

Draft Open Space Plan Jaffrey, NH



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October 2010

Executive Summary

Some of the defining characteristics of Jaffrey have always been the beauty of its landscape, the richness of its natural resources, and the abundant recreational opportunities. The wise use of land and preservation of open space is encouraged in many sections of Jaffrey's Master Plan, and conservation of natural resources is a recurring theme throughout the Master Plan. The purpose of this draft Open Space Plan is to illuminate possible approaches to preserving and enhancing these desirable attributes as the town continues to grow.

In order to develop recommendations on possible approaches to open space protection, the Jaffrey Select Board appointed four volunteers to form an ad hoc Open Space Committee (OSC) in early 2010, and then expanded the committee size to a total of ten members in June 2010. The original ad hoc committee conducted focus sessions with seven distinct interest groups of Jaffrey citizens, and the expanded committee evaluated the input collected in the context of preparing a draft Open Space Plan. This draft plan builds upon data collected in previous reports such as the 2009 Natural Resource Inventory, and offers recommendations on steps to be taken in order to implement a more proactive approach to open space protection in Jaffrey.

Based on the public input it received, the committee identified a set of criteria that express the values placed on open space by the citizens of Jaffrey. These criteria, along with maps prepared to depict the areas of town considered valuable by each of the interest groups, provide the building blocks for finalizing an Open Space Plan for Jaffrey. Potential tools and techniques for implementing the goals of open space protection are also identified in this draft plan.

The ad hoc Open Space Committee has identified a number of benefits for the town in the protection of open space and has suggested that it is fitting and appropriate for Town government to encourage conservation and protection of certain lands as a matter of public policy. The role of Town government in this area can include activities such as educating landowners about the topic, networking among landowners and land trusts, identifying lands that have particularly high natural resource, recreational, or working land values, and acquiring or assisting in transactions involving land or conservation easements.

In order to implement these goals, the ad hoc committee recommends the creation of a 7-member permanent Open Space Committee (OSC) that will report directly to the Select Board. Members of the OSC should encompass a broad representation of the various interests in Jaffrey. The OSC should be tasked with finalizing the Jaffrey Open Space Plan, providing recommendations to the Select Board on expenditures from the Land Acquisition Capital Reserve Fund, interacting with other Town boards and committees on open space issues, and providing outreach and educational resources pertinent to open space issues for Jaffrey citizens. The draft plan concludes with a set of action items that will lead toward the achievement of these goals.

1.0 Introduction

Some of the defining characteristics of Jaffrey have always been the beauty of its landscape, the richness of its natural resources, and the abundant recreational opportunities. These qualities are prized by the town's residents and also serve as an important attraction for bringing visitors to the town. The purpose of this draft Open Space Plan is to illuminate possible approaches to preserving and enhancing these desirable attributes as the town continues to grow.

This Plan supports and elaborates upon some of the primary objectives and strategies voiced in Jaffrey's 2007 Master Plan Update. Wise use of land and preservation of open space is encouraged in many sections of the Master Plan, and conservation of natural resources is a recurring theme throughout the Master Plan. Perhaps the most succinct expression of these goals is found in this opening passage from the Plan's Vision Statement:

The people of Jaffrey have indicated that they want to see Jaffrey remain a small town, with a friendly atmosphere. We envision a Jaffrey that combines controlled growth and development with strong land preservation and environmental protection.

Preservation of open space, forests and fields, and wildlife habitats, all of which are integral to our rural character, is of crucial importance. Mount Monadnock, and our ponds, lake, wetland areas, and scenic vistas are trusts to be passed unspoiled to future generations.

In order to provide a more concrete basis for realizing this vision, the Jaffrey Select Board appointed volunteers to form an ad hoc Open Space Committee (OSC) in early 2010. The OSC initiated a series of public participation meetings to solicit input from town residents regarding the town's open space areas. Following this initial information gathering phase, the committee was expanded to a larger group in order to evaluate the input.

Although not all members of the expanded committee had attended the earlier focus sessions, all members were able to review the maps and meeting minutes generated during that process. The committee's evaluation of this input, along with its analysis of other supporting documentation describing the town's natural resources has led to the preparation of this draft Open Space Plan. Specific elements included as components of this draft plan include:

- Evaluation criteria for considering the preservation of open space and recreational opportunities.
- Strategies for maintaining healthy and functional open space networks as the town continues to grow.
- Descriptions of resources and techniques for implementing land protection strategies.

