

# Use Policies for SPNHF Forest Reservations

## Introduction

As New Hampshire grows, so too will public use and enjoyment of Forest Society reservations. This increased use will potentially have many benefits for the Forest Society, including increased membership and a wider public appreciation of forests and the benefits they provide.

To continue to provide satisfying recreational opportunities to users, the Forest Society will need to increase the level of recreation management provided on its reservations. While this management will predominantly be directed towards protection of the natural resources, there will also be opportunities to direct public use towards the enjoyment and appreciation of unique natural features of the New Hampshire landscape.

## Goals and Objectives

The following *Goals and Objectives for Land Ownership* adopted by the Forest Society's Board of Trustees in 1999 are used to guide the development of the Policies contained within this document.

- To permanently protect and manage the Forest Society's forest reservations as open space.
- To seek and protect lands that enlarge and enhance our existing land base.
- To demonstrate the practice of ecologically and economically sustainable forestry.
- To actively test, implement, and evaluate state-of-the-art land and resource management techniques.
- To generate revenue through the management of our lands for the highest-value growth of wood and other forest products and land uses where consistent with other conservation values.
- To protect and manage important and unique natural areas, significant heritage resources, rare, threatened and endangered species, critical wildlife habitat and biological diversity.
- To provide public access for various forms of recreational, educational, and scientific use where appropriate.
- To continue to inform landowners, government officials, and the public at large, through active demonstration and education about the importance of a healthy, vibrant, and biologically diverse forest resource in the state.

## Use Policies

The written policies below approved and periodically reviewed/revised by our Board of Trustees, will help the Forest Society's Land Management Staff:

- 1) evaluate user requests within a decision framework that is based on and compatible with the *Goals and Objectives for Land Ownership*;
- 2) be consistent in what is communicated to members, and other visitors to Forest Society reservations; and
- 3) ensure that allowed uses promote the mission of the Forest Society.

All requests for uses of Forest Society Reservations beyond those discussed in this policy will be submitted to the Land Management Department.

## I. FOREST SOCIETY RESERVATION INFORMATION

The Forest Society is in the process of developing an on-line guide to its recreationally important properties. Maps, descriptions and text information included in the on-line guide will be developed using the most accurate information available for each property listed. Published reservation data, including trail maps, will be available to the public for downloading from their home computers.

Not all Forest Society Reservations will be included in the on-line guide. Some reservations, particularly eco-reserve properties and some of the more remote and isolated woodlots, are not appropriate for the facilities development needed for recreational use.

As part of their management activities the Land Management Department (with input from other Forest Society staff) has described four recreational categories for reservations based on their potential to provide a rewarding recreational experience. These categories are used to prioritize Forest Society investment in recreational developments and to direct public use toward those properties that have, or will have, adequate infrastructure (parking, trails, etc.) and a level of stewardship that will allow the property to withstand a reasonable level of recreational use without compromising its ecological integrity. The reservations with the highest recreational potential will be listed on the website for the enjoyment of our members and the general public.

Information on other reservations is available upon request from the Land Management staff.

## II. RECREATION USES

These use policies are intended to be comprehensive policies that generally apply to all reservations, with the caveat that some Forest Society reservations may be subject to other property specific restrictions due to donor wishes, conservation easement deed restrictions or organizational goals of ownership. A comprehensive list of properties in this category is attached to this Policy.

Exclusion of uses from this document does not imply that they are allowed. Any use not explicitly covered by these policies will be addressed on an as needed basis by the Land Management Department.

Approvals granted by the Forest Society for uses specifically requested by user groups, or uses related to a specific reservation, trail or area will be controlled by the issuance of a special use permit. These permits will be written, signed by the Land Management Department of the Forest Society, be related to one specific activity or use, and will be provided for a specific duration.

Members of the public who access the Forest Society's properties do so at their own risk. Pursuant to RSA 508:14, RSA 212:34, and other principals of law, the Forest Society is entitled to certain protections from liability, and assumes no responsibility for, and absolves itself from, any liability to members of the public for personal property damage or injury occurring on its properties.

### 1. Camping

Camping is not allowed on Forest Society reservations, except by special exception.

### 2. Campfires

Campfires are not allowed on Forest Society reservations, except by written permission.

### **3. Recreational Trails**

- a. No trails shall be constructed on Forest Society reservations unless a trail proposal is reviewed and approved by the Land Management Department.
- b. No commercial trail use is allowed without a properly executed lease agreement which has been approved in advance by the Land Management Department.
- c. The Forest Society may limit the size of groups using our reservations if, due to the physical characteristics of the property (soils, slopes, sensitive wildlife), it is determined that damage may result from large group use.

### **4. Horses**

Local and occasional horse riding is permitted on most Forest Society reservations. This use is restricted to trails and woods roads; no off-trail riding is permitted. The Land Management Department may prohibit horse use on any trail or property for any period of time if such use is determined to be damaging to resources, or if such use conflicts with other uses of the property. Riders should restrict use of trails during mud season, or whenever soils are saturated. The Forest Society has no intention of developing additional trails or facilities in support of concentrated horse use on any property.

