



RECREATION

CHARLESTOWN COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

A description of Charlestown's recreational programming and facilities, issues and opportunities related to the accessibility of year-round recreation for all users, and recommendations to achieve a range of outdoor recreation opportunities while balancing recreation with conservation.

Map

REC-1 Recreation Sites

Cover Photo: Salt Ponds Coalition

RECREATION CHAPTER

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CHARLESTOWN COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

CHAPTER 3. RECREATION

Planning Commission Final Draft; December 2019

INTRODUCTION

With its miles of barrier beaches, large salt ponds, open bodies of fresh water and a boundary along a major river; hundreds of acres of conservation land available for passive recreation; and its active recreation lands and extensive recreational programming, Charlestown has many outdoor recreational opportunities. Many activities are available all year long; the beaches are accessible year round for fishing and walking, the dark skies afford stargazing at any time of the year, and in the winter, snow shoeing, skiing and bird watching are possible on a number of trails.

These significant recreational resources – the conservation lands, passive recreation open space areas, active recreation sites and dark skies – affect the quality of life in Charlestown in a number of positive ways:

- **Rural Character:** Maintaining a large percent of open space and recreation land ensures that much of Charlestown will remain undeveloped and identified as rural.
- **Protection of Natural Resources:** Open space for conservation purposes is critical for the protection of significant natural resources while still providing access to these spaces.
- **Economy:** The beaches, parks and hiking areas, and dark skies support the town's largest economic sector – tourism.
- **Community Cohesion:** Open space set aside for either passive or active recreation provides a community focus for residents and becomes the setting for organized programs and activities.
- **Health Attributes:** Public parks and recreational opportunities improve the overall health and wellness of a community. They are essential in combating physical inactivity and obesity, and are important for mental health.

This chapter describes the existing recreational assets in Charlestown. These include active recreation, which typically involves organized activities and requires structures or other built amenities, and passive recreation, which involves use of existing natural resources with minimal site alteration or impact. Recreational programming is also described.

Following a discussion of issues and opportunities, the goals, policies and implementation actions of this chapter are intended to promote appreciation and appropriate use of Charlestown's recreational resources, focus on healthy community activity, and provide a wide range of recreational opportunities for Charlestown residents and visitors.

RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER CHAPTERS

This chapter complements a number of others:

Natural Resources Chapter

In the Natural Resources chapter, the ecological significance of Charlestown's natural resources and the way in which people and the natural features and landscapes interact are described. The protection of open space is critical to maintaining the natural resources on which the economy and the lifestyles of residents depend. The Town of Charlestown continues to collaborate with state and federal agencies and with private and non-profit organizations in its conservation efforts to both protect significant natural resources and provide additional outdoor recreational activities.

Services and Facilities Chapter

The town's recreational programs and assets are described in this chapter; most other town services and facilities are described in the Services and Facilities chapter, including many which support recreational activities. Because Charlestown depends upon groundwater for its drinking water, the protection or acquisition of open space for outdoor recreation has an additional benefit in terms of ensuring clean and adequate drinking water by reducing development potential and protecting watersheds.

Economic Opportunity Chapter

Recreation relates directly to economic opportunity in Charlestown as the abundant outdoor recreational activities support tourism, the main source of economic activity, and enhance the quality of life for both residents and visitors. Activities like swimming, beach combing, boating, fishing, bicycling, hiking, sightseeing, stargazing and bird watching make the community attractive to visitors and tourists, support businesses, and attract new residents, some of whom retire in Charlestown. The tourist economy is described in detail in the Economic Opportunity chapter.

EXISTING CONDITIONS

Parks and Recreation Department

For a town of its size, Charlestown has a very active Parks and Recreation Department which provides many activities and programs, much in response to a high seasonal demand. The department plays an important role in creating a high quality of life in Charlestown.

The Parks and Recreation Department coordinates all activities and programs at town active recreation sites. The maintenance of these facilities is done by the Department of Public Works. The Parks and Recreation Department staff consists of one full time director, a full time assistant director for programs and a secretary shared with the Wastewater Management Office. During the summer the department employs an additional 32 full time and 6 part time staff. The department uses volunteer services for special events and for help with year round activities. Activity and user fees offset some of the department's costs. The responsibilities of the Parks and Recreation Department include:

- Managing the town's salt and fresh water beaches, including providing lifeguards, hiring staff, coordinating concessions and parking lot use, and handling fees.
- Managing parks and playgrounds, athletic fields and other community recreation facilities, including coordinating and managing organized sporting events that use town facilities; overseeing special events in Ninigret Park; managing a summer camp for children; conducting and promoting special events such as trips, movie nights and concerts; and developing activities at the Charlestown Senior/Community Center.
- Coordinating activities with the school department, including a number of Chariho school programs (football, softball, basketball, lacrosse, volleyball and the youth soccer league) and with outside agencies, such as the Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts, and outside athletic groups.
- Coordinating all facility maintenance and improvement activities with the Department of Public Works; and
- Preparing and administering budgets and writing grant proposals.

The department is advised by a Parks and Recreation Commission, consisting of nine residents of Charlestown appointed by the Town Council. The commission discusses and advises on recreational and cultural programming, acquisition and maintenance of facilities, and setting of budgets and fees for recreational programs and facilities.

Conservation Commission

The Charlestown Conservation Commission, a seven member volunteer board also appointed by the Town Council, maintains and promotes the town's natural resources, including open space used for passive recreation. Some of the duties of the Conservation Commission are as follows:

- Conduct research into local natural resource areas and coordinate the activities of other groups organized for similar purposes;

- Produce and distribute books, maps, charts, plans and pamphlets related to the management and promotion of natural resource and conservation areas;
- Maintain an index of all open spaces within the town, both publicly and privately owned;
- Prepare management plans, develop trail systems and maintain them with the assistance of the Department of Public Works; and
- Make recommendations to the Town Council, and any board, commission or town department on programs for the better promotion, development, utilization or preservation of open space and other natural resources.

Recreational Programs and Events

The Parks and Recreation Department runs a variety of seasonal and year round programs which are available to the entire community. These programs are listed on the Town of Charlestown website; highlights include summer movies and a concert series, a summer day camp, teen programming at the Charlestown Senior/Community Center, and family holiday programming including the Valentine’s Day dance, Easter Egg hunt, “Trunk or Treat” at Halloween, a Town Hall Christmas event with Santa and a New Year’s Eve bonfire.

Of the recreational assets available for recreational programming and events, one of the major facilities is Ninigret Park, which provides the following amenities:

- Basketball and tennis courts
- Athletic fields and open fields
- Disc golf course and dog park
- A 0.9 mile criterion bicycle course, a 1.3 mile paved multi-purpose trail, and walking trails
- Senior/Community Center and garden
- Playground (handicapped accessible) and a swimming pond
- Three pavilions with picnic tables and barbecues
- The Frosty Drew Observatory and Science Center
- Direct access to the adjoining Ninigret National Wildlife Refuge and Ninigret Pond

In addition to the school programming and that provided by private youth groups such as the Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts, recreational programming is provided by the RI Department of Environmental Management, the US Fish and Wildlife Service, and non-profits at their respective properties. A comprehensive list of recreational programming available in Charlestown is found in Appendix Rec-1; the programs described are typical and are subject to change over time.

Outdoor Recreation Resources

Charlestown is fortunate to have large areas of open space available for passive recreational activities such as hiking, horseback riding and cross-country skiing, camping and picnicking, bird watching and nature study, swimming and boating, and fishing and hunting. From Ninigret Park and Ninigret National Wildlife Refuge and the salt ponds and barrier beaches, to Burlingame State Park and Management Area and Francis C. Carter Memorial Preserve, and with the myriad of smaller parks and preserves, Charlestown provides its residents and visitors with a rich array of outdoor recreation opportunities.

Table Rec-1 lists these resources, owned by the town, the State of RI (DEM) and the US Fish and Wildlife Service, as well by private conservation organizations. Detailed descriptions of these resources are contained in Appendix Rec-2. Map REC-1 *Recreation* shows the locations of outdoor and community recreation facilities in Charlestown.

Accessibility and Usage of Recreational Land and Facilities

The accessibility of the town's recreation areas for various outdoor activities is described below.

Swimming and Beach Activities

Charlestown has over three linear miles of beach front on Block Island Sound that provides opportunities for ocean swimming and beach combing. The Ninigret Pond barrier beach is the longest uninterrupted barrier beach between New York and Cape Cod, and most of this is part of the East Beach Conservation Area, owned by RI DEM. The town also owns approximately six acres of beach front land, half of which is used as a public beach. Lifeguards are available at the two town owned beaches – Blue Shutters Beach and Charlestown Town Beach – as well as at the RI DEM Charlestown Breachway State Park.



Vic G. Dvorak

Charlestown Breachway and Barrier Beaches

One can walk for miles along the beach, swim, fish, or take part in other recreation activities along the shore. Article 17 of the RI Constitution states, in part, *“The people shall continue to enjoy and freely exercise all the rights of fishery, and the privileges of the shore, to which they have been heretofore entitled under the charter and usages of this state, including but not limited to fishing from the shore, the gathering of seaweed, leaving the shore to swim in the sea and passage along the shore.”*

Ninigret and Quonochontaug Ponds offer quiet waters suitable for children to wade in, but they are too shallow for much swimming and their shores are too narrow to accommodate many visitors. The beaches and most areas along the salt pond margins are available for passive recreation such as walking and bird watching.

Freshwater swimming is available at Watchaug Pond in Burlingame State Park and Little Nini Pond in Ninigret Park. The Parks and Recreation Department organizes swimming lessons at Little Nini Pond.



Frances Topping

Little Nini Pond

Boating

Despite shallow water depths, Ninigret and Quonochontaug Ponds provide excellent motorized boating opportunities, including water skiing and tubing, fishing and anchoring to access the barrier beaches. There is also access to the ocean through the breachways of both ponds. However, boaters face the difficulties of strong currents in the breachway channels, along with consistent ocean swells that can make navigation in and out of the breachways challenging.

