

## Welcome to the Acton Land Stewardship Committee



I. **As an Acton Land Steward** you have joined a group of volunteers who work to protect and maintain hiking trails in Acton. Without you and our other stewards, the Town of Acton would not be as efficient in delivering its extensive services to residents and visitors. You are an important part of a well established organization dedicated to facilitating the enjoyment of the great outdoors.

### II. **Acton Land Stewardship Committee's Mission:**

The Committee acts for the collective and sustainable benefit of humans, wildlife, and vegetation to help preserve and enhance the woodlands, meadows and wetlands of the Stewardship Lands.

### III. **Who we are:**

The Land Stewardship Committee (LSC) is an advisory committee to the Board of Selectmen, the Conservation Commission, and the Natural Resources Director of the Town of Acton. The LSC defines and implements standards of care for the almost 2,000 acres of public conservation lands owned by the Town and the geographic sites of conservation restrictions, trail easements, and similar interests held by the Town. The LSC maintains trails on two parcels which are not conservation land. These are the Assabet River Blue and Green Trail, located on DPW property, and at Morrison Farm. The LSC has 15 members, 7 voting and 8 associates. Voting members have 3 year terms and associates have one year terms. The Town Clerk's office coordinates with the Town Manager to renew membership each June, notifying members if their term is going to expire.

Stewards are required to take Open Meeting Law and Conflict of Interest training and be sworn in by the Town Clerk upon renewing their membership.

In the course of our duties, we consider ways to increase public awareness of and appreciation for the stewardship lands, the benefits of land conservation, accessibility, and the protection of natural habitats and resources.

### IV. **Duties of Acton's Land Stewards**

#### 1. **Trail Maintenance**

##### A. **Monitoring**

- Monitor your trails at least once a month. Take note of trail conditions, remove large branches, check on kiosks and boardwalks, note any violations. Note wet areas that might need remediation in the future.
- Monitor and refill map boxes by contacting the Natural Resources Assistant who will make copies for you to pick up at town hall, take home and fold into quarters, and place in the map box. Sometimes map boxes need to be wiped out with disinfectant if they have ant or other insect nests.
- Remove trash from parking areas and trails. Natural Resources can give you Town trash bags or you may bring home for disposal.

- In the event of illegally dumped large items like TV's or tires, NR can send a truck or you can bring to the Transfer Station, informing them you're an Acton Land Steward.

#### **B. Trail marking**

- As you walk the trails, look for markers that need to be replaced and opportunities to improve marking.
- Report missing trail markers/wood block arrows, or signs, and do regular trimming to make markers more visible.
- Report when the colored blazes need repainting. Either repaint yourself or ask committee members for assistance and guidelines. A few volunteers do this and can train you.
- Blazing paint is stored in the LSC shed at Morrison Farm. Contact the Natural Resources Assistant for a tour, learn locking system, equipment maintenance.
- Markers should be hung about 6' up.
- Nashoba Brook, Spring Hill, and Camp Acton have custom Bay Circuit Trail markers and Trail Through Time markers. The Assabet River Blue and Green Trail have custom round plastic markers. Leave 1/4" or 1/2" between the nail head and the trail marker. Markers nailed flush will soon fold as the tree grows in diameter.
- It is important to walk the trail in both directions to assess where markers are needed. Please replace old markers when the tree has outgrown them. Remove tags and nails from trees that have fallen over.
- Extensive details on blazing can be found here from the website <https://trails.actonma.gov/cutting-maintaining-and-blazing-trails/>

#### **C. Structural Repairs**

- Maintain existing boardwalks, bridges, and kiosks. Minor repairs can be done yourself using tools and supplies in the LSC Shed at Morrison Farm. Request assistance from experienced stewards for guidance. Plan a workday to rebuild broken structures. Familiarize yourself with boardwalk construction guidelines <https://trails.actonma.gov/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/BoardwalkDesign.pdf>

#### **D. Workdays and Developing a Workday Plan**

- As you visit your site over the seasons, make notes about possible improvements that could be the focus of future work days.
- Improvements might include rerouting a portion of the trail around a seasonally wet area, installing a boardwalk, blocking an access that has been the source of dumping or motorized vehicle access, or improvements to the kiosk.
- Recruit volunteers to assist with these duties and run workdays as needed. Major maintenance is generally done by stewards with the help of volunteers recruited for a work day. The Committee and Natural Resources Assistant maintain a spreadsheet of interested volunteers. All work is done with the consent of the Natural Resources Division.

#### **E. Building New Trails or Identifying Special Project Needs**

- New trails are built if a steep trail is in need of rerouting due to erosion, or needs additional switchbacks because it's too steep, or if a better route is proposed.
- Learn the locations on your parcel of state certified vernal pools. Observe if new ones develop that could be certified <https://www.mass.gov/service-details/vernal-pool-certification> .