### **5. Non- motorized bicycles (i.e. Mountain Bikes)**

Non-motorized bicycle use is permitted on most Forest Society reservations, but is confined to woods roads that can support local and occasional bicycle use. No off-trail use is permitted. No use of existing hiking trails is permitted. The Land Management Department may prohibit non-motorized bicycle use on any road, trail, or property, for any period of time, if such use is determined to be damaging to resources, or if such use conflicts with other uses of the property. Bicycles will be restricted from Forest Society lands during mud seasons, or whenever soils are saturated.

Permission to create mountain biking trails on Forest Society land will be entertained only when proposed by an organized and established group willing and able to provide construction, management and maintenance of the trail system to a standard acceptable to the Forest Society. As staff time permits, the Forest Society may work with requesting organizations to locate an appropriate reservation, approve the type and location of the trail system, provide trail maintenance standards and monitor the natural resource impacts of the use. A written agreement will be developed prior to any trail construction, and the Forest Society is in no way bound by any such permission to provide parking or trail head facilities for this use. Forestry activities may disrupt any trail network at any time, and the Forest Society will not be responsible for re-establishing recreational trails following a timber harvest.

### **6. Boating**

Boating is allowed on Forest Society reservations that:

- a. Have existing boat access (Creek Farm, Grafton Pond);
- b. Have shoreline frontage with access from other points (Flint Memorial Forest, Conservation Center);
- c. Have existing trail access where people can park vehicles “outside” of a Forest Society reservation and can carry a boat to water.
- d. Boating is not allowed on Heald Pond as requested by the donor.

### **7. Swimming**

There are no public swimming facilities on any body of water accessed by Forest Society lands.

**8. Rock Climbing**

- a. is prohibited in sensitive natural areas (as posted) or on known nesting bird cliffs (i.e. Devil's Slide).
- b. Development of fixed routes is prohibited.

**9. Geocaching**

Geocaching and the placement of geocaches is permitted on most Forest Society reservations, but cache locations and types must be pre-approved by the Land Management Department. The following restrictions apply to placement of geocaches on Forest Society reservations:

- a. Caches cannot be located within, on, beneath, or near cultural resources including stone walls, foundations, dams, and cellar holes;
- b. No cache will be allowed in any sensitive natural area (i.e. known sites of rare, threatened, or endangered species or natural communities, critical habitat or nesting sites, wetlands, watercourses, or lake/pond shorelines).

The Forest Society reserves the right to remove any cache on any reservation at any time. Cache owners will not be notified if a timber harvest or other land management activity is likely to disrupt their cache. The Forest Society will not be responsible for damage to geocaches or their contents as a result of forest management activity.

**10. Paintball**

Use of paintball guns and/or development of paintball courses is prohibited on Forest Society reservations.

<b>III. OFF HIGHWAY RECREATIONAL VEHICLES</b>
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**11. Snowmobiles**

Use of snowmobiles on Forest Society reservations is limited to established trails that are part of a larger trail system maintained/sponsored by a recognized club. Permission to use the trail segment is controlled by a written agreement between the Club and Forest Society within which the Club agrees to provide trail maintenance and to adhere to the following guidelines:

- a. No off trail use;
- b. Yield to wildlife and people on foot, snowshoes or skis;
- c. Follow and enforce all State laws pertaining to their allowed use.

**12. All-Terrain Vehicles, Trail/Dirt motorcycles (Bikes), and Other Motorized Wheeled Vehicles**

The use of all-terrain vehicles, Trail/dirt motorcycles (bikes) and any motorized on- or off-highway wheeled vehicles is prohibited on Forest Society reservations.

The Forest Society may, from time to time, allow the non-recreational use of off-highway motorized vehicles over a prescribed right-of-way for specific activities described in a written agreement. Emergency use of motorized off-highway vehicles is allowed for firefighting, search and rescue, and certain training activities.

## **IV. HUNTING, FISHING AND TRAPPING**

### **13. Hunting**

Hunting consistent with state law is allowed on Forest Society reservations.

- a. Donor conditions may prohibit hunting on specific reservations.
- b. Permanent tree stands are prohibited.
- c. Certain reservations or parts of reservations may be periodically closed to hunting, depending on available research information regarding local wildlife population levels, or because of active forest management activities. These areas will be posted at these times.
- d. The Land Management Department reserves the right to grant or deny requests to employ certain hunting practices (such as the use of bait or dogs) on Forest Society reservations.

### **14. Fishing**

Fishing consistent with state law is allowed on Forest Society reservations.

### **15. Trapping**

As is required by state law, trappers must request permission before trapping on private property. Trapping consistent with state law is allowed on Forest Society reservations with the following limitations:

- a. As is the case with hunting, certain reservations or parts of reservations may be periodically closed to trapping, depending on available research information regarding wildlife population levels or due to designation as an ecoreserve (as posted);
- b. Donor conditions may prohibit trapping on specific properties;
- c. Trapping is prohibited on reservations near residential areas and/or with recreational trails where dogs frequent;
- d. Trappers must report their take to the Land Management Department.

