management, use, and disposition of town lands needed to implement Pratt's Brook Parks, trails, pedestrian easements, and open-space goals of the community; and to engage the town and public in stewardship, protection, and uses of*

***the natural environment and ecosystems of Yarmouth through public education, shared responsibility and personal experience, and connection to the lands and waters of Yarmouth.***

It is important to note that Pratt's Brook Parks & Lands Committee is not a conservation organization, but more accurately a town appointed committee created to help maintain and encourage the use and enjoyment of town parks and open spaces for Yarmouth residents. As anticipated, current uses and recreational desires for Pratt's Brook Park have evolved since the publication of the 2000 Management Plan, resulting in the need for an updated plan.

The objectives of the current management plan were informed by the 1988 Public Access and Recreation Plan and the *2000 Pratt's Brook Park Management Plan* and are to develop a plan to identify critical open space needs and opportunities within the Town.

Note: For historical reference, the objectives of the *1988 Public Access and Recreation Plan* and *2000 Pratt's Brook Management Plan* initiatives can be referenced at the Town Offices or the office of Yarmouth Community Services- 200 Main Street, Yarmouth ME.

## **PARKS & LANDS COMMITTEE**

With a liaison from the Yarmouth Community Services department, Parks & Lands Committee is an advisory committee for town lands and open spaces in Yarmouth.

Regarding Pratt's Brook Park, these responsibilities include:

- Identifying and prioritizing projects within Pratt's Brook Park: developing a 'master list' of what needs to be completed annually.
- Building support for Pratt's Brook Park throughout the community.
- Reviewing and recommending management policies and allowable activities to the Town Council.
- Recommending planting and vegetation management within Pratt's Brook Park.
- Coordinating volunteer efforts and work days.
- Monitoring land use and recreational activities within Pratt's Brook Park.
- Advising on and making recommendations to trail construction/relocation.
- Recommend suggestions to upgrading the signage program in Pratt's Brook Park.
- Participate in conversations surrounding landowners' participation in the expansion of Pratt's Brook Park.
- Reviewing development plans for nearby properties to determine their potential impact or value on Pratt's Brook Park.
- Recognizing volunteer efforts by individuals and organizations that make significant contributions of time and effort to Pratt's Brook Park.

The PLC will continue to work closely with representatives of user groups (e.g., the Yarmouth Ski Team), abutters, Yarmouth Community Services, Yarmouth Schools, Town athletic programs, and other interested parties.

## **I. INTRODUCTION**

This management plan provides a vision for the future management of Pratt's Brook Park. These recommendations are based on an understanding of historic land uses, natural resources, as well as current and evolving use patterns. It recognizes the sensitivity that many residents have to alteration of 'natural' areas, and the need to provide recreational opportunities for the citizens of Yarmouth. The Management Plan recognizes conflicts and recommends strategies to deal with those conflicts.

Pratt's Brook Park is a 220± acre town-owned parcel in the northern portion of Yarmouth that was acquired in the late 1980's, with additions in the early and late 1990's. Pratt's Brook Parks & Lands Committee has built on the previous efforts of the entity formerly known as the Yarmouth Conservation Commission, who developed the previous *2000 Pratt's Brook Park Management Plan* in conjunction with Terrence J. DeWann & Associates Landscape Architects and with Friends of Pratt's Brook Park.

Pratt's Brook Park offers a relatively wild area with a limited amount of interference to natural processes. It is intended that Pratt's Brook Park be managed to retain a balance of forests, fields, streams, wetlands, blueberry barrens, and other noteworthy features. Pratt's Brook Park should be used primarily for recreation on a limited network of trails, while also mindful of the evolving nature of desirable public uses. Pratt's Brook Park should largely remain in a semi-wild state where natural processes dominate, and additional land should be added to Pratt's Brook Park when the opportunity arises.

The plan includes an Executive Summary that highlights the major findings and recommendations. The background and rationale behind these recommendations are included in the text of the plan. It also outlines the cultural factors (historic land uses, etc.) that have shaped its development. Additional resources and technical information regarding Pratt's Brook Park can be found in the *2000 Pratt's Brook Park Management Plan* and the Appendix of this document.

As mentioned in the Executive Summary, this management plan addresses Pratt's Brook Park as configured in 2017. Other parcels may be acquired and added to Pratt's Brook Park. This plan is not meant to constrain how those parcels are used.

## **II. BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES OF THE MANAGEMENT PLAN**

### **A. Background**

Increasing and uncontrolled use of Pratt's Brook Park could lead to undesirable and potentially hazardous conflicts. These could take the form of physical or psychological conflicts between user groups (e.g., hunters and dog-walkers, etc.), conflicts between users and neighbors, or degradation of natural resources (e.g., erosion, litter, graffiti, dog waste, siltation of streams, etc.).

In setting forth the direction for Pratt's Brook Park, Parks & Land Committee was guided by background information provided in the previous *2000 Pratt's Brook Park Management Plan*.

The Management Plan was developed with input from many sources, including:

- The vision of Bill Hamill, who donated a substantial piece of property that started the initial assemblage of Pratt's Brook Park.
- The 1991 Yarmouth Comprehensive Plan, which called for a continuous pedestrian trail system throughout the town, securing open space for active and passive use, protection of significant natural resources, and the purchase or protection of public forest land.
- The energy and enthusiasm of countless volunteers who started the development of an interconnected trail network in Pratt's Brook Park and created a significant recreational resource for the Town of Yarmouth.