**Table Rec-1
Outdoor and Community Recreation Resources in Charlestown**

TOWN		
Site	Location	Acreage
Blue Shutters Town Beach	469 East Beach Road	3.2
Charlestown Elementary School	363 Carolina Back Road	15.5 *
Charlestown Moraine Preserve	Kings Factory Road	78
Charlestown Senior Community Center	Ninigret Park, 100 Park Lane	—
Charlestown Town Beach	Charlestown Beach Road	14.5
Clark Memorial Field	Columbia Heights Road	5.3
Ninigret Park	Old Post Road and Park Lane	230
Patricia Sprague Forest Preserve	Railroad Avenue	27.8
Pawaget Park	Sportsman Road	7.2
Puchalski Field Town Hall	4540 South County Trail	16.8*
Richard Trails	South County Trail	95.7
School House Pond Preserve	Kings Factory Road	93.5
South Farm Preserve	Old Coach Road	86.7
Wicklund Field	Route 112 next to Elementary School	6.1

PRIVATE		
Site	Location	Acreage
Cross Mills Library Open Space	4417 Old Post Road	7 *
Frosty Drew Observatory and Science Center	61-62 Park Lane, Ninigret Park	—
Quonochontaug Grange	5662 Post Road	2

* Acreage of entire parcel

STATE		
Site	Location	Acreage
Burlingame State Park and Management Area	1 Burlingame Park Road	3100+
Charlestown Breachway State Park	Charlestown Beach Road and East Beach Road	79
East Beach and Ninigret Conservation Area	(Both sides of the Breachway) Off East Beach Road	231.5
Fort Ninigret	Fort Neck Road (Off Old Post Road)	2.6
Great Swamp Wildlife Management Area (Charlestown)	277 Great Neck Road, West Kingston	54.8
Kimball Wildlife Refuge	Southern shore of Watchaug Pond	29.3
Quonochontaug Breachway State Park	End of West Beach Road	27

FEDERAL		
Site	Location	Acreage
Ninigret National Wildlife Barrier Beach Unit	Off East Beach Road	27
Ninigret National Wildlife Kettle Pond Unit	50 Bend Road	115
Ninigret National Wildlife Lewis Trail Unit	Off Lewis Trail and Route 2/112	365
Ninigret National Wildlife Salt Pond Unit	Ninigret Park, 100 Park Lane	380

THE NATURE CONSERVANCY		
Site	Location	Acreage
Francis C. Carter Memorial Preserve	Route 2, Route 112	1032
Pasquiset Preserve	Old Coach Road	255

CHARLESTOWN LAND TRUST		
Site	Location	Acreage
Mill Pond	Route 2	76.3

The salt ponds are also used for shallow draft sailing and windsurfing, and are very popular for kayaking, canoeing and paddle boarding. There are four public boat launches serving the ponds:

- The town boat launch located on Charlestown Beach Road, adjacent to the Town Beach parking lot. This launch is primarily used for launching of kayaks, canoes, row boats and other non-motorized vessels into Ninigret Pond.
- The Ninigret boat launch located in Ninigret National Wildlife Refuge, with access from Park Lane in Ninigret Park. This launch is available for kayaks and canoes only.
- The Charlestown Breachway boat ramp, located in the state recreational vehicle camping area at the north end of the breachway. This launch is a developed concrete ramp for use by both motorized and non-motorized vessels.
- The Quonochontaug Breachway boat ramp, located off the parking area at the north end of the breachway. This launch is a developed concrete launch ramp for use by both motorized and non-motorized vessels.



Cody Clarkin

Paddle Boarding on the Salt Pond at Sunset

Boat launching is also available at the three private marinas on Ninigret Pond for a fee.

There are canoe/kayak put-ins along the Wood Pawcatuck River and at some freshwater ponds within and surrounding Charlestown. There are also private canoe/kayak rental facilities in town. See Map REC-1 for the locations of all boat launch ramps in Charlestown.

Fishing and Shellfishing

Access for fishing is readily available in Charlestown. Fishermen can cast from the beaches and from the breachway channel walls. The margins of the salt ponds, including Ninigret National Wildlife Refuge, provide access for shellfishing and crabbing, which are popular summer activities. Boaters may fish in either the salt ponds or the ocean. Fishing is also available in the rivers and freshwater ponds. An annual fishing derby for children is held at Little Nini Pond.

Hiking and Winter Trail Sports

The opportunities for hiking in Charlestown are considerable. The most significant sites are the Ninigret National Wildlife Lewis Trail Unit and Kettle Pond Unit (north of Route 1) owned by the US Fish and Wildlife Service; Burlingame State Park and Management Area, the adjoining Kimball Wildlife Refuge and the Great Swamp Management Area owned by RI DEM; the two preserves owned by The Nature Conservancy, Francis C. Carter Preserve and Pasquiset Preserve; the Charlestown Moraine Preserve, Richard Trails and South Farm Preserve, all owned by the town; and the Mill Pond Preserve owned by the Charlestown Land Trust. Together these areas represent over 5,300 acres of land, with many miles of trails for hiking, bird-watching, snow shoeing and cross country skiing in Charlestown. All of these sites have public parking.

Also of regional significance is the North-South Trail, a 77 mile hiking trail that runs the length of the state which begins at the Blue Shutters Beach in Charlestown and ends at the Massachusetts border in Burrillville, Rhode Island. The trail is remarkably rural and scenic. From the beach at the south end, features include lakes and wetlands, hills and rock outcrops, farmland and dense woodland. It can be used for walking, horseback riding and mountain biking. The North-South Trail is the logical extension of the Midstate Trail in Massachusetts and the Wapack Trail in New Hampshire; together these trails make up a 191 mile system.

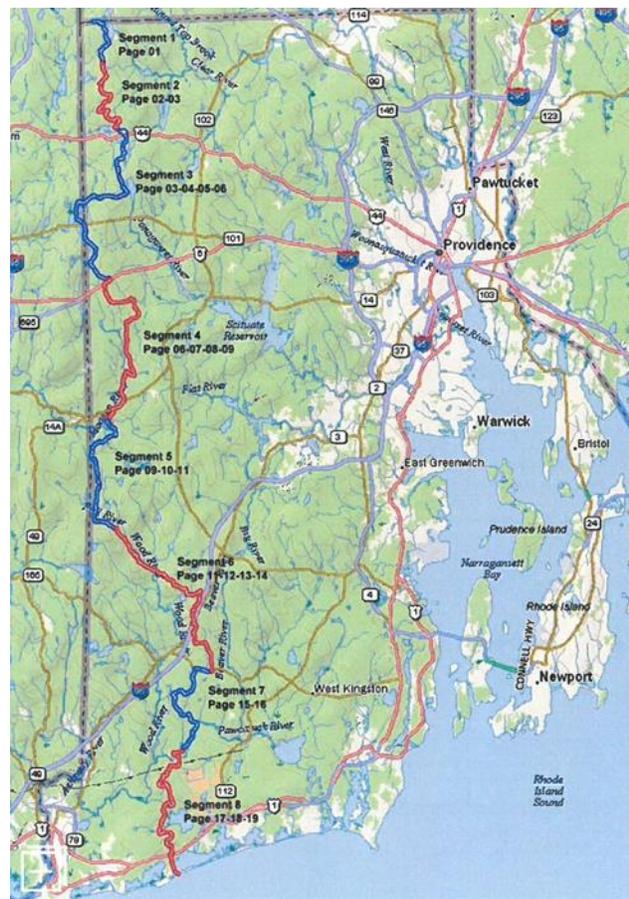


Figure Rec-1 Rhode Island's North-South Trail

Bicycling

The narrow country roads of Charlestown require caution when bicycling, although it is a very popular activity. The RI Department of Transportation has designated a number of roadways in Charlestown as “most suitable” and “suitable” for bicycle travel, including the major collector routes – Route 2, Route 112 and Route 91, as well as the country roads of Buckeye Brook, Shumankanuc Hill, Kings Factory, Old Shannock and Old Coach Roads.

For separate bicycle facilities, there is a criterion bicycle course in Ninigret Park, and a ten foot wide 1.3 mile paved multi-purpose trail designed and constructed in the park in 2016. The town is also working with the adjoining communities of Westerly and South Kingstown on a coastal bike route that will be part of the statewide bicycle system. Bicycling as a mode of transportation is discussed in detail in the Transportation chapter.



Cody Clarkin

Multi-Use Path in Ninigret Park

Camping

Camping is available at Burlingame State Park, with 700 sites in a large campground near the southern shore of Watchaug Pond, with access off Route 1. There are sites for tents only, for small trailers, and for large trailers and motor homes. There are also 20 cabins available. The campground is serviced by water, restrooms with showers, portable toilets, fireplaces and waste disposal facilities. It is very popular and fills up on summer weekends.

Recreational vehicle camping is also available at the Charlestown Breachway State Park at the end of Charlestown Beach Road (east side of the breachway), and at East Beach State Park at the end of East Beach Road (west end of the barrier beach). The Charlestown Breachway area fronts the ocean, the breachway channel and the tidal delta area of Ninigret Pond, and has about 75 sites for self-contained vehicles and includes composting toilets. The East Beach area, which also lies between the ocean and the salt pond, has 20 sites and includes composting toilets. Both areas are popular vehicular camping sites in the summer.

Birdwatching

The beaches, salt ponds and conservation areas, particularly the Ninigret National Wildlife Refuge (the Lewis Trail, Kettle Pond and Salt Pond Units) in Charlestown provide abundant opportunities for birdwatching. They serve as important areas for nesting, migratory stopping and overwintering for a variety of birds. The “Coastal Birding Trail” of the Rhode Island Coastal Adventure Trails, a joint effort of the Charlestown Chamber of Commerce and the US Fish and Wildlife Service is an on-line resource that identifies all of the bird species that can be seen at the salt ponds, Burlingame State Park and Management Area, and all of the national wildlife refuges in Charlestown, South Kingstown and Richmond¹. Its purpose is to encourage participation in bird watching, hiking and biking through the integrated networks of ten outstanding birding sites along the south coast, and to extend the tourist season to the spring and fall periods which coincide with peak bird migration along the Atlantic Flyway, the major north-south flyway for migratory birds in North America.

Astronomy and Science Education

Charlestown is well-known for its dark skies, the darkest between New York and Boston, and as one of the most accessible locations in New England to clearly see the Milky Way. Charlestown’s dark skies attract people from a wide area to view the night sky and study the cosmos at the nationally recognized Frosty Drew Observatory in Ninigret Park.

