



# Stewardship Manual

# **The 300 Committee Stewardship Manual**

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# **Manual for Land Stewards**

## **Introduction**

One of the most important responsibilities of our conservation effort is the stewardship of conservation lands owned by the town and The 300 Committee. These lands have been set aside for the public's enjoyment and recreation, to protect our water resources, plant and wildlife habitat, and to preserve some of the Cape's unique natural beauty.

Without a strong stewardship program to monitor the lands and enforce any applicable conservation restrictions, boundaries and land use can be modified over time. A byproduct of a good stewardship program is greater public engagement and support for conservation lands.

The parcels monitored by T3C are either owned by the town, T3C, or Conservation Restrictions (CR's) under private ownership. The land trust works closely with the town, Conservation Commission, Marine and Environmental Services Department and The Department of Public Works, to coordinate trail maintenance, land cleanups and related activities.

The Stewardship arm of T3C is steered by the Stewardship Committee with staff support from the Stewardship Coordinator. Employed full-time by T3C, this coordinator manages the monitoring and land steward programs, organizing any work needed to solve problems as they arise and implement property plans for management initiatives.

## **Land Steward's Role**

The primary responsibility of a land steward is caretaking — to be a presence on the land. The steward should monitor the land regularly, keep trails cleared, and alert the Stewardship Coordinator when larger cleanup efforts are necessary. The steward is encouraged to join work days to help further management objectives of the property. The 300 Committee maintains a list of members willing to volunteer with outdoor work, and assumes the responsibility of soliciting volunteers and organizing work sessions.

### **Guidelines for Stewarding:**

- Using the Landscape Conservation app walk boundaries once or twice per year; Notify T3C office if the boundary markers are not visible;
- Note how the property is used;
- Note any erosion problems;
- Check for encroachment;
- Note any safety hazards. Bring to attention of Town/T3C contact persons;
- Maintain trails (when necessary):
  - Hand prune woodland trails 4' wide and 8' high (call T3C if hand pruning is not feasible),
  - Mow grassy paths 4' wide, when applicable
  - Keep signs visible;
- Additional if Applicable:
  - Remove invasive plants (when necessary) — seek guidance from T3C staff, as the removal may require permission from the Conservation Commission;
  - Remove litter — see below for large trash item

### **Do not:**

Plant or destroy vegetation or construct new trails without prior consultation with Stewardship Coordinator (see Conservation Commission Policy on Trails).

### **Procedures for Reporting Illegal Dumping**

Items such as mattresses, cars, furniture and large piles of trash that cannot be removed by the steward should be reported as follows:

The steward should call the Conservation Departments Land Management Technician (508-495-7445) to report the location and nature of the dumping. If the party is caught in the act, give a description of the vehicle and the person or persons dumping the trash to the Land Management Technician so they can investigate.

If a Land Management Technician is unavailable, the steward should contact the Stewardship Coordinator. The Stewardship Coordinator will report the incident to the DPW for cleanup. Please note that the DPW may not be able to pick up the trash right away.

Always report the information to T3C staff and make a note of the incident for your annual steward's report.

### **Procedures for Reporting Other Problems**

Motorized vehicles (ATVs, trail bikes, etc.) are prohibited on all T3C and town land. Experience has shown that gates and boulders are not always effective in keeping ATVs out of conservation land. The police department has a trail bike unit, which is most effectively used if the steward notices a pattern of ATV use, e.g., certain days or times of day. Please email the Stewardship Coordinator with your observations so they can coordinate police assistance. If you witness any trespassing with unauthorized vehicles, please call the police department directly at that time. You may be asked to stay on site to assist the officer when they arrive, DO NOT approach or attempt to interact with the individuals involved in the illegal activity. Your safety is most important in this scenario.

If a steward finds needles or syringes or other items that present a safety risk, place a can over the items and call police (508-457-2527). Notify T3C Stewardship Coordinator.

Note: Please be consistent with the parcel name and address you give the police. If the name and address are consistent, the police central records department can produce year-end statistics on problem areas. This will help direct management priorities on town conservation land. Addresses/Adjacent addresses of properties can be found on our website.

\*Report the information to the T3C Stewardship Coordinator and make a note of the incident for your annual steward's report.

## **Land Evaluations — An Annual Physical for the Land**

The land steward's second responsibility is to submit an annual evaluation report on the property. An annual Monitoring Visit is completed and submitted through the conservation software app 'Landscape'. This report acts as the land's "annual physical," recording the health of the land and any changes over time. Each property has a file at the 300 Committee office with maps, correspondence and evaluation forms, as well as a record on the Landscape Software. If a steward has yet to access the Landscape Software, a one-on-one training will be scheduled. Once the steward has access to the app they will be able to see all monitoring visits for the associated property.