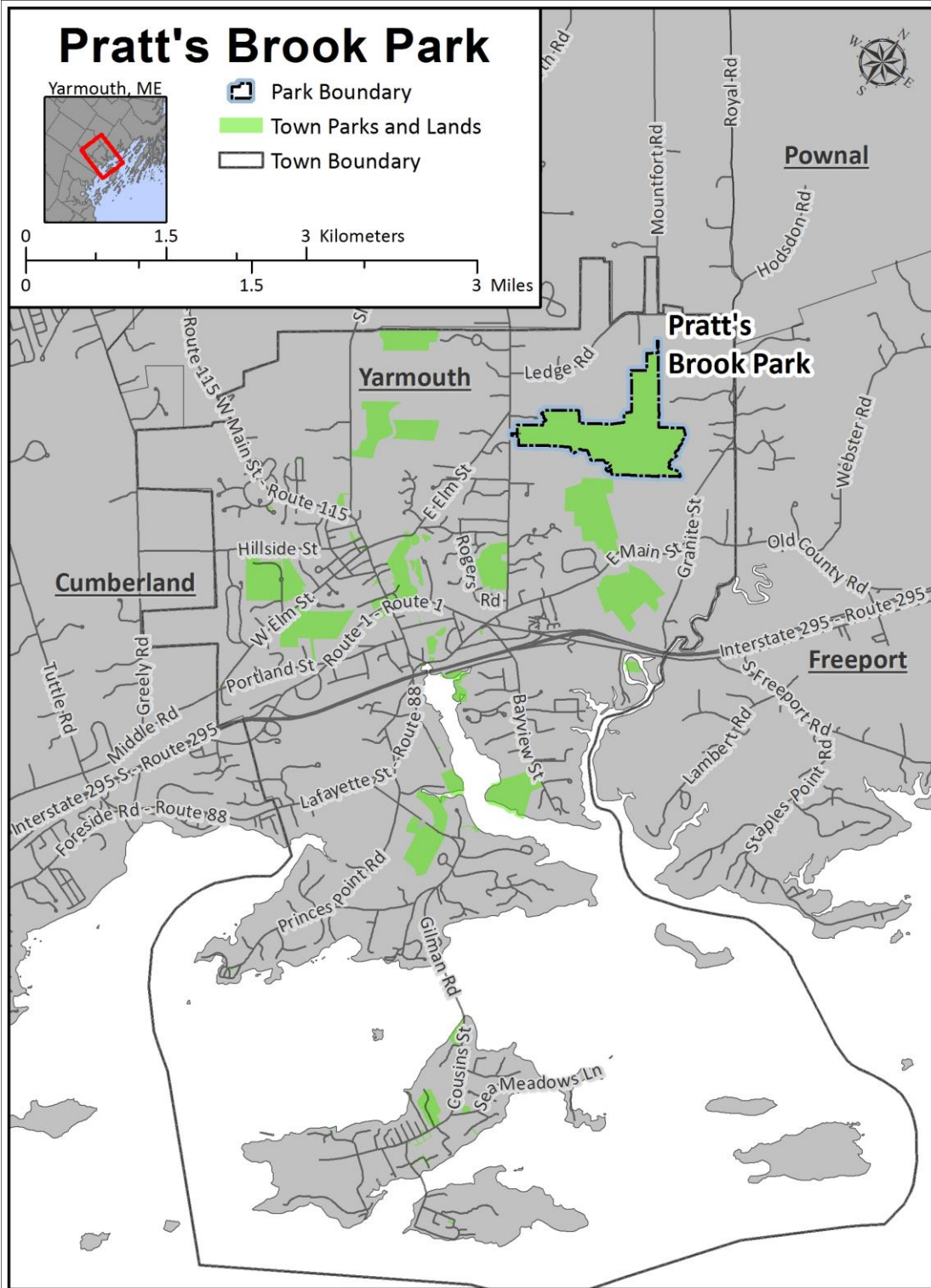
#### **B. 2017 Management Objectives**

The vision for Pratt's Brook Park, as established by this plan integrates several key objectives:

- Providing open space in the form of fields and woods, and well-designed, usable trails throughout the year, for all residents of Yarmouth.
- Preserving habitat diversity to maintain a thriving wildlife population.
- Integrating and connecting Pratt's Brook Park to residential neighborhoods and other open spaces.
- Establishing a pattern of land use on adjacent parcels that will lead to additional land protection and compatible uses.
- The need for flexibility in the plan and its recommendations to recognize changing circumstances and recreational desires. The plan should be reevaluated on a periodic basis and adjustments made to keep it current.

### III. LOCATION OF PRATT'S BROOK PARK

Pratt's Brook Park is located in the northeast corner of Yarmouth between North Road and Ledge Road.

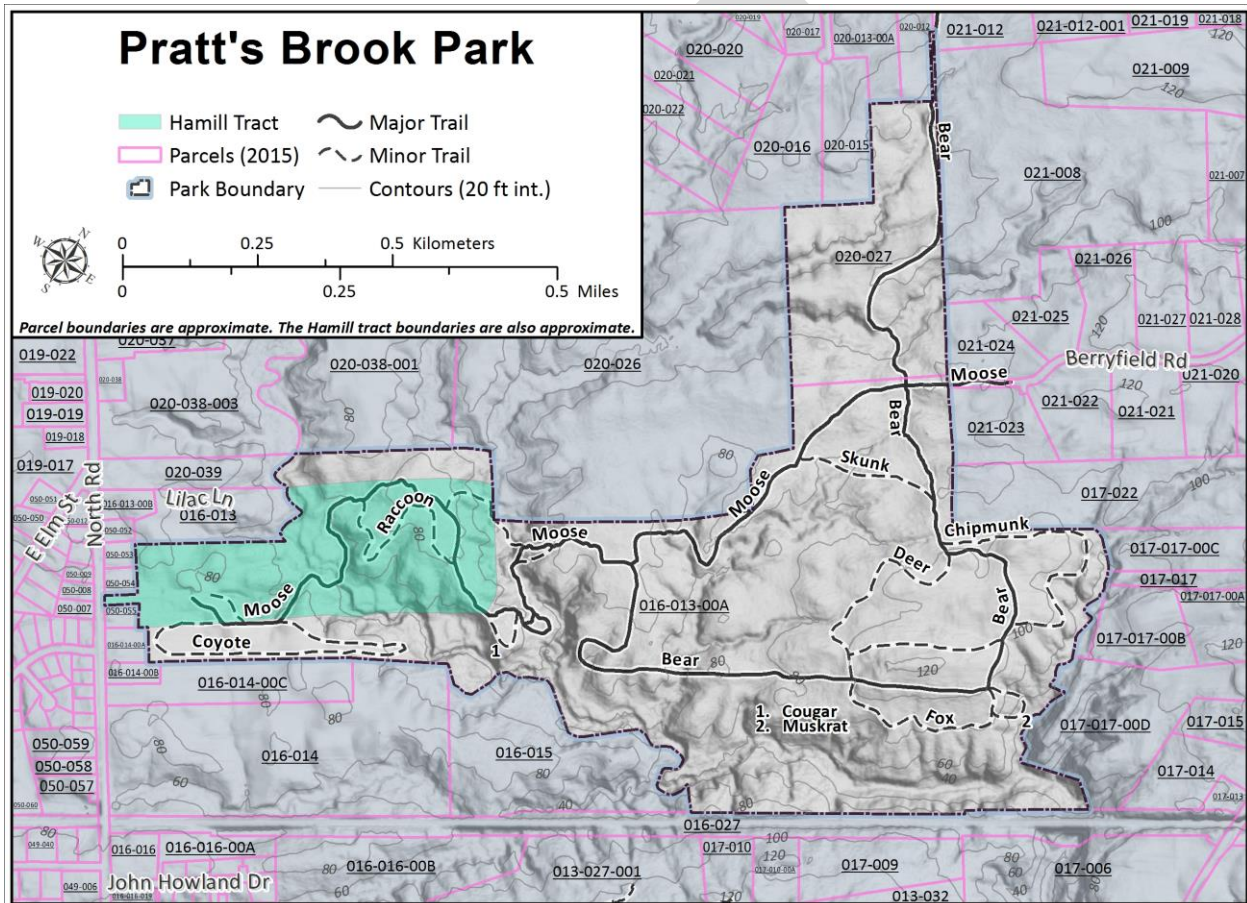




## IV. DESCRIPTION OF THE LAND

### A. Historic Land Use

Pratt's Brook began to take form in 1986 when Bill Hamill, a resident of North Road, offered to donate 34± acres of land to the Town for passive recreation. The town accepted the offer and spent the next five years working out the details of the transaction. Hamill's vision for passive recreation included activities such as walking, hiking, and picnicking, while prohibiting such equipment as bikes, strollers, and wheelchairs. His wish was for the public to use the land in quiet enjoyment of its 'natural' state. In 1988 the Town Council voted to name the land Pratt's Brook Park. The Town Council finally accepted the land in 1991.



