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Mt. Piscgah Community Conservation Area Management Plan

Winthrop Conservation Commission

Kennebec Land Trust

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Mt Pisgah Community Conservation Area Management Plan



Version 2

September 2006

Winthrop Conservation Commission
Kennebec Land Trust

Executive Summary

The Mt Pisgah Community Conservation Area was established in 2003 when the Maine Forest Service granted a conservation easement to the Kennebec Land Trust and then sold the property to the Town of Winthrop. The successful protection of the Mt Pisgah tower property culminated a community-wide effort to conserve the area for outdoor recreation, water quality protection, and continued access to the lookout tower.

The 94 acre parcel of wooded “mountain” land is located on the westerly side of Mt Pisgah in Winthrop, Maine. The conservation area extends from the Mt Pisgah Road to the top of the mountain, incorporating the former Maine Forest Service fire tower, the tower access road and utility line, and a new hiking trail that connects the roadside parking area to the lookout tower. The heavily wooded land provides open space, outdoor recreation and education opportunities for residents and visitors from Winthrop and surrounding communities.

The community conservation area is the keystone piece in the larger Mt Pisgah Conservation Area, a land conservation focus area of the Kennebec Land Trust, providing critical public access to the mountain and surrounding area.

The goal of this management plan is to assure that the conservation area will be maintained forever in its essentially undeveloped, open space, scenic, and natural condition for public recreational use, for education and for the protection of plants and wildlife and to prevent any use of the property that will significantly impair or interfere with this condition. It is the intent of the Town of Winthrop and the Kennebec Land Trust to work together in a cooperative manner to manage the property for the benefit of the public. To this end, this stewardship management plan is created to guide the actions and activities of the Town and the Trust in current on-going and future management efforts.

Stewardship Objectives and Actions

The property will be managed to accommodate low-impact outdoor recreational activities with appropriate and suitable improvements, to provide a safe and enjoyable experience in a natural setting, and to prevent over use and degradation of the resources.

Existing trails, including the new Tower Trail and existing branch trails to KLT lands, will be maintained for non-motorized uses, with signs and other structures incidental to such trails.

Trails for motorized use and signs and other structures incidental to such use may be provided in a manner consistent with the purpose of the CE and in accordance with a written plan so as to minimize erosion and to assure the safety of non-motorized recreational users, and to minimize impacts on and buffer adjoining lands.

The Tower Road, with an acceptable gate by-pass, provides snowmobile access to the mountain top, with connection to the ITS. Other recreational motorized trail uses of this road are deemed unsuitable because of the potential for damage to the road resulting in erosion and expensive repair costs.

The existing Tower Road (and utilities) will continue to be used and maintained for periodic access to the mountain top towers for regular operations and maintenance. The Town will develop a town policy and reserve account for periodic maintenance, and develop a shared cost understanding with other users of the road and utilities, including arrangements to encourage the tower company to reposition the utility lines in a manner with less visual impacts.

The fire lookout tower will be maintained and available for use as an observation platform. Designation as an historic look out tower will be established by listing on the National Historic Lookout Register.

Although forestry opportunities are limited on the Community Conservation Area, there is room for demonstration and educational activities, providing opportunities for teachers and students to learn about forest management and timber harvesting practices. The planning committee intends to (with Town approval and KLT Board acceptance) establish a community planning process leading to a forest management plan for the greater Mt Pisgah area.

Public Access will be maintained from the present small parking lot on the Mt Pisgah Road. The existing kiosk will be used to display a map and brochure about the property, including any usage rules established by the Town.

Summary of Management Actions and Stewardship Tasks

Stewardship Plan – adopted by the Town Council and the Board of Directors of the Kennebec Land Trust will be used to guide stewardship activities, with periodic review and updating. (Add trails and forestry plans.)

Trail system plan – incorporates non-motorized and motorized trail use and development, based on trail suitability and use designations, linked and consistent with KLT trails and other land owners desires. A map based plan needs to be created that covers planned trail development and maintenance, roles for a friends of Mt Pisgah stewardship group, utilization of Winthrop schools Day of Caring, other school community programs, and other volunteer trail or property work opportunities. The plan should address trail signage and include a list of trail development and maintenance tasks and jobs to guide the activities of volunteer activities.

Tower Trail improvements and maintenance – need to assess the desired level of trail improvements, (more than a rough trail hike through the woods because of the heavy usage, and all-seasons usage, by diverse and mixed groups of walkers and hikers), develop project plans to guide volunteer efforts, and implement required improvements.

Policing the property – needed to discourage inappropriate uses with signage, enforce adherence to town use rules, monitor condition of the road gate.

Forestry plan – work with KLT to develop a community forestry program for the larger Mt Pisgah area, with appropriate forestry education, demonstration, and economic returns from the towns property consistent with the conservation purposes of the conservation area.

Tower road (and utilities) use and maintenance – develop a town policy and reserve account for periodic maintenance, develop a shared cost understanding with other users of the road and utilities, verify status of utility easements if any.

Fire Tower – replace wooden stairs as needed, research and record historical and community values, seek designation as historic lookout on the National Register of Historic Lookout Towers, connect with Maine FFA group.

Public Access sites, facilities, and user information – maintain kiosk, add property name board to kiosk, create property brochure with map, post use rules, police and maintain the parking lot/access area.

Mt Pisgah Community Conservation Area Management Plan

Conservation Area Description

The Mt Pisgah Community Conservation Area is a 94 acre parcel of wooded “mountain” land located on the westerly side of Mt Pisgah in Winthrop, Maine. The conservation area extends from the Mt Pisgah Road to the top of the mountain, incorporating the former Maine Forest Service fire tower, the tower access road and utility line, and a new hiking trail that connects the roadside parking area to the lookout tower. The mostly wooded land provides open space, outdoor recreation and education opportunities for residents and visitors from Winthrop and surrounding communities.

