

REPORT FROM THE CASCO OPEN SPACE COMMISSION

FY 2015

As background information, the Casco Open Space Commission (COSC) was established through a community management planning process, which includes the Casco Comprehensive Plan, the Casco Open Space Plan and the Casco Open Space Conservation Ordinance. Intent was to create a conservation commission which would work “...to protect, conserve, enhance and provide stewardship for open space and its natural resources in the Town of Casco...” Open space is simply defined in the Casco Open Space Plan as undeveloped land, i.e., land upon which there are no man-made structures. There are four such focus areas identified for the Town of Casco, and within which the COSC works to fulfill the intent of the Ordinance.

Over the past year, the Casco Open Space Commission (COSC) has concentrated in large part upon compiling information regarding undeveloped lands in area 1, which is described as the Pine Hill/Owl Pond/Heath area. Towards that end, the Commission has hosted some landowners in Commission meetings to ascertain what future plans there may be for the lands and what potentials exist for open space protection(s). The quest for determining how much of this area could be protected is ongoing, and landowners continue to be contacted. The areas of Quaker Ridge East (area 3) and Quaker Ridge West (area 4) have also received some Commission attention because of timbering activities currently in progress there, plus the possibilities for protection. Rattlesnake Mt. (area 2) is an area which, if opportunities arise, will garner attention from COSC, although it is not immediately an area of resource concern.

In conjunction with being alert to possibilities that exist for protections in all focus areas, “news” that may be conveyed in a less organized way, COSC has completed and will soon do a mailing to all landowners in the Town of Casco. The mailing includes a cover letter which explains COSC intentions and invites landowners to consider placing their lands in a conservation status, a set of 7 strategies which are somewhat abstracted. An attachment gives a lengthier explanation of the strategies which are available, and also provides Internet addresses where the landowner can obtain much more information. It is intended that this document will also “live” at the Town’s website.

COSC has also been alerted to other opportunities in or near focus areas; however, there are funding limitations for potential acquisitions.

COSC has also been engaged in working to identify the recreation and natural area possibilities for a 71-acre parcel, currently belonging to the Town of Casco, located west of and fronting on

U.S. 302. The property is also somewhat near both Ring Landing and Lakewood roads. The area needs better boundary definition, but it is hoped that the parcel can have established paths and allow a parking area with an information kiosk. A Town property of about 51 acres bordering State Park Road has been visually assessed on the ground with recommendations that, hopefully, will allow it also to be included as a Town recreational area, with signage, paths, and appropriate other features that will allow the public to use it without harming the resources.

COSC reviews lists of foreclosure properties and makes recommendations for any that have potential for Town acquisition as open space.

Two Commission members attended the Maine Land Conservation Conference, April 25, 2015, held in Topsham, Maine.

The Commission received a presentation from a representative of the initiative known as the Raymond Community Forest Project (Loon Echo Land Trust), which is an approximate 360-acre area that includes Pismire Mt. and Crescent Lake. Inasmuch as a successful conclusion to this project would provide viewshed and natural resource benefits for the Town of Casco, the Commission has forward to the Select Board a Resolution of Support. Fund raising is nearing the goal; however, a large share of the funds remaining to be raised had been included in Land for Maine's Future bond issuance – the release of which is being withheld by the Governor.

COSC recently received an hour-long presentation from a GIS (Geographic Information System) specialist regarding how the technology could be incorporated into our working toward more efficient and effective preservation of open space.

The CASCO Open Space Commission can be reached through the Town office at 635 Meadow Road, or by phone (Barbara York, Chairwoman) at 207.627.4655.

Respectfully submitted,

Casco Open Space Commission