

Maine Bureau of Parks and Lands

Talking Brook Public Land

Summary of Resources & Issues/Concerns/Needs/Opportunities

Summary of Resources

- Fee ownership and acquisition history:
 - Talking Brook Public Land was acquired from the Fralich family and Royal River Conservation Trust (RRCT) in December 2023, total ~200 acres
 - Parcel west of Woodman Road in New Gloucester (156 acres)
 - Parcels east of Woodman Road in New Gloucester and Auburn, former RRCT Big Falls Preserve (43 acres)
 - Parcel at intersection of Woodman Road and Meadow Lane (< 1 acre)

- Public Access and Roads:
 - The Unit is easily accessible to a large part of the population of the state, being within an hour's drive of the larger cities and towns in southern Maine (Portland, Lewiston/Auburn, Augusta). Paved roads reach within a few miles; remainder of access is on maintained gravel roads.
 - Formerly, parking was at the end of the town-maintained portion of Woodman Road; BPL constructed a new gravel parking area on the corner parcel in 2025
 - Woodman Rd provides pedestrian and vehicle access to the public land and the trails
 - Beginning 125 feet north of Ayer Road, road was abandoned by the Town of New Gloucester in 1993, with a public access easement retained
 - Conveyance included an Access Easement on the first ~800 feet (from roadside parking area to nearest parcel) and a 20' x 50' parking easement area (for management use only) within that easement area; No public parking allowed on the road
 - First ~800 feet is maintained by residents who use the road to access their properties

- Non-motorized trails:
 - Existing network of hiking trails developed by the previous owner; multiple loops, total 4.3 miles, passing scenic brooks with waterfalls and winding through wooded hills.
 - Bureau has made some modest changes to the trail system, closing some wet and eroded sections, and installing short reroutes
 - With the assistance of RRCT, new bridges have been installed, trail maps have been posted at several locations and trail blazes (colored plastic markers) have been added

- Hunting and trapping:
 - Not known if these activities have been occurring on the property; will follow up with former landowners about previous hunting access and activity, if any.
 - Former Preserve area -- RRCT generally allows hunting, with permission, following all applicable State and Town hunting regulations. Trapping is permitted with notification at select preserves.

- Fisheries and Wildlife:
 - **Wildlife:** Expect common mammal and bird species indigenous to Southern Maine mature forest environments to be present; small forested wetland at center of the unit may host beaver and other species not found in forested areas
 - **Fisheries:** no ponds present; no data on fish present in Meadow Brook or Talking Brook (Royal River tributaries); area is within MDIFW-mapped brook trout habitat area; potential barriers to movement exist at downstream road crossings

- Special Resources:
 - **Wildlife:**
 - **Riparian areas** adjacent to the mapped streams are valuable wildlife habitat.
 - MDIFW field survey did not document any **vernal pools**
 - No known **rare species**; will review IF&W records of any occurrences in the area
 - Mature forest may provide habitat for **bats**; the following species have been documented nearby: big brown bat (Special Concern), eastern red bat (Special Concern, SGCN 3), hoary bat (Special Concern, SGCN 3), silver haired bat (Special Concern, SGCN 3), and little brown bat (Endangered, SCGN 2). Snags with bark separating from the tree create spaces which bats use for roosting (daytime resting). Older trees also can provide cavities and flaky bark for roosting. [SCGN = Species of Greatest Conservation Need, 2 = high priority, 3 = moderate priority, in Maine's Wildlife Action Plan]
 - **Natural Communities/Rare Plants:**
 - no Maine Natural Areas Program (MNAP)-mapped exemplary natural communities or rare plants

- Timber Resources:
 - **Overview of forest stands:** Much of the parcel is occupied by stands of mature white pine and eastern hemlock which include scattered mature red oak and pockets of aspen. Sugar and red maple, basswood, white ash, and yellow birch also occur as components of these stands. At the northeast corner of the main parcel is a younger hardwood stand of about 15 acres dominated by American beech and paper birch. A mixedwood stand of similar size occupies much of the hillsides to the west of Talking Brook, where a scattered white pine overstory includes some especially large, open-grown trees indicative of past agricultural use. Here, areas of fir, hemlock, and white pine regeneration are present beneath a mixed hardwood midstory.