Conservation Area Background

The Mt Pisgah Community Conservation Area was established in 2003 when the Maine Forest Service granted, first, a conservation easement to the Kennebec Land Trust and then sold the parcel to the Town of Winthrop. These actions culminated a nearly two year long community effort to preserve the property and the historic fire tower, a Winthrop icon.

The desire to secure continued public access and use of the property arose from a combination of concerns over the condition of the eroding tower access road, which at the time was also the public trail to the tower, and the State’s determination that the fire tower was no longer needed and could be sold or transferred to another owner.

Community support for taking action grew from the concerns of the Wilson/Dexter/Berry Ponds Lake Association over potential water quality impacts from the eroding road, and a widespread community desire to improve and maintain the hiking experience and to keep the fire tower in place as an observation platform.

In the eyes of the Kennebec Land Trust, the state held fire tower property was the keystone piece of a vision for a greater Mt Pisgah Conservation Area encompassing the mountain and surrounding lands, to be held as part of a large undeveloped open-space available for a variety of outdoor recreational activities. The KLT had been acquiring land parcels in the Mt Pisgah area since 1995, amassing over 600 acres in seven parcels, including lands adjacent to the fire tower property.

The Winthrop Town Council was supportive from the beginning of the effort to gain local ownership of the property because they saw the area as an important element of the town’s rural character that could provide needed outdoor recreation opportunities. The Town’s 1996 Comprehensive Plan identifies Mt Pisgah area as one of the unique natural areas that contributes to the rural character of the town and provides important outdoor recreational opportunities. The Plan lists the Mt Pisgah property as an open space area supporting recreational activities, and recommends that the Town consider the establishment of bike paths and walkways in scenic areas such as Mt Pisgah.

To provide management and stewardship of the property, the Town Council, re-established a Conservation Commission charged with the responsibility of caring for the property, working in partnership with the Kennebec Land Trust. The Conservation Easement over the property commits the Town and the Trust to work together in a cooperative manner to manage the property for the benefit of the public.

The Town and the Trust worked together to create this stewardship management plan to guide management actions and assure consistent management of the lands around Mt Pisgah. The Winthrop Conservation Commission and the Kennebec Land Trust worked closely to establish the stewardship objectives and management activities in the Stewardship Plan, establishing a pattern of shared responsibilities and decision making in all aspects of the management and use of the conservation area.

Vision

At its initial meeting the new Winthrop Conservation Commission discussed its visions for the Mt Pisgah Community Conservation Area. Committee members expressed views of the area as a place for Winthrop citizens to enjoy the outdoors and to recreate. They saw the conservation area as a place for educational activities, and an opportunity to appreciate the history of the fire tower. They saw the mountain linked by a trail to the high school and middle school properties.

The KLT expressed a view of the property fitting into its concept of a greater Mt Pisgah Conservation Area open for a variety of outdoor recreational activities. The Trust saw the parcel as the principle point of public access to the larger area and expressed its desire to coordinate management of the town's conservation area with its stewardship of surrounding lands.

The committee discussed the Town's responsibilities for working with the KLT in a shared effort to care for the property, expressing a view that management of the property should be self-sufficient and not creating a burden on the town budget, although it was understood that town services will be provided as available and needed to meet stewardship obligations.

The shared vision for the Mt Pisgah Community Conservation Area is a place open for outdoor recreational uses (including hunting and fishing), education, and nature appreciation in a natural setting. It is a place to learn about and observe nature at work, to understand and appreciate local history, and a resource for teachers. A place for a quiet family walk and picnic, to enjoy the panoramic views from the lookout tower, and a place that is well maintained and managed to provide a safe and pleasant outdoor recreation experience. It is a property cooperatively managed with the Kennebec Land Trust as part of a larger conservation area, eventually linking the mountain to the town center.

Stewardship Goals

As expressed in the Conservation Easement (CE), the purpose of conserving the property is to assure that it will be retained forever in its essentially undeveloped, open space, scenic, and natural condition for public recreational use (including hunting and fishing), for education and for the protection of plants and wildlife and to prevent any use of the property that will significantly impair or interfere with this condition.

It is also the intent of the parties to work together in a cooperative manner to manage the property for the benefit of the public. To this end, this stewardship management plan is created to guide the actions and activities of the Town and the Trust in current on-going and future management efforts. The parties have worked hard to create a partnership and shared decision making at all levels from the content of the plan to on the ground activities. Shared responsibility is a central theme in this management plan.

Property Characteristics, Values, and Uses

To set reasonable and realistic management objectives it is necessary to understand the nature and character of the property, its natural resources and cultural values, and past and present uses. This section of the plan presents the available information about the history of the property, its natural resources, and current uses.

A. Property Location and Setting

Mt Pisgah is the highest point on a north-south trending ridgeline that dominates the western edge of the Town of Winthrop. Located on the western slopes of Mt Pisgah, the conservation area incorporates the peak of the 803 foot high mountain, which is capped with the former Maine Forest Service forest fire lookout tower. The property stretches in an irregular H-shaped configuration to the Mt Pisgah Road, which runs along the base of the mountain between N. Monmouth and Wayne. The 94 acre parcel contains mixed woods of variable ages, areas of exposed bedrock along the ridge top, and the head waters of two small intermittent brooks. A small parking lot with a kiosk at the site of the former fire warden cabin on the Mt Pisgah road provides access to the new tower hiking trail and the tower road with electric utility line. Adjacent to the fire lookout tower on a small parcel is a 150 foot tall communications tower and small electronics control building owned by Pinnacle Communications Inc., plus a second adjacent 1.5 acre undeveloped lot potentially available for an additional tower facility.

Surrounding the community conservation area and communication tower lots are lands held by the Kennebec Land Trust and other private land owners. These mountain lands are heavily wooded and contain linking trails to the tower property. Adjacent lands along the Mt Pisgah Road are developed residential properties.