## **F. Reporting large, or messy blowdowns blocking the trail**

- If you encounter a large tree across the trail requiring a chainsaw, the LSC has a group of stewards who have taken safety training with the Town's insurance company. These stewards provide their own safety equipment for themselves. Email [lscsawyers@googlegroups.com](mailto:lscsawyers@googlegroups.com) to report the size and location of the downed tree(s).

## **2. Meetings, Reports and PR**

- Once Stewards have been sworn in by the Town Clerk they will be added to the email shell. Stewards should respond to emails from the Committee and other town offices as requested. Always beware of Open Meeting Law. If unsure whether to respond, email just the chair or the Natural Resources Assistant.
- The LSC meets on the third Tuesday of the month at 7pm at Acton Town Hall, ground floor conference room 9. During the pandemic all committee meetings are virtual using Zoom. Agendas can be found on the town website calendar. Members receive the agenda via email.
- Email a monthly report to the LSC [lsc@actonma.gov](mailto:lsc@actonma.gov) making note of anything significant, such as trash, hunting, vandalism, illicit use such as ATVs or snowmobiles, campfires, or vegetation dumping. Report wildlife sightings, condition of the trail, condition of kiosks and map supply.
- You can act as an ambassador for the Acton Land Stewards by explaining the mission to those you encounter on your site, and directing them to the [trails.actonma.gov](https://trails.actonma.gov) website, as well as the Town of Acton webpage for the Committee <https://actonma.gov/633/Land-Stewardship-Committee>
- You may encounter visitors and abutters who may have concerns about our work and our authority to maintain a site. Please avoid confrontation at all costs, and refer them to Acton Natural Resources for more information.
- In the event that you see an inappropriate use as it is happening (dumping, motorized vehicle use, etc.), do not confront the persons involved directly. Make a note of the time and location, and send this information along to Natural Resources.
- Serious vandalism or illegal activity should be reported to the police as soon as possible.
- Encourage visitors to notify the police in the event of a dog fight or attack.

## **3. Equipment and Supplies**

- The LSC has an equipment storage shed located at Morrison Farm behind the grey farmhouse on Concord Road. Stewards are welcome to sign out tools.
- New stewards often obtain a few essential tools for their work such as a bow saw, loppers, and small hand pruners and keep them at home. Be sure to sign these out with the logbook. If none of the equipment is suitable, the Natural Resources Assistant can procure new tools for a steward to use in their service to the Town. Many stewards prefer to use their own tools but this is not required.
- There are backpacks for wood chips, shovels, and some battery operated drills, drivers, and a sawzall. There are many bits of hardware as well such as lag bolts, deck screws, washers and nuts. If you don't see what you need, contact the NR Assistant.
- Power equipment such as gas powered weed whackers and chain trimmers are available for those who are experienced with their use. They have "sign out" books and engine log hours are tracked. There is fuel in the shed as well. Always wear safety glasses and follow all property safety guidelines.