- Recommendations on the lead agency that should be responsible for open space issues within town government.

2.0 Definition of Open Space

In order to provide an underpinning for the Plan, one of the OSC's first tasks was to settle on a working definition for "open space". A town's open space can serve a variety of different interests, and the way in which open space is defined helps to provide a focus for the issues addressed in the Open Space Plan.

Open space, as envisioned in this plan, can include forests, farmland, fields, shore lands, waterbodies, and wetlands. Open space can also encompass scenic vistas, town forests, historic sites, and recreational trails. It often has important natural, historic, ecological, cultural or recreational resources. With the exception of agricultural and forestry uses, open space has generally not undergone development.

Open space can be either public or private parcels of land, and size is not necessarily considered to be a limiting characteristic. Land designated as open space may be maintained in its natural state to protect specific environmental features or it may be used for agricultural, forestry, or outdoor recreational purposes. Some lands deemed environmentally sensitive or that have endangered species may or may not be conducive to certain recreational uses. It was also agreed that for the purposes of this Plan, open space would not include commercial or municipal organized recreational facilities such as ball fields and playgrounds. While these types of facilities provide clear benefits to the town, they are already a clearly defined responsibility of the town's Recreation Department, and do not require the guidance or prioritization criteria offered in this Plan.

3.0 Process and Approach to Plan Development

The initial group convened as an ad hoc Open Space Committee was comprised of two members from the Planning Board and two members from the Conservation Commission. This group was tasked by the Select Board to provide a recommendation regarding the proper role, composition and/or need for a permanent Open Space Committee in Jaffrey. After its initial meeting, the ad hoc committee concluded that this issue would be best explored by conducting a process that would culminate in the production of an Open Space Plan for Jaffrey. At the conclusion of this process, it was felt that the committee would have a much clearer understanding of the types of issues that would be faced by a permanent Open Space Committee and how this function could be best addressed in town government. With the assent of the Select Board, preparation of an Open Space Plan was added to the ad hoc committee's scope.

Given the diversity of different stakeholders in town with an interest in open space issues, the committee felt that a robust public participation process was necessary in order to fully explore the perceived values of open space in Jaffrey. A series of public sessions were held during the Spring of 2010, with each session focusing on one

particular aspect of open space. Each public meeting was properly noticed and publicized in the local newspaper and on the town website, but the primary intent was not to assemble a high turnout and wide cross-section of town residents at each meeting. Rather, the goal was to assemble the most knowledgeable and passionate advocates for each narrowly defined interest in a focus session where they could provide input to the committee for evaluation, analysis and synthesis at a later date. In keeping with this goal, personal invitations were issued for each meeting to specific individuals known to have high levels of knowledge and involvement in activities related to the topic for the meeting.

Seven of these focus sessions were held during the course of the Spring, covering the following topics:

- Snowmobiling
- Working Lands - agriculture, forestry, maple sugaring, etc.
- Hunting
- Ecosystem Services - aquifer protection, wetland functions, wildlife habitat, stormwater control, etc.
- Town character - artists, historic preservationists, photographers, scenic vista proponents, etc.
- Trail Users - hikers, bikers, birders, skiers, snowshoeing, ATVs, dog walkers, equestrians, etc.
- Water Access - fishing, boating, swimming, etc.

At the conclusion of these focus sessions, the committee moved into an evaluation phase where it attempted to find common themes among the groups and synthesize the disparate inputs into a cohesive overall open space strategy. In order to conduct this analysis, the committee size was expanded from its initial size of four members to a total of ten members. In addition to the continued representation from the Conservation Commission and Planning Board, additional members were added to provide viewpoints from groups such as large landowners, people actively working the land, builders and developers, and realtors. The resulting draft Open Space Plan and recommendations are products of the efforts of this expanded 10-member committee.

4.0 Background Information

Protection of open space and natural resources has been a recurring theme in a number of reports, plans and other efforts conducted in Jaffrey over the years. The preparation of this Open Space Plan builds on this previous work and represents the next logical step toward planning for the protection of the town's vital resources and interest.