From a regional or landscape level perspective, the Mt Pisgah Community Conservation Area is located within the central interior biophysical region of the state (Janet S. McMahon, *Biophysical Regions of Maine*. 1990). A biophysical region is an area with distinct similarities and common influences of climate, topography and soils, and vegetative character. The state is divided into 15 regions based on their physiography, climate, geology and soils, and vegetation. The central interior region, as the name implies, lies between the marine influence zones along the coast and the more mountainous areas to the north and lies in a broad band across central Maine, incorporating most of Androscoggin, Kennebec, Waldo and lower parts of Penobscot counties. The Mt Pisgah area is situated on the northwest edge of the region where it grades into the adjacent western foothill region.

In terms of ecosystems the conservation area lies in a central interior transitional zone between the boreal or Acadian zone to the north and the mesophitic hardwood zone to the south. The Mt Pisgah area contains a mix of forest types or plant associations typical of the eco-zone - spruce and fir dominated forest, northern hardwoods of beech, birch, and maple trees, hemlock groves, white pine stands with mixtures of oak. An ecosystem is an integrated, interacting assemblage of plants and animals in a common environment.

Ecosystem elements in the Mt Pisgah area include forest communities, wetlands, brooks and ponds.

Biodiversity is a measure of the health and functioning of an area. Biodiversity, as a concept, is a key element of a land conservation stewardship plan. And protecting, maintaining and enhancing biodiversity is a prime stewardship goal for a protected property, and its surroundings. Biodiversity is defined in the Biological Diversity in Maine report as the variety of all forms of life – plants and animal – existing at the different levels on which life operates –genetically to ecosystems. Although difficult to quantify, BD is a measure of the diversity of life forms interacting in an area from the microbial to man-kind interacting in complex ecosystems, a measure of the health and vitality of functioning ecosystems. If there was a biodiversity index, the higher the index number the better would be the diversity in an area, the property would have a medium rating. But, biodiversity diversity is scale or size dependent, where a given land parcel will not contain all of the variety of life indigenous to the larger area or region. Thus, the Mt Pisgah Community Conservation Area can be seen as a relatively small representative sample of the natural features and ecosystems in the greater Mt Pisgah area. Its inherent biodiversity is limited, but it contributes to a much greater whole.

B. Natural Resources

Land Forms (Physiography)

Mt Pisgah is part of long northeast-southwest trending ridgeline located along the town boundaries of Winthrop and Wayne. At 802 feet, it is the highest point in the area and provides a commanding view of the surrounding lands and lakes. (Relief and slopes, aspects and shapes, Geo structure and formation) The shape of the mountain property is created by its geologic history.

The conservation property subtends four distinct parts of the mountain terrain. The top is generally rounded and smoothed with bedrock exposed at or close to the surface, gently sloping shoulders incline to steep westerly facing slopes (15-25%), and an area of benches or terraces with a brook valley along the foot of the mountain.

Geology

According to Robert Marvinney, State Geologist, the geology of the Mt Pisgah area is fascinating in its variety, complexity, and history. The bedrock is a mix of layered metamorphic rocks that underlie most of the landscape of central Maine, which is here punctuated by a complex of igneous rocks that intruded into the original rock at depth as molten magma over several geologic periods. Since the time of the last intrusion, around 290 million years ago, the land has been weathered and eroded away, first through long exposure to weathering and more recently by repeated glaciations over the past two million years. The last glacial advance ending a mere 13,000 years ago.

The metamorphic rocks of similar composition and position are grouped into formations. The Mt Pisgah area is divided into the Sangerville Formation, a unit consisting of thin to

thickly bedded meta-sandstones and schist, which are further subdivided into a number of distinct units that are well exposed on the mountain. The southern part of the area is called the Waterville Formation, a unit consisting of thinly bedded schist with varying amounts of meta-limestones, which can be seen on the east and south slopes of the mountain. These metamorphosed Silurian era sandstones and limestones are inter-cut with intruded Devonian and Carboniferous aged granites. The original sandstone, shale and igneous rocks in these regions have been metamorphosed into to gneisses, schist's and slates. Metamorphic rock types found in the Mt Pisgah area include quartzite, slate, phyllite, schist, and gneiss.

The underlying structure of the bedrock controls the general shape and structure of the existing landscape. The formation of Mt Pisgah results from eons of weathering and geologic erosion of the bedrock which was then scraped and shaped by repeated glacial actions in more recent times to create the present shape of the land. The rounded top is grooved by ice movement and the mountain sides and valleys are plastered and buried under surficial deposits laid down and shaped by the last glacier.

The surficial geology of the area has been mapped at a reconnaissance level by Woody Thompson and Geoff Smith and published by the Maine Geologic Survey in 1977. Except for areas of thin drift cover and bedrock exposures, the area is mapped as glacial tills, which are a mixture of different sized materials deposited as the last glacier melted away leaving a potpourri of rocks and dirt of variable textures and composition. Relatively extensive areas of exposed bedrock and thin drift cover are found along the ridge line and top of Mt Pisgah. Deeper deposits coat the slopes of the mountain, benches on the lower slopes may mark the edges of a meltwater channel occupied today by the small intermittent brook and wet area behind the parking lot. These deposits of rock and dirt became the parent materials for the soil types that have formed over the last 10,000 years as the results of weathering, and other influences acting on the virgin materials.

Soils

According the Kennebec County Soil Survey, the predominant soil types on the conservation property are classified as Paxton very stony fine sandy loam on 8 to 25 percent slopes. These are soils that are suited to woodlands, pastures, and orchards but severely limited by stoniness and slopes to cultivated crops and hay. Limitations for septic tank absorption fields are severe, and the soils are rated as moderate to severe limitations for campsites and wilderness tent sites because of stones and slopes. The soil layer is the surface of the earth which supports vegetation and sustains land use activities.