The only evidence of prior human habitation appears to be the remnants of the old Jack Whiting farm on the eastern end of the property near the power lines. The farm used to be accessed from a road that led to an old stone quarry opposite the road that now leads into the Town landfill. There also is an old farm road from Ledge Road across the Kelly parcel. This road has large blocks of granite in some of the low areas and stream crossings. It is bordered by barbed wire.

The name of Pratt's Brook Park is assumed to have come from the Pratt family, who had owned land in the North Road and Ledge Road area since before 1805. The family had been residents of Yarmouth (and the previous North Yarmouth) since at least the early 1770s (when the first Pratt births were recorded). In 1842 the property owned by Benjamin Pratt, opposite Ledge

Road, was chosen for the site of the town farm, and by 1871 there were at least 4 Pratt family farms on North Road, near the junction of East Elm Street.

## **V. NATURAL RESOURCE INVENTORY**

### **A. Soils**

A significant portion of Pratt's Brook Park is underlain by heavy clay soil. This has important management implications in that this soil may be easily eroded, and trail construction and use must be carefully designed and managed. Soils in this classification are poorly-drained, and water may collect and pool in low-lying areas.

Most of the soils of Pratt's Brook Park are classified in the Scantic-Buxton-Windsor Association. In this association the soils on higher hills are somewhat coarser and therefore better-drained fine-sandy loams. Beyond the hilltops the soils are somewhat more eroded and contain finer silt-loams. These grade from somewhat poorly, to very poorly drained soils as the ground slopes from gentle side slopes to broad wet basins surrounding many of the headwater streams and floodplain areas around the main stem of Pratt's Brook.

Drainage patterns and dense subsoil tends to create perched or raised seasonally high water tables in some locations. This has affected historic settlement patterns of this land as well as the farming/pasture history.

These soils may present challenges in siting, maintaining and designing trails, characteristics that mandate the wise use of erosion control measures and careful consideration to the layout of any future trails. The use of organic mulch and other materials should be used to reinforce areas with unavoidable heavy wear due to traffic levels or the concentrated impact of treaded tires, hooves, or heavy machinery.

### **B. Hydrology**

Pratt's Brook is a minor tributary of the Cousin's River. The land bounded by Ledge Road and Granite Street, North Street, and the Maine Trunk railroad contains over 80 percent of the watershed for Pratt's Brook, consisting of a regularly branching pattern of streams and tributaries. Water falling on these hills does not have far to run before intercepting a stream or stream-associated wetland.

This intensively "dendritic" pattern of stream valleys presents challenges for any trail system. The current trail system tends to ride along watershed boundaries, or heights-of-land, between stream valleys and only crossing the major streams at minimal number of spots.

The modest Maine Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) classification for the water quality of Pratt's Brook (Class B) is a reflection of a number of factors. It has relatively flashy flow rates (water tends to run quickly off this land, flood the stream, and then quickly subside), and therefore carries a lot of fine sediments. The stream may also be subject to some non-point source pollution from agricultural fields, underground waste disposal, and roadways. This classification means that this water generally supports a range of the aquatic species (fish, plants, and aquatic invertebrates). The floodplain of Pratt's Brook is approximately 200 feet in width throughout much of Pratt's Brook Park.

### **C. Bedrock Geology**

The metamorphic schist bedrock that underlies most of Pratt's Brook Park is largely buried under a thick layer of marine silt and clay. There are several areas where stream down cutting has exposed outcrops of platy gray bedrock to create small cascades within a steep-sided rocky ravine. While some ravines may still be steep-sided, most hilltops and stream valleys tend to be more rounded. This is a result of surficial geology brought about by the latest glacial period followed by the subsequent erosion of the land.

### **D. Surficial Geology**

The soils of Pratt's Brook Park developed from metamorphic and igneous bedrock that was pummeled and ground by continental ice sheets, eroded by glacial streams and washed onto a marine estuary miles beyond the post-glacial shoreline of Maine. Unlike the sands and gravels that accumulated in and around glacial streams, the fine sediments that make up this areas' Presumpscot Formation were suspended in glacial outwash and ocean water before settling out onto the seabed.

### **E. Vegetation**

Pratt's Brook Park is dominated by hemlock forest, followed by equal portions of mixed hardwoods and mixed hardwood/hemlock. There are portions of open meadow that if left unmanaged, will transition to successional shrub and tree species. Eastern Hemlock is the primary tree species found in Pratt's Brook Park, with lesser quantities of White Pine, Red Maple, White and Paper Birch, Green Ash, and Quaking Aspen.

The 1957 USGS topographic quadrangle map (photo-inspected 1975) shows approximately one third of Pratt's Brook Park as being open fields. The areas shown as forested were probably cleared fields at some point in the century preceding this as evidenced by the even-aged White Pine stands that cover some of the hill tops. The land use history of this area is not fully known, however we can presume from the nature of the soils, that most of this area was not plowed, but more likely grazed and used as woodlots. Remnants of barbed-wire fences, relict field openings with common juniper and meadowsweet, and the difficulty of crossing the numerous streams would support this conjecture. The forests that grow on the upper slopes and hill tops in Pratt's Brook Park are somewhat mature, early to mid-successional species such as White Pine, Red Maple, Birch, and Aspen.

### **F. Wildlife**

Pratt's Brook Park supports a fairly typical assemblage of wildlife species for the post-agricultural patchwork of forests, current and abandoned fields, and wetlands of southern Maine. Most of the forests occur in somewhat fragmented blocks, the largest of which is nearly contained by the current Park boundaries. The surrounding woodlands are dissected by roads, developments, fields, and utility rights-of-way. This leaves relatively small areas of isolated forest interior suitable for sustainable and stable populations of many forest birds (hawks, owls, grouse, and many warbler and flycatcher species) and mid-sized carnivores (mink, weasels, fisher, and coyote). It provides adequate habitat for animal species that take advantage of forest edges such as whitetail deer, raccoon, skunk, fox, and more recently opossum.

### **G. Topography**

Ravines and gentle slopes crisscross Pratt's Brook Park. The Yarmouth USGS topo map indicates that there is approximately 90 feet of grade change from the high point in the old blueberry fields to the low point where Pratt's Brook joins the westernmost tributary. The elevation at the North Road parking lot is approximately 80 feet above sea level, while the Berryfield Road entrance is at elevation 100±.

## **VI. LEGAL AND REGULATORY ISSUES**

### **A. Deed Restrictions**

When the Hamill parcel was donated to the town, it was his intent to see the land used for 'passive' recreation in its natural state. This included activities such as walking, hiking, and picnicking. Mr. Hamill's wish was for the public to use the land in quiet enjoyment of its natural state. He specifically stated that "no trails for snowmobile or all-terrain vehicles shall be constructed on the land conveyed" by him to the town. It is important to note that the Hamill parcel currently represents only a portion of Pratt's Brook Park.