4.1 Previous Plans and Studies

In addition to the public involvement process described previously, three previous plans and studies provided some of the data and maps that provided a foundation for the development of this Plan. The following excerpted highlights provide a brief summary of the pertinent documents:

Jaffrey Cost of Community Services Study (2005)

A Cost of Community Services (COCS) study was completed for the Town of Jaffrey, NH in 2005 to better understand the relationship between revenues and costs associated with the various land use types in town. This information was intended to be used as part of decision-making by town boards and departments as they addressed the ramifications of growth. The Cost of Community Services Study (COCS) methodology was developed by the American Farmland Trust in the 1980's. The object of such a study is to collect actual data on how much tax revenues are paid by a municipality according to land uses. Innovative Natural Resource Solutions LLC completed such a study for Jaffrey in 2004. The study breaks land use down into three categories:

- Residential – all single and multi-family residences and apartment buildings, including farmhouses, residences attached to other kinds of business, and rental units;
- Commercial & Industrial – all privately owned buildings and land associated with business purposes, the manufacture of goods or the provision (with the exception of agriculture and forest industries which are considered part of Open Space land uses), and utility-owned property;
- Open Space – all privately owned land that is devoted to agriculture, forestry or open space, as well as wetlands, are considered open space. Open space is defined as land enrolled in or clearly eligible for enrollment in New Hampshire's current use program.

The results of the study show that, in Jaffrey, using data from 2004, for every \$1.00 in revenue collected by the Town for the particular land use:

\$1.15 was spent in services to residential properties
\$0.49 was spent in services to commercial/industrial properties
\$0.68 was spent in services to open space lands.

Results will vary by community, but according to this study specific to Jaffrey, residential properties required more net tax expenditures than open space lands. This is a rather broad conclusion that does not make distinctions between particular areas where residential development might be located in town, however it does point toward the notion that residential development is not necessarily a net financial benefit to the town.

Jaffrey Master Plan (2007 Update)

The 2007 update to the Master Plan addressed natural and scenic resources prominently in the Vision Statement and Implementation sections, as well as in the individual chapters on Economic Development, Historic and Cultural Resources, Land Use, Natural Resources, Recreational Resources, and Regional Context . The following quoted excerpts are selected from the Vision Statement and Implementation sections of the Master Plan:

“The people of Jaffrey have indicated that they want to see Jaffrey remain a small town, with a friendly atmosphere. We envision a Jaffrey that combines controlled growth and development with strong land preservation and environmental protection.”

“Preservation of open space, forests and fields, and wildlife habitats, all of which are integral to our rural character, is of crucial importance. Mount Monadnock, and our ponds, lake, wetland areas, and scenic vistas are trusts to be passed unspoiled to future generations.”

“Jaffrey will encourage the wise use of land and preservation of open space, such as is provided by its present Open Space Development Plan. Jaffrey will focus on concentrating high density housing development or mixed uses in or adjacent to the Town’s hub where town water and sewer are presently available.”

“Develop a plan for open space and agriculture designed to protect Jaffrey’s natural resources, open spaces, and rural character.”

Jaffrey Natural Resources Inventory (2009)

This study aimed to categorize, catalogue, and map the rich natural resources of Jaffrey, NH as a basis for natural resource management and conservation planning. The study was commissioned in 2008 by the Jaffrey Conservation Commission and was written by Kane & Ingraham of Concord, NH. The summary report is accompanied by nine large format maps which illustrate the various resources.

Natural resources were divided into the following four categories:

- Wildlife Habitat
- Water Resources
- Soils
- Scenic Resources

In addition to these distinct resource areas, a co-occurrence analysis was also performed to facilitate conservation planning. A co-occurrence analysis incorporates all of the resources mapped as part of this study in a single model, thus simplifying the process of selecting potential conservation priorities. Numerous areas had high scores in the model and were deemed to deserve further consideration or study as potential conservation priorities.