- **Harvest History:** No known history of timber harvests in recent decades; none occurred under the previous ownership (~30-50 years depending on parcel). Evidence of harvesting 40+ years ago in the form of cut stumps and old skid trails.
- **Potential “Regulated” Acres:** Preliminary examination indicates perhaps 25-30% of the Unit may be suitable to be classified as regulated acres if reliable management access were secured. (Regulated acres are actively managed for timber production, as a primary or secondary use; these may not include all operable acres on a Unit, due to the presence of sensitive or rare/high value natural communities, trails and other recreation amenities, and other factors.) Limitations on access may preclude the “regulated” classification of any acres.
- **Access:** Poor -- No public roads abut the property and there are no management roads on the land; west side of unit has potential for future harvests due to lack of trails but is abutted on west and south by residential lots
- **Growth potential:** The operable acres include a mix of shallow, well-drained soils on higher ground and more enriched, moist sites in lower areas and drainages. Enriched sites show potential to produce high-quality northern hardwoods. Drier areas have potential to be managed for pine and oak; however, much of the existing pine component is likely a legacy of past agricultural use, and without active management it is likely that pine will form a lesser portion of future age classes due to competition from hardwood species.
- Historic/Cultural Resources:
 - There is no record of archeological sites on the Unit; Town of New Gloucester Comprehensive Plan indicates no known pre-settlement or post-settlement sites nearby, but many areas of town have not been surveyed
 - Survey notes “old mill” site on Meadow Brook
 - State Historic Preservation Office will be consulted
- Zoning:
 - New Gloucester – nearly all the acreage is zoned **Farm and Forest**; buffer zone along Meadow Brook is zoned **Resource Protection**
 - Farm and Forest – Covering the least developed portions of town...non-residential permitted uses are focused on traditional, land intensive uses such as agriculture, forestry, and recreation. This zone is expressly intended to protect and foster these uses from large scale development.
 - Shoreland - Resource Protection – Covering those portions of the Limited Residential zone that are most environmentally sensitive, this zone heavily restricts uses that may have any detrimental impact on the environment.
 - Auburn – similarly, the parcel in Auburn (and all the surrounding forest land) is zoned as “Agriculture and Resource Protection”

Issues/Needs/Opportunities

1. *Trail System*

- Trail Maintenance – Trails were built for generally light and mostly local use; need to ensure trails meet standards and can withstand expected increased use;
- Potential Additional Trail System Changes -- Sections of trail remain where erosion is a concern due to unsuitable soils and higher-than-ideal trail gradients. Also, certain trail sections are in close proximity, which diminishes opportunities for users to experience relative solitude and may make wayfinding confusing.
- Dogs on the Trail System -- Talking Brook is a popular destination for dog-walking, much of which is focused on Woodman Road, and for trail users who like to bring their pets. There has been a concern, predating the Bureau's ownership, with off-leash dogs straying onto adjacent residential properties and leaving waste, about which the Bureau has received repeated complaints. There is also a concern with dog waste not being picked up from the road and trails.
- Equestrian Use of Trails – Local equestrians have enjoyed riding to Talking Brook and riding on some portions of the trail system. However, the trails and bridges were not designed for equestrian use and there are unsuitable soils and slopes in some areas, causing erosion and trail degradation.

2. *Hunting Access*

- There is strong sentiment regarding the need to maintain traditional hunting access on the Public Lands in the plan area. High development pressures and land postings have combined to reduce hunting opportunities.
- By Public Lands rule, loaded firearms may not be carried or discharged within 300 feet of marked hiking trails, limiting the opportunity to hunt on most of the Talking Brook property. However, opportunities remain, particularly on the trailless westernmost side of the unit, and for hunting with non-firearm methods.

3. *Wildlife and Habitat Protection*

- Protection will be provided by a Wildlife dominant allocation, applied as a 330-foot or 75-foot buffer zone ("major" and "minor" riparian buffers) on each side of the streams. A 75-foot buffer zone will be applied to the one mapped wetland on the unit, which in part will overlap the Talking Brook stream buffer.
- Avoiding additional trail development in new areas will preserve remaining unfragmented and undisturbed habitat

4. *Timber Management*

- Timber harvesting could occur, as a primary use or compatible secondary use on the ~70 acres westernmost part of the land, recognizing recreational and aesthetic values, particularly in the vicinity of the trail network, and visual concerns as viewed from residences and roads. However, as noted above, poor access is a major constraint.

- No harvesting would occur in areas with trails to avoid disturbing trails and in consideration of visual resources
- To protect visual resources, Visual Class II would need to be applied to areas visible from the above listed areas. (VC II areas are managed to avoid any obvious alterations to the landscape as seen from those viewpoints, with openings of a size and orientation so as not draw undue attention.)

5. *Administrative Issues:*

- Vehicle Use of Woodman Road and Maintenance
 - BPL has the right to maintain and improve the portion of the road covered by the Access Easement. That portion of the road provides vehicle access to abutting residences on either side of the road and is maintained by those residents. Beyond that point, where the road crosses the Talking Brook parcels, it is rutted and drainage improvements are failing in some locations. These conditions may discourage most vehicular use, but if it continues, may further damage the road and so make it less desirable for pedestrian use.
- Staffing and Management Partners
 - Continued collaboration and coordination between BPL Parks and Lands divisions in management of Unit
 - Continued collaboration with Royal River Conservation Trust (RRCT) to conduct trail maintenance and to provide a visible presence on site.