### **16. Unauthorized Use of Firearms**

Unauthorized use of firearms (i.e. target practice) on Forest Society reservations is prohibited.

## **V. OTHER USES**

### **17. Telecommunications Facilities**

The Forest Society generally does not support location of telecommunications facilities on Forest Society reservations. We consider such development to be inconsistent with the purposes for which we own and manage forest reservations. Donors have gifted many of these properties with deed restrictions specifically prohibiting such development. We have not, nor will we ever actively seek such development on our lands, with or without deed restrictions.

The Federal Telecommunications Act of 1996 prohibits municipalities from banning such development by use of zoning or planning powers. If a municipality determines that a Forest Society reservation is the most appropriate location for such a facility (only after a thorough analysis of all possible alternatives, and by vote of its governing or legislative body), we might consider a request to locate a tower on our lands, if such lands are not encumbered by donor or deed restrictions. After such consideration, we reserve the right to say no. If we agree, we will insist on the least aesthetically intrusive design and technology that will provide the desired coverage. We will also

require in a formal lease that the tower be removed by and at the sole expense of the lessee upon termination of the lease. Any revenues from the leasing of such sites will be deposited to the Forest Society's Reservation Stewardship Fund, a permanent endowment, to be used in support of Forest Society land management objectives.

We will not solicit or entertain inquiries directly from commercial telecommunications service providers.

### **18. Buildings and Improvements**

If buildings and improvements on Forest Society reservations do not have a programmatic use, our policy shall be to address this condition as follows (on a case by case basis):

- a. Find an organization or individual that would use and maintain the building, if it is compatible with Forest Society long-range objectives, or
- b. Keep the land and remove the buildings, or
- c. Subdivide the land, keeping the subdivision at the smallest size allowed by local regulation, following natural (streams, shoreline) or cultural features (stonewalls, roads) where possible, and sell the parcel containing the building.

### **19. Agricultural Uses**

Proposals to allow agricultural uses of Forest Society reservations (i.e. sugaring, haying of fields, grazing of animals) will be entertained on a case-by-case basis. Proposed agricultural uses will be evaluated based upon the following criteria:

- The proposed agricultural use must not be contrary to the Forest Society's mission and goals;
- The proposed agricultural use must not be contrary to the goals and objectives established for the reservation by the Land Management Department;
- The Forest Society must not confer a net private benefit onto individuals or organizations in permitting the proposed agricultural use; therefore, an annual fee may be charged for the lease;
- All permitted uses will be controlled by a written agreement between the user/farmer and the Forest Society. This agreement may require the user/farmer to adhere to Best Management Practices established by the NH Department of Agriculture or other entity.

The liability risks and management burden associated with permitting the proposed use must be within acceptable limits.

### **20. Academic Research**

Academic research on Forest Society reservations shall be allowed with approval of standard Memorandum of Understanding Concerning Academic Research (see attached).

### **21. Public Water Supplies**

Forest Society lands are not available for commercial water extraction; however in several instances municipal water supplies (either wells or reservoirs) are located within the bounds of our lands.

### **22. Dogs**

Dogs are allowed on Forest Society reservations, with the following limitations:

- a. Dogs must be under direct owner control at all times (leash, voice, etc.);
- b. Owners must pack out pet waste on trails and other high use areas;
- c. Dogs are prohibited on Monadnock Reservation and Creek Farm Reservation.

The Forest Society reserves the right to prohibit dogs on any property if the presence of dogs is resulting in resource degradation and/or user conflicts.

**23. Plants, Mineral, and Historical/Cultural Resource Collecting**

The collection of plants, minerals, and historical/cultural artifacts from Forest Society reservations is allowed only when the collection of such materials is a necessary part of an academic investigation by a qualified undergraduate or graduate student, or faculty researcher. The student must agree to and sign the *Memorandum of Understanding Concerning Academic Research on Forest Society Lands* before the research or collection of materials begins. Collection, by the public, of limited amounts of common (not on state rare or endangered plant list) wild edibles is allowed for non-commercial purposes.

**24. Dumping**

No material of any sort may be placed, dumped, stored or otherwise introduced onto Forest Society reservations without written permission from the Forest Society.

Forest Society Reservations with additional restrictions on use:

Grampa Watson's Forest	Madbury	No horse or bicycle use
Hills Family Forest	Madbury & Durham	No horse or bicycle use
Creek Farm Reservation	Portsmouth	No dogs
Monadnock Reservation	Dublin, Jaffrey, Troy	No dogs
Monson Village	Milford	
The Rocks	Bethlehem	
Strathorne	Stratham	No horse or bicycle use
Sharp Forest	Sandwich	No hunting, no wheeled vehicle use