The top five, in no particular order, were:

- Meade Brook Wetlands
- Monadnock massif
- Gap Mountain unfragmented area
- Jaffrey downtown from Contoocook Lake to Cheshire Pond and to the Mountain Brook Reservoir
- Mountain Brook Swamp unfragmented area

4.2 Inventory of Currently Protected Land

Based on review of the 2009 Natural Resources Inventory, GRANIT GIS files, and Jaffrey Assessor's records, a summary of the land currently protected as open space in Jaffrey is presented in Table 1.

Table 1 Protected Land in Jaffrey as of August 2010

Property Name	Type	Protection Entity	Ac. in Jaffrey
Ames Forest	FO	The Monadnock Conservancy	60
Andrews (A) / Russell	CE	Society for the Protection of NH Forests	118
Andrews (B) / Russell	CE	Society for the Protection of NH Forests	51
Andrews (C) / Fairbanks	CE	Society for the Protection of NH Forests	11
Andrews (D) / Fairbanks	CE	Society for the Protection of NH Forests	2
Annett State Forest	FO	NH Dept. of Resources & Economic Dev.	2
Blaine Forest	FO	Society for the Protection of NH Forests	167
Bradley-Draper Memorial Forest	FO	New England Forestry Foundation	113
Cheshire Pond Conservation Area	FO	Town of Jaffrey	66
Childrens Woods + Carey Park	FO	Town of Jaffrey	125
Dr. Mills Land	FO	Jaffrey Village Improvement Society	13
Gap Mountain Reservation	FO	Society for the Protection of NH Forests	294
Gay State Forest	FO	NH Dept. of Resources & Economic Dev.	116

Goundry	CE	Society for the Protection of NH Forests	8
Gray Goose Farm	CE	Town of Jaffrey	58
Haven State Forest	FO	NH Dept. of Resources & Economic Dev.	93
Jaffrey - Monadnock Lot	FO	Town of Jaffrey	253
Jaffrey Town Forest	FO	Town of Jaffrey	162
Jaffrey Contoocook Wellfield	FO	Town of Jaffrey	23
Jaffrey Squantum Wellfield	FO	Town of Jaffrey	13
Jaffrey Turnpike Wellfield	FO	Town of Jaffrey	12
Jewell Forest	FO	Society for the Protection of NH Forests	17
Kaiser CE	CE	Society for the Protection of NH Forests	42
Lacy Rd. Lot Town Forest	FO	Town of Jaffrey	11
Lowe	CE	Society for the Protection of NH Forests	4
Meade Brook	CE	The Monadnock Conservancy	205
Monadnock Memorial Forest	FO	New England Forestry Foundation	72
Monadnock Reservation	FO	Society for the Protection of NH Forests	2,342
Monadnock State Park	FO	NH Dept. of Resources & Economic Dev.	1,022
Morgan Forest	FO	Society for the Protection of NH Forests	52
Morgan Forest II	FO	Society for the Protection of NH Forests	106
Mountain Brook Reservoir	CE	The Monadnock Conservancy	77
Perkins Pond Lots	FO	Town of Troy	2
Perry Forest II	FO	Society for the Protection of NH Forests	29
Pierce	CE	Society for the Protection of NH Forests	51
Querfurth & McCaqq	CE	The Monadnock Conservancy	177
Richardson	CE	Society for the Protection of NH Forests	62
Rowlands	CE	The Monadnock Conservancy	6
Snelling/Miller	DR	Society for the Protection of NH Forests	13
Stonewall Farm / Stanley Brook	CE	The Monadnock Conservancy	3
Stonewall Farm II	CE	The Monadnock Conservancy	161.5
Stonewall Farm III	CE	The Monadnock Conservancy	215
Strong, R.	CE	Society for the Protection of NH Forests	14
Thorndike Pond Beach	FO	Town of Jaffrey	9
Troy Mills Wetland	FO	Society for the Protection of NH Forests	3
Troy Water Works Land	FO	Town of Troy	163
White Easement	CE	The Monadnock Conservancy	74
Whittemore Island Preserve	FO	The Nature Conservancy	6
		TOTAL	6,699

Sources: GRANIT Conservation Land Data 2009, Complex Systems, University of New Hampshire, Durham NH; Jaffrey Assessor records.