### **What is the steward's role?**

- A frequent on-foot inspection of the property and annual walk of the boundaries;
- Record positive, neutral, or negative changes in the annual monitoring report;
- Complete this visit in the app and save the report to the site folder within the app.

### **Prepare for the visit:**

- Download Landscape Conservation App and get access to property
- Review the previous year's files for property history, characteristics and special features or problems
- Study maps to determine size, terrain, access, and landmarks in advance;

### **What to look for and record if possible:**

- Clues that suggest change, i.e. new roads / trails, piles of brush or debris, downed trees, trash, changes in vegetation, cleared land;
- Ask questions about any changes from neighbors or walkers you meet;
- Walk the boundaries to check for encroachment. We advise doing this in the winter to avoid ticks and to be able to see through the underbrush;
- Look for special features, invasive species, unusual plant life, evidence of wildlife, terrain change;
- Observe trail usage and condition.
- Observe signage, especially along boundaries.
- Boundary conditions; are the bounds present? are new bound markers needed?

### **Monitoring Conservation Restrictions:**

A conservation restriction, or easement, is a legal document that restricts development on a parcel to protect its natural resources. Most of the conservation restrictions held by, or enforced by, The 300 Committee are on private land, with a few on town land: See up to date list of Properties and assigned monitors on the Stewardship page of our website.

T3C sends out annual notices to all landowners that monitoring will take place between Jan1-June30. Please call the property owner prior to your visit to be as respectful of their space as possible.

## **Falmouth Conservation Commission's Trail Policy**

### **Guideline for Trail Creation/use on Land under Conservation Commission Jurisdiction Policy Adopted April 29, 1992**

1. It is the policy of the Conservation Commission that all land under its jurisdiction shall be open to the public. The public has bought the land; only public enjoyment of the land will ensure its long-term protection.
2. Trails may be planned, made and maintained only with the approval and under the guidance of the Conservation Commission.
3. Trails shall avoid the habitats of all rare or endangered species and shall be designed to prevent erosion. Most trails shall be exclusively for walkers, runners and skiers; some trails shall be specifically designated for mountain bikes or trail bikes. No motorized vehicles shall be allowed on land under the jurisdiction of the Conservation Commission except for official purposes such as trail maintenance.
4. The public land should be respected by all users. No vegetation should be cut, no stone walls should be damaged, no wildlife should be disturbed.

### **The 300 Committee and the Falmouth Conservation Commission agree that:**

- T3C land stewards are not employees or special employees of the Town;
- There is no employment relationship between the land stewards and the Town;
- T3C maintains its own liability insurance.
- T3C land stewards are not covered by the town's insurance except to the same degree that other volunteers are covered;
- T3C should be held harmless for any damage unintentionally caused to town conservation property.
- This Memorandum of Understanding does not convey an interest in real estate;
- T3C is not a tenant on any town owned land subject to the terms of this agreement;
- The Town will not be responsible for funding stewardship activities; and
- That, as Grantees of conservation restrictions encumbering town owned land, the ConCom and T3C will not impose monitoring fees to Grantors, but T3C may assess fees when dealing with privately held conservation land.

## **History of The 300 Committee**

The 300 Committee is a non-profit, fully tax-exempt 501(c)(3) organization, led by a board of directors that is elected at an annual meeting of dues-paying members. Much of its work is accomplished through the board of directors, with the help of volunteers, other conservation groups, and town boards. The 300 Committee employs a full-time administrator, a director of program services, and a stewardship coordinator. Over the years, a unique public/private partnership has developed involving cooperation between numerous town boards, town meeting and The 300 Committee. The committee's tax-exempt status allows it to raise funds through membership contributions as well as accept land donations. A tax accountant is hired to review the books at each year's end to maintain this status. Presently, the organization has a membership of about 1,200 and an annual budget of \$180,000.

Without reviewing its origins, today's T3C members may lose perspective and forget those aspects of The 300 Committee's effort to preserve land that have made it so successful. The brief history below is intended to remind and inform members about the formation of T3C and its history.

