



**TOWN OF ASHLAND MASSACHUSETTS
OFFICE OF THE
CONSERVATION COMMISSION
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March 22, 2010

An Open Letter to the Ashland Board of Selectmen

Re: Ashland Conservation Commission Position Statement on Warren Woods

The Ashland Conservation Commission strongly recommends that the Town of Ashland purchase and preserve Warren Woods, the 140 acre parcel of land currently for sale by Northeastern University.

The protection of Warren Woods is listed as a top priority in Ashland's 2010 Open Space and Recreation Plan, and it is easy to see why. If acquired by the town, this unique combination of wetlands, uplands, open meadows and full forest would provide multiple benefits to Ashland residents. The land offers recreational trails for hiking, skiing, bird watching and photography as well as the potential to create ball fields and community gardens. In addition, the site is of high ecological value. The mixture of diverse habitat types and corresponding edge effects (created by the juxtaposition of meadows, forests and fields) and the many wetlands provide optimum conditions for a wide variety of wildlife species. Perhaps most importantly, the woods are a critical link in a wildlife corridor extending from the Holliston Town Forest through to Ashland State Park and the Massachusetts Audubon Society's Waseeka Bird Sanctuary in Hopkinton. Because of its important role connecting these areas, development of Warren Woods would not only result in loss of valuable wildlife habitat on the parcel itself, but it would also diminish the value of these adjacent habitat areas as well.

The forests and meadows of Warren Woods also help to protect the water quality of nearby waters such as Ashland Reservoir, by reducing erosion and pollutant transport caused by stormwater runoff. The woods also replenish groundwater supplies in town, and reduce flooding within the watershed.

Ashland is fortunate to be one of the earliest participants in the Massachusetts Community Preservation Act program, a program that creates a fund from real estate transaction fees and property taxes that can only be used for the protection of open space, historic preservation, development of recreational fields, or creation of affordable housing. By using or leveraging these funds in combination with state grants, Ashland has an opportunity to acquire Warren Woods without the use of the Ashland general fund, without affecting other general financial needs in town, and without affecting taxes or tax rates of residents. On the other hand, development of this property for residential use is likely to incur more costs to the Town

(infrastructure and school) than tax revenue generated, resulting in a net drain on Town resources. So acquisition and preservation is actually likely to be less costly to Ashland tax payers than the development of the land in this case.

In its current condition, the open space of the Warren Woods and adjacent lands comprises a non-renewable natural resource with very high ecological, aesthetic, historic, and economic value to the Town of Ashland. As with all scarce resources, the value of Warren Woods (undeveloped) will increase as available open space in the region continues to decline. If Warren Woods is developed, this value will be permanently lost and the value of surrounding areas will be irreversibly decreased.

For these reasons and others, the members of the Conservation Commission voted unanimously on Monday, March 22, 2010, to encourage the Board of Selectmen to diligently pursue the purchase of Warren Woods, and to encourage Ashland residents to authorize the purchase of this land if so requested at Ashland Town Meeting.

Sincerely,

Steve Brandt

Gene Crouch

Bill Moulton (vice chair)

Eric Perkins

Cheri Vallone (chair)

Cathy Van Lancker

Michelle Wilen

Members of the Ashland Conservation Commission