The Kelly parcel has an access easement from the parcel to Ledge Road. This 30 foot wide easement is to be used for park access, as well as maintenance, construction and emergency vehicles.

### **B. Yarmouth Zoning Ordinance**

The Yarmouth Zoning Ordinance is specific regarding the types of uses that are allowable within Pratt's Brook Park and on the abutting properties. Current details of applicable zoning regulations can be obtained from the Yarmouth Planning Department and Code Enforcement Office. Similarly, any proposed structures in Pratt's Brook Park would need to conform to current MDEP regulations with regard to stream setbacks, timber harvesting, etc.

### **C. Town Council Action**

Pratt's Brook Park is governed by *Chapter 501, Public Grounds Ordinance* adopted by the Town Council. These include general regulations for Yarmouth's town properties as well as the following requirements:

- Pratt's Brook Park shall be open for use by the general public during daylight and evening hours throughout the year, and it shall be closed to public use from 11:00P.M. until one (1) hour before sunrise of the immediately following day during which time it shall be unlawful for any person to be within the limits of Pratt's Brook Park or related parking areas, except for special events approved by the Town Council or Yarmouth Community Services Department.
- All-terrain vehicles (ATVs), motor bikes, and motor vehicles shall be prohibited at all times except for emergency use or in specially designated areas, if any.
- Snowmobiles shall be prohibited from use on all trails and areas except for such trails specifically laid out and authorized as snowmobile trails across Pratt's Brook Park lands. This shall not be construed to prohibit the use of snowmobiles and/or snow grooming

equipment for the maintenance and grooming of ski trails as authorized by the Yarmouth Community Services Department.

- In 1995 the Yarmouth Town Council, acting in response to concerns from residents along Berryfield Road (formerly known as Meadow Way), established a limit of cars to be parked at the end of the road.

## **D. State and Federal Regulations**

### **1. Alterations of Freshwater Wetlands**

In 1995, the US Army Corps of Engineers granted approval to the Town "to place fill in wetlands in conjunction with the construction of a series of culverted and/or bridged wetland crossings" as part of the development of a recreation trail system. If the Town were to undertake any additional work involving wetlands, a new permitting application would be necessary.

### **2. Natural Resources Protection Act**

Trail-building and other activities may fall under Permit-By-Rule (PBR) provisions of the MDEP. This procedure requires an applicant to notify MDEP of the activity prior to undertaking work. For PBR provisions and restrictions, please refer to current MDEP regulations and requirements for permitting.

Additional information concerning trail building activities may require Natural Resources Protection Act Permits. These regulations and restrictions are available from the Maine Department of Environmental Protection.

## **E. Utility Easements**

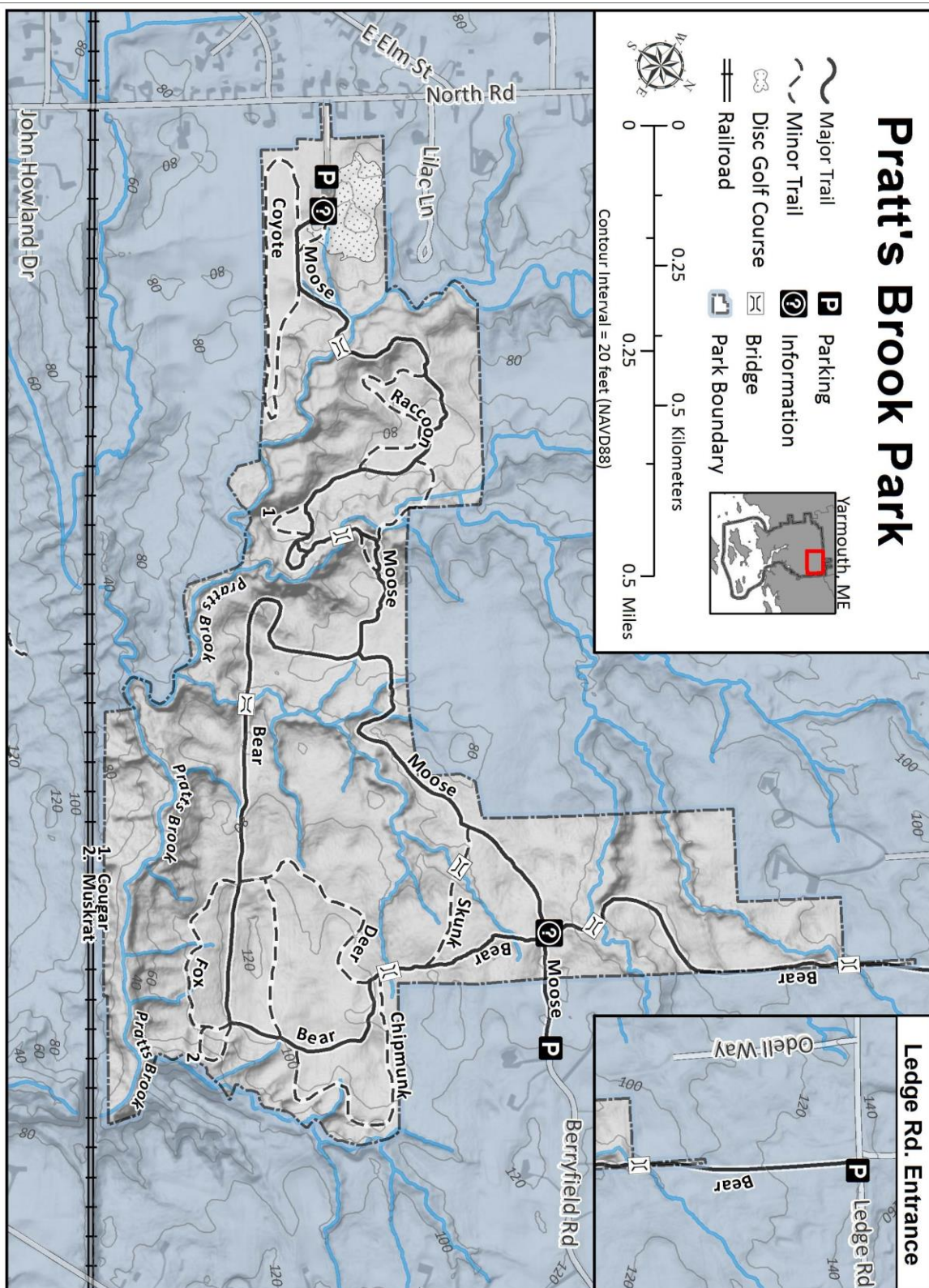
A Central Maine Power Company easement runs through Pratt's Brook Park, parallel to its southerly boundary. Vegetation is controlled by CMP. Maine Central Railroad abuts a portion of Pratt's Brook Park as well.