Frosty Drew has conducted science programs in Ninigret Park since 1982. Its observatory was constructed in 1988 for observational astronomy and research. It is open to the public year round. Visitors come to observe and learn about the planets, lunar geography, solar dynamics, star clusters, nebulae, galaxies and thousands of astronomical objects. Additionally, numerous students visit to explore the viability of a career in astronomy, physics or engineering.

As Frosty Drew’s programs, popularity and engagement increase, so too will the need for facility expansion. The current facilities are continuously evolving to meet current demand, and to accommodate technological advances in observational astronomy and science communication. Meeting long term growth projections, which are based on increased demand for observational and educational capabilities, may require expansion of existing facilities or the introduction of additional facilities.

1

https://www.fws.gov/uploadedFiles/Region_5/NWRS/North_Zone/Rhode_Island_Complex/Trustom_Pond/CoastalBirdingTrail.pdf

Nature Education

The US Fish & Wildlife Service and the Salt Ponds Coalition both provide educational programs for children and adults (see Appendix Rec-1). This includes field study programs in life and earth sciences for Rhode Island and Connecticut school students and families which makes use of the wildlife refuge, the salt ponds and the barrier beaches as their “outdoor classroom”.



Vic G. Dvorak

Seining at a Salt Pond Safari

The Kettle Pond Visitor Center includes a natural history museum and natural history lectures. The outdoor programming that is part of the wildlife refuge includes a salt ponds exploration with use of a large seining net, guided walks in the refuge, volunteer training in invasive plant identification and treatment methods, and a piping plover program where volunteers are trained to protect nesting territories, monitor beaches, document activity at nesting sites and educate the public on plover biology and local laws. A native plant garden is also used to educate visitors. The Salt Ponds Coalition provides programming on dredging and marsh restoration, sea level rise and aquaculture, as well as field trips for children to Ninigret Pond, called the Salt Pond Safari.

Visual Access

The ability to see the water is an important part of Charlestown’s scenic coastal and rural character. Visual access to the salt ponds and the ocean is provided at sites such as Fort Ninigret, Pawaget Park, Town Dock, an observation platform in the Ninigret National Wildlife Refuge, the private marinas and of course, the salt pond breachways and the state and town beaches. Visual access from a distance is also available from the Ocean View Trail at Kettle Pond and from the Charlestown Moraine Preserve. Portions of certain roads provide visual access to the water, such as US Route 1 and Charlestown Beach Road. However, the water or shore is not easily visible from a number of sites where it would otherwise be expected, including from within Ninigret Park and much of the Ninigret National Wildlife Refuge. Providing and protecting views of Watchaug Pond and Mill Pond, as well as the Pawcatuck River, are also important.



Frances Topping

View from Kettle Pond Overlook

Adjoining Communities

Close to Charlestown and easily accessible to residents is the Trustom Pond National Wildlife Refuge in South Kingstown; this US Fish and Wildlife Service property adjoining a coastal pond and including a small barrier beach, has mixed habitats and concentrations of migrating waterfowl, particularly in the winter. It is supported with a small visitor center. The 3,350 acre Great Swamp Management Area lies mostly in South Kingstown; about two thirds is comprised of forested freshwater wetlands dominated by red maple swamp and some cedar swamp. The 2,360 acre Carolina State Wildlife Management Area in Richmond is almost entirely wooded, with an extensive trail system. Both abut Charlestown along the Pawcatuck River, and provide easy access to hiking, birdwatching and hunting.

The 550 acre Grills Preserve owned by the Westerly Land Trust has diverse habitats including streams and ponds, freshwater marsh, wetland and upland forest, and sandy pitch pines and oaks being managed for the New England cottontail rabbit. It has 3 miles of trails including more than a mile along the Pawcatuck River, and a granite outcrop with extensive views. It connects by a pedestrian bridge to adjoining Hopkinton Grills Sanctuary, which has 4 miles of trails.

RECREATION: ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Balance of Use

The major recreational features in Charlestown, including Burlingame State Park and Management Area, Ninigret Park and Ninigret National Wildlife Refuge, the Francis C. Carter Memorial Preserve, the public beaches, and Ninigret and Quonochontaug Ponds, are major regional attractions. Residents, both year round and seasonal, must often compete with visitors for the limited space at beaches or parking areas.

In addition, Charlestown’s seasonal influx of visitors drawn to the town precisely because of these recreational amenities, places a heavy demand on its recreation sites and natural resources, requiring significant resources and planning for their proper maintenance and protection.

In general, the rural nature of the town and the need to protect its natural resources requires an appropriate balance between developed active recreational areas, such as playing fields and events, and undeveloped passive recreational areas, such as fishing sites and hiking trails. This balance is not one of equivalent acreage but rather one that accounts for all the benefits provided by open space – rural character, protection of natural resources, the economy, community cohesion and public health.

Year Round Access to Recreation

Charlestown has long been known as a place for summer recreation because of its beaches, salt ponds and freshwater ponds. However, the numerous and large areas of open space and conservation lands with diverse habitats north of Route 1 provide ample opportunities for fall, winter and spring activities such as hiking, foliage tours, horseback riding, bicycling, hunting and fishing, cross country skiing, ice skating, bird watching and stargazing. Year round recreational activities are also provided by making use of indoor facilities.

Expanding recreational opportunities year round is important to the quality of life for Charlestown residents and to the town’s economy through extension of the tourist season.

Outdoor Recreational Activities

Rhode Island’s climate does allow for year round hiking except for a few weeks of most years. Hunting and fishing are also popular year round, as is stargazing. Winter hiking, snow shoeing and cross-country skiing, and bird watching, are possible, but cleared access to trailheads is needed. Ice skating is another viable winter sport. Expanding these winter activities requires plowing parking areas and on-going trail or facility maintenance, an issue of staffing for both publicly and privately owned areas.



Frances Topping X-Country Skier

Indoor Recreational Facilities

Year round recreation also involves access to indoor activities during the winter. Indoor accommodations for field sports like baseball, soccer, lacrosse and track, as well as court sports such as basketball, volleyball and tennis, not only extend the season for these popular sports but can provide space for activities such as cheerleading, marching band exercises and fitness training.

Opportunities to provide indoor recreation can be found by making uses of facilities already in place in Charlestown and surrounding communities. These include the public schools, the Cross Mills Public Library, the Senior/Community Center, the Quonochontaug Grange (owned by the Dunn's Corner Fire District), area YMCAs and even facilities at the University of Rhode Island.

However, indoor recreational space at the public schools is often booked for after school use or school-related activities and not available for the Parks and Recreation Department athletic programs. There is also an ongoing demand for additional arts and exercise programming and the sites to host them, as the Senior/Community Center has insufficient space to accommodate many of these activities. The long-term recreational and community programming needs of residents of all ages in Charlestown should be determined, and the capacity and appropriate location of an indoor recreational facility/community center that best meets these needs should be identified.

Geographic Distribution of Active Recreational Resources

Charlestown's year-round population is relatively small compared to other Rhode Island coastal communities, and is scattered among the coast and inland areas. Seasonal residents primarily occupy the coastal areas and the neighborhoods just north of Route 1. Most open space for active recreation is currently located in the area surrounding Route 1 and south along the coast. While considerable areas of open space for passive recreation (hiking, nature study, bird watching, camping) is found north of Route 1 and east of Route 2, there are few town owned active recreational sites (athletic fields and playgrounds) west of Routes 2 and 112.

The year round community is accustomed to and well served by Ninigret Park, which is a centralized facility for active recreation where the majority of the community comes together. However, some open space for active recreation and recreational opportunities should be conveniently located in other areas of the town to serve distinctly local needs.

Management and Use of Ninigret Park

Ninigret Park, with access from Old Post Road (Route 1A), is Charlestown's largest town-owned outdoor recreational facility. It is on land that was part of a WW II-era naval air training base, remnants of which are still in place – pavement from runways, service areas and access roads. The base closed in the early 1970's and by 1982 the property had been transferred to the US Fish and

Wildlife Service (Department of Interior) and the Town of Charlestown. Approximately 380 acres became the US Fish and Wildlife’s Ninigret National Wildlife Refuge and the remaining 230 acres became Ninigret Park, owned by the town.

Ninigret Park consists of two parcels. One is a 175 acre lot owned by the town but subject to restrictions by the National Park Service (NPS) that it be used “*exclusively for public park or public recreation purposes in perpetuity by the Town of Charlestown*”. This land use must complement that of the Ninigret National Wildlife Refuge abutting the property to the southwest. The other is a 55 acre lot owned by the town and not subject to the administrative restrictions of the NPS. However, records indicate that the award of the entire 230 acres was predicated on using it compatibly with the Ninigret National Wildlife Refuge (see Appendix REC-3, which contains documentation sent from the Refuge Manager to the Charlestown Town Council in 2012).

Master Planning

The development of Ninigret Park has been guided by three utilization/master plans: the 1980 Utilization Plan and the 1994 Utilization Plan, both approved by the NPS, and the 2008 Ninigret Park Master Plan. The 2008 plan proposed separating the concert venue from the recreational uses. Recommendations included entrance improvements, relocation of Park Lane, treed parking and camping areas, introduction of design techniques to reduce paved surfaces and other Low Impact Development (LID) principles, and invasive species management. A naval air museum and a new community center were proposed, as well as expansions that would allow additional athletic and public events.

In 2014, an update to the 2008 Ninigret Park Master Plan was prepared by a design firm for the Parks and Recreation Commission. New concept plans were submitted, and revisions suggested to the text of the 2008 plan. The proposed 2014 master plan update was not adopted by the Town Council. The 2008 adopted plan and the proposed update can be found on the town website.



Steve McCandless Aerial View of Ninigret Park

Park Facility and Improvement Needs

Ninigret Park has hosted over thirty years of music, circus, sporting and other types of events. These special events require basic facilities such as restrooms, potable water access, electricity, fencing and other functional elements that assist in working effectively with large crowds. These are currently provided by the event promoters. The town must balance any expansion of facilities for accommodation of large public events with such concerns as daily public access to the park, spring and fall bird migrations and the nesting season at the adjoining Ninigret National Wildlife Refuge. Permanent lighting in the park is of particular concern because of potential effects on the refuge and its mission to protect birds and other wildlife, and interference with the dark sky activities at the Frosty Drew Observatory and Science Center. Noise pollution affecting wildlife, residents and visitors is another concern.