Vegetation (Flora)

Today the parcel is entirely wooded, which was not the case in the past. The existing forest are a reflection of past land uses, including some more recent timber harvesting activity. A small fairly mature stand of hardwoods, including a sugar maple "sugarbush", is found along the intermittent brook valley and lower bench area at the bottom of the mountain tract. The forest cover on the steep slopes is a combination of relatively young old field pines, pioneer or early successional stage hardwoods, and a small patch of dense hemlocks all reflecting the former pasture uses.

Forest conditions on the shoulders and higher reaches of the parcel also echo former pasture land uses. The young mixed stands of hardwoods and pines blend into a dense second growth white pine area that became established on abandoned pasture lands. An older pine dominated stand is well established near the top of the mountain on both the west and east sides. These lands were probably abandoned earlier than other areas. All of these areas and stands are established on former pasture lands and have not been subsequently disturbed by timber harvesting.

The area in the southeast section of the property was harvested about 1975 when all of the mature white pine were removed. This forest today is a mixture of early successional hardwoods with a scattering of white pine trees.

Wildlife Resources (Fauna)

The variety of land and forest conditions found on the conservation parcel contribute to the support of complex of wildlife species endemic or common in the region. The conservation area is home to all of the common bird, fish, and wildlife species to be found in the region.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Gulf of Maine Watershed program provides a wildlife habitat analysis that identifies high value habitat for 91 species of migratory birds and fish common in Maine. A summary analysis of the Mt Pisgah area shows areas of forest and wet lands with low to moderate wildlife habitat values. The forested habitats of the Mt Pisgah Community Conservation Area do not contain recognized habitat for high priority threatened or endangered migratory species, although the area certainly supports species of concern, especially migrating neo-tropical birds.

Significant wildlife habitats. The Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife identifies and maps significant upland and wetland wildlife habitats in the state. A compilation of this information is provided to towns to support local comprehensive plans and is included in the Beginning with Habitat maps and analysis available from the Department. Habitat areas for certain rare, endangered, and threatened wildlife species are officially mapped as significant wildlife habitats under the Natural Resources Protection Act, including the recent addition of vernal pools. There are no mapped significant species habitats on the Conservation Area or in the Mt Pisgah area.

C. Human Context (Land Use, historic and cultural values)

So far, we have built-up a "layer cake" of natural resources that constitute the environment and ecosystem elements in which we live. Now we will look back, "to read the land", to understand how past uses have influenced present conditions and character, and to perhaps appreciate what we might expect in the future.

Current Land Uses

The primary use of the property today is for outdoor recreation activities. Today the property is fully wooded with a mixture of forest conditions that reflect past uses of the land. A new hiking trail provides access to the mountain top and the former forest fire lookout tower from a small parking lot on the Mt Pisgah Road. The former fire lookout provides an observation platform to see and admire the surrounding country. The reconstructed gravel Tower Road with utility line is used to provide access to a communication tower on a small lot adjacent to the old fire tower. But, the evidence of past land uses can be seen in the conditions of the forest growth and stonewalls cutting through the woods.

New uses are superimposed over previous uses, sometimes reusing the existing structures, sometimes obliterating the past. Each generation or cycle of use leaves a trace or bit of evidence of past activities. Stone walls indicate past agricultural uses, stone cairns mark the placement of the first telephone line to the lookout tower, and old spring was the water supply for the watchman and his family, the remains of a 55 gallon drum stove in the sugar maple stand suggest a maple syrup operation, and old well and adjacent depression in the ground suggest a cattle watering facility, old apple trees hint at a former orchard, and so forth.

Past Land Uses

The Mt Pisgah parcel was purchased by the State of Maine in 1958 to secure its continued use as a forest fire lookout. The lookout was established in 1949 on leased land. The first lease of the property was signed August 1, 1949 with land owners John Andrews and Roy Turner of Winthrop. This was a ten year lease, renewable for another ten years, for \$15/year. This lease was resigned with Roy Turner (the then sole owner) effective August 1, 1951 for a ten year period with the same conditions as the original lease.

This lease allowed the State of Maine Forestry Department to:

Use “as much of the summit of Mt Pisgah, not to exceed one-half acre, as may be deemed sufficient to maintain a lookout station thereon for forest fire protection”,

“together with a right of way across the property of said lessor for the purpose of foot travel, and transportation by man and car of all materials necessary in the maintenance of above mentioned tower, and of a telephone line.” and

“the further right for the maintenance of a watchman’s camp”

The lessee also agreed to construct gates in stone walls where the right of way crosses pastured land. There is a 1958 map of the property showing the bounds of forest stands, and the remaining open land. This map also shows the original right of way to the lease from the Mt Pisgah Road, which is not the present point of access to the property.

The extensive stonewalls bounding the property is direct evidence of a history of farming uses of the land. It is common knowledge in the area that cattle, dry cows and

heifers were pastured on the mountain each summer well into the 1950's. (Cobb's on Old Lewiston Road). (more research on this, look at old maps and early aerial photos) A watering hole with old well can be found along the hiking trail providing testimony to past grazing use of the property.

Second growth pine stands that had become established on former pasture land were harvested about 1971 or 1972, The log yard, skid road are still evident as is the residual stocking of white pine and mixed hardwood growth.

There is no evidence of a former homestead on the property, but the remains of cut stone foundations can be found on adjacent lands, suggesting the extensive use of the mountain land for farming and agricultural purposes.

The name of the mountain suggests that during settlement of the area tree cover on the mountain top was sparse, affording views of the surrounding lands. In Hebrew, Pisgah means a lookout or place with a view, referring to the place on Mt Nebo from which Moses looked out over the promised lands. One can imagine the first explorers and land surveyors scaling the mountain to get a look at the surrounding land.