## **4. Trail Pruning Guide**

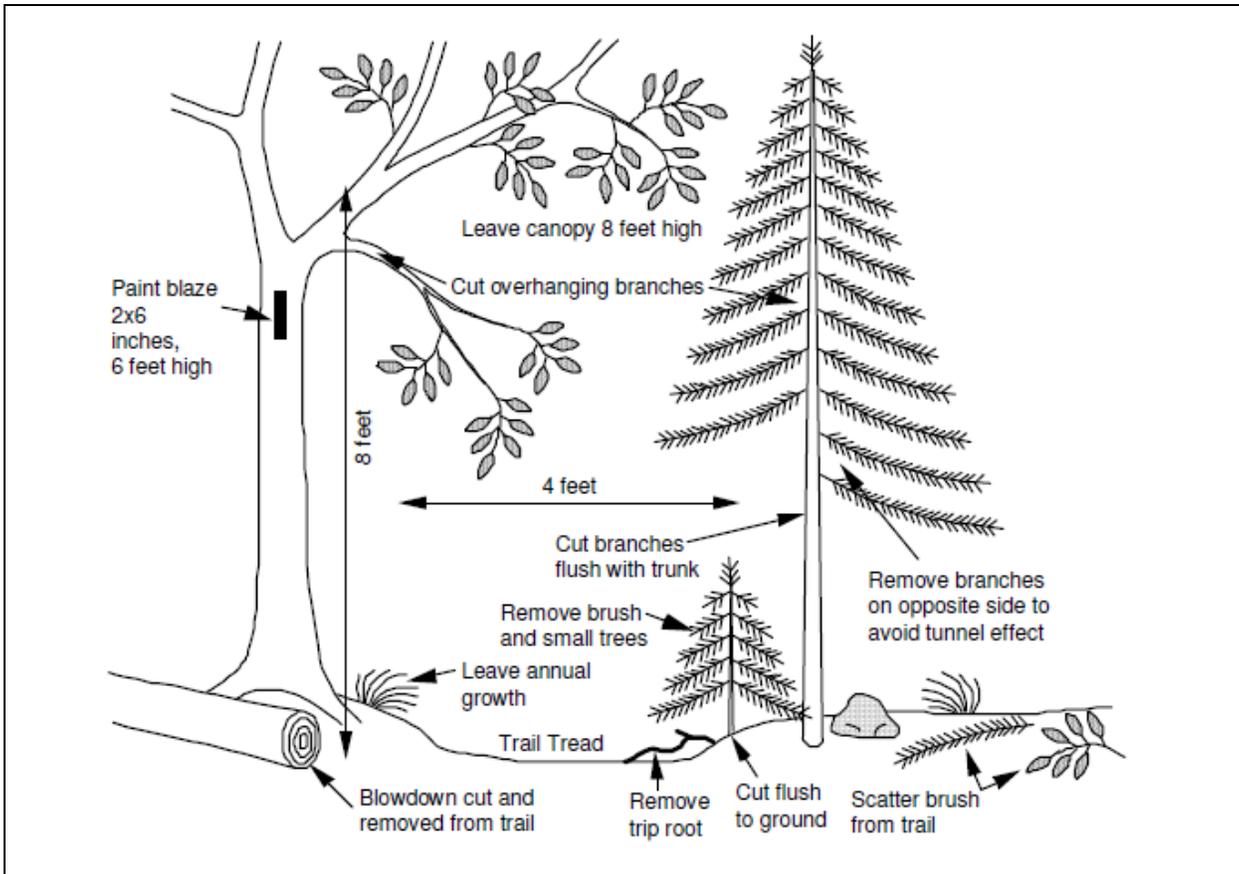
Acton's cutting and pruning information can be found here <https://trails.actonma.gov/cutting-maintaining-and-blazing-trails/>

Thank you to the Cape Ann Land Stewards for sharing

the following additional pruning guide:

If you do not have clippers or a saw, we will supply them. Both will stay sharp longer if you spray the cutting surfaces with WD-40 or silicone spray after each use and store them where they can air dry. Avoid touching the cutting surfaces, as there may be poison ivy oils from prior use.

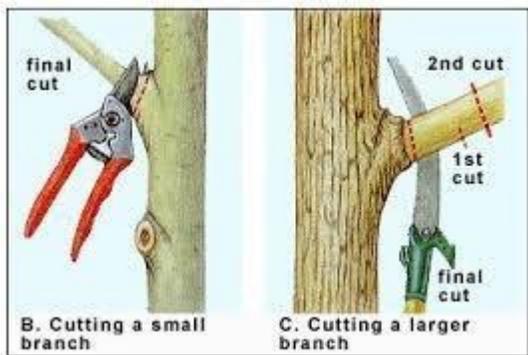
Prune branches that intrude onto the trail or that obscure trail makers. (See figure below for proper trail pruning.)



It is best to cut branches near the node where they connect to the trunk (see image

B.

below). A long stub won't heal properly, and will lead to infection and rot. When cutting a large branch, first cut the branch a few inches from the trunk, and then remove the stub with a second cut (See image C. below). This will prevent the branch from splitting away and leaving a large wound.



If you need to cut a sapling or shrub at ground level, try to cut it flush with the ground. Leaving a stub will create a trip hazard.

### **Trail Appearance**

A well-maintained trail should look natural, with few visible cuts on bordering vegetation.

All cut branches and brush should be moved well off the trail with the cut end pointing away from the trail.

### **Trail Width and Height**

Trails should generally be trimmed to the following widths from ground level to the highest overhead reach while standing on the ground:

- Singletrack with normal trailside vegetation: 4 feet (both elbows outstretched)
- Singletrack if trailside vegetation is thorny, allergenic (poison ivy), rapidly growing, or invasive: 6 feet (both arms outstretched)
- Doubletrack minimum: 8 feet
- Doubletrack for easy passage of any sized service vehicle: 11 feet

Better visibility around curves reassures users about what is ahead and reduces conflicts between visitors. For example, faster traffic can slow down when approaching slower traffic. By selectively pruning growth on the inside of curves, good visibility can be maintained without overly widening trails. Intersections are a common stopping point for visitors to rest, navigate, or socialize and should be trimmed wider than trails to accommodate these needs and reduce conflicts involving faster traffic.

