

## **Falmouth celebrates old protected forest, new conservation grant**

By [Gillian Graham](#)

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FALMOUTH — Conservation Commission members hope residents will turn out this weekend to explore a part of town that will look the same in 100 years as it does today.

The idea, Conservation Commission Chairman Mel Dickenson said, is to introduce residents to the 300-acre tract of wooded land known as Hadlock Community Forest.

The area, which will never be developed, is adjacent to a 250-acre tract of land in Cumberland and is connected by trail to another 200 acres of protected land in Falmouth.

The town owns more than 1,100 acres of conservation land. There currently are 32 miles of trails on the land, many built by the volunteer Conservation Corps.

Hadlock Discovery Day will take place from 1-3:30 p.m. Sunday, Feb. 12, at the forest on Hadlock Road. The suggested donation is \$6 per family. Activities include show-shoe hikes, a digital scavenger hunt, snow kickball, and hot chocolate and toasted marshmallows around a fire.

Bob Shafto, open space ombudsman, said people also will have a chance to measure the height and width of trees. The area is part of the Conservation Commission's forestry management program; trees are measured annually by sixth-grade students.

Additionally, the discovery day will include information about the history of the property, previously known as Hadlock Farm. Shafto said the land was cleared before area farms were abandoned in the early 20th century. As a result, it contains many small trees and has less habitat diversity than other forests.

"We hope it's a fun day for people and we'll sneak in a little education on the side," Shafto said.

The event comes as officials work to finalize the acquisition of one of seven high-priority conservation areas identified by the town's open space plan as a priority for protection.

The town recently was awarded a nearly \$183,000 Maine Natural Resources Conservation Program grant to acquire 87 acres of conservation land that contains the town's only northern peat bog, a three-acre beaver pond and 39 acres of upland hardwood forest.

A \$20,000 grant from the Casco Bay Estuary Partnership and \$15,000 in town funds also will be used to buy the property. Officials expect the acquisition to be finalized by April.

Shafto said the property is on the west side of Blackstrap ridge and east of Mast Road. The property includes much of the headwaters of Suckfish Brook, a tributary of Highland Lake that provides spawning habitat for brown trout and white suckers.

Dickenson said the property is particularly important because of its wetlands and location in the Highland Lake watershed area. Protecting the area will help ensure the future health of the lake, he said.

"These wetlands provide the important function of filtering much of the rainwater that falls on the west side of Blackstrap ridge, mediating water levels and nutrient load from run-off, and providing unique wildlife habitat for a wide range of species," he said.

Shafto said future plans for the property include a trail head and parking area on the Westbrook side of the town border and an elevated walkway through the peat bog.

Dickenson said Falmouth residents have long been supportive of efforts to conserve land and create an infrastructure of open space.

"We're very blessed to have a town that conceptually supports that 100 years from now it will be nice to have open space infrastructure," Dickenson said.

"We're trying to leave an infrastructure of open space for future generations," Shafto added. "We want people 100 years from now to know they live in Maine, not New Jersey."

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