### **The Initial Land Acquisition Effort**

The 300 Committee was first organized in 1985 as part of a grassroots effort to preserve open space in celebration of the Town of Falmouth's 300<sup>th</sup> year. The groundswell began at the precinct level, with residents identifying parcels throughout their neighborhoods that might be suitable for town purchase. These parcels were ranked by T3C volunteers according to their importance for water supply protection, linkage to other open space, and a number of other criteria. In pursuit of eventual acquisition, a letter was sent by T3C to the owners of the most desirable, highly ranked parcels inquiring whether they were for sale. Parcels were assigned to 300 Committee board members who then followed up on the letters by contacting the owners directly. In this way, T3C developed a package of parcels whose owners wished to sell. The 300 Committee commissioned appraisals of land belonging to willing sellers to establish the fair market value at "highest and best use." Formal offers were made to landowners at the appraised value. Offers were non-negotiable, with T3C offering no more than the appraised value.

It quickly became apparent that the only way enough money could be raised to pay for these lands (over \$8 million was required) was through a municipal bond issue to be repaid over time using additional tax dollars generated by a Proposition 2½ override vote. The 300 Committee appeared before various town boards (the Finance Committee, Selectmen, Planning Board, Conservation Commission, etc.) seeking endorsement of the land acquisition package. The Conservation Commission and Planning Board offered to formally sponsor a warrant article seeking for the acquisition.

The first presentation by The 300 Committee of the collected package of parcels was very successful. Through the Town Meeting process and override system in 1986 a package of 10 parcels totaling more than 400 acres was assembled. A mass mailing was organized to promote this package. The warrant article seeking funding for this purchase was passed overwhelmingly by Town Meeting and the Proposition 2½ exclusion referendum was ratified by a 76% majority of the voter

### **The 300 Committee**

The 300 Committee Land Trust is a private, nonprofit land trust comprising paid staff and volunteers and funded by membership dues and grants. The ConCom acknowledges the critical role that T3C land stewards play in the monitoring and management of town-owned conservation land. T3C shall monitor those conservation restrictions they hold (as the Grantees) on town- owned land. Upon request of the ConCom and as agreed to by T3C, T3C may take the lead in applying for State Self-Help Grant funding for land acquisition or reimbursement, with input from the ConCom, as needed. T3C presently makes recommendations to the ConCom for natural resource inventories, resource management and protection plans, identifies land management issues needing attention, and works with the ConCom to identify parcels on which conservation restrictions are needed. T3C works with the ConCom to help with land stewardship roles on town land and land stewards and monitors are supervised by the T3C Stewardship Committee.

The land stewards of T3C have traditionally been responsible for the cleanup and monitoring of some of the town-owned parcels. In 2002, its Stewardship Committee developed a strategy to organize the land stewards to more effectively monitor ConCom conservation land. Stewards may walk the property, clean up trash, maintain trails through trimming or mowing, remove invasive plants and vines from vegetation, and report acts of vandalism to T3C staff who will report issues to appropriate town department: the ConCom, the Department of Natural Resources, the DPW or directly to the police.

The placement of signage, creation of new trails or structures, the removal of vegetation through excavation or by machinery, camping or special projects on Town Land will require *prior* permission from the ConCom. Any activity within 100 feet of a wetland or other resource area regulated by the ConCom will require the appropriate permit filing with the ConCom. Any volunteer interested in working on an initiative will coordinate with T3C staff to get all appropriate approvals necessary from a town department.

### **The Conservation Commission**

One of the original charges of Falmouth Conservation Commission (ConCom) was the protection of the natural resources of the community, focusing primarily on acquisition and protection of open spaces. In 1972, the Commonwealth passed Ch. 131, §40 et seq. (the Wetlands Protection Act) giving responsibility of implementation and jurisdiction for wetland regulation and permitting and open space protection to the Conservation Commissions. Also beginning in the 1970's communities began to adopt local wetlands protection by-laws (the By-Law) under their home rule powers. Falmouth adopted a Wetlands Bylaw in 1989, with implementing wetland regulations. The Falmouth Town Charter calls for the Board of Selectmen to appoint a Conservation Commission of seven members (Falmouth Code, Chapter 7-6). The Conservation Commission is responsible for implementing the Massachusetts Wetlands Protection Act and the Falmouth Wetlands Bylaw and Regulations as well as for the oversight and management of all town-owned Conservation Land.

The ConCom is responsible for taking the lead in the development of land management plans and conservation restrictions on town conservation land. The ConCom refers individuals interested in monitoring a specific conservation parcel to T3C Stewardship Committee. The Stewardship Committee makes available to the ConCom their updated database of land stewards and the locations of the properties being monitored.