So trails will remain passable all winter, overhead clearance should be as high as can be achieved by workers standing on the ground (approximately 8 feet) to allow for deep snow cover and branches weighted down with snow and ice.

If there are large blow downs or overhanging branches that require the use of a chainsaw, email [lscsawyers@googlegroups.com](mailto:lscsawyers@googlegroups.com). Include a photo with a location tagged either by description or on a map.

## **5. Common Problems**

### **A. Invasive plants.**

- Acton conservation lands are loaded with invasive plant species. The most commonly encountered are multiflora rose, honeysuckle, bittersweet, barberry, burning bush, garlic mustard, Norway maples, buckthorn and more. There are water chestnut aquatic invasives on Nashoba Brook.

- Stewards should familiarize themselves with these plants and the best methods for conquering or at least keeping them at bay.
- Workdays are frequently held to prune back invasive plants from stone walls, cut back, and dig out of the ground.
- We do not generally use herbicides as these must be administered by licensed state applicators.

**B. Encroachment/Dumping**

- Some parcels have notorious neighbors or people new to the neighborhood who are not aware of their property lines. They intentionally or unintentionally dump yard waste on conservation land.
- Generally stewards need to alert the Natural Resources Director of major illegal dumping. Remedies have included building stone walls, or requiring cleanup. Rarely does the Town need to fine for such violations. But the Town does have the authority to do so if necessary.

**7. Field and Meadow Mowing**

- Some fields and meadows are mowed by the Natural Resources Division and large brush hog equipment.
- Some trails and meadows are mowed by Land Stewards with the Sarlo field mower stored in the LSC shed at Morrison Farm. New stewards can be trained in how to operate the mower. It can also be trailed by stewards who have a hitch on their car.
- Recurrent mowing/maintenance tasks on certain parcels:

**Spring – Summer – Fall Seasons**

**The Land Stewardship Committee** mows trails on the following parcels:

- Arboretum – Billings Trail from Concord Rd. to Wood Lane.
- Assabet River Canoe Launch – Japanese knotweed control; Small field and parking lot.
- Bulette Land/ Town Forest – Access trail from Bulette Rd. to the kiosk.
- Grassy Pond – Access trail and the Yellow trail in the Nagog Hill field. Small clearing on the N side of the Nagog Hill Rd. parking lot. Access trail from Newtown Rd.
- Guggins Brook – Trails in the small internal meadow. Access trail from Central St. in the field adjacent to New View community. Access trail from Rt. 11.1 Inner meadow.
- Heath Hen Meadow - Trails in upper and lower meadows.
- Jenks Land – Access trail from Central St. Trails in old orchard. Trail on W side of RR track.
- Nagog Hill – Trail in field behind J. Young property. Trail in field abutting HyBid Farm. Upper access trail from Nagog Hill Rd. to Yellow Trail
- Nashoba Brook – Access trail at the intersection of Milldam Rd. and Northbriar Rd. Access trail from Milldam Rd. cul-de-sac. Trails in internal glades.
- Pacy Land – Access trail from Central St.
- Pratt’s Brook – Trails in pine barrens.
- Wetherbee Land – Yellow trail in internal glade near Rt. 2A. Access trail from Wetherbee St. to Yellow trail.
- Wills Hole/Town Forest – Access trail from Capt. Handley Rd. to Yellow trail. Access trail from Harris St. to Capt. Handley Rd. access trail.

The **Natural Resources Division** mows the following parcels;

- Camp Acton – Parking lot.
- Nashoba Brook – Small meadows at the Wheeler Lane and Davis Rd. trailheads.
- Pratt’s Brook – Small meadow at the Audubon Hill Brewster Lane trailhead.

**Annually in the fall:**

- Arboretum – Small field at end of Wood Lane. Internal field near the path from Wood Lane.
- Grassy Pond – Field next to Nagog Hill Rd. parking lot.
- Great Hill – Hillside above soccer field at the School St. trailhead
- Guggins Brook – Field next to New View community.
- Heath Hen Meadow – Upper and lower fields.
- Jenks Land – Old orchard.
- Nagog Hill – Field at rear of Young property. Area B meadow behind Hybrid Farm.
- Stoneymeade – Large field.

**Winter Season**

The **Land Stewardship Committee** removes downed trees on the trails.

The **Natural Resources Department** plows the conservation land parking lots and driveways.

**6. Our Partnership!**

- Keep in touch with your fellow stewards and the Natural Resources staff.
- Seek help whenever you need it.
- Ask questions, offer suggestions and new ideas.
- We want your volunteer experience with the Acton Land Stewards to be enjoyable so that you will be involved with your site for many years.

**Thank you!**