Historic Land Uses (Significant historic, cultural, and social values including pre-historic uses)

Based on the published history of fire towers in Maine (Hilton, David N. *From York to the Allagash, Forest Fire Lookouts of Maine, 1905 – 1991*. Moosehead Communications. 1997.) the 60 foot tall all steel Mt Pisgah fire tower was erected in 1949 on 980 foot high (incorrect elevation) Mt Pisgah. Regular use of the tower was officially deactivated in 1991. The tower is still in place providing spectacular views for those brave enough to climb the stairs to the lookout cab.

The era of the manned fire lookout came to a dramatic end in 1991 when state budget cuts eliminated funding for eleven towers in Southern Maine, and the MFS turned entirely to aircraft patrols to detect forest fires. In 1959 there were 102 active towers across the state. By 1973 the number of active towers had declined to 13, which were discontinued in 1991. In 1991 and 1996 three towers were manned on a voluntary basis, with full MFS support.

An unrealized attempt to man the Pisgah Tower was initiated by Chief Rance Knowles of Manchester, representing a local mutual aid group in 1993/1994. See letter in the Pisgah property files. There is no further evidence in the files about the voluntary manning of the Pisgah Tower. Could be researched?? In the letter from Andy Mendes, he provides information about voluntary manning of the Mt Agamenticus Tower and the Johnson Hill tower in Bremen.

Stewardship Targets (Objectives), Threats and Actions

In this section of the plan we establish the stewardship objectives that will guide the management of the property, that refine the vision and goals expressed above and begin to spell out how the conservation area will be used and managed. The stewardship objectives are drawn from the provisions in the CE, as well as, the planning committee's understanding of the community's desires for the property, and current uses of the area. The management objective is first stated (quoting from the Conservation Easement as appropriate), then any threats/issues/considerations are identified, and finally a course of action is established.

Joint stewardship and management plan:

The Town of Winthrop and the Kennebec Land Trust (KLT) will work together in a cooperative manner to manage the property for the benefit of the public. A planning committee will be formed, which will include representatives of the KLT to prepare a stewardship management plan to implement the objectives of the conservation easement and to assure consistent management of the lands around Mt Pisgah. The Town and the KLT will work together to implement the plan for stewardship and to regularly communicate regarding use and management issues.

To carry out its responsibilities the Town Council re-established a Conservation Commission and charged it with the responsibility of advising the Council in all matters related to the Mt Pisgah property. The Commission with KLT representatives has prepared this management plan for adoption by the Town Council and the KLT Board of Directors to guide the uses and stewardship activities on the Mt Pisgah Community Conservation Area. The Conservation Commission takes responsible for the management of the property working with the Town Manager to assure that provisions in the management plan are implemented and carried out.

The KLT, exercising its responsibilities to monitor the terms of the conservation easement, will work closely with the Town to assure that management activities are carried out in ways consistent with the purposes of the easement.

Low-impact outdoor recreation:

The conservation area will be managed to provide low-impact outdoor recreation, nature observation and study, including trails, structures such as lean-tos, and signs incidental to such use. Low-impact outdoor recreation, nature observation and study is meant to include dispersed, traditional non-commercial outdoor activities that do not generally rely on buildings or spectator facilities and may include hunting, fishing and trapping, hiking, bird watching, picnicking, cross country skiing and running, snow-shoeing, bicycling, horseback riding, primitive non-commercial camping, and outdoor education, including scientific and archaeological research and observation.

The principle threats to the conservation property from dispersed outdoor recreational activities are the occurrence of un-authorized activities, over-use, and inappropriate activities that damage or degrade recreational resources and improvements and adversely effect the natural resources and character of the conservation area.

The property will be managed to accommodate low-impact outdoor recreational activities with appropriate and suitable improvements, to provide a safe and enjoyable experience, and to prevent over use and degradation of the resources. The planning

committee discussed and decided not to provide camping sites and lean-tos because of the difficulty and cost for maintaining these types of facilities. In accordance with provisions in the Conservation Easement, trail development, and forestry demonstrations, will be conducted in accordance with more specific plans for these activities.

Non-motorized trails:

The Conservation Easement (CE) states that trails may be installed, maintained and repaired for non-motorized uses in locations and in a manner consistent with the purpose of the CE, with signs and other structures incidental to such trails all in conjunction with the stewardship plan. The planning committee found that sufficient trails are in place for non-motorized uses, including the new Tower Trail and exiting branch trails to KLT lands.

One threat is the development of unauthorized trails by well intentioned users, another issue is coordinating trail designations (trail use policies) and uses with KLT and other abutting land owners. A major issue is the question of what kind of trail experience will be provided. That is how much trail development is going to be required to accommodate the levels of use the new trail is getting, to provide a safe and enjoyable experience and not detract from the natural setting?

Further work is needed to prepare a trail development and use plan, to be included in this stewardship plan, with designated trail use based on a trail suitability or use classification system. The trail development plan will include provision for trail improvements and annual maintenance utilizing volunteers and school groups, such as the WHS Day of Caring, and other opportunities to take advantage of volunteer efforts.

Motorized vehicle trails:

The CE states that trails may also be installed, maintained and repaired for motorized use and signs and other structures incidental to such use in a manner consistent with the purpose of the CE and in accordance with a written plan so as to minimize erosion and to assure the safety of non-motorized recreational users, and to minimize impacts on and buffer adjoining lands. The Tower Road, with an acceptable by-pass of the gate, can continue to provide snowmobile access to the mountain top and inter-linking trail system. Other motorized trail uses of this road are deemed unsuitable because of the potential for damage to the road resulting in erosion and expensive repair costs.

Threats include uncontrolled access over adjacent and abutting properties and by-passing the gate on the tower road by motorized vehicles. Access to the property and the tower area is gained over adjacent properties, including KLT lands, by ATV, four-wheel drive, dirt bikes, and other vehicles which has resulted in severe erosion on adjacent properties and physical damage to the Tower Road. This access and use is deemed inappropriate. The Town will not accommodate motorized trail use, except for snowmobiles on snow covered ground, of the Tower Road and will work with adjacent land owners to discourage and prevent unauthorized access to the mountain property.

