

## Mares Pond Reservation

Northeast of the High School, on the gently rolling land close to the geographic center of Falmouth, this wooded 123-acre reservation protects an important town well and parts of the shoreline of three lovely ponds. Well-used trails thread their way among the trees and lead to pleasant vistas from the high banks of Mares, Spectacle and Deer Ponds.

The Town of Falmouth gets most of its water from groundwater, water that fell as rain or snow on the high land of the Massachusetts Military Reservation or the northern part of Falmouth and which soaked into the sandy ground to fill the spaces among the grains of sand. That groundwater moves slowly south beneath the ground surface toward Vineyard Sound, encountering on its way the Mares Pond well, which pumps some of the water up into the large water tower here for distribution through the town water system.

The groundwater also travels through the ground into these three ponds, three deep holes formed when buried blocks of glacial ice melted, perhaps 10,000 years ago, at the end of the last Ice Age. Mares Pond is the largest, and at 55 feet deep, probably the deepest of these ponds; Spectacle Pond, which is probably the shallowest, gets its name from the two lobes like the lenses of eyeglasses created by the peninsula in the middle. Deer Pond is the smallest of the three; it sits farther north, up-gradient on the water table, so its surface is several feet higher than the other two. The groundwater continually seeps in from the north to fill these ponds, and seeps out the southern sides to continue to other ponds and wetlands on its way to the Sound. This is the way all the freshwater ponds in Falmouth, and in fact on the Cape, work.

Mares Pond Reservation was originally acquired by the town to protect the well site here. By protecting the drinking water source the town also has protected this attractive traditional hiking area and habitat for birds and other wildlife. These natural woodlands and undeveloped pond shores have many values to the town and to everyone in it, whether they ever walk here or not. Besides protecting our drinking water, this open space also prevented the construction of hundreds of housing units and the concomitant traffic, pollution, and taxes. It is worth remembering that residential developments cost the town more in services—water, school, fire and police, road maintenance—than they produce in taxes.

The flat or gentle land in the Mares Pond Reservation is smooth, not interrupted by big rocks like Beebe Woods or the west side of Long Pond. These gentle slopes were formed by the streams of meltwater that carried silt, sand, and fine gravel away from the melting front of the ice sheet when that ice filled Buzzards Bay and its edge was along the West and North Falmouth shores. The meltwater streams flowing from the melting ice were not powerful enough to carry much in the way of rocks, so the land is built of the sand and gravel those streams could transport. This ground is quite porous and it lets any rainfall soak in quickly, so, despite the ponds, this forest is quite dry. Most trees are oaks and Pitch Pines, with a few Red Maples near the pond edges. Beneath the trees is the common understory of Black Huckleberry, Low-bush Blueberry, Wintergreen and Sheep Laurel that thrives in these dry soils. The presence of this suite of plants also provides a glimpse of the farming history of this land—it was used mostly for pasture. If it had been plowed these plants would have been destroyed and could not have returned by now.

Access to Mares Pond Reservation is from Sandwich Road to Deepwood Dr. to Pinecrest Beach Dr. Parking is in the small dirt lot on the south side of the Pinecrest Beach Dr. just west of Owls Nest Rd. The parking area is a short distance from the trailhead; walk west on Pinecrest Beach Dr. to the trail or east to the Mares Pond Well Road which connects to the trails. A trail map of the Mares Pond area as well as 24 other trail maps for Falmouth may be found at [www.300committee.org](http://www.300committee.org).