Improvements and enhancements have taken place over the years, most recently using funds from a \$1 million bond approved by voters in 2015 and from the Ninigret Park Fund, which is dedicated to the development, operation and maintenance of the park. Wayfaring signs and an entry area/welcome kiosk will be in place by 2020. Ninigret Park is in need of additional physical improvements, some of which depend on remediation of areas in the park by the US Army Corps of Engineers. Aside from the ongoing maintenance needs of the various recreational facilities, these include:

- More areas with shade, and tables and benches for people to congregate, relax or take in a scenic view
- Additional walking and multi-purpose trails
- Removal of the aging macadam (original service areas, runways and roads of the naval air station)
- Removal of invasive plant species coordinated with transplanting or planting of native and hardy vegetation to enhance open and stark areas within the park, create wind barriers and serve to direct people through natural means.

Future Use

The town has an obligation to the National Park Service to manage all of Ninigret Park compatibly with the adjacent Ninigret National Wildlife Refuge. This obligation not only arises out of the historical record, but is based on the critical importance of the refuge as a stopover habitat during bird migration. Bird banding station data collected at the Ninigret National Wildlife Refuge indicates that the number of birds using Charlestown as a stopover in the Atlantic Flyway is higher than any other refuge in New England, and birds that are displaced from the refuge are much less likely to survive. An understanding of the sensitivities of the wildlife refuge is needed to ensure that future improvements at the park are consistent with this obligation, which includes avoidance

of activities, noise or lighting that would cause birds to avoid the refuge, particularly during spring and fall migration.

Surveys have indicated that the majority of residents in Charlestown want Ninigret Park to be available for year round use, but to stay relatively undeveloped with more walking and biking trails. There is support for public events of a moderate scale. There is also support for community oriented events such as arts and craft festivals and antique shows, or even a once a year community yard sale.

Public Access to the Shore

Much of the waterfront property in Rhode Island is privately owned. Despite this, there are a wide variety of access sites along the coast and salt ponds available to the public, including beaches and parks, municipal waterfront areas, bike paths, fishing areas, boat launches, marinas and mooring areas. There are also specific pathways, or rights-of-ways to the shore, although to be legally open to the public they must be publicly owned, maintained and/ or used in some manner openly by the public, as opposed to being owned by members of a private association or the owners of a subdivision plat.

As the state agency responsible for the management of the coast, the RI Coastal Resources Management Council (CRMC) identifies and designates public rights-of-ways to the shore. A CRMC public right-of-way (ROW) is one that the agency has determined already exists and on which they have placed an official designation. Once a ROW has been so designated, the CRMC prohibits any activities that would interfere with or obstruct the public's use. A CRMC ROW, including a municipally owned street, also cannot be abandoned without prior approval by the CRMC (see discussion on "Public Access" in Chapter III of the Charlestown Harbor Management Plan, approved July 2018)².

The CRMC has just two designated rights-of-ways to the shore (Atlantic Ocean) in Charlestown. One is part of the 79 acre Charlestown Breachway parcel owned by the RI DEM on Charlestown Beach Road. It consists of a 40 foot wide ROW extending from the west end of Charlestown Beach Road, south to the Atlantic Ocean, but is indistinguishable from the rest of the beach in this area. The other is part of the 13 acre town-owned Blue Shutters beach parcel, which consists of a 33 foot wide ROW extending from East Beach Road where it takes a 90 degree turn, south to the ocean. It is also indistinguishable from the remainder of the town recreation and beach area.

There are many public right of ways to the shore which are not designated as such by the CRMC. This means that their legal status as a public resource may be uncertain and/or their preservation

² https://www.charlestownri.org/vertical/Sites/%7BDF68A5B8-A4F3-47A1-AE87-B411E21C6E1C%7D/uploads/Charlestown_Harbor_Managment_Plan.pdf

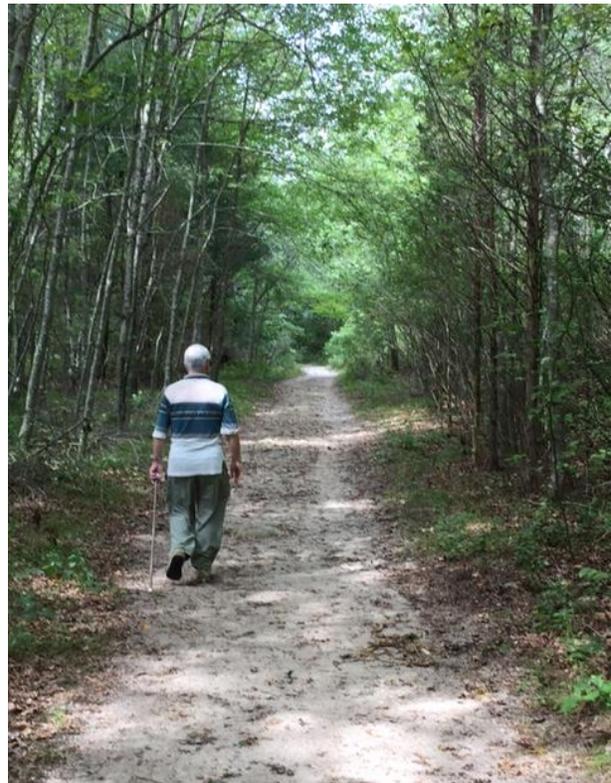
for public use may not be ensured in perpetuity. There are opportunities for some public access points to the salt ponds to be upgraded to CRMC designated ROWs. Upgrading a public access site to a CRMC designated ROW involves submitting evidence to the CRMC to document and affirm that legal public access to the shore for all citizens already exists at that location. It is a legal process which culminates in a public hearing by the full Coastal Resources Management Council.

Population Changes

Charlestown, like much of the state, has an aging population. Demand for senior services has been steadily increasing and is projected to continue as baby boomers age in place and people choose Charlestown as a retirement community. As the town's proportion of older population grows, so will the need to possibly require access accommodations and other amenities at recreational areas. There are also many recreational opportunities for older people that can be expanded in Charlestown. In particular, the nationwide increase in bicycling responds to the recreational needs of a population no longer running, playing basketball or other more demanding athletic activities. Bicycling, like moderate hiking and swimming, can be enjoyed well into later years, helping to maintain a healthy lifestyle.

Health Attributes

Public parks, open space preserves and recreational facilities improve the overall health and wellness of a community. They are needed to combat poor nutrition, physical inactivity and obesity, as well as stress and other mental health issues. Charlestown is fortunate to have abundant opportunities in its open space lands, parks and programs to incorporate exercise into a healthy lifestyle. Efforts should be made to promote these attributes, make them widely available to both residents and visitors, and keep them well maintained and staffed. This is necessary for the provision of long term health benefits, as well as for a high quality of life and a strong economy.



Frances Topping Hiking at Kettle Pond Preserve

RECREATION: GOALS, POLICIES AND ACTIONS

GOALS

- GOAL 1** Provide Charlestown residents and visitors with a wide range of recreation opportunities to meet both current and future needs.
- GOAL 2** Maintain the balance between open space set aside for conservation purposes with that for recreation in a manner that protects natural resources while meeting the demand for active and passive recreation.
- GOAL 3** Ensure that public open space, parks and recreation facilities are accessible, well managed and maintained, and remain viable so as to protect Charlestown's economy, environment and quality of life.

POLICIES AND ACTIONS

- GOAL 1** Provide Charlestown residents and visitors with a wide range of recreation opportunities that meet both current and future demand.

Charlestown is committed to building upon its considerable recreational assets so as to meet the long-term recreational and programming needs of residents of all ages, as well as its seasonal visitors. The demand for more leisure programming and the space to locate these programs, the need for more indoor active space, and the opportunities for year round activities have all been identified in this chapter. A number of policies and actions address these issues.

Policy 1.1 Continue to provide active recreational programming for all ages.

Recreational programs and sports should continue to be made available for all ages in Charlestown. Organized activities such as field trips and family programming that reinforce intergenerational connections in the community should be expanded if possible. Recreational opportunities can also be enhanced by coordinating with other programs and facilities in the region. These include recreational activities provided by other towns and organizations such as the YMCA, as well as the University of Rhode Island.

- Action 1** Annually review the variety and accessibility of recreational programming in Charlestown to determine adequacy in meeting the needs of all residents.
- Action 2** Continue to coordinate recreational programming with that of other organizations and recreational facilities in the region.

Policy 1.2 Maintain and expand opportunities for outdoor active recreation.

The Parks and Recreation Department continuously works to provide active recreational opportunities in response to demand. Much can be done by making use of and improving existing facilities and resources, and by promoting individual activities such as biking and outdoor skating by making places for these activities to occur.

Action 1 Undertake a facilities study to evaluate the condition and use level of all active recreational facilities, and to identify the need for additional facilities, particularly in areas of town which are underserved.

Action 2 Review the previous plans developed for Ninigret Park to determine the best utilization of the park.

Any plan for Ninigret Park must take into consideration the impact of park activities and facilities on the adjoining wildlife refuge, on other recreational uses in the park, and on residential areas and streets, including the need for traffic control and emergency management. Implementation of the agreed upon design solutions should occur as funding is available.

Action 3 Develop a schedule for acquisition and development of additional playing fields and active recreation facilities in town, based on need and availability of funding.

Policy 1.3 Provide opportunities for year round recreation.

In addition to the field trips and programming scheduled by the Parks and Recreation Department, and the use of indoor facilities for active recreation, year round recreation can include outdoor activities such as hiking, bicycling, birdwatching and stargazing, as well as ice skating and cross-country skiing in the winter.

Action 1 Develop and expand programs for early spring, fall and winter activities for both passive and active recreation.

Action 2 Publicize forested and natural areas as available for year round passive recreational activities, and make use of such areas in recreational programming.

Action 3 Continue to partner with the public schools, neighboring municipalities and other organizations for use of indoor recreational facilities.

Action 4 Consider the development of a new indoor recreational facility/community center and determine its needed capacity and appropriate location.

GOAL 2 Maintain the balance between open space set aside for conservation purposes with that for recreation in a manner that protects natural resources while meeting the needs for active and passive recreation.

Access to recreation in natural surroundings fosters appreciation of nature. The use of Charlestown's abundant natural and open space areas for outdoor recreation is fully supported, but in a manner compatible with the ecosystems and habitats of these areas.