The ConCom has hired a Conservation Technician to focus on specific land management issues and projects. This employee serves as a liaison with other town partners involved in land management. The Conservation Technician is responsible for developing or overseeing the development of land management plans for specific parcels and for implementing the provisions of each management plan.

### **The Continuing Effort**

After the tercentenary, members agreed it was critical to continue the process of acquiring open space and recreation areas within Falmouth to counterbalance burgeoning development through the 1980's. During 1987, two more parcels totaling just over 99 acres were purchased using additional funds voted by Town Meeting and a public referendum on the ballot. In addition, The 300 Committee solicited donations of land and conservation easements in a mailing to owners of parcels 5 acres or larger. This initial effort yielded the donation of approximately 11 acres. (To date, about 90 acres have been donated to The 300 Committee.) Over the next 10 years, approximately 175 acres of open space were purchased by the Town through the override process described above. The last public lands purchased by Town Meeting vote together with a Proposition 2½ exclusion referendum were the 88-acre Peterson Farm off Woods Hole Road and the 21-acre Bournes Pond parcel in East Falmouth, both purchased in 1998.

That same year, the passage of the Cape Cod Land Bank Bill in Falmouth provided a significant new opportunity to the Falmouth community: access to millions of additional dollars to be used for open space over 20 years. Shortly after passage of the Land Bank Bill, the town appointed The 300 Committee as its agent for land purchases using Land Bank funds. Funds collected from a 3% surcharge on property taxes were dedicated to open space purchases by the town. From 1999 to 2006, more than 900 acres of open space were purchased with Land Bank funds.

In 2002, recognizing the limits of the Land Bank, The 300 Committee turned to the private sector for assistance and undertook an \$8 million capital campaign. By 2004, T3C had reached its goal in cash, pledges and donations of land, and by 2006 had identified several new priority parcels for conservation.

To date, The 300 Committee has spearheaded the public purchase of more than 2,000 acres of land for conservation, recreation and water protection. Funding sources have included property taxes, state grants and private contributions raised by The 300 Committee. In addition, the land trust has acquired more than 100 acres by gift and outright purchase.

In 1998 the town adopted the goal of preserving 25 % of all land in Falmouth for conservation, recreation and water protection. This became a cornerstone of Falmouth's Local Comprehensive Plan. Official figures show we are close to achieving this goal, yet The 300 Committee plans to continue its efforts to permanently protect as many acres as possible.

Many of the 900 acres purchased through the Land Bank were financed with municipal bonds, fully committing Land Bank revenues through the year 2020 when the debt will be retired and the Land Bank is due to expire. The Community Preservation Act (CPA), adopted by voters in 2005, allowed Falmouth to access state funds (providing, in essence, a dollar-for-dollar matching fund for Land Bank monies) to protect open space, preserve historic properties, create affordable housing, and acquire land for active recreation..

## **Stewardship**

Since the 1980s, the addition of hundreds of acres of new public lands has raised, and kept in the forefront, the issue of monitoring, maintaining and improving the properties. In October 1989, T3C sponsored its first open lands cleanup day. Simultaneously, T3C established The Stewardship Program.

Modeled after the Appalachian Mountain Club's "Adopt a Trail" program, The 300 Committee has over the years recruited volunteer "stewards" for many parcels of town-owned open space. The stewards "adopt" the land and take responsibility for regularly walking it and leading or participating in regular cleanups. This AMC program won a National Award for Environmental Excellence in 1991.

In 2012 The 300 Committee hired a part time Stewardship Coordinator for the first time having a staff member dedicated to the ever growing needs of stewardship. In 2014 the position evolved to a full time position. With the support of an AmeriCorps placement from the Barnstable County program, T3C had the assistance of an AmeriCorps member one day a week from 2016-2020. Through this partnership T3C has been able to grow our capacity, increase our presence on the land, and maintain an extensive database of properties and volunteer hours. In 2020, T3C was awarded a full time volunteer placement through TerraCorps, a branch of AmeriCorps servicing MA, RI and CT. This placement along with the upgrade to Landscape Conservation Software for monitoring has enabled T3C to leverage the support of over 50 monitors and stewards, in addition to increased volunteering opportunities.

As of 2020, Volunteer opportunities through the stewardship arm of T3C include: Trail Crew, Property Monitoring, Stewarding, Wildlife Stewards, Seasonal Watering Program, Weekly Coffee Clean-ups.

\*Covid-19 has restricted the availability of some activities. Opportunities can be found on our Stewardship Tab, Facebook Page, and e-blasts.