

**Ranger Report 2017**  
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The summer 2017 Ranger season was different than previous seasons, with an increase in duties and time spent at additional Town Conservation Lands. The Rangers continued to patrol White Pond, but were also responsible for patrolling sites including Mattison Field, Punkatasset, Old Rifle Range, Hapgood Wright Town Forest, the newly acquired October Farm Riverfront, as well as occasional patrols of other popular locations. The Rangers were also responsible for actively collecting land usage data. This new role was requested by the Natural Resource Commission (NRC) in their pursuit of better understanding the delicate balance between nature and passive recreation on Town land. The Rangers were tasked with making observations on how dogs and owners interacted with the sensitive landscapes, and collected data on whether dogs were on or off leash, the number of dogs, and the quantities and locations of dog waste on the trails. This report will serve as a summary of observations made by Rangers throughout the summer of 2017.

**White Pond**

❖ **Parking:**

- Parking violations were not a common occurrence over the course of the summer. Very few, if any, cars were noted to be parked illegally along Dover Street, Plainfield Road, or any other locally situated streets. The Varick Street parking area consists of 3 (or 4 if you squeeze) parking spots that are officially designated. There are additional areas available to park, but are posted as No Parking. Rangers received complaints from residents/pond-goers about vehicles parking in this area; these people were recommended to contact the Water and Sewer Division of Concord Public Works with any concerns. In early August a chain barrier was placed by CPW Water Division, blocking access to the potential additional parking spots. With only 3 spots available, on several occasions vehicles parked illegally in front of the barrier designated as a Tow Zone; CPD was contacted in these instances.

❖ **Swimming**

- Swimming from Town Land was the single most noted rule violation at White Pond, with both humans and dogs frequently observed entering the water. Rangers ensured that more-than-adequate signage was placed at access points to clarify rules. Approximately 50 percent of the time individuals left the water after spotting the presence of Rangers, indicating an awareness of the ban. All individuals observed to be swimming were politely reminded/informed of the pond regulations. Often times the Rangers were questioned on the reasoning behind the ban, and when explained the violators were understanding of the policy. Relatively infrequently the situation would be escalated by defensive swimmers who did not believe the reasoning behind the ban. These individuals were encouraged to contact the Natural Resources Division for any clarification or concerns. While it sometimes took some prodding, almost all visitors were agreeable to the swimming ban, at least in our presence. Several individuals were requested to

leave the pond after repeated offenses. CPD only had to be contacted once by Rangers for swimming violations.

#### ❖ **Dogs**

- Rangers observed that more than half of dogs at White Pond were unleashed over the course of the summer, and were frequently spotted in the water. Rangers informed dog owners that dogs must be leashed at White Pond Reservation, and are banned from swimming. Owners were also informed of the possible presence of cyanobacteria during different periods of the summer, and were advised to take preventative measures to avoid harm. Some owners genuinely did not know about the regulation, while others were reminded on a regular basis. Dog infractions were the second most common violation at White Pond.

#### ❖ **Litter**

- Litter was a daily issue on Town Land. Rangers collected large quantities of fishing related trash, empty cans and bottles, and other miscellaneous items. The largest quantities of trash were encountered after weekend nights, indicating a significant presence of people at the Pond after hours. Trash receptacles were brought to the curb on a weekly basis by Rangers; these containers were rarely full or overflowing, indicating that this was not the reason for trash being left on the beach. When large groups were observed, Rangers would remind the visitors to remove their trash when they were finished. Rangers encountered numerous pond-goers throughout the summer who stated that they also would collect trash when it was spotted. Fire pits were also found relatively frequently on the shoreline; Rangers disrupted any apparent fire pits, after ensuring that no risk of fire still existed.

#### ❖ **Cyanobacteria (blue-green algae)**

- Several small blooms of cyanobacteria were discovered throughout the summer, most frequently occurring away from town land. The Concord Health Division issued one Health Advisory during the course of the summer, though bacteria counts were not to be found at a toxic level. This advisory was taken as a precaution, and lasted the course of a weekend. Signage was posted by Rangers informing visitors of potential health concerns. Vandalism of these signs occurred several times, but they were replaced promptly by the Rangers. Additional evidence of a bloom occurred several times, with algae being spotted in Sachem's Cove on two occasions. The Health Division was contacted on these occasions, but no further action was necessary. Rangers were available to answer questions to visitors, and did so on numerous occasions throughout the summer.