Actions include placement of necessary signs, policing inappropriate and unauthorized motorized uses, providing a safe and suitable bypass around the gate for winter snowmobile use, and necessary signage.

Forestry:

The CE states that the property may be used for the cutting and removal of trees and other silvicultural practices to i) maintain the view from the observation tower, ii) for other purposes which are in accordance with the goals, purposes and management techniques established in a forest management plan prepared and/or approved by a Licensed Professional Forester which provides wildlife habitat, maintains water quality, provides recreational opportunities and environmental education and generally maintains the natural undeveloped character of the conservation property.

The tower parcel is part of an extensive area of forested lands with a diversity of conditions resulting from past land uses and recent timber harvesting across a number of adjacent ownerships. Existing forest conditions are not static and conditions will change over time. An active forest management program can provide a means to assure continued biodiversity in the area, to meet wildlife management objectives, to protect sensitive resources, to accommodate recreational activities in a safe and pleasant setting, and to guide resource management and use in ways that support local employment and wood products manufacturing, and to yield income that can be used for land management purposes.

An active forest management program will change the condition of the forest and influence future values and characteristics of the property. Forestry activities can be planned and conducted to achieve stewardship objectives for wildlife habitat, water quality protection, and scenic values. An active timber harvesting regime can be a tool and a means to enhance property values, but the desired outcomes need to be clearly established to guide forest plans and harvesting activities. Timber harvesting activities will need to be carefully monitored and supervised to assure adherence to planned outcomes.

Because of the relatively small size of the property and its setting in the larger forested landscape, any active forest management program needs to be part of a broader, area-wide program that includes lands held by KLT and other adjacent land owners. The steward planning committee intends to work with the KLT and others to incorporate forestry activities into a forest management plan for the Mt Pisgah Conservation area. The planning committee expressed a preference for using a forest management model known as Community Forestry, which is founded on the concepts of sustainable forestry while meeting community needs and desires for a well managed, healthy forest that continues to provide a variety of good and services, including forest products used to support local economic activities. The planning committee intends to (with Town approval and KLT Board acceptance) establish a community planning process leading to a forest management plan for the greater Mt Pisgah area.

Although forestry opportunities are limited on the Community Conservation Area, there is room for demonstration and educational activities, providing opportunities for teachers and students to learn about forest management and timber harvesting practices. Such educational and demonstration forestry programs will be accommodated in keeping with the conservation purposes and plans for the property.

In addition, the trails plan will provide for judicious cutting of trees for public safety and forest health, including control of invasive plants and improvement of views from the mountain top and along the tower hiking trail.

Although not the first reason or prime purpose of a forestry program, it is recognized that income from timber harvesting can be an important source of funds for stewardship activities, and that a regular harvesting regime can provide local employment opportunities and timber that can be used on the property and to support wood products manufacturing businesses in the area.

Tower Road:

The Conservation Easement recognizes the existing tower road extending from the Mt Pisgah Road, including the rights of others who have legal rights to such road and provided that it may be maintained and repaired. The road was first created in 1949 by the Maine Forest Service for the “transportation by man and car of all materials necessary in the maintenance” of a forest fire lookout tower and “a telephone line”. The road has been used and improved over the years to provide access to the fire tower and to an adjacent communication tower. The road was originally located to use a generally un-located or specified right of way across the property. Access rights over this deed right of way were also granted by the seller of the tower property to the State of Maine in other deeds to adjacent properties. Thus the Town, along with Pinnacle Tower Corp., plus land held by the KLT, and land owned by Lou Carrier all benefit from this deeded road right of way.

Over the years the road has been used and abused with minimal to no maintenance until it gets into a washed-out, eroding condition threatening the water quality of nearby ponds and becoming impassible for maintenance vehicles. In recent time, the road has been upgraded and repaired on two occasions, first in 1993 when the adjacent communications tower was constructed and utility lines upgraded, then again in 2002 when the MFS had the road repaired to check erosion and repair damage from unauthorized use of the road. The threat of damage from unauthorized vehicle use, including ATVs is real and ever present. Although the road is gated, ATV’s are tearing up the ditch to get around the gate. Vehicles, especially four-wheel drive vehicles, gain access to the tower road from the backside of the mountain across adjacent properties. The greatest damage is done during wet periods, spring and fall, when the road is wet and soft.

As the owner of the property the Town of Winthrop would seem to have the primary responsibility for the maintenance and repair of the Tower Road. When the property was acquired from the Maine Forest Service it came with the road in good repair and serviceable for periodic and limited access to the towers on the top of the mountain. The costs for the road repair were shared with Pinnacle Tower Corp., setting a precedent for shared maintenance and repair of the road, at least by those actively benefiting from

the use of the road. The Town will continue to attend to the maintenance and repair of the road, working with tower companies and any other users of the road to share costs.

In the long run, the planning committee expressed a preference to discontinue use of the road, permanently stabilizing the road way and allowing it to re-grow.

Utility Lines:

The easement provides that the existing utility line extending from the Mt Pisgah Road, including the rights of others who have legal rights to such utility line may be maintained, repaired, and replaced. A “grounded” telephone line was first installed in 1949 along with the lookout tower. In 1974 power lines and an upgraded telephone line were set on new poles placed by Pine Tree Microwave Corporation when they first leased the fire tower to for microwave relay dishes. In 1993 in the process of upgrading the telephone service the Community Service Co. determined that some of the existing poles were unsafe, and not usable to install new line. At this time Mt Pisgah Tower Corp. (Ken Knight, et al), owner of two adjacent parcels, installed a new pole line from the public road to their new tower adjacent to the fire tower (done in 1994). This project involved placing 22 poles to CMP and Community Service Telephone specifications, with the intent of transferring ownership of the poles and lines to the utilities (no evidence of this happening, so pole line now owned by Pinnacle Tower Co) This is the current set of poles and lines.

