

Meredith Conservation Commission Agriculture Plan

This document will serve as a management guide for the agricultural lands of the Meredith Page Pond Town Forest, which are approximately 20 acres in size and shown on the attached Map A – Agricultural Fields of the Page Pond Town Forest. These lands are currently open fields managed by the Meredith Conservation Commission in Meredith, NH. The Conservation Commission is responsible for ensuring that the management guidelines set out herein are followed.

Agricultural production will be encouraged in these fields where feasible. Through the use of the Best Management Practices (BMP) for Agriculture in New Hampshire (see appendix) the groundwater and surface water will be safeguarded, and wetland function maintained. This Management Plan is written to ensure the long-term productivity of the land from both an agricultural and resource-management perspective. This includes putting value on farm economics, wetland buffers, ground- and surface-water quality, and wildlife habitat.

The goal of re-establishing agriculture on the property is listed in the Page Pond Stewardship Plan, Section II, Purposes, paragraph e:

- e. To re-establish an agricultural use for local food since a portion of this property includes abandoned agricultural fields with good soils. The plan is to recruit a local farmer to utilize a portion of the property under a lease arrangement. There are very few agricultural properties available in Meredith, so this opportunity is particularly significant.

Uses could also include community farming or a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) program.

Other Requirements and/or Objectives as Previously Stated

- The Agriculture Management Plan shall include BMPs recommended by UNH Cooperative Extension, the Belknap County Conservation District, the USDA and Natural Resources Conservation Service.
- Active agriculture onsite can inadvertently impact other conservation values as delineated in the Conservation Easement, such as wildlife habitat (e.g. grassland bird species, that require late mowing in order to successfully brood young in grassland nests), water quality (inputs of chemicals, organic or otherwise), wetland function, and other resources. Care should be taken to develop responses to such potential impacts, and triggers and response categories should be developed as part of the Agriculture Management Plan.
- Whenever possible, agriculture onsite shall utilize techniques with the fewest impacts to the property, for example, preference shall be given to smaller sized farm equipment.

Facilitation of Agricultural Operations – farming plots and zones

Depending on input from interested lessee farmers, the fields may be divided into multiple areas to be used by different lessees for different uses. In order for each lessee farmer to maximize productivity while not interfering with other farmers' operations, plots should be delineated by visual barriers, such as fencing or vegetation. Establishment of pollinator buffer strips in these areas would be ideal (see below under management recommendations).

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Crop-rotation is encouraged and is an adopted Best Management Practice as proposed by UNH Cooperative Extension.

Development of future water infrastructure onsite can be accomplished using municipal water on Barnard Ridge Road, or by re-establishing an existing well on the property. Electrical power is also available on Barnard Ridge Road or by using solar technology. The establishment of any and all infrastructure including parking areas, farm stands, field vegetable washing stations, and temporary equipment storage must be in accordance with the Conservation Easement and approved by the Meredith Conservation Commission.

Agricultural Practices Allowed by the Easement/Management Plan

A. Organic certification – strongly encouraged

The property has not been farmed in many years and may be able to be certified organic. It is the strong preference of the Meredith Conservation Commission to have organic farming practices onsite.

B. Animal husbandry - discouraged

Due to the small area and the residential location with multiple abutters animal husbandry is not a preferred use. Keeping of animals onsite will present challenges, as there is currently no developed water infrastructure, fencing, or other structures that could be used for housing animals. Keeping animals onsite will be decided on a case-by-case basis. Allowing individual lessee farmers to raise chickens, for example, in portable housing or “chicken-tractors” may present fewer challenges than allowing hogs, cows, or other large animals onsite.

C. Cropping (general) – allowed, with cover-cropping required for fallow fields

The property is ideally suited for row-crop cultivation. Growing vegetables, grains, flowers, and other products which are sown or planted on an annual basis is easily accomplished onsite, and would be a good utilization of the farmland soils present. Corn, hay and other crops with high environmental impact are discouraged.

D. Small fruits - encouraged

Small fruits such as blueberry cranberry and strawberry are well suited to property

E. Large fruits orchards / vineyards – contemplated for future uses

The property could also be suited for long-term agriculture but would require a committed long-term lease agreement. As the town gains experience with agriculture, leasing for orchards and vineyards will be considered.

F. Mushrooms – allowed

Parts of the property, including those not designated as “farmland” may be suitable for mushrooms.

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G. Wildflowers - encouraged

Wildflowers provide benefits to farmers, pollinators, and public alike.