Policy 2.1 Continue to acquire, protect and manage open space areas that can be utilized for passive recreation open to the public.

Action 1 Identify and rank open space land that provides both resource and habitat protection and recreational opportunities.

Action 2 Provide trailhead facilities and well-marked trails to facilitate use of natural areas, while notifying users of any restrictions due to natural resource protection.

Action 3 Develop (jointly with Carolina and Kenyon in Richmond) a Heritage Trail along the Pawcatuck River that would link the Carolina Management Area and the Great Swamp Management Area.

Action 4 Collaborate with conservation groups such as The Nature Conservancy, the RI Wild Plant Society and the Audubon Society to expand recreational programming focusing on Charlestown's natural resources, and to educate the public on their ecological importance and need for sensitive management.

GOAL 3 Ensure that public open space, parks and recreation facilities are accessible, well managed and maintained, and remain viable so as to protect Charlestown's economy, environment and quality of life.

Policy 3.1 Maintain the varied recreation opportunities on Ninigret and Quonochontaug Ponds, on the freshwater ponds and the Pawcatuck River, for boating, swimming shellfishing and fishing, while protecting the resources from the adverse impacts of overuse.

Action 1 Continue to develop small-scale access ways to the shore, the freshwater ponds and the river, to allow a few visitors, such as anglers, hikers or people who wish to sit and look at the water at these areas. Provide limited parking at or near shore access points where appropriate.

Action 2 Investigate the potential for additional boat ramps or small boat put-ins to increase access to the salt ponds and the Pawcatuck River.

Action 3 Identify coastal areas subject to the conditions of climate change, such as storm surges and sea level rise, for public acquisition as a means to provide additional shoreline access, while preventing inappropriate development.

Action 4 Identify public ROWs to be upgraded to CRMC ROW designation, and assist the process by undertaking preliminary research involving town records, historical records and physical evidence of the proposed sites.

Policy 3.2 Educate the public on the availability and proper use of Charlestown's significant areas of open space.

Action 1 Educate recreational users and others who enjoy open space on appropriate use to protect natural resources and habitat by developing and distributing public informational brochures.

Action 2 Publicize the wide array of available recreational opportunities through various organizations and media, including the town website and social media.

Policy 3.3 Ensure that the facilities required to support recreational uses are adequate.

Action 1 Annually review figures for use of all facilities and activities in order to assess the adequacy of staff, facility and maintenance needs. Compare these with projected population demographics on a periodic basis.

Action 2 Conduct a utility assessment of parking, sanitary facilities, shelter and trash disposal associated with all recreational facilities.

Action 3 Continue to apply for recreation and open space grants to meet facility needs.

Appendix REC-1 Recreational Programming

There is indoor and outdoor recreation programming in Charlestown for all ages, every day and evening, year round except for major holidays. The following is a listing of recreation programming and events offered by the Town of Charlestown, the US Fish and Wildlife Service, the RI DEM and non-profits. Programs are typical and subject to change over time.

Ninigret Park

Programs

The park provides recreational programming for all ages including many sports activities such as:

- Youth and adult tennis, baseball, softball, football, T-ball and basketball leagues
- Softball camp, volleyball camp, golf camp, Camp Ninigret summer day camp
- Ten-speed bicycle racing, swimming lessons, pickle ball and soccer

Events

The park hosts many events such as:

- Bicycle races
- Disc golf
- 5Ks to support non-profits
- Seafood Festival, Rhythm and Roots Festival, Harvest Festival
- Special Olympics
- Easter egg hunt, Halloween program and New Year's Eve bonfire
- Summer concert and movie series

Frosty Drew Observatory and Science Center

- Open weekly for star gazing year round to the public free of charge
- Presentations in the sky theatre and tours of the observatory by astronomers during cloud, rain, or snow conditions
- Open for seasonal programs, such as its Milky Way series, and for special celestial events such as meteor showers and eclipses
- Educational offerings with a specific focus on astronomy, physics, engineering and ecology
- Summer internship programming for middle school through college-aged students in science and engineering
- Public outreach to regional schools, conferences and expos

Senior/Community Center in Ninigret Park

Indoor programming for all ages:

- Classes in cooking, painting, guitar, piano and other skills
- Teen programming such as babysitting courses, teen dances and more
- Aerobics, yoga, Tai Chi, Zumba, Pilates, and others
- Card and board games, knitting and walking groups
- Senior tax services, visiting nurses, flu clinic, hot meals, etc.
- Rentals for community meetings

Town Hall Athletic Field

- Chariho Cowboys football and cheerleading August through mid-November

Elementary School Gymnasium

- Indoor tennis and recreational basketball from November to March

Ninigret National Wildlife Refuge Kettle Pond Visitor Center

The Visitor's Center has indoor nature based programming every day for all ages:

- Natural History Museum with interactive exhibits and displays is open to all
- Community Artists Program – displays nature inspired artwork, each month a different local artist is showcased
- Programs for children including nature based reading, crafts and wildlife investigations
- Weekly family-friendly films loosely based on wildlife and nature documentaries
- Natural history lectures

Ninigret National Wildlife Refuge Outdoor Programming

A few examples are:

- Salt water fishing – fishing poles, waders and bait/lures are provided
- Salt pond exploration – a large 20 foot net is dragged through the pond and all of the amazing creatures that inhabit the area are identified
- Instructions in surfcasting, archery, canoeing, kayaking, and navigation using map and compass or GPS
- Guided walks in Ninigret and Trustom Pond National Wildlife Refuges
- Cinder Worm workshop (yearly) – two weekday evening classes in fly tying instruction on cinder worm patterns and one weekend evening of fly fishing
- Volunteer training in invasive plant identification and treatment methods
- Piping Plovers program – volunteers are trained to protect nesting territories, educate the public on plover biology and local laws, monitor beaches and document activity at nesting sites
- Hunting opportunities involving White-tailed deer hunting and hunter education courses

Burlingame State Park and Wildlife Management Area

- The North South Trail Council organizes a trek of the North South Trail from Blue Shutters Beach to the Massachusetts line over six weekends each spring
- There are organized trail races in Burlingame by different groups
- Supervised swimming and other activities at the beach on Watchaug Pond

Free Programs of The Salt Pond Coalition – <http://www.saltpondscoalition.org/>

- Kayak/canoe paddles – two or more organized paddles in the summer months in the different salt ponds, paddlers provide their own equipment
- Lecture series and workshops – topics include marsh restoration and dredging projects, sea level rise, aquaculture and lots more
- Salt Pond Safaris – introduces children to the wonders of the coastal lagoons

Free Charlestown Land Trust Programs - <http://www.charlestownlandtrust.org/>

- Turkey Trot – the annual Friday after Thanksgiving guided trail walk of CLT properties or other preserves in Charlestown
- Hiking for All! – short hikes that cater to individuals (and their caregivers) with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities
- Farmer’s Market – open weekly, spring and summer in Cross Mills
- Annual winter bonfire – held at the protected historic Amos Greene Farm, a walk of the farm and soup around the hot bonfire on a February day

Charlestown Programs of Audubon Society

- Organized weekly morning bird walks of the wildlife refuges which are free
- Kayaking and birding along the Charlestown Breachway, for a fee which includes equipment and guide

Free Charlestown Programs of Rhode Island Chapter of The Nature Conservancy

- TNC staff lead several organized hikes each year of the Francis C Carter Memorial Preserve and explain the natural history of this 1,100+ acre preserve
- Other organizations such as the Providence Hiking Club or Charlestown Land Trust lead public hikes at the Carter Preserve

Free Programs at Cross Mills Library

Indoor recreation programming every day and evening for all ages such as:

- Weekly recently released and critically acclaimed films for adults
- Weekly recently released films for children and the whole family
- Summer and winter concert series – live music such as a classical string ensemble, folk, jazz and Celtic
- Weekly bridge, Mah Jong, quilting, knitting, beading and more
- Art programs and craft workshops for both adults and children
- Workshops on food canning, plant propagation, pruning
- Yoga
- Children’s programs such as traveling/petting zoo, magic shows, juggler, URI Master Gardeners seed-planting workshop, raptor presentation by Born to Be Wild Nature Center, visit with the Casey Farm baby chicks

Charlestown Historical Society

- Lectures
- Revolutionary War Re-enactment (Amos Greene Farm)
- Schoolhouse and museum tours

Appendix REC-2 Outdoor and Community Recreation Resources

Town Owned Properties

Blue Shutters Beach

Size: 3.16 acres.

Date Acquired: 1990.

Funding/Acquisition: Town open space bond funds and a RIDEM open space grant. Recreation easement held by RI DEM.

Access: Public parking lot off of East Beach Road.

Trails: Ocean beach in both directions – about 3 miles east to the Charlestown Breachway or 1.5 miles west to the Quonochontaug Breachway.

Recreation: Walking, swimming and other beach activities. Life guards are present during daytime hours in the summer. Fishing from the beach allowed off hours and off season.

Description: The property includes parking for 120 vehicles and is open to the public for a seasonal or daily fee. There is an attractive public restroom building with composting toilets, accessed by an outside stairway and ramp, with an open porch facing the ocean, which was built in 2012. Blue Shutters Beach is the beginning (west end) of a long stretch of barrier beach that includes the state owned East Beach Conservation Area, one of the least developed of the state beaches.

Condition: The restroom building and parking lot are in excellent condition. The beach is subject to coastal erosion.

Maintenance: Maintained by the Charlestown Parks and Recreation Department and Public Works Department.

Charlestown Town Beach

Size: 13.76 acres.

Date Acquired: 1957 and 1976.

Funding/Acquisition: Town purchase.

Access: Parking lot off of Charlestown Beach Road.

Trails: Ocean beach.

Recreation: Walking, swimming and other beach activities. Life guards are present during daytime hours in the summer. Fishing from the beach allowed off hours and off season.

Description: The town beach is comprised of two parcels in Charlestown totaling 13.76 acres, a 13 acre lot with a parking area for 300 vehicles and a restroom building of similar design to that at Blue Shutters Beach, also constructed in 2012, and a noncontiguous 0.76 acre lot on the beach itself. It also includes 1.17 acres of beachfront property owned by Charlestown in the Town of South Kingstown. The public restroom building includes composting toilets. The larger parcel directly fronts Ninigret Pond and includes a small parking and launch area for non-motorized boats.

