

Wildlife Habitat Evaluation of the Canoe River in Norton MA 2006-2008

6. Johnson Acres

This former farm land was purchased in 2000 with Land and Water Conservation Funds. Johnson Acres is located on the corner of North Washington Street and Newcomb Street. The large field provides a picnic area and the trails are used often by equestrian riders. The property is now part of the Canoe River Greenbelt. The rich history of the property has been documented by Bruce Church and is available in the Conservation Office. Do not park in the driveways. This is the only conservation parcel where hunting is NOT permitted. Several different natural communities can be found on the fifty-acre parcel like cultural field, white pine-oak forest, red maple swamp, and Atlantic white cedar swamp.



Brian Reid of the Wildlands Trust performed a rapid natural resource assessment on August 19, 1999. He found an abundance of findings that many of the general public may not be aware of. An Atlantic White Cedar Swamp, a globally rare natural community type, was documented. This is a small but very mature swamp forest on the west side of Tucker Brook, with an unusually large amount of Atlantic White Cedar trees, Red Maple and Green Ash. This part of

the property alone identifies this area as somewhat of a treasure and also makes it a high priority for protection by the Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program. Also noted in this report was a streamside forest, which is a Red Maple dominated forest with frequent rich seepy openings. Some of the species found in this forest, along with the Red Maple are skunk cabbage, Marsh violet, Water horehound, Clematis, Tall meadow rue, Sensitive fern, False nettle and Beggar ticks. This property has a perennial stream with a fairly cold water flow, probably due to groundwater. Species found in this stream include stream invertebrates, such as Dragonfly larvae, Leeches, Mollanid caddisfly larvae, Midge larvae and Sialid (Dobsonfly) larvae. These species are indicative of high water quality and it should be noted that streams supporting these species are uncommon in this area. Johnson Acres supports a native grassland area which is a patch of open habitat dominated by native Bluestem grass and interrupted by stands of Red cedar trees and saplings. We are very fortunate to have this area as we lost much of this type of property with the decline of farming.

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What a beautiful place for Norton to have, giving us an opportunity to enjoy many facets of open space in one area. Not only are we lucky enough to have our town own and protect this property, but we also have well defined trails that are clear and peaceful to walk on. We cannot thank the Johnson's enough for this jewel.

A mammal tracking event was held at Johnson Acres on February 11, 2006. While there wasn't



any snow, participants did observe several other signs of wildlife (below left). Several dead trees yielded woodpecker holes and red squirrel scat (below right). A mourning cloak butterfly was observed. Scat of fox or coyote was seen in the field and on the trail. Deer signs were found on cedar trees and a bedding area within the cedars was observed. Gray squirrel nests were seen in the trees and someone had stuck their nose into the grass and left several holes, suggesting a skunk.



On August 25, 2007 there was a Bug and Butterfly walk of Johnson Acres. Other wildlife noted during the walk was a Ruby Meadow Haw, land snails and dragonflies.

The open space committee members met at Johnson Acres to perform a cultural grassland form for one of the fields on March 29, 2006. We observed cardinals, robins, chickadees, ant hills, mourning cloak butterfly, and signs of chipmunk.

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On October 24, 2007 there was an inspection of the fields by Jennifer Carlino and Jim Hendrickson. They documented ten varieties of trees that created the areas canopy, two types of saplings, five different shrubs, fourteen different herbaceous plants, three distinct types of vines and evidence of four types of wildlife that frequented this area.

Two vernal pools are found within the red maple swamp on this property.



The fields (left) are commonly used for camping and civil war re-enactments and the picnic tables (right) are used by all visitors.