

Coming to a Trailhead Near You

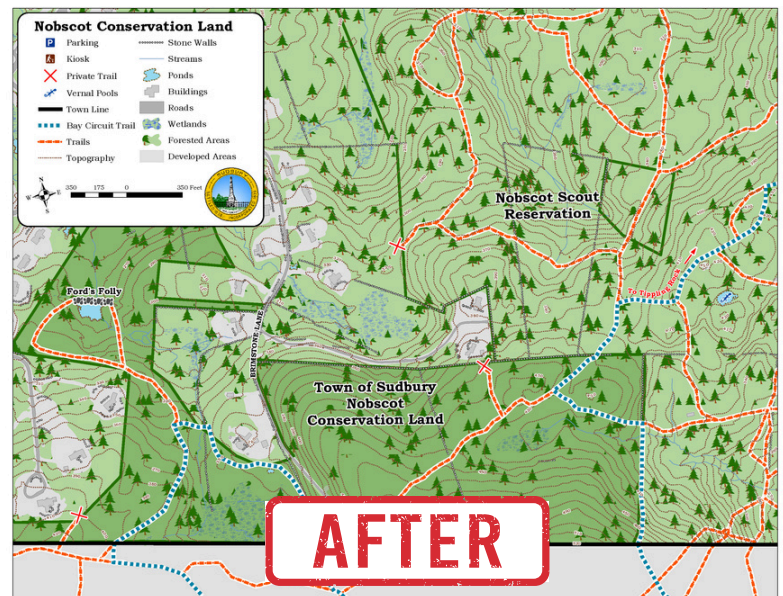
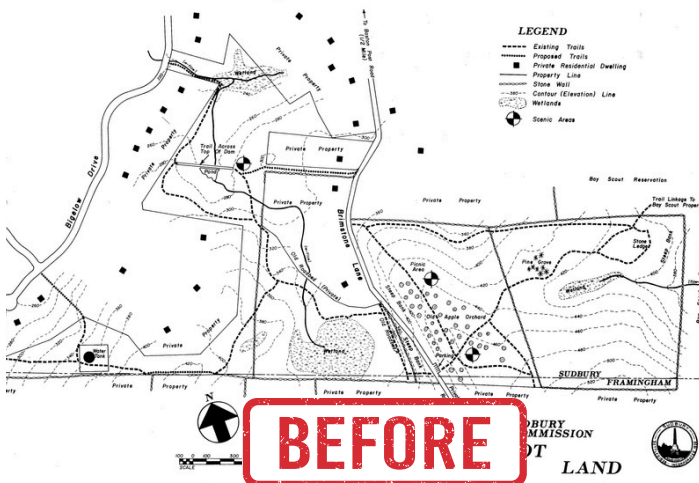
**BY ROBERT BOSSO,
CONSERVATION ASSISTANT**

If you happened to visit one of Sudbury's Conservation Lands within the past few weeks, you may have noticed some changes. Colors have begun to poke up from the leaf litter, through the understory, and down from the canopy as winter gives way to spring. The air is losing its frosty edge, and carries a different set of notes to the ears and nose. Astute observers may also notice something else: after many years, the Conservation Department has taken a giant leap forward in the effort to spruce up the appearance and usefulness of our trailhead kiosks.

To understand how we arrived at this point, we have to go back in time to 2019. Lori Capone had just stepped into the role of Conservation Coordinator for the Town. In reviewing the Department's collection of trail maps, she noticed that some of the them dated to the 1970s, while others existed only as rudimentary sketches. Some Conservation Lands didn't have any trail maps at all. This essential element of kiosk design was clearly in need of a revamp.

Her attention turned first to Frost Farm, a conservation land off North Road in North Sudbury. The only existing trail map was of undetermined origin, possibly dating back to the early part of the current century, and marked as a "Draft" copy. Black and white, the features tended to blend together. Spatial relationships were not obvious and didn't easily tie to the actual landscape. Some key features were missing entirely. Simply put, it was hard to use.

After walking the trails to collect data and get a general feel for the land, she set about designing a new trail map. The map she envisioned would emphasize accuracy and usability. Furthermore, with vibrant colors and engaging symbology, it would present a stark contrast to the previous map, while having a unique appearance to set it apart from other trail maps. As it so often happens, other matters took precedence and the project was pushed onto the back burner.



Trailhead Improvements, cont.

Four years later, the effort was renewed, and this time the project was completed. The map was published as a laminated poster and also included in a brand-new trail guide. These were promptly installed at the Frost Farm kiosk. At the same time, digital copies were uploaded to the Department [website](#). To publicize this breakthrough, a supplemental [article](#) was published in the Summer 2023 edition of the Sudbury Municipal Update Newsletter.

However, this was just the beginning. The pivotal event that accelerated this project into high gear was the hiring of Joseph Miller into the newly-created Land Manager position. With a satellite-linked tablet computer in hand, he collected GPS data for all twelve of the Conservation Lands which host trail networks. In so doing, he discovered some trails that were not captured on previous versions. Back in the office, he exported the data and used GIS (Geographic Information System) software to draft new maps for each property, using the original Frost Farm design. After multiple, exhaustive rounds of critique and revision, the maps were finalized and published on the Conservation Commission's website.

Concurrently, the process of revising the Conservation Land narratives was underway.

A narrative is the text describing the location, history, ecology, and other aspects of the land. Information was added, removed, or corrected after hours of research, with Steven Greene of the Historical Society and Commission Chair David Henkels generously contributing their expertise. The narratives and trail maps at last came together in the form of brand-new tri-fold trail guides and laminated kiosk posters. Revised regulations for the Conservation Lands, recently voted on by the Commission, were also incorporated.

To date, new materials have been debuted at the kiosks for Davis Farm, Frost Farm, Hop Brook Marsh, Lincoln Meadows, Nobscot, and the Tippling Rock Trail Conservation Lands. In the near future, expect to see the same for Barton Farms, Haynes Meadows, Landham Brook, King Philip Woods, Piper, and Poor Farm.

And that isn't the end of it. At the urging of the Select Board and the Board of Health, educational literature highlighting the dangers associated with ticks and mosquitos will be provided at all kiosks. Specialized postings will also be installed. These address issues specific to a given Conservation Land, e.g. the Nobscot kiosk features a trail map for the adjacent Nobscot Scout Reservation. As a finishing touch, kiosks have all been freshly painted with the help of Senior Worker Martin Hensel, and new plexiglass windows have been installed where needed.

Volunteers and staff have also been hard at work painting trailhead signs, mulching, opening and blazing trails, clearing fallen trees, installing bog bridges, carrying off trash, removing invasive plants, and other activities aimed at promoting the recreational and ecological values of the Conservation Commission. We hope you will visit the Town's Conservation Lands soon, and experience them for yourself.