Condition: The restroom building and parking lot are in excellent condition. The beach is subject to coastal erosion.

Maintenance: Maintained by the Charlestown Parks and Recreation Department and Public Works Department.

Charlestown Moraine Preserve

Size: 77.9 acres.

Date Acquired: 2013.

Funding/Acquisition: Town open space bond funds.

Access: Small parking lot off of Kings Factory Road at the trail head.

Trails: Constructed in 2017.

Recreation: Year round activities including hiking, snow shoeing and wildlife observation.

Description: This property represents nearly a mile of scenic road frontage on Rt. 1 (Post Road) between Kings Factory Road and Prosser Trail. The Charlestown Moraine serves as an important forested wildlife corridor between the two RI Natural Heritage Areas of Watchaug Pond and School House Pond/Deep Pond complex, enabling some species to disperse into or through the area. The School House Pond complex is connected to other lands of US Fish and Wildlife Service and Narragansett Settlement Lands so the wildlife corridor is quite extensive. Vernal pools on the moraine property and surrounding uplands are important to amphibians, some of which are state species of concern. The unfragmented forest of this parcel, the stream draining School House Pond, and the rapidly draining soils work together to protect the water quality of the coastal ponds.

The preserve also provides Charlestown with the opportunity to educate the public on the importance of the town's underlying geography and the unique landforms upon which all local activity and its tourist economy depends.

Condition: With the assistance of volunteers including the Charlestown Conservation Commission and The Nature Conservancy, a hiking trail and parking lot have been added to the site. A second trail is planned.

Maintenance: Maintained by the Charlestown Conservation Commission with occasional help from the Public Works Department.

Ninigret Park

Size: 230 acres.

Date Acquired: 1979.

Funding/Acquisition: Transferred from the US General Services Administration.

Access: Park Lane off of Old Post Road.

Trails: Multi-use bike trail, criterion bicycle course, roads and other paved areas.

Recreation: George F. Bliven Jr. Playground; soccer and ball fields; basketball and tennis courts; picnic areas and pavilions; Little Nini Pond, a freshwater swimming pond and public beach and associated bath house with lifeguards on duty seasonally; a disc golf course and dog park; open fields for informal use; and access to the Ninigret National Wildlife Refuge and kayak launch.

Description: South of US Rt. 1 and adjacent to the salt ponds lies Ninigret Park, an important recreational resource, serving a broad range of residents and visitors. Once part of a WW II-era naval air training base, the 230 acre park consists of two parcels, a 55 acre parcel owned and managed directly by the Town of Charlestown and a 175 acre parcel owned by the town but subject to restrictions by the US Secretary of the Interior to be used "*exclusively for public park or public recreation purposes in perpetuity by the Town of Charlestown.*" The land use must compliment the US Fish and Wildlife Ninigret National Wildlife Refuge abutting the property to the southwest.

Site features include a large area of pavement central to the developed portion of the site which is utilized for event parking, a summer recreation office, maintenance and storage building, restrooms, the Charlestown Naval Auxiliary Landing Field Memorial, the Frosty Drew Observatory and Science

Center, and the Senior/Community Center and community garden. The park is open during daylight hours, except for observatory use and special events licensed by the town.

See Appendix REC-1 for a list of activities and programs in Ninigret Park or contact the Charlestown Parks and Recreation Department for the most up to date list.

Condition: Ninigret Park is in good condition overall. It has many features which have been added at varying times throughout the park's history and are in conditions ranging from good to excellent.

Maintenance: Maintained by the Charlestown Parks and Recreation Department and Public Works Department. Ninigret Park has a "friends" group that raises money and advocates for the park.

Patricia Sprague Forest Preserve

Size: 27.81 acres.

Date Acquired: 2016.

Funding/Acquisition: State grant (RI Natural Heritage grant) and town open space bond funds. Conservation easement held by RIDEM and Charlestown Land Trust.

Access: Small parking area off of Railroad Avenue leads to the trail.

Trails: Hiking trails that lead to and along the river, where one can walk to the water's edge or to bluffs overlooking the river, and which pass through two fields and a forested area.

Recreation: Year round activities including hiking, snow shoeing and wildlife observation, access to Pawcatuck River.

Description: This nearly 28 acre parcel in the Village of Carolina along the Pawcatuck River contains vernal pools, fertile meadows, open fields, forest and spectacular views from 1,700 feet of riverfront. This property contains a three-acre meadow near the river and a one-acre hay field bordered by several old apple trees. The land was managed organically for over 80 years.

Condition: Excellent.

Maintenance: Maintained by the Charlestown Conservation Commission with some help from the Public Works Department.

Pawaget Park

Size: 7.15 acres.

Date Acquired: In sections from the 1960s to 2003.

Funding/Acquisition: Town bond funds, federal funds, state gift. Conservation easement held by RIDEM.

Access: Parking area off of Rt. 1 on Sportsman Road.

Trails: A quarter mile of handicapped accessible trail leading to a boardwalk with a view of Ninigret Pond, and mowed trails in a grass field (which are not handicapped accessible).

Recreation: Walking, including handicapped-accessible boardwalk and a viewing stand on Ninigret Pond, picnicking.

Description: Formerly a driving range, the property was first acquired in the 1960s as a scenic overlook using federal highway funds under the Ladybird Johnson Beautification Act. In 2003, the land was transferred from the RI Department of Transportation to the RI Department of Environmental Management, who then signed an agreement with the town.

A portion of the trail, boardwalk and viewing area is located on a larger parcel (20 acres) of adjoining state land. RI DEM worked in collaboration with the town to develop Pawaget Park, which has been open since the summer of 2014 and includes picnic facilities.

Condition: Excellent.

Maintenance: Maintained by the Charlestown Parks and Recreation Department and Public Works Department.

Richard Trails

Size: 95.74 acres.

Date Acquired: 2002.

Funding/Acquisition: Purchased with funding from the Rhode Island chapter of The Nature Conservancy.

Access: Small parking lot off of Rt. 2 (South County Trail) leads to the hiking trail.

Trails: A hiking trail which follows an old Indian trail constructed by Conservation Commission members.

Recreation: Year round activities including hiking, snow shoeing, geo-caching and wildlife observation.

Description: The property is contiguous with part of the Ninigret National Wildlife Refuge on the north side of Rt. 1, and forms part of a nearly 500 acre parcel of land protected for conservation, wildlife protection and passive recreation. The area is a popular geo-cache location. Bushwhacking is common, especially in the winter.

Condition: Excellent.

Maintenance: Maintained by the Charlestown Conservation Commission with some help from the Public Works Department.

School House Pond Preserve

Size: 93.5 acres.

Date Acquired: 1991.

Funding/Acquisition: Purchased with funding from The Nature Conservancy, RI DEM and town open space bond funds. Conservation easement is held by RI DEM.

Access: Two small parking areas are available off of Kings Factory Road.

Trails: 2.5 miles of hiking trails through hardwood and pine forest, which connect to a trail in Burlingame that in turn connects to the Vin Gormley Trail. A trail map is available on the Charlestown Conservation Commission website.

Recreation: Year round activities including hiking, snow shoeing, swimming and wildlife observation.

Description: The property consists of undeveloped frontage on pristine School House Pond plus hiking trails. Limited access for a view of the pond is available for passive recreational opportunities. The pond is also an important historical and cultural resource for the Narragansett Indian Tribe and access to the pond is carefully observed.

Condition: Good.

Maintenance: Maintained by the Charlestown Conservation Commission with some help from the Public Works Department.

South Farm Preserve

Size: 86.7 acres.

Date Acquired: 2002.

Funding/Acquisition: RI DEM open space grant and town open space bond funds. A conservation easement is held by RI DEM.

Access: Parking lot off of Old Coach Road.

Trails: Hiking and equestrian trails, a trail map is available on the Charlestown Conservation Commission website.

Recreation: Year round activities including hiking, horseback riding, snow shoeing and wildlife observation.

Description: Located across Old Coach Road from The Nature Conservancy's Pasquisset Pond Preserve. These two preserves provide a nearly 350 acre complex for conservation, wildlife and passive recreation. The property consists of approximately 2,700 feet of undeveloped frontage on Old Coach Road and together with The Nature Conservancy land on the opposite side, it protects a long section of the scenic and undeveloped north end of Old Coach Road. The property is mainly forested, but also contains two large fields that are hayed, a small pond and other wetlands, and a renovated sheep barn and historical cemetery.

Condition: The property has stone walls and buildings in very good condition. The fields have had problems with invasive plants species.

Maintenance: Maintained by the Charlestown Conservation Commission with some help from the Public Works Department.

Other Town Owned Recreation Areas

Charlestown Elementary School

Size: 15.5 acres.

Date Acquired: 1950.

Funding/Acquisition: Land purchased by Town of Charlestown.

Access: Parking lot located at 363 Carolina Back Road (Rte. 112).

Trails: A half mile walking trail located behind the school.

Recreation: Playfields, playgrounds and half mile walking trail. The school also has a gymnasium with basketball courts and a cafeteria for community use.

Condition: Good.

Maintenance: Maintained by the CHARIHO School District.

Charlestown Senior/Community Center in Ninigret Park

Size: 5,454 SF on a 175 acre lot within the 230 acre park.

Date Built: 1975.

Funding/Acquisition: Town and state funding.

Access: 100 Park Lane in Ninigret Park.

Recreation: Classes, activities, lunch program, room rentals and special programs, year round.

Description: What began as the Charlestown Senior Center in the early 1980s is now the Charlestown Senior/Community Center. Located in Ninigret Park, the Senior/Community Center provides a gathering place for leisure programs, activities, meetings and social events for seniors and persons of

all ages. A senior information specialist and a community visiting nurse are available monthly to help with health and social service needs.

The Senior/Community Center is also the home of the Charlestown Senior Citizens Association which has been providing services and programs for seniors since 1981. Member benefits include many health, social and recreational programs and activities (trips, classes) conducted by the association and its volunteers at discounted fees. The Senior/Community Center is open Monday through Thursday 8:30 am to 4:00 pm, Fridays until 1:30 pm and on weekends and evenings as needed. It also serves as a daytime warming/cooling center and as an evacuation center during emergencies.

Condition: Good.

Maintenance: Maintained by the Charlestown Parks and Recreation Department and Public Works Department.

Clark Memorial Field - Columbia Heights Park

Size: 5.26 acres.