## **VII. CURRENT USE**

Pratt's Brook Park is primarily used for dispersed, recreational activities (hiking, dog-walking, etc) with cross-country skiing, ski racing, and cross-country running also favored by park's users. Pratt's Brook Park is best known for its natural environment, as described in the natural resources inventory. The facilities that have been developed over the past several years have been designed to allow more people to access Pratt's Brook Park while striving to maintain its 'natural' character.



## A. Park Facilities



## 1. Trails.

As of 2016, Pratt's Brook Park approximately 7.5 miles of trail throughout Pratt's Brook Park. Since their original layout and construction as Nordic ski trails, the use has become dominantly pedestrian throughout the year. When conditions allow, Parks Department compacts snowy trails with the snowmobile and snow grooming equipment. As weather, staffing, and equipment allow, snow grooming may be conducted at Pratt's Brook Park. Summer mechanical maintenance of the trails includes bi-annual mowing of major trail shoulders and hazard/obstacle tree removal as needed.

- **Moose Trail** is a major (east/west) trail through Pratt's Brook Park connecting Berryfield Road Trailhead and North Road Parking Lot (**1.45 miles**). This trail has been hardened with geotextile fabric and gravel. It is designed for pedestrian, soft wheeled strollers and mobility devices and winter travel.
- **Bear Trail**, the other major (north/south) trail through Pratt's Brook Park; connects the Ledge Road Trailhead and the CMP powerline (**1.25 miles**). This trail has been hardened with geotextile fabric and gravel. It is designed for pedestrian, soft wheeled strollers and mobility devices and winter travel. The bridges are designed to accommodate Pratt's Brook Parks Department mowing and grooming equipment and small emergency response vehicles. To the south of the intersection with Moose Trail near the Berryfield Road Trailhead, the trail passes the edge of the historic Knight Family blueberry fields just before the CMP corridor. CMP has historically used this trail and the access from Berryfield Road for emergency access to maintain this power line with up to 32k GVW tracked vehicles. Additionally, Bear Trail continues west along and under the powerline, looping back to Moose Trail after nearly 3/4 mile. The powerline section of this trail has not been improved and is often wet and not appropriate for wheeled travel.
- **Skunk Trail** connects Moose Trail and Bear Trail (0.25m). This trail has been hardened with geotextile fabric and gravel. It is designed for pedestrian, soft wheeled strollers and mobility devices and winter travel. The bridges are designed to accommodate Pratt's Brook Parks Department mowing (similar in size to John Deere 4410) and grooming equipment, and small emergency response vehicles. This trail is the connector which forms the 5k XC run course.
- **Otter Trail** is a scenic, short (0.25m), narrow path to the north and connecting parts of the Moose Trail. This is a primitive trail with the steepest grades in Pratt's Brook Park, descending through a Hemlock forest and requires fording a branch of Pratt's Brook across stepping stones. If no crossing is visible due to high water crossing should not be attempted. This crossing was improved in 2016 by a partnership with Maine Conservation Corps and the Town of Yarmouth.
- **Raccoon Trail** is a short (0.25m) path to the south and connecting parts of the Moose Trail. This is a rustic trail with deep roots and somewhat level terrain. During wet conditions, the roots hold water and make foot travel suboptimal. In wet conditions, alternate routes should be selected. In 2017, this trail surfacing was improved.

- **Cougar Trail** is a short (0.1m) path to the south connecting parts of the Moose Trail. This is a somewhat primitive trail with deep roots, and is somewhat level. During wet conditions the roots hold water and make foot travel suboptimal. In wet conditions, alternate routes should be selected.
- **Fox Trail** is a short (0.15m) primitive loop trail to the south of the CMP powerline connecting the end of the hardened Bear Trail, and the Bear Trail/ Deer Trail intersection under the CMP powerline.
- **Chipmunk Trail** is a scenic primitive trail (0.5m) along the east boundary of Pratt's Brook Park connecting parts of the Bear Trail, in places following the bluff edge of a tributary to Pratt's Brook. The south end of this trail opens to the historic Knight Family blueberry fields near the CMP powerlines.
- **Deer Trail** is a hardened, stable, internal loop trail (0.5m) connecting Bear Trail to the CMP powerline. A spur of this trail also returns (parallel to the north side of the powerline) to the historic Knight family blueberry fields.

## **2. Snowmobile Trail.**

An abandoned snowmobile trail crosses into the southeast corner of Pratt's Brook Park and crosses Bear and Moose Trail. Recreational snowmobiling is not compatible with the desired use of Pratt's Brook Park as a low-impact recreational opportunity. Portions of the trail appear abandoned, and the historic snowmobile trail no longer connects through Pratt's Brook Park to neighboring towns.

## **3. Bridges and Boardwalks.**

In 1994 two wooden footbridges (round-pole, trestle construction) – the Morski Bridge on the western end of Moose Trail, and the Kangaroo Bridge on Moose trail were constructed, primarily through the efforts of neighbor Geoff Shallard, the Yarmouth Ski Club, and members of the Yarmouth business community. Between 1994 and 2016, a vastly improved and expanded trail network has required the construction of additional bridges, boardwalks, and numerous culverts. The Yarmouth Town Engineer conducts regular inspections of the spans for safety and lifespan evaluations. The locations of these bridges have been identified and recorded on the municipal GIS database.

## **4. Culverts.**

Some of the trails cross wetland areas, but these sections are restricted for winter use when the wetlands are frozen. Culverts have been installed under the trails to carry runoff from intermittent streams allowing trail use to continue throughout the year.

## **5. Parking Areas.**

The primary access to Pratt's Brook Park is from the large gravel lot off North Road. Access from the Berryfield Road trailhead is limited to a few cars and by snow removal needs when relevant. A 4-car parking lot near the Ledge Road trailhead provides access to the north end of Bear Trail.



## **6. Signage.**

There are informational kiosk stations at each of the three trailheads. In 2017, a revised set of directional signs were created to help guide users on the trails and at intersections throughout Pratt's Brook Park. Several previous attempts at a comprehensive signage regime remain in the field. Any new signage shall be installed under the direction of Yarmouth Community Services.

## **B. Park Activities**

Since 1994 Pratt's Brook Park has seen increasing recreational use. Currently there is a medium but steady use of Pratt's Brook Park by year-round by users, including the following activities:

### **1. Cross-country Skiing.**

Local residents report that the heaviest use occurs in the winter, in conjunction with cross-country skiing. During the winter months the Yarmouth High School Ski Team uses Pratt's Brook Park for practice, and occasionally for races.

### **2. Walking.**

Walking is the most common use at this park. Wear patterns on the trails seem to indicate that most of the trails are being used during non-snow season, with limited evidence of over-use or trail degradation. There are groups of 'regulars' that frequent Pratt's Brook Park, often from the surrounding neighborhoods. Dog walking in Pratt's Brook Park is a common activity. Trail maintenance efforts to date have been sufficient to avoid degradation.