Type Codes: CE = Conservation Easement
FO = Fee Ownership
DR = Fee Deed with Conservation Restrictions

5.0 Open Space Evaluation Criteria

Based on opinions voiced during the focus sessions and additional discussions, the committee compiled a list of potential qualities exhibited by open space that provide value to the Town of Jaffrey. These reflect a diverse set of interests including natural resource protection, recreational uses and economic returns from working lands.

In particular, an evaluation of specific criteria will be useful when considering potential investments in the protection of open space. The following criteria would be considered desirable characteristics for any potential open space protection project. While not every opportunity will provide all of these benefits, opportunities could be ranked and prioritized according to how many of these benefits are associated with a particular project.

- Provides local or regional linkage and corridors between protected lands and other areas with high natural resource and/or recreational value
- Encourages or maintains managed use of productive lands, such as forestry and agriculture
- Creates or preserves scenic vistas
- Protects water quality of surface or groundwater resources
- Creates or protects existing and potential trails
- Maintains high quality wildlife habitat
- Provides good alignment or connections with other community planning efforts such as economic development, municipal facilities, etc.
- Benefits a significant portion of population or has broad political support
- Maintains or increases tourism potential
- Preserves cultural or historic interests
- Is consistent with values expressed in Jaffrey Master Plan
- Has a favorable cost/benefit ratio when considering direct out-of-pocket costs, impacts to tax base, direct and indirect economic benefits.
- Provides public access to recreational resources
- Preserves rural character or existing ways of life
- Provides shoreline protection or public access to water bodies
- Encourages wood energy production and maintains carbon sink potential of forested land
- Maintains opportunities for diffuse recreational activities such as hunting, bird watching, etc.
- Is suitable for multiple uses and multi-season uses

6.0 Focus Session Maps

Based on input during the focus sessions, a series of maps were prepared to depict the areas of town that are either currently used by particular interest groups, or that would be desirable areas for expansion of their use. These maps have been plotted on clear acetate overlays for ease of use in identifying priority areas where many different uses or interests converge. These maps, as well as a re-formatted Conservation Focus Areas map developed as part of the 2009 Natural Resource Inventory, are attached as Appendix A.

7.0 Open Space Protection Tools

As a broad characterization, the three ways in which land may remain as open space rather than being developed for residential or commercial/industrial use are 1) regulation, 2) land conservation transactions, and 3) as working lands that are sustainable and economically viable.

For the most part, governmental regulations affecting land uses are consolidated under the authority of the Planning Board, and the topic of regulation is not addressed directly in this Open Space Plan. As a general observation, however, the Town has indicated its interest in open space issues within the language of the current Master Plan, and open space issues should certainly inform the Planning Board's approach to land use planning. The Planning Board may want to consider formally adopting the final version of this Open Space Plan as a chapter of the Town of Jaffrey Master Plan.

Land conservation transactions can take the form of either fee simple outright land purchases, or less-than-fee simple transactions such as easements. An outright purchase by the town is the most straightforward and protective type of transaction, but is also the most costly both in terms of initial acquisition costs and as ongoing costs in the form of foregone tax revenue and direct costs for land stewardship. Considering the economic challenges faced by town government, it is not anticipated that direct purchases would constitute the cornerstone of an open space protection strategy in Jaffrey.

Property ownership is often described as a bundle of rights, and the less-than-fee simple approaches to open space protection typically extinguish, transfer, or in some way limit a subset of those rights. The landowner retains ownership of their property, but either voluntarily, or in return for compensation, gives up certain rights such as the right to develop. Depending upon the resource being targeted for protection, these types of easements can be a very cost-effective tool.

Finally, the economic viability of open space uses such as agriculture or forestry will have a direct bearing on whether those lands remain as open space. Town government

can play a direct role in this area through its exercise of taxation policy, discretionary easements, tax incentives, and general land use planning policies that either encourage or discourage compact development patterns. The town can also play an indirect role in terms of providing educational resources, outreach to landowners and researching ways to improve the economic viability of working lands.