Date Acquired: 1989.

Funding/Acquisition: Donated for recreational use in honor of the George P. Clark family in 1989.

Access: Parking lot off of Columbia Heights Road. Open to all as a public park, sunrise to sunset.

Trails: Large mowed field which could accommodate walking around the perimeter. There are no organized or defined trails.

Recreation: New playground installed in 2017 which includes a large field for play and picnicking, playground equipment, a basketball hoop, parking lot and two acres for playing fields.

Description: A public park with playground and open field.

Condition: Excellent.

Maintenance: Maintained by the Charlestown Public Works Department.

Town Hall – Puchalski Field

Size: 16.86 acres (includes Town Hall building site and parking, town salt shed and adjoining woods).
Date Acquired: 1961 (13.3 acres) and 2018 (3.56 acres of adjoining lot previously in private ownership).

Funding/Acquisition: Lots purchased by Town of Charlestown (2018 purchase made use of town open space bond funds).

Access: Parking lot behind the Charlestown Town Hall.

Trails: Playfields which can accommodate walking around it. There are no defined trails.

Recreation: A playing field behind the Town Hall that is used for football and has a backstop for kickball, softball or baseball.

Description: Football field with bleachers and a baseball backstop. The Town Hall parcel containing the athletic field consists of two separate lots. The original parcel has been in public ownership since the 1890's, while the adjoining long and narrow lot was acquired by the town in June 2018 and will be used to protect access to the field, and connect with the wooded area behind the field, which has informal trails.

Condition: Good.

Maintenance: The fields are maintained by a local football organization and the Charlestown Public Works Department.

Wicklund Field

Size: 6.1 acres.

Date Acquired: 1964.

Funding/Acquisition: Lot purchased by Town of Charlestown.

Access: Parking lot off Carolina Back Road (Rte. 112). The field is adjacent to the Charlestown Elementary School.

Trails: Playfields which can accommodate walking around it. There are no defined trails.

Recreation: A softball field with backstop and benches, and two tennis courts towards the rear of the property.

Condition: Both the tennis courts and softball field are slated for improvements from 2017 to 2019.

Maintenance: Maintained by the Charlestown Public Works Department.

State of Rhode Island (RI DEM) Owned Properties

Burlingame State Park and Management Area

Size: 3,100+ acres.

Date Acquired: 1935 – 2009.

Funding/Acquisition: State funds.

Access: Multiple public road entrances to access the trails in Burlingame, including off of Prosser Trail, Klondike Road, Kings Factory Road and Buckeye Brook Road.

Trails: Includes the southerly end of the North South Trail, a 77 mile hiking trail that runs the length of the state along its western border. There is a 9.5 loop trail, the Vin Gormley Trail, which goes around Watchaug Pond, and various other connecting trails in the management area.

Recreation: Year round activities including hiking, snow shoeing, cross country skiing, biking, horseback riding, swimming, fishing, boating, camping, hunting, observing wildlife and more.

Description: The largest amount of open space land for recreation north of US Rt. 1 in Charlestown is found in the state owned Burlingame State Park and Management Area. This state park resulted from the acquisition of woodland around Watchaug Pond and adjacent parcels, either by direct purchase or through condemnation. Burlingame, which consists of 3,100 acres of rocky woodland, opened in 1934.

Activities at the park include all the opportunities listed above and over 700 state maintained camp sites including 50 fireplaces, toilets, drinking water, a swimming beach and a nearby RI DEM boat launch for boating and fishing. The area north of Buckeye Brook Road, abutting the Pawcatuck River, is primarily a hunting/hiking area.

RI DEM has developed a hiking trail that originates at Blue Shutters Beach at the shore, extends through Burlingame State Park, and then continues northward through the western portion of the state. The North-South Trail continues on to the Massachusetts border where it connects with the Midstate Trail that proceeds into New Hampshire on the Wapuck Trail. Part of the Management Area also extends to the Pawcatuck River although the site currently does not provide direct access to the river. Future river access within the Management Area may provide boating and fishing opportunities.

Condition: Excellent.

Maintenance: Maintained by RI DEM staff. Some maintenance and improvement work is also performed by scout troops and other volunteers.

Charlestown Breachway State Park

Size: 79 acres (adjoined by 2.66 acres of town owned beachfront).

Date Acquired: 1952 (town parcels acquired between 1987 and 2004).

Funding/Acquisition: State funds.

Access: Parking area at the end of Charlestown Beach Road.

Trails: Ocean beach between the Charlestown Town Beach and the Charlestown Breachway (paralleling Charlestown Beach Road).

Recreation: Fishing, boating, swimming and RV camping.

Description: This property includes an ocean beach along Block Island Sound, a camping area for recreational vehicles, access to fishing from the stone jetties, a boat launch and parking for 150 vehicles. There are eight composting toilets. Considered a prime fishing area, Charlestown Breachway attracts people from nearby states. It is owned by RI DEM, but the parking lot and adjacent RV campground is privately operated. The boat launch provides access to both Ninigret Pond and the ocean.

Condition: The breachway is in good condition, the parking area and boat ramp are in need of repair.

Maintenance: Maintained by RIDEM staff.

East Beach and Ninigret Conservation Area

Size: 231.5 acres including miles of undeveloped barrier beach.

Date Acquired: 1967 and various times since.

Funding/Acquisition: State funds.

Access: Parking lot off of East Beach Road.

Trails: Ocean beach and sand trails between Blue Shutters Beach and the Charlestown Breachway.

Recreation: Walking, swimming and other beach activities, hunting.

Description: This state conservation area includes a large parking area with seasonal port-o-johns at the beginning of a long expanse of undeveloped barrier beach with direct access to both Ninigret Pond and the ocean. Off-season vehicle access is allowed. Blue Shutters, East Beach Conservation Area, and land owned by US Fish and Wildlife Service (part of the Ninigret National Wildlife Refuge) share and provide access to this 3 mile stretch of barrier beach, the longest in Rhode Island. East Beach is home to piping plovers and other birds. During piping plover nesting season, the nest areas close to the dune grass are roped off to protect the eggs.

Condition: Good.

Maintenance: Maintained by RI DEM staff.

Fort Ninigret

Size: 2.6 acres.

Date Acquired: 1880s (after the state conferred citizenship rights to the Narragansett Indian Tribe and transformed the remnants of the fort into a monument).

Funding/Acquisition: Acquired by the State of RI, ownership and management granted to RI DEM.

Access: Small parking area at the end of Fort Ninigret Road off of Rt. 1A.

Trails: Walking can be done around the perimeter of the remnants of an old trading post, enclosed by an iron fence.

Recreation: Viewing of a principal historic site in town, walking, picnicking and passive uses.

Description: A fortified trading post used by the Narrangansett and Niantic Indians and the Dutch located on a high bluff on the north shore of Ninigret Pond. The fort was likely built by the Dutch on the site of a Native American settlement. The property offers some local history education and views of Ninigret Pond. It was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1970.

Condition: The parking area and grounds are in good condition, as are the remnants of the fort.

Maintenance: Maintained by RIDEM and the Charlestown Historical Society.

Great Swamp Wildlife Management Area

Size: 54.83 acres.

Date Acquired: 1999.

Funding/Acquisition: Funds from the Champlin Foundation, RI Chapter of The Nature Conservancy, and RIDEM.

Access: Trail head at Biscuit City Road.

Trails: Between Biscuit City Road and the Pawcatuck River along the power line easement.

Recreation: Year round activities including hiking, snow shoeing, cross country skiing, horseback riding, hunting and observing wildlife.

Description: A portion of the Great Swamp Wildlife Management Area lies in Charlestown. The rest of the 3000± acre property lies in South Kingstown. The land is managed for both wildlife protection and hunting. At one time there was a bridge over the river that connected Charlestown to the larger Management Area. If that were to be replaced by RIDEM, it would provide access from Charlestown to the trails, wetlands, forest and meadows of the Great Swamp Management Area and Worden's Pond, and to the William C. O'Neill Bike Path in South Kingstown.

Condition: Trail is eroded due to motorized trail bike use, which is prohibited.

Maintenance: Maintained by RI DEM staff.

Kimball Wildlife Refuge

Size: 29.3 acres.

Date Acquired: Acquired by RI DEM in 2015, but previously owned by Rhode Island Audubon.

Funding/Acquisition: Purchased by RI DEM.

Access: By car from Sanctuary Road, or by foot from inside Burlingame State Park.

Trails: Hiking trails on the property and connecting trails to the rest of the state land, and to the US FWS Kettle Pond area.

Recreation: Same activities as other areas in Burlingame, with the exception of camping.

Description: Kimball Wildlife Refuge abuts Burlingame State Park and is now part of the park, although it remains a separate entity. The property is located on the south shore of Watchaug Pond and includes a small swimming beach. There is an historic house on the property.

Condition: The property was well cared for by RI Audubon and is in good condition.

Maintenance: Maintained by RI DEM staff.

Quonochontaug Breachway State Park

Size: 31 acres.

Date Acquired: 1890s (west side parcel) and 1970s and 1980s (east side parcels).

Funding/Acquisition: State funds.

Access: Parking area at the end of West Beach Road.

Trails: N/A.

Recreation: Fishing, boating and swimming.

Description: This property includes land on both sides of the breachway, access to fishing from the stone jetties, a boat launch and parking for 100 vehicles. It is a very popular summer recreational area and provides the only public access site in Charlestown to Quonochontaug Pond. The boat launch provides access to both the pond and the ocean.

Condition: The parking area and breachway are in good condition, the boat ramp is in need of repair.

Maintenance: Maintained by RI DEM staff.

US Fish and Wildlife Properties – Ninigret National Wildlife Refuge Units

Ninigret National Wildlife Refuge - Lewis Trail Unit

Size: 364.8 acres.

Date Acquired: 2000 and 2003.

Funding/Acquisition: Federal funds, Charlestown open space bond funds, and funding from The Nature Conservancy.

Access: Off of Lewis Trail.

Trails: Unmarked trails are in place throughout the property.

Recreation: Hiking, hunting and wildlife observation.