### **3. Running.**

An unknown number of individuals use Pratt's Brook Park trails for cross-country running, starting at one of Pratt's Brook Parking lots and running the internal loops. The Yarmouth High School Cross-Country Team sometimes uses Pratt's Brook Park for practice sessions. Local cross-country track meets are held occasionally at Pratt's Brook Park in the early fall.

### **4. Hunting.**

Bird and deer hunting have been traditional uses of Pratt's Brook Park. Seasonal signage will be posted at trailheads into Pratt's Brook Park by Yarmouth Community Services during each hunting season. Please reference *Chapter 314, Firearms Ordinance* for locations where firearms may be discharged in Yarmouth.

### **5. Horseback Riding.**

Although horseback riding is not currently prohibited in Pratt's Brook Park, trails and bridges in Pratt's Brook Park are not designed to accommodate horseback riding. Similarly, foliage and tree limbs along the trails have not been pruned to the required height for mounted riders.

### **6. Berry Picking.**

Blueberry harvesting has been a principal use of the old blueberry fields since Herb George and Frank Knight owned them, up until the 1980s. Both had cleared additional trees on the property to expand their crops. Berry picking today is an informal activity, enjoyed by local residents. Abutters report that fiddleheads are also harvested in Pratt's Brook Park.

### **7. Nature Study.**

Scout troops have used Pratt's Brook Park for field trips for nature study. The Environmental Science class at Yarmouth High School also completed a research project on species composition within Pratt's Brook Park. Students that worked on the original evaluation recommended the establishment of an outdoor classroom for environmental studies. This plan envisions an easily accessible, informal place for educational activities, at a location near the North Road parking lot. Pratt's Brook Park is also used for informal bird-watching.

### **8. Disc-Golf.**

A 9-hole disc golf course was established in the open fields of Pratt's Brook Park in 2013, and is used on a steady basis by residents. Disc-golf 'baskets' are permanently mounted and maintained, and the course at Pratt's Brook Park remains a popular destination for this activity.

### **9. Snowmobiling.**

Due to increased winter hiking and XC skiing in Pratt's Brook Park, snowmobilers are prohibited from using Pratt's Brook Park unless access is required for emergency or trail-grooming purposes.

### **10. Biking.**

Historically, biking has been prohibited in Pratt's Brook Park. As the demand for biking in the community continues to increase, trail improvements and the integration of new trails may be considered. All proposed bike trail development must be approved by Yarmouth Community Services and the Yarmouth Town Council.

## **VIII. FUTURE ACQUISITIONS**

As the town continues to grow and the popularity of Pratt's Brook Park increases, there will be increased demand for adding acreage to the core property that now makes up Pratt's Brook Park. Additional land would allow for the development of more trails for specific activities. There are a number of ways for the Town to be pro-active to ensure the managed growth of Pratt's Brook Park and surrounding land:

- Use monies in the land acquisition account to purchase development rights or properties as they come on the market.
- Secure rights of first refusal on abutting properties that are valuable for their recreational, visual, habitat, access, or buffer values.
- Meet with surrounding property owners to discuss plans for their land and possible participation in the expansion of Pratt's Brook Park. Abutter estate planning may open up opportunities for the Town to acquire more land.
- Encourage the development of Cluster Subdivisions on adjacent or nearby properties, using the provisions of the Open Space Requirement of the Yarmouth Zoning Ordinance. This practice may help protect land in proximity to Pratt's Brook Park with significant natural features, buffer areas, recreational needs, abutting Town-owned property, and land areas greater than 20 acres.

- Encourage the development of a town-wide trail system that inter-connects Pratt's Brook Park.
- Review new acquisitions to ensure that any new parcels foster optimal compatible uses with Pratt's Brook Park (for example, shared parking, access, etc.).

## **IX. MANAGEMENT APPROACHES AND GUIDELINES**

### **A. Overview**

The activities allowed in Pratt's Brook Park should have limited impact on soils, water and air quality, noise levels, vegetation, and wildlife. Management strategies shall address potential conflicts caused by specific park uses.

Most of the management strategies are low-key in nature. More aggressive techniques may be necessary where the health of the ecosystem is threatened (e.g., to halt the spread or establishment of invasive, exotic species).

Pratt's Brook Park is host to a range of recreational activities. Soil and trail conditions should continue to be monitored on a regular basis for over-use and improvement. Specific activities should be limited if necessary, by authorization of Yarmouth Community Services and authorized Town staff.

Pratt's Brook Park will continue to be managed under the direction of the Yarmouth Community Services and under advisement of the Parks and Lands Committee. Pratt's Brook Park will not be self-supporting, although a fee structure may be considered for special events if necessary.

### **B. Access Improvements**

Parking for the general public is limited to three park entrances. North Road on the western side of Pratt's Brook Park, Berryfield Road (off Granite Street) on the eastern end of Pratt's Brook Park, and Ledge Road. Several improvements may be considered to improve current parking and trail conditions:

- To encourage connectivity, plan for a trail corridor that connects Pratt's Brook Park to existing and future trails as part of a comprehensive town-wide system. Any new trails must be authorized by Yarmouth Community Services prior to design and construction.
- Explore the idea of connecting Pratt's Brook Park with the Frank Knight Forest on the southeast side of the railroad tracks. With new development in this area, there may be increasing pressure to cross the tracks to gain access to Pratt's Brook Park.

### **C. Forest Management**

With the goal of providing an attractive, safe area for limited outdoor recreation, the primary goal of forest management activities at Pratt's Brook Park is to maximize habitat diversity for wildlife and the enjoyment of local residents. Pratt's Brook Park is not intended as a revenue source for the Town (e.g.- generating money through the harvesting timber for pulp, firewood, or logs).

The Town should continue to consult with a professional land-use consultant and/or stewardship organizations to assist in managing existing resources, and to balance the desire for increased public access and use. A long-range strategy to carry out the goals of the plan may consider the following issues to be addressed:

- Recommending ways to increase habitat diversity. This may include limited cutting to promote diversity in the age of stands, and to create more density in the shrub layer.
- Determining when trees become hazardous and may need to be removed to protect public safety.
- Recommending appropriate methods to harvest and transport trees out of Pratt's Brook Park.
- Setting certain areas aside for scientific or wildlife purposes.
- Evaluating the current trail locations in terms of their impact on wildlife populations.
- Recommending species that should be removed due to their invasive nature.
- Setting guidelines on introducing plant material into Pratt's Brook Park for wildlife habitat, screening, or visual interest.
- Developing themes and stories to be used in interpretive material (pamphlets, signs, displays) throughout Pratt's Brook Park.

#### **D. Design and Construction Oversight**

Yarmouth Community Services is responsible for the design and construction of all park infrastructure – trails, bridges, signage, culverts, etc. While this management plan does not anticipate major new construction, any proposed work shall be of a high-quality municipal standard, and compatible with the intended use.