#### ❖ **Erosion**

- Erosion of the shoreline and slopes continued to be a concern during the 2017 summer season, exacerbated by continued low water levels. Rangers noted that control measures that were installed during previous seasons were beginning to fail due to tampering, in addition to

sediment build-up. Rangers took action by reinforcing with additional stakes and digging out the excessive sediment. These measures were enough to control erosion until late in the season when a severe thunderstorm overcame the soil retainers, at which time the beach was severely eroded. The eroded shoreline was fixed, and additional coir logs were placed during a work day organized by the Natural Resources Division, including Division staff and volunteers. These measures are intended to temporarily reduce erosion and sedimentation until funding is secured for a more permanent slope restoration project. Rangers encountered numerous individuals using closed trails/ slopes to access the White Pond Shoreline, despite signage and physical barriers. The lack of vegetative regrowth on closed trails also indicates that closed trails are still being used on a regular basis. A new trail has been constructed to provide an alternate access to the shoreline in the vicinity of the closed trail to the western point of Sachem's Cove. Measures were also taken to repair erosion by the State Boat Launch, located on the Northern end of the pond; CPW crews used gravel and cobble to restore the dirt ramp that had been washed away. This supplements efforts undertaken by the White Pond Associates beach association to replace the infiltration trenches at the boat launch in 2016.

#### ❖ Invasives

- Rangers spent some of their down time at White Pond pulling invasive plant species; species included *Celastrus orbiculatus* (oriental bittersweet) and *Rosa multiflora* (multiflora rose). Rangers spent a significant amount of time pulling bittersweet in the meadow and surrounding wood-line, located adjacent to Sachem's Cove. *Allaria petiolate* (garlic mustard) was also observed and removed from town land. Rangers were informed of *Toxicodendron radicans* (poison ivy) along the Varick Street driveway by several hikers.

#### ❖ Trails

- Trails were in good shape throughout the season. Rangers removed a few trees that fell across the trails during the summer. Trail signage was checked regularly to ensure proper information was being displayed. On one occasion, three dirt bikes operated by youths were observed on town land, in the southeastern corner of the property. These operators were informed that motorized vehicles are prohibited from town land. Bicycles were encountered on the trail on several occasions; the cyclists cited improper signage as the reason. Consequently, signage prohibiting bicycles on the trail was posted.

#### ❖ Vandalism

- Rangers encountered vandalized signage frequently, with both wooden and metal signs being ripped from the ground. Rangers were vigilant about replacing signage as needed.

#### ❖ Wildlife

- Rangers observed a variety of different wildlife at the pond throughout the summer. *Ardea herodias* (great blue heron) was a frequent visitor to the pond, often spotted walking the

shoreline. *Strix varia* (barred owl) was spotted at the pond on several occasions; owl calls were also heard in the forest on numerous occasions. Early in the summer a black bear was spotted in the area of White Pond; this bear was later spotted farther north and has apparently not returned. *Chrysemys picta* (painted turtle) and *Nerodia sipedon* (northern water snake) were frequently spotted in the area of Sachem's cove both swimming and basking on woody debris found in the cove.

### **Hapgood Wright Town Forest**

#### **❖ Parking**

- Rangers did not run into many issues at the Town Forest conservation land, other than issues with parking in the lot along Walden Street. Due to its proximity to Walden Pond, the Town Forest parking lot is an oft targeted spot used by visitors looking to enter Walden Pond, even after DCR has closed its parking lot. Rangers observed numerous people walking from the Town Forest lot, alongside Walden Street, headed in the direction of Walden. The Town Forest lot would begin to fill even prior to Rangers coming on duty, leaving no way for Rangers to enforce the Walden Pond parking restriction. On busy days, vehicles would park off of the pavement at the Northern end of the parking lot, having to climb over a curb to do so. Additional cars were also observed parking alongside the island separating the lot from Walden Street; No Parking signs are displayed in this area. Rangers also patrolled the Harry Beyer Assessed Trail handicap parking lot, located south of the main Town Forest lot; on several occasions illegal parking was also observed at this location. When parking became an issue in these areas, Rangers contacted CPD to enforce parking regulations.

#### **❖ Vandalism**

- While not directly overseen by Division of Natural Resources, Rangers did observe vandalism on several occasions in regards to the Art Ramble display on town conservation land. Rangers did not notice any vandalism of town owned property.

#### **❖ Dogs**

- Dogs, more often than not, were observed off leash at this property. Rangers observed that dogs at this property tended to be well behaved while off leash, and as a result Rangers had few conversations on leash regulations in this area. Rangers observed some dog waste on the trail system, both bagged and unbagged; it should be noted that trash receptacles are available at this site.

#### **❖ Litter**

- Litter was an issue at Town Forest, with the highest densities of trash being discovered along the roadside as well as within the parking area. This trash is likely a result of the highly travelled Walden Street that runs parallel to the property, in addition to the high number of vehicles using the parking lot. Trash was collected by Rangers on a regular basis.

