

KUNCANOWET TOWN FOREST AND CONSERVATION AREA TRAIL POLICY

Approved July 5, 2022

The 1,000-acre Kuncanowet Town Forest and Conservation Area (KTFCA) is an important community asset not only for recreation, but also for wildlife. Its size, natural diversity, topographic variability, and setting in the broader context of undeveloped lands create an extraordinarily rich habitat for native wildlife. In trail development and recreational use decision making, wildlife habitat protection is a top priority.

Trail policies reflect this priority. When originally established in 1989, recreational use of the property was restricted to non-motorized activities, and the existing 7-mile trail system was designed with that limitation in mind. Seven years later residents at Gorham Pond petitioned the town to expand trail uses “*to allow a through snowmobile trail to access Clough State Park when the ground is covered with snow.*” This limited vehicular use was approved, and the policy remains in effect. However, new owners of private lands across which the trail needed to pass closed their portions of the trail, essentially foreclosing snowmobile use.

The current trail system provides a range of options, from trails accessible to families with young children to reasonably challenging hikes. A system of short, medium, and long loops offers variety while accommodating time constraints.

Most visitors come to hike the trails, which also accommodate occasional runners, horseback riders, and non-motorized vehicles. In winter trails are used also by cross-country skiers and snowshoers.

Because the trails currently serve the community well, any trail development in the KTFCA will be limited to minor improvements to remediate problems with the trail or reroute a trail to accommodate new information on wildlife use or significant plants or habitats. Any change in trail layout requires a formal vote of the KTFCA Committee.

Should changes to the trail system be deemed necessary, the Committee will consider:

- Construction costs, e.g., need for bridges, tree removal, hillside ditching
- Anticipated effort required for maintenance
- Impacts on wildlife as described and documented in *Trails for People and Wildlife* (www.wildnh.com/trails) or similar, recognized publications. Such impacts are ameliorated by:
 - Maintaining unfragmented, trail-free areas as large as possible
 - Avoiding patches of high quality or special habitats, e.g., deer yards, steep slopes
 - Avoiding trails immediately adjacent to wetlands, vernal pools, and streams and the riparian areas associated with each of them
 - Avoiding known and potential wildlife travel corridors
 - Avoiding known locations of rare wildlife
- Known cultural/archaeological features, i.e., Stinson Mill and associated cellar hole
- Desire to limit access to the trail system to the current parking area at Gorham Pond

New trail construction, if any, and maintenance shall conform to best trail-building practices. Appropriate guidance is available from the Appalachian Mountain Club (currently, *The*

Complete Guide to Trail Building and Maintenance, C. Demrow, D. Salisbury, Appalachian Mountain Club), NH State Parks (currently, *Best Management Practices* manual (<https://www.nhstateparks.org/uploads/pdf/BMP-Manual.pdf>), the National Park Service, or similar organizations known for their trail building and maintenance expertise.

The Committee will draw upon the *NH Wildlife Action Plan*, the NH Natural Heritage Inventory, relevant GIS layers and applications, local knowledge, and existing specialized reports when considering changes to the trail system. As part of its assessment, Committee members will walk the proposed corridor. To improve site-specific natural resource information, the Committee may involve qualified individuals or groups interested in preparing natural resources inventories.

The Committee also welcomes data on wildlife sightings and other relevant information provided to it by knowledgeable individuals and/or professionally certified biologists, as well as KTFCA visitors. All such data shall be maintained by the secretary and may be used for both resource protection and public education purposes. Features of interest include plants, animals, water, soils, topographic features, geologic features, and historic resources.

Available data sources notwithstanding, it is understood that the absence of information on use of suitable habitat by wildlife does not diminish the area's existing or potential importance for wildlife, hence, our reliance on broad principles contained in documents like *Trails for People and Wildlife*.

This Policy shall be available to the public on the KTFCA Committee's website.