8.0 Recommendations

After reviewing the information gleaned from focus group sessions and previous reports, the committee identified many ways in which the Town of Jaffrey benefits from its open space lands. Accordingly, the committee has concluded that it is in the town's interest to take active steps to encourage and protect its open space. Specific roles that have been identified for town government in promoting open space include:

- Prospecting for grant opportunities
- Research-based public education regarding the value of open space
- Public education regarding open space protection techniques
- Maintaining current maps
- Meeting with public to stay current with changing priorities or uses of land
- Prioritizing expenditures from ear-marked land acquisition/conservation funds
- Liaison with other towns on regional open space corridor issues
- Liaison with local land trust organizations to stay current with conservation easement activity

In considering the best way to fill these roles, the committee posed the following question in its deliberations and developed a list of pros and cons:

Question: Would these roles be served more effectively by a dedicated Open Space Committee (OSC) rather than one of the existing Town bodies dealing with these issues (Conservation Commission, Planning Board, or Select Board)?

Pros	Cons
Could provide broader representation of various town interests if structured properly. Might be viewed politically as more balanced approach than either ConCom or PB.	Dilution of pool of volunteer resources available for all town government needs
Advocacy and education are key – OSC would have more time available for this role	Increased town bureaucracy
Provides a local, Jaffrey-centric perspective on open space issues	Possibly redundant with functions provided by other private or regional land trusts and other entities
Focuses more narrowly on open space issues, not saddled with other regulatory duties	Limited authority – no regulatory powers, staffing resources or real teeth beyond an advisory role

Although there were valid arguments both for and against having a dedicated OSC, the committee concluded unanimously that, on balance, the benefits of having a dedicated committee to address open space issues outweighed the potential drawbacks.

As a complement to the general roles described above, the committee also recommends that a permanent OSC provide recommendations to the Select Board on expenditures from Jaffrey's Land Acquisition Capital Reserve Fund and recommendations for warrant articles, bond articles, or other means of funding this reserve.

In order for it to be effective in these various roles, the committee considers it imperative that a permanent OSC be a diverse group representing a variety of interests in town. We recommend a 7-member committee as being large enough to represent different viewpoints, but not so large that it would be difficult to find enough willing members. Committee members should be appointed by the Select Board, and should include representatives from land use interest groups (such as those represented in the focus sessions this spring), other town boards/departments such as the Planning Board, ConCom or others, and interested citizens in general. No more than one representative from any single town board should serve on the OSC, in order to maintain diversity of viewpoints and reduce impact on volunteer schedules.

9.0 Conclusion and Action Items

This draft Plan provides the framework for a final Open Space Plan that will set forth criteria, goals, and recommendations for open space issues in Jaffrey. Many of the informational resources presented here including collection of public input, development of criteria for evaluation of open space opportunities, and preparation of interest group maps will constitute the building blocks for a final plan. The ultimate purpose of the Open Space Plan is to provide a more concrete approach toward implementing the general goals expressed in the 2007 Master Plan Update pertaining to wise use of land and preservation of open space. It should be the responsibility of a permanent Open Space Committee to finalize the Open Space Plan, encourage its adoption by the Planning Board as a chapter of the Master Plan, ensure that it is understood by all municipal officials, and keep it regularly updated.

In the course of its deliberations, the ad hoc Open Space Committee has identified a number of benefits for the town in the protection of open space and has suggested that it is fitting and appropriate for Town government to encourage conservation and protection of certain lands as a matter of public policy. The role of Town government in this area can include activities such as educating landowners about the topic, networking among landowners and land trusts, identifying lands that have particularly high natural resource, recreational, or working land values, and acquiring or assisting in transactions involving land or conservation easements.

Action items that are recommended in order to move forward with a proactive approach to open space protection in Jaffrey include the following:

Within 6 months:

1. Appoint seven members to a permanent Open Space Committee that will report directly to the Select Board.
2. Finalize the Open Space Plan, including the adoption of a system for prioritizing potential open space opportunities.
3. Establish a meeting schedule for the group, and publicize the Open Space Plan to the general public, landowners, and interest groups.
4. Meet with other Town Boards to review the Open Space Plan and actions.

Annually:

1. Consider what actions might be needed at Town Meeting to implement the Open Space Plan. This could include identifying means for funding the Land Acquisition Capital Reserve Fund.
2. Hold a landowner education workshop on conservation options.
3. Report to the Planning Board, Conservation Commission and Select Board to review progress toward implementation.