- Bridges, signs, rest areas, etc. should be designed with a sense of permanence, consistency, and sensitivity to the natural environment.
- Where feasible, Pratt's Brook Park infrastructure should comply with the requirements and recommendations of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).
- Future structures should be reviewed by the Town Planner, YCS Director, and the Yarmouth Parks & Lands Committee for consistent design.
- Appearance of trails should be as simple as possible and should not be lined with brush, tree limbs, or rocks to mark the trail edges. The design and maintenance of the trail system shall offer range of trail types, including some narrow paths, and wider, hardened trails for heavier use.

- Culverts should be installed in inconspicuous locations along watercourses and constructed of durable materials. The use of brightly colored plastics (white or aqua blue) should be avoided. The ends of all culverts should be riprapped or treated with stonework to protect them and to blend well into the surrounding landscape.
- Where human activity has occurred, care should be taken to restore the natural environment: e.g., tree removal, stump treatment, brush piles, bank cuts, wood chips.
- All signs and trail markers shall be adequate for their intended use. A consistent signage program should be established throughout Pratt's Brook Park to ensure that signs are legible, adequately spaced, provide appropriate levels of information, and do not conflict with the appearance of the surrounding forest land. All signage should be coordinated with pamphlets and maps. Maps used in Pratt's Brook Park should be designed to allow for modifications as trails are relocated or other management changes are made.

## **X. SUMMARY OF MANAGEMENT APPROACHES**

The tables on the following pages summarize the recommended management approaches for recreational and educational activities that may take place in Pratt's Brook Park.

The priorities for these approaches are:

- Maintain existing parking and improve as necessary
- Maintaining and improving trails- mowing, grading, chipping, clearing downed trees and replacement/upgrading of signage
- Developing new trails where feasible
- Maintain existing disc-golf baskets

### **A. Recreational / Educational Activities**

Recreational activities in Pratt's Brook Park continue to evolve based on the interests of user groups and town residents. Please refer to specific management activities and recommendations for each activity.

In order to minimize the maintenance responsibilities for Pratt's Brook Park, a 'carry-in / carry-out' trash policy is recommended for all activities. However, trash receptacles may be used if deemed necessary by Yarmouth Community Services.

### **B. Management Activities**

This section deals with the activities related to the physical condition of Pratt's Brook Park: the fields, forest, wildlife, trails and infrastructure. In all cases, the management levels are guided by the goals established by Pratt's Brook Parks & Lands Committee and Yarmouth Community Services.

For each activity, the chart identifies specific strategies and goals for its implementation. Additional detail for specific activities (access improvements and forest management) is contained in the next section.

## XI. MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES

### A. Recreational/Educational Activities

Activity	Management Strategies
<b>Walking, Hiking &amp; Snowshoeing</b>	<p>Evaluate condition of trails on a yearly basis.</p> <p>Address natural or human damage as soon as it becomes noticeable.</p> <p>Develop range of trails for a variety of user experiences including alternative trails / loops to take pressure off most popular trails.</p> <p>Close trails to give the land time to recover as necessary.</p> <p>Include ADA considerations in any new trail development.</p> <p>Consider evolving trail needs.</p>
<b>Cross Country Skiing</b>	<p>PBP is groomed for cross country skiing as long as weather, staff, and equipment allow.</p> <p>Moose and Bear Trails were designed as trails to be groomed for Nordic skiing, and could be used seasonally if groomed by Yarmouth Community Services.</p>
<b>Competitive Athletic Events: e.g., Running, Skiing</b>	<p>Provide ample public notice of scheduled events.</p> <p>Post signs in park and notices in local papers publicizing event.</p> <p>Provide off-site shuttle for parking if necessary.</p> <p>Require a designated representative to be responsible for clean-up, signage, and other event logistics.</p>
<b>Dog Walking</b>	<p>Refer to <i>Chapter 309, Dog Control Ordinance</i> for current rules.</p> <p>Currently dogs are allowed at PBP, but are required to be leashed within 100 yards of any trailhead.</p> <p>Enforce rules to keep all pets on leash and/or under voice control.</p>
<b>Horseback Riding</b>	<p>Develop future guidelines for horses in PBP.</p> <p>Bridges and trail surfaces are not currently designed or maintained for equestrian use.</p> <p>Refer to <i>Chapter 501, Public Grounds Ordinance</i> for rules on horses in public spaces.</p>

Activity	Management Strategies
<b>Biking</b>	As trails and surfacing allow, bicycles may be allowed on designated trails. Any new trail development proposals for bicycles in PBP must be approved by Town Council after design and advice from Yarmouth Community Services and the Parks and Lands Committee.
<b>Berry Picking</b>	Permitted.
<b>Snowmobiling</b>	Not permitted except for emergency, maintenance, and trail grooming.
<b>Group Nature Study Educational Programs</b>	Permitted.
<b>Nighttime Activities: i.e. star-gazing, owling</b>	PBP hours of operation are designated in the <i>Chapter 501, Public Grounds Ordinance</i> . Limited to quiet activities. Access allowable with permission from Yarmouth Community Services after posted hours. YCS may notify police of planned and allowed activities.
<b>Hunting</b>	By Permit Only (bow hunting and shotgun only). Please refer to <i>Chapter 314, Firearms Ordinance</i> . YCS shall post signage at trailheads when hunting is in season.
<b>Paintball</b>	Not compatible with current uses. Paint-ball is prohibited in PBP.
<b>Disc Golf</b>	Permitted in designated area.
<b>Additional Uses</b>	Additional uses may be considered and PLC shall review proposals as they are submitted to Yarmouth Community Services.

## B. Resource Management Strategies

Activity	Management Strategies
<b>Blueberry Field Maintenance &amp; Restoration</b>	<p>Work with specialty organizations and trained professionals to develop long-range plan for maintenance and restoration of fields.</p> <p>Remove invasive trees and shrubs by mechanical means. Limit or prohibit the use of chemical controls.</p>
<b>Forest Management</b>	<p>Consult with a forester or land-use consultant to develop a long-term management plan for the present park and any additional lands as they are incorporated.</p> <p>Develop an interpretive program (brochures, signs, guided walks) to inform the public about the forest management objectives of Pratt's Brook Park.</p> <p>Manage dead trees and limbs if they present a hazard to park users.</p> <p>Limit activities to control nuisance or invasive plant species.</p>
<b>Wildlife Management</b>	<p>Consult with specialty organizations and trained professionals when developing long-term plans to enhance the value of PBP for wildlife.</p> <p>Develop an interpretive program (brochures, signs, guided walks) to inform the public about the wildlife management objectives of Pratt's Brook Park.</p>
<b>Erosion Control</b>	<p>Follow current Best Management Practices for all work undertaken in Pratt's Brook Park.</p> <p>Rely upon bio-engineering methods to stabilize slopes and prevent further degradation where appropriate.</p> <p>Minimize the use of structural means to control erosion.</p> <p>Evaluate all site improvements for their erosion potential.</p> <p>Coordinate all work with Yarmouth Community Services.</p> <p>Site new trails to decrease impacts on erosion.</p> <p>Minimize or control uses that impact erosion.</p>



