

Bike Path Extension Increases Access to Conservation Lands

Most townspeople agree that the Shining Sea Bikeway Extension is a marvelous resource for Falmouth. What may not be obvious to users of the bike path is its proximity to a variety of conservation lands, from North Falmouth to Falmouth Village. Fully 25% of the 10.8-mile bike path is adjacent to protected land, offering easy access to trails in the woods, winding paths near bogs, ponds, farmland and marsh, and beautiful expansive views, particularly across Great Sippewissett Marsh.

We are indebted to the foresight of early conservationists who worked hard to protect the marsh—Salt Pond Areas Bird Sanctuaries, Massachusetts Audubon Society and the state. Little did they know the benefits that would accrue with the bike path extension.

Protected land along the bikeway is similar to the Moraine Trail, the Coonamessett River Greenway and Sea Farms Marsh, areas that have been preserved piece by piece, creating large expanses of linked open spaces that provide fantastic recreational benefits for residents and visitors.

Land at Wing Pond in North Falmouth is the northernmost conservation area directly accessible from the bike path; it was part of the first open space package of more than 400 acres crafted by The 300 Committee for town meeting approval in 1986. The 19 acres at the southern end of the pond are flanked by water: cranberry bog, stream, pond and herring run.

Trails established by youngsters in the 4-H Club circle the bog and skirt the southern tip of the pond. These soft sandy paths lead past the herring run—and a lovely watercress pool upstream—into the woods, meandering over rocks and gnarled tree roots. The tidal stream flows west through Herring River Marsh and out to Buzzards Bay at Old Silver Beach.

The paths at Wing Pond Woods connect to hilly trails behind Bourne Farm. The 49-acre property is owned by Salt Pond Sanctuaries, a private land trust begun in the early 1960's by the late Ermine Lovell. Bourne Farm is perhaps best known for its historic buildings, lovely fields and the Pumpkin Day festivities held each October. The open rolling meadows on the east side of the bike path give way to a lesser-known network of wooded trails on the west side, one of which is marked as a horse trail (walkers beware!). Those who wish to explore both sides can traverse an historic cattle crossing under the bike path.

South along the bike path is land that was once another working family farm: the 45-acre Cardoza Farm, purchased by the town in 1999, the first year Land Bank funds were available. To the east, a trail winds through the farm's open field to the bike path. This rare abandoned field habitat is home to many types of birds and wildlife; the field is mowed and kept open by 300 Committee volunteers. Crossing over the bike path, the western, wooded portion of this conservation parcel has several new trails created for an Eagle Scout project by a Falmouth Scout, Erol Karchner. A side trail leads to Tall Pine Road, providing access from Quaker Road.

Farther down the bike path are four acres of Salt Pond's Marshlands in West Falmouth Village. Foot access only (no parking) via a private way, Quahog Pond Lane, leads along a lovely trail to an observation deck overlooking the marsh between two small ponds.

Just south is the open expanse and gorgeous scenery of the Great Sippewissett Marsh and Black Beach, 140 acres that are protected by several entities: the town, Mass Audubon, and Salt Pond. Because this area is designated as a District of Critical Planning Concern (DCPC), it has an added layer of protection, and public access is limited.

Little Sippewissett Marsh is the next portion of protected land, where 40 acres of saltmarsh spread out below the bike path. The marsh is fed by a tidal creek with water entering at Woodneck Beach from Buzzards Bay. Access into the marsh is along the creek from the beach; in summer, many young beachgoers with nets and buckets search for crabs and other critters at low tide.

Beebe Woods and Peterson Farm are among Falmouth's open space gems. The woods almost touch the bike path at the southwest corner of its intersection with Depot Avenue/Highfield Drive, but the best access to the trails is up the hill past Highfield Hall, Highfield Theater and the Cape Cod Conservatory. The 387 acres of Beebe Woods were donated to the town in 1966 by Mr. and Mrs. Josiah K. Lilly III; the town purchased the adjacent 88-acre Peterson Farm in 1998 for \$3 million, one-third of which was raised by The 300 Committee. These nearly 500 acres of rolling woods, shimmering ponds, and open fields are just a short walk away from the commercial center of Falmouth.

While not directly adjacent to the bike path, the 980 acres of the Falmouth Town Forest, including Long Pond and Goodwill Park, are immediately east of Route 28 and extend all the way to Gifford Street, with Brick Kiln Road as the northern boundary. The Town Forest protects Long Pond, the town's primary source of drinking water, and has numerous trails for hiking, mountain biking and cross-country skiing, especially the dirt road that circumnavigates the reservoir.

The one-acre pocket park at the corner of Ter Heun Drive and Palmer Avenue is on the east side of the bike path. This was an empty lot purchased by the town in 2000 to prevent further congestion at the hospital lights and to preserve more green space at the entrance to Falmouth.

Continuing toward Woods Hole is a 40-acre bird sanctuary, the Salt Pond Reservation, purchased in 1961 by Salt Pond. With several access points from the bike path, these trails are flat, grassy and well tended. Cedar trees, low woods, marsh grasses, and scenic pond views abound here; the hustle and bustle of a busy summer day on the bikeway is quickly forgotten in this peaceful preserve.

The public beach at Trunk River, 2.4 acres on Vineyard Sound, is completely different from the wooded parcels to the north, but is an important parcel for recreation and provides wide open views along Falmouth's south coast to Nobska Point and across the sound to Martha's Vineyard.

This southernmost open space parcel completes the nearly 1,800 acres of open space for conservation and recreation that are accessible from the bike path. While a trip along our town's paved 10.8-mile linear park is a wonderful outing all its own, it is also a chance to explore miles of wooded trails and a variety of natural places that will be preserved forever.

(Trail maps for many of these conservation areas can be found on The 300 Committee web site: www.300committee.org.)



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