The utility line carrying both power and telephone service to Pinnacle Communication’s tower and for any similar tower that may be erected on an adjacent parcel that is currently on the market for this purpose are the responsibility of the tower company (with any easements to utility companies), which requires use of the road to service and maintain. Some maintenance activities of the utility corridor could have a negative or positive impact on the conservation and recreational values of the property. Vegetation management practices may include undesirable physical or chemical controls, but will keep the view open. The utility line as currently laid out criss-crosses the road diminishing the views of Androscoggin Lake and the mountains beyond popular with hikers.

The Town of Winthrop plans to develop a road and utility line maintenance plan and agreement with current and any future tower owners, including a formula for shared costs. These arrangements should encourage the tower companies to reposition the utility lines in a manner with less visual impacts.

Fire Tower:

The observation tower (formerly a fire lookout tower) on the property, including a reserved right by the MFS to use such tower for wildfire detection purposes as needed may be maintained, repaired, and replaced. The existing all steel tower was erected in 1949 by the Maine Forest Service as part of an expansion of fire lookouts in the southern districts of the state. The tower was periodically manned until 1991, when lookout towers gave way to aerial surveillance flights for forest fire detection. The tower is a Winthrop

icon and popular destination for day hikes and picnics. During the process of acquiring the property widespread community support was voiced for keeping the tower in place as an observation tower and historical resource. In selling the property to the Town the MFS reserved a right to use the property, as needed, for wildfire detection purposes. Although perhaps implied, the retained right is not specific about the existence or serviceability of the lookout tower.

The first concern with holding the tower in place and providing for continued public use is its physical condition and safety. The Department of Conservation, Bureau of Parks and Lands, as part of the states' process to transfer the property to the town had the tower inspected by a professional engineer to assess its structural integrity and identify any need for repair. The tower was found to be in sound condition, although some of the wood stairs are in need of replacement. At the same time the MFS addressed the issue of public use of the tower and liability issues. They pointed out the long term record of safe public use of fire towers around the state, never having serious incident of public access up and down manned towers. They also pointed out the limited liability under Maine tort law for municipalities providing public recreational facilities. The historic significance of the Mt Pisgah tower is unclear. It has a long record of use, but is not an early tower or a tower of particular design, being a standard design steel tower of its day. It is one of a declining number of steel towers, still in good shape, and certainly of significance to the citizens of Winthrop and surrounding communities.

The historical and community significance of the former fire lookout tower needs to be researched and recorded. Although stories about the tower have been collected locally none of this material could be located and made available for this plan. Forest fire lookout towers can be registered on the private, non-profit National Historic Lookout Register, which is a project of the American Resources Group – head quartered in Washington DC area, is a conservation service organization working nationwide in support of forestry. The purpose of the register is to recognize both active and inactive fire towers as symbols of forest conservation. The tower will need some minor maintenance to replace rotted wooden stair treads.

Public access and use:

Through the Conservation Easement, the public has a right of access to and use of the conservation property for the purposes of low-impact outdoor recreation, nature observation and study. The Town has the right to provide reasonable rules regarding public uses of the property (see the CE for additional conditions).

The Town of Winthrop and KLT have a common interest in making the conservation area open and accessible to the general public for appropriate outdoor recreational activities. But, similarly, they also are responsible to manage use of the area to avoid over use and degradation of the conservation values. Reasonable rules controlling access and uses of the property can be established (by Town ordinance) to manage uses. One challenge in managing the use of the property is determining what kind of user experience will be created and what levels of development of necessary facilities will be appropriate to the desired experience. Already after just three seasons of

usage, the new Tower Trail is showing signs of over use where the trail way is widening, wandering and braiding around wet places, and the trail surface is wearing through root systems and exposing rocks and soil. To some extent, recreational resources such as trails will need to be upgraded to accommodate the levels of use, without necessarily changing the character of the hiking experience.

Access and use of the property will need to be guided by the adoption of suitable rules that can be posted on the kiosk and printed on brochure and map materials. The stewardship committee will need to judge how much “development” is appropriate to accommodate the level of usage without adversely affecting the recreational experience. The levels of trail development can be worked out in the context of a Trail Plan.

Summary of Management Actions and Stewardship Tasks

Stewardship Plan – adopted by the Town Council and the Board of Directors of the Kennebec Land Trust will be used to guide stewardship activities, with periodic review and updating. (Add trails and forestry plans)

Trail system plan – incorporates non-motorized and motorized trail use and development, based on trail suitability and use designations, linked and consistent with KLT trails and other land owners desires. A map based plan needs to be created that covers planned trail development and maintenance, roles for a friends of Mt Pisgah stewardship group, utilization of Winthrop schools Day of Caring, other school community programs, and other volunteer trail or property work opportunities. The plan should address trail signage and include a list of trail development and maintenance tasks and jobs to guide the activities of volunteer activities.

Tower Trail improvements and maintenance – need to assess the desired level of trail improvements, (more than a rough trail hike through the woods because of the heavy usage, and all-seasons usage, by diverse and mixed groups of walkers and hikers), develop project plans to guide volunteer efforts, and implement required improvements.

Policing the property – needed to discourage inappropriate uses with signage, enforce adherence to town use rules, monitor the condition of the road gate.

Forestry plan – work with KLT to develop a community forestry program for the larger Mt Pisgah area, with appropriate forestry education, demonstration, and economic returns from the towns property consistent with the conservation purposes of the conservation area.

Tower road (and utilities) use and maintenance – develop a town policy and reserve account for periodic maintenance, develop a shared cost understanding with other users of the road and utilities, verify status of utility easements if any.

Fire Tower – replace wooden stairs as needed, research and record historical and community values, seek designation as historic lookout on the National Register of Historic Lookout Towers, connect with Maine FFA group.

