

HORSE HILL WOODS

A Town of Westbrook Open Space Conservation Area

Directions: From I-95 Exit 64, go north 2 miles on Route 145, parking area is on the left, just south of where Eversource transmission lines cross Route 145.

Horse Hill Woods (HHW), a 228-acre town-owned conservation and passive recreation property is characterized by forested ridges, Plane Brook, a head water stream, wetlands and over 3 miles of stone walls. The ridges are dominated by mixed hardwoods including oak (red, white and black), hickory, beach, and black birch; all providing mast (seed), an important wildlife food source. Between the ridges are two large palustrine (wetland) forests dominated by red maple and yellow birch and scrub-shrub wetlands with likely hydrologic connections to the sites watercourse, Plane Brook.

The Northern part of HHW consists of 10 acres of former CL&P land given to the town, and the 24 King property, purchased from the King Family in 2002. The white (1) and blue (2) marked trails are within this 34 acre portion of HHW. As you hike on these trails look for moss covered telephone poles on the ground, evidence of a former CL&P transmission line route. And look for dead or over topped cedar tree evidence that the land was once cleared and likely farmed.

On this map only an orange (3) marked trail is shown in the adjacent 186 acre Russo-Miele property acquired in 2012. However, as of August 19, 2016, other trails have been established with blue trail marking. A map will be available in spring 2017. Hikers can follow former logging roads south where the terrain flattens and you see the effects of a 2011 logging operations by the former owner. This area is dominated by mixed hardwoods of oak, hickory and beach, with an unusually high stocking of yellow birch. We expect these species will continue to be the dominant species. Now the area is relatively open providing a partial “edge effect” for protecting wildlife foraging in the field-like opening and creating opportunity for establishment of invasive plants.

A Habitat and Recreation Management Plan and Forest Bird Habitat Assessment will be completed for Horse Hill Woods in 2016 to help guide development of additional trails. The 7.67 acre St. John property connecting HHW to Breakneck Hill Road, was acquired in November 2015 and permanently protected by the town, establishing HHW as a 228 acre forest to protect water quality and quantity and provide recreation opportunity. In 2016 a parking area off Breakneck Hill will be established to provide access to the HHW trail system.