H. Beekeeping – encouraged

Beekeeping is allowed, but care should be taken to site the location of any hives away from areas of high public use, or to otherwise separate these uses of the property through signage, temporary fencing or other means.

I. Composting – allowed

Composting is allowed as part of the lessees farming activities. In siting composting onsite, these consideration shall be taken into account to minimize impacts to other conservation values:

- Visual and odor - impacts to public
- Water quality – impacts to groundwater
- Water quality – impacts to wetlands

J. Minor Infrastructure for Farming Operations – allowed with review

The following infrastructure is allowed, pending design review with the Meredith Conservation Commission:

1. High tunnels/ semi-permanent greenhouse structures in which plants are planted in native soil. Examples include typical wooden-ended high tunnels with roll-up sides, which would allow for soil function and not present a permanent barrier to the soil.
2. Water infrastructure – e.g., above ground water pipes and solar-powered pumps – allowed on mutually agreeable locations.
3. Permanent or semi-permanent fencing (other than portable electric fencing)

These improvements to the property shall be sited to minimize impacts to views and other conservation values protected by the Conservation Easement.

Any water infrastructure developed onsite must be used for the onsite agricultural practices and not transported off of the property or otherwise bartered or sold for commercial purposes.

K. Major Infrastructure for Farming Operations – may be allowed with review & approval by all parties

Major infrastructure may be allowed as described in the Warranty Deed and Stewardship Plan (see appendix) pending design review and approval from property stakeholders.

Any structures proposed for consideration must be limited to those structures necessary in the accomplishment of the onsite agricultural and forestry goals of the Easement.

Management Guidelines for Allowed Practices

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1. Cover-cropping of fallow and/or bare areas used in cultivation – REQUIRED. Every effort shall be taken by the lessee to incorporate cover crops into their agriculture management plan. Maintaining a crop cover throughout the winter will lessen the potential for erosion, improve soil health, and act as a “catch” crop for any left-over nutrients.
2. Establish pollinator buffer strips between farm plots and along access roads – RECOMMENDED. In order to minimize weed seeds, it would be ideal for the pollinator buffer strips to be bordered by mowed areas, which in turn border the area of active cultivation. Buffer strips should be 5-20 feet wide; mowed areas bordering the buffer strips should be of a similar size.
3. Soil tests shall be performed every other year – RECOMMENDED. Fertilizing (which includes spreading of compost, manure, lime, or chemical fertilizers) will be done ***as needed*** based on crop production and soil test results. See *Manual of Best Management Practices for Agriculture* (see appendix) for specifics on handling and spreading fertilizer.
4. Maintain and/or enhance soil organic matter – RECOMMENDED. Every effort should be taken by the lessee to improve the long-term soil health and maintain soil organic matter. The Cornell Soil Health Assessment Manual should be used to identify strategies for improving soil health (see appendix).
5. Avoid wet areas/ high-water areas until late season – REQUIRED. Sections with a high water table that are historically wet late into the spring should be used for fall cropping or hay/forage fields where spring cultivation is not necessary. Cultivation and tractor work should not be started until fields are adequately dry to prevent soil compaction of these sections. Based on experience, this guideline is appropriate for the northwestern areas of “Lessee Farmer Plot B”.
6. Manure management – REQUIRED. If keeping animals, manure should be managed in accordance with New Hampshire BMPs (see appendix). This would include fencing animals out of water bodies, and utilizing intensive rotational management to minimize concentrations of manure.
8. Many additional conservation practices are available through NRCS.

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Appendix

[Page Pond Stewardship Plan, January 2019:](#)

https://www.meredithnh.org/sites/g/files/vyhlif4681/f/uploads/page_pond_stewardship_plan_-_jan_2019.pdf

[Page Pond Warranty Deed, 24 October 2017:](#)

https://www.meredithnh.org/sites/g/files/vyhlif4681/f/uploads/page_2_deed_-_certifiedcopydeed_3136-294.pdf

[Cornell Soil Health Assessment Manual:](#)

<https://soilhealth.cals.cornell.edu/training-manual/>

[New Hampshire Department of Agriculture, Markets, and Food, “MANUAL OF BEST MANAGEMENT PRACTICES \(BMPS\) FOR AGRICULTURE IN NEW HAMPSHIRE” 2017:](#)

<https://www.agriculture.nh.gov/publications-forms/documents/bmp-manual.pdf>

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