Public Access sites, facilities, and user information – maintain kiosk, add property name board to kiosk, create property brochure with map, post use rules, police and maintain the parking lot/access area.

Environmental and Land Use Regulations

The Mt Pisgah Community Conservation Area is in the Rural Zoning District, which includes land presently characterized by low density development, forest, abandoned fields, and farms. The Zoning District seeks to protect the existing open space, forestry, agriculture, and residential uses and to restrict commercial and industrial activity.

Uses permitted by right in this district include open space uses such as recreational and conservation areas. Uses requiring a permit from the Codes Enforcement Officer include earth moving greater than 10 cubic yards, timber harvesting or clearing of land, and similar uses. Uses involving more intensive or extensive changes, such as mineral extraction, recreational facilities require a conditional use permit from the Planning Board.

Trail development, improvements, and maintenance activities seem to be an allowed use without permit review as long as site disturbance and soil movement is kept to a minimum. Road maintenance and improvements would also be subject to the standards of the Town's codes. In some instances state environmental laws may apply, such as the NRPA and Forest Practices Act, to planned activities.

It is good policy to share stewardship plans and activities with the local planning board and CEO as a courtesy and to keep them informed and to identify any possible requirements for town review and approvals of planned uses. This is particularly important for lands and projects on or near lakes and other protected resources.

Winthrop's new tower ordinance encourages clustering of communications towers to avoid towers being placed on every tip top in town. This policy supports use of the mountain top for new towers, supporting the potential for another tower.

Management Responsibilities and Procedures

Stewardship of the property is a shared responsibility between the Town of Winthrop and the Kennebec Land Trust. Fundamentally, the Town as the holder of the property is ultimately responsible for the care and maintenance of the area, while the KLT is responsible for monitoring the terms of the conservation easement, but both are obligated to joint and shared management of the conservation area under the terms of the easement.

Through the planning process the Town and KLT have developed a close working relationship that is the model for continued stewardship of the property. Decisions about management activities are mutually reached, with a clear understanding of the fundamental responsibilities for the property. The Conservation Commission is charged with advising the Council on all matters pertaining to the conservation area, will continue to take responsibility for management activities, organizing and sponsoring volunteer and Town activities on the property, and monitoring the property in cooperation with the KLT steward. The KLT assigns voluntary land stewards for each of its holdings who are responsible for monitoring their property, working with the staff stewardship coordinator to carry out management activities, and generally watching over the protected property. In this case the KLT steward will work closely with the Conservation Commission to assure sound management of the property.

The Commission with the KLT steward will annually inspect the property and prepare a task list and plans for implementation drawing on the resources of the KLT (such as trail building expertise, other technical resources) to guide the work of volunteer and school groups. The Winthrop Conservation Commission will take the lead for organizing a Friends of Mt Pisgah stewardship group (would it work better to have the KLT maintain the friends list???) to conduct periodic cleanup and maintenance activities, such as the Annual Mt Pisgah Cleanup Day. The KLT will work to provide volunteer members to help with maintenance tasks. The Commission will also take the lead to prepare for and host the Winthrop Day of Caring Program and other school sponsored community involvement activities (KLT role?? Especially as conduit for other schools like Kents Hill School). (again with the assistance of the KLT Stewardship Coordinator??) The Town and KLT will jointly apply for any stewardship management grants or other sources of funding support needed to carry out management tasks.

The Town and KLT will work together to address and resolve management issues and problems as they may arise. Stewardship problems or issues will be reported to the Town Manager (??) who will be responsible for informing the members of the Conservation Commission and the KLT steward. The CC and KLT will work together to resolve the problem, with the appropriate support of the Council and the Board.

Stewardship Resources and Budget

The Town has a variety of resources at its disposal. The Winthrop Conservation Commission has established an annual work day and is developing a Friends of Mt Pisgah stewardship crew. The Winthrop Student Day of Caring/community service program is providing crews of students for trail projects. Similarly, crews from Kents Hill School are available for both spring and fall community service days. The Maine Conservation Corps has been conducting spring training sessions resulting in rock steps and other trail improvements. And the State's Recreational Trail Grants program is a possible source of grant funding for major projects, while the Town of Winthrop public works department is able to contribute to the maintenance of the access parking lot and tower road.

The KLT's stewardship and education coordinator works to assist in the management of protected properties by coordinating activities, identifying resources, and contributing services as time and priorities allow. KLT can help provide volunteers for stewardship projects, arrange for technical expertise on a variety of issues, and ... The KLT holds some stewardship funds dedicated as memorials for stewardship activities on Mt Pisgah (Morrison Fund) and could do the same with other memorials, funding opportunities, etc

Annual Management Budget:

- Project costs for supplies, materials, and services –
- Brochures and maps -
- Signs -
- Road maintenance and repair –
- Misc. supplies, materials, and services –
- Policing, emergency response, and fire control -

Projects and Implementation Schedule

Project /Tasks	What	Who/How	When
Public Access and Use Information			
Rules	Town Ordinance	Council	
Brochure, Map	Create, publish		
Kiosk	Ad sign, materials	Conserv. Commiss.	
Trail Signage	Replace signs	CC	
Trail Devel./Maint.			
Friends crew	Org. stew. crew	CC/KLT	
Project plans	Insp., work plan	CC/KLT	Annually
Lookout Tower			
Stairs	Replace stairs		
National Register	Res., Applic.	Volunteer, Town Hist	
Tower Rd/Utility			
Maint. Program Pol	Town Policy	Mgner/Council	
Monitoring/Policin	Patrol	Public Safety Dept	On-going
Repair	Fix water bars,	Town and Friends	ASAP

Appendix

Conservation Easement

Friends of Mt Pisgah stewardship group (to be formed?)

Maps

Property boundary map, with roads and trails

Aerial photos

Topo base map

Mt Pisgah Conservation area map