## Mattison Field

### ❖ Dogs

- Leash restrictions are active at Mattison Field between April 1 and July 31; this restriction is enacted to protect the ground-nesting Bobolink. Rangers strongly enforced this policy, with many violations occurring during the first month of patrols. Rangers installed more obvious signage in the middle of the trail, at which time the number of violations began to decrease. Rangers still encountered occasional unleashed dogs as the season moved on, but at reduced rates. After July 31<sup>st</sup> passed, Rangers noticed an increase in unleashed dogs. Dog waste was an additional issue on the trails cutting through the field; both bagged and unbagged waste was seen on a nearly daily basis.

### ❖ Wildlife

- Rangers observed numerous wildlife at Mattison Field including *Odocoileus virginianus* (whitetail deer), and *Dolichonyx oryzivorus* (bobolink). Deer were observed in the area of the parking lot, browsing on apples from the crab apple tree, as well as corn from the adjacent corn field. Bobolinks (of which the leash restriction protects) were numerous in the early portions of the summer, seen all around the entire field.

## Punkatasset

### ❖ Dogs

- This season Punkatasset and Estabrook Woods became the site of a contentious debate over leash laws on conservation land. The private landowners of Estabrook Woods enacted a leash requirement for dogs on their properties, leaving Punkatasset as the only publically accessible land within the Estabrook Woods to allow dogs off leash. In response to this decision, as well as concerns from some trail users on out-of-control dogs, potential effects on wildlife and habitats from unleashed dogs, and accumulating dog waste, the NRC and Division of Natural Resources have been evaluating options for a safe and enjoyable experience for all Town conservation lands. Rangers were tasked with making observations and recording data on land usage by dogs and dog owners at this and other popular conservation areas. Rangers did not observe large numbers of unleashed dogs, or dogs in general, but this is likely due to Rangers coming on duty after prime dog walking hours are complete. Several visitors informed Rangers that dog walking was busiest prior to 9:00 A.M. Rangers most often observed dogs in or around Hutchins Pond, right off the main trail loop. Rangers actively enforced the policy that dogs must be on leash while travelling on the driveway between the road and trail head.
- Prior to Rangers starting for the season, reports were received about coyotes attacking dogs at Punkatasset. A coyote den was determined to be close to Hutchins Pond, and the main trail loop. As a precaution, the trail was posted as leash only until coyote pups were weaned, and mature coyotes were no longer on “high alert”. Visitors were encouraged to keep their dogs on

leash until June. During this period of time, Rangers saw very few dogs or dog walkers on Punkatasset conservation land; again this may be due to dog walking being popular at earlier times of day.

#### ❖ **Parking**

- Parking at Punkatasset is limited to road-side parking off of Monument Street. New parking options are currently being explored by the Town. Rangers observed that the current parking scenario is often sufficient to handle the number of cars parking there, but cars are also located dangerously close to busy Monument Street.

### **October Farm Riverfront**

#### ❖ **Invasives**

- Invasives are one of the largest concerns at the newly acquired October Farm Riverfront property. Rangers were informed of a patch of *Cynanchum louiseae* (black swallow wort) and worked with staff of the Concord Land Conservation Trust (CLCT) to remove it. Oriental bittersweet and multiflora rose were also removed.

#### ❖ **Dogs**

- Rangers noted that this property has a large dog-to-person ratio, with most of these dogs being off leash. Rangers did not have many dog related issues at this property, but did notice some dog waste along the trail just past the parking area. On one occasion Rangers encountered an aggressive dog on the trail, with no owner in site. This animal was muzzled, but still could have been intimidating to trail users. Rangers were unable to find or contact an owner, but the dog was not seen on this property again.

#### ❖ **Horses**

- Historically, this property has been used for horseback riding, as evidenced by numerous horse jumps spread among the walking trails. Rangers observed horses at October Farm on several occasions, and experienced no issues. Rangers however did note that horse waste would often be left on the trail.

#### ❖ **Litter**

- Rangers removed some trash from this property, including broken glass and chunks of metal. It appeared that these items had been there for a while, and were not recently discarded on Town/CLCT property. Rangers spoke with several visitors/residents of Balls Hill Road about concerns of parties on the property after hours. To this point, no evidence of such parties (cans, bottles, fire pits) has been discovered.

### **Old Rifle Range**

- ❖ Rangers observed that the Old Rifle Range is not a very busy conservation area. Rangers would occasionally observe vehicles in the parking area, but would rarely encounter anybody on the trails. The only issues identified were some litter at the trail head, limited dog waste along the trail, and vandalism to the targets. Rangers performed an erosion control project to protect the wetlands at this property with the assistance of Bob White, Chair of the Concord Trails Committee.