### C. Park Maintenance Activities

Activity	Management Strategies
<b>Parking Lot Maintenance</b>	<p>Grade and roll parking lots to compact surface material.</p> <p>Patch as necessary to fill holes.</p> <p>Plow with care to minimize damage to edges and surrounding landscaping.</p> <p>Upgrade existing parking areas to ADA standards where feasible.</p>
<b>Planting Trees and Shrubs</b>	<p>Employ native plantings that will naturalize with time wherever new plantings are introduced in Pratt's Brook Park.</p> <p>Avoid introducing exotic plants (non-natives).</p> <p>Select trees and shrubs that may also have wildlife value and year-round interest.</p> <p>Educate and train volunteers involved with plantings.</p>
<b>Mowing</b>	<p>Consult with specialty organizations and trained professionals regarding proper times to mow fields to minimize danger to ground nesting species and vegetation goals.</p> <p>Mowing may not be required every year.</p> <p>Monitor growth of pioneer species and develop a mowing regime accordingly.</p>
<b>Trail Maintenance</b>	<p>Coordinate trail maintenance days to bring trails back up to standards. Provide training sessions and proper tools for volunteers.</p> <p>Monitor trail use on regular basis. Be prepared to close sections of trails as required to prevent excessive degradation or to protect special habitats.</p> <p>Inform public of trail status at entrance bulletin boards/kiosks. Update and maintain kiosks as necessary.</p> <p>Consider updating designated trails to ADA standards.</p>
<b>Trash Pickup</b>	<p>Establish a 'Carry-in / Carry-out' policy. Use existing trash receptacles for dog-waste.</p> <p>Reinforce the message on bulletin boards, maps, and Community Service brochures.</p> <p>Encourage visitors to pick up stray trash.</p> <p>Monitor on a regular basis.</p>
<b>Winter Trail Grooming</b>	<p>Continue to groom the trails as snow conditions permit.</p>

## D. Physical Development

Activity	Management Strategies
<b>Bathroom Facilities</b>	<p>Develop plans for a simple outhouse based upon specific siting criteria: proper soils, privacy, ADA access, within 300 feet of parking lot, shaded site, min. 75-100' from trails and wetland.</p> <p>OR Lease portable outhouses on a seasonal basis, to be enclosed by an attractive wooden screen.</p> <p>OR consider eliminating restroom facilities.</p>
<b>Bridges and Boardwalks: Building &amp; Reconstruction</b>	<p>Regularly inspect all bridges and boardwalks for safety, design, environmental concerns (erosion), and compliance with ADA.</p> <p>Follow recommended guidelines for design of wooden structures.</p> <p>Maintain and replace parts or portions to ensure maximum safety.</p>
<b>Trail Building</b>	<p>Develop a trail construction plan.</p> <p>Use current trail construction methods for any proposed trails within park.</p> <p>Careful consideration shall be given to location and layout of new trails.</p> <p>Avoid constructing trails that may be too steep, cross wetlands, or disturb critical habitat.</p> <p>Prohibit unauthorized trail building.</p> <p>Yarmouth Community Services should oversee any new trail construction and repair.</p>
<b>Shelter Construction</b>	<p>All structures should be designed by a licensed architect, use appropriate materials that are consistent with PBP structures, and sited to respect the surrounding landscape.</p>

### NOTE:

**GIS Mapping.** The Town has the ability to assemble and manipulate data layers through their Geographic Information System. GIS mapping can be a useful tool for land-use planning and management. GIS mapping may also be useful to abutting landowners, the scientific/educational community, Pratt's Brook Parks & Lands Committee, and Yarmouth Community Services in the generation of trail maps, forest cover maps, three-dimensional views of the property, and other graphic tools with a variety of applications associated with the planning and maintenance of Pratt's Brook Park. A map of Pratt's Brook Park can be found on the Yarmouth Community Services website.

## **XII. APPENDIX**

### **Current Rules Governing Pratt's Brook Park**

These rules have been adopted by the Yarmouth Town Council to govern activities at Pratt's Brook Park (per *Chapter 501, Public Grounds Ordinance*).

- No person shall deposit or leave any trash, litter, or refuse except in designated containers or disposal areas.
- No person shall set, leave, bait, or tend any animal traps, water sets, or snares.
- No person shall deface, injure, destroy, vandalize, or remove any fences, signs, gates, benches, structures, amenities, buildings or any other public improvements.
- No person shall place, construct or assemble any fence, tree house, permanent tree stand, building, structure, latrine, lean-to, bridge, culvert, or conduit, without the explicit permission of the Town.
- No person shall set, kindle, burn, or allow any fire, without the explicit permission of the Town.
- No person may camp or tent on any Town properties after 11:00 p.m. or during authorized evening hours of operation, whichever is earlier, without the explicit permission of the Town.
- Except for brushing or maintenance of approved trails systems no person shall cut or remove any trees, limbs, shrubs or bushes nor remove any vegetation, without the explicit permission of the Town. This shall not be construed to prohibit the gathering of nuts, fruits, ferns, leaves, berries, cones, ornamentation, scientific or educational purposes.
- No person shall apply any herbicide, fungicide, or pesticide, without the explicit permission of the Town.
- Motor vehicles, bicycles, all-terrain vehicles and other motorized equipment shall be prohibited from all areas except roadways, parking areas, and tracts specifically established or designated for such use, without the explicit permission of the Town.

Note: The Town Manager, under the direction of the Town Council, or with the advice and consent of the Citizens Advisory Committee or Agency assigned may adopt or establish additional rules and regulations as are reasonable and necessary to accomplish the following purposes:

- To assure healthful, safe, and sanitary conditions on the subject property.
- To promote peaceful and considerate public use and enjoyment of Town properties and to minimize any nuisance, disturbance or interference, or safety concerns on adjoining or nearby lands that may be caused by such public use or enjoyment of Town lands.

- To protect or enhance the scenic, recreational and environmental values of the property and to prevent erosion, unreasonable disturbance of natural habitat and wildlife, or to prevent pollution.
- To allocate the limited use of time and space fairly and equitably among various persons or groups seeking use of the properties.
- To provide for efficient care and maintenance of the properties.

Any person aggrieved by the decision of the Town Manager, Parks & Lands Committee, or Yarmouth Community Services may appeal to the Town Council.

### **SPECIAL REGULATIONS FOR PRATT'S BROOK PARK**

- Pratt's Brook Park shall be open for use by the general public during daylight and evening hours throughout the year, and it shall be closed to public use from 11:00 P.M. until one hour before sunrise of the immediately following day during which time it shall be unlawful for any person to be within the limits of Pratt's Brook Park or related parking areas, except for special event approved by the Town Council or Yarmouth Community Services.
- All-terrain vehicles (ATV's), motor bikes, mountain bikes, and motor vehicles shall be prohibited at all times except in specially designated areas, for such use, if any.
- Snowmobiles shall be prohibited from use on all trails and areas except for such trails specifically laid out and authorized as snowmobile trails across Pratt's Brook Park lands. This shall not be construed to prohibit the use of snowmobiles for emergency purposes and/or snow grooming equipment for the maintenance and grooming of ski trails as authorized by Yarmouth Community Services.