Description: This large irregularly shaped parcel of 365 acres is made up of two lots and extends as far south as Route 1. The forested uplands are home to pitch and white pines, black and white oaks, blueberry shrubs, sweet fern and princess pine club moss. Hiking along the trails offers a chance to see visual reminders of the great ice sheet. This parcel is contiguous along Lewis Trail with the 96 acre Richard Trails property owned by the town, and forms part of a nearly 500 acre parcel of land protected for conservation, wildlife protection and passive recreation such as hiking, snow shoeing and cross country skiing.

Deer hunting with a permit, including bow hunting, is allowed at all four units and includes the special youth hunt, the only one offered in the state.

Condition: Good.

Maintenance: Maintained by US FWS staff.

Ninigret National Wildlife Refuge - Kettle Pond Unit

Size: 114.8 acres.

Date Acquired: 2001.

Funding/Acquisition: Federal funds.

Access: Bend Road off of north side of Rt. 1.

Trails: 1.75 miles of interpretive trails and handicap accessible trails. A trail map is available from US FWS website.

Recreation: Hiking, hunting and wildlife observation, snow shoeing and cross country skiing. There is also indoor programming at the visitor center.

Description: This parcel, where the Kettle Pond Visitor Center is located, is referred to as the headquarters unit. The forested uplands are home to pitch and white pines, black and white oaks, blueberry shrubs, sweet fern, and princess pine club moss. Hiking along the trails offers a chance to see visual reminders of the great ice sheet and seasonal changes in a vernal pool, and appreciate views of Watchaug Pond.

The Kettle Pond Visitor Center contains a natural history museum and meeting rooms where many programs are offered for all ages. The scientific staff at the refuge leads both indoor and outdoor programs. See Appendix REC-1 for a list of current programs at the Kettle Pond Visitor Center and at the four refuge units.

Condition: The visitor center is 14,088 square feet and is in excellent condition. The trails are well maintained. The staff and volunteers actively manage invasive species.

Maintenance: Maintained by USFWS staff and volunteers.

Ninigret National Wildlife Refuge - Salt Pond Unit

Size: 379.7 acres.

Date Acquired: 1979.

Funding/Acquisition: Transferred from the US General Services Administration.

Access: From both Rt. 1 and Rt. 1A.

Trails: 4.3 miles of trails. A trail map is available from US FWS website.

Recreation: Hiking, hunting, bird watching, swimming, fishing, kayaking, snow shoeing and cross country skiing.

Description: The salt pond unit consists of diverse upland and wetland habitats including grasslands, shrub lands, wooded swamps and freshwater ponds, as well as approximately 2 miles of shoreline on Ninigret Pond and associated coastal wetlands. Once part of a WW II-era naval air training base, the land that is now the wildlife refuge is unique ecologically and important for migratory waterfowl nesting and stopover. The refuge protects federally threatened and state endangered species and is part of the Atlantic Flyway, a major migratory bird pathway. For the birding enthusiasts, over 250 species of birds have been recorded at the refuge.

There is a view of Ninigret Pond, the largest salt pond in Rhode Island, from the observation platform at Grassy Point. The salt pond shores support a large diversity of marine life such as blue crab, bay scallop and winter flounder.

Condition: The trails are well maintained. The staff and volunteers actively manage invasive species.

Maintenance: Maintained by USFWS staff and volunteers.

Ninigret National Wildlife Refuge - Barrier Beach Unit

Size: 27 acres with undeveloped barrier beach

Date Acquired: 1942.

Funding/Acquisition: Transferred from the US General Services Administration.

Access: State parking lot off of East Beach Road.

Trails: Ocean beach and sand trails.

Recreation: Walking, swimming and other beach activities, hunting.

Description: The wildlife refuge lies between the state East Beach Conservation Area and private land holdings along the long expanse of undeveloped barrier beach on the west side of the Charlestown Breachway with direct access to both Ninigret Pond and the ocean. The barrier beach is home to piping plovers and other birds.

Condition: Good.

Maintenance: Maintained by US FWS staff and volunteers.

Rhode Island Chapter of The Nature Conservancy Properties

Francis C. Carter Memorial Preserve

Size: 1,112 acres (1,032.5) in Charlestown).

Date Acquired: 2001 and 2014.

Funding/Acquisition: The Champlin Foundation, Doris Duke Charitable Foundation and Cove Point Foundation.

Access: Small parking lots off of Rt. 112 and Old Mill Road at trail heads.

Trails: 7 miles of trails.

Recreation: Hiking, snow shoeing, cross country skiing, hunting, wildlife observation and horseback riding on specified trails. The 2014 addition to the preserve allows for access to the Pawcatuck River.

Description: The Carter Preserve includes the rocky uplands of the Charlestown Moraine and a portion of the sandy floodplain of the Pawcatuck River. The preserve joins several thousand acres of contiguous forest and contributes to an 11 mile corridor of open space from the Ninigret National Wildlife Refuge to the RIDEM Carolina Management Area in Richmond. The preserve protects a variety of natural features including rare pitch pine and scrub oak barrens, vernal pools and an approximately 70-acre grassland, as well as some unique plants and animals. Seasonal bow hunting for deer is permitted at the preserve.

The Nature Conservancy staff lead nature walks at the preserve, and school and scout programs use the property as an outdoor classroom. TNC is restoring and maintaining wildlife habitat at the preserve, to help reverse the decline in the number of grassland and shrub-nesting birds. Trailhead kiosks greet visitors with an introduction to the preserve and its natural features. There, visitors can pick up a trail map, a self-guided hike and a bird checklist. Visitors have a choice of hiking the wide Narragansett Trail that leads to the grassland or hike on the narrower woodland trails that meander through the heart of the property.

Condition: Excellent.

Maintenance: The Carter Preserve has its own volunteer group called the “Friends of the Carter Preserve” who assist TNC staff with ongoing stewardship projects including trail maintenance, preserve monitoring, litter cleanups and management of invasive plants.

Pasquiset Pond Preserve

Size: 254.68 Acres.

Date Acquired: 2000 (original 199.7 acre parcel) and 2018 (55 acre adjoining lot).

Funding/Acquisition: Purchased with private funds and some financial support from the Town of Charlestown, one half of the 2018 purchase made use of town open space bond funds.

Access: Parking along Old Coach Road provides access to the trail head.

Trails: A short loop trail. The property is also bisected by the Narragansett Trail, an old Indian trail. A trail map is available from TNC website.

Recreation: Year round activities including hiking, snow shoeing, cross country skiing and wildlife observation.

Description: This property includes wetlands that support the rare ringed boghaunter dragonfly and an Atlantic white cedar swamp. Parking along Old Coach Road provides access to a short loop trail through mature white pines, while further south on Old Coach Road the Narragansett Trail runs through the property passing by numerous wetlands, mountain laurel and a field. It is located across Old Coach Road from the town owned South Farm Preserve. These two preserves provide a nearly 350 acre complex for conservation, wildlife and passive recreation.

Condition: Excellent.

Maintenance: Maintained by The Nature Conservancy staff.

Charlestown Land Trust Property

Mill Pond

Size: 76.29 acres.

Date acquired: 1995 (by The Nature Conservancy).

Funding/Acquisition: Gift of Oliver Hazard and the American Fish Culture.

Access: Driveway off of Rt. 2, just north of the Rt. 1 intersection.

Trails: Various trails throughout the property.

Recreation: Year round activities including hiking, snow shoeing, cross country skiing and wildlife observation.

Description: Mill Pond is a special part of the area's history as well as a place for quiet walks set in woodland on the edge of a pond. Cross Mills drew water from Mill Pond which has springs that are up to forty feet deep and ten feet wide. These springs produce 200 gallons per minute at a steady temperature of 48 degrees year round. The remnants of a once thriving trout hatchery are also present. The parcel was originally donated to The Nature Conservancy who transferred title to the South County Conservancy (2002) who transferred it to the Charlestown Land Trust in 2011. The Charlestown Land Trust has built a trail system on the property that was opened to the public on Earth Day 2005.

Condition: Good.

Maintenance: Maintained by Charlestown Land Trust members and other volunteers who care for the property.

Private Organization Properties and Facilities

Cross Mills Public Library

Size: 5,757 SF on a 7 acre lot.

Date built: 1950.

Funding/Acquisition: Private funding with support from the Town of Charlestown.

Access: Parking lot off of Old Post Road in Cross Mills.

Trails: Trails are in place in the undeveloped section of the parcel behind the library.

Recreation: The Cross Mills Library offers yoga, concerts, movies, quilting, painting, photography, bridge, mahjong, gardening and much more. See Appendix REC-1 for a full list of current recreation activities or contact Cross Mills Library directly for the most up to date list.

Description: Besides providing traditional library services, Cross Mills Library provides daily recreation opportunities. Most of the parcel is undeveloped and the area behind the library, accessed from a lower parking area, contains a small loop trail.

Condition: Good.

Maintenance: Maintained by the library board with support from volunteers and donors.

Frosty Drew Observatory and Science Center

Size: The Frosty Drew “campus” in Ninigret Park comprises 3.65 acres.

Date Acquired: 1981.

Funding/Acquisition: Private funds and grants.

Access: Park Lane in Ninigret Park.

Trails: N/A.

Recreation: Educational programs and events throughout the year, including Friday night stargazing.

Description: This facility is a memorial to Edwin “Frosty” Drew whose efforts contributed to the preservation of Ninigret Pond and its surrounding areas. The Frosty Drew Science Center is a renovated naval officer’s house and includes a sky theater, added later. The Frosty Drew Observatory was constructed separately. The work was done with the assistance of volunteers and financed with grants and private funds.

The Frosty Drew Observatory, located across the road from the Frosty Drew Science Center, is set in an open lawn area free of obstructions to nighttime viewing. It is open to the public free of charge every Friday year round and Wednesdays in summer. The sky theatre is used for educational purposes and live views for groups of people, including for handicapped individuals for whom the stairs to the telescope are an issue. The observatory enjoys dark night skies, the darkest between New York and Boston, because of its location near the undeveloped lands of Ninigret Park and the Ninigret National Wildlife Refuge, as well as the barrier beach and Block Island Sound to the south. It is a popular regional attraction that allows for excellent astronomical viewing, including events such as meteor showers.

Condition: The Frosty Drew Observatory and Science Center and overall site are all in good condition. For additional programming to meet demand, the facility may require expansion.

Maintenance: Maintained by the Frosty Drew Memorial Fund.

Quonochontaug Grange

Size: 5,543 SF on a 2 acre lot.

Date acquired: 1948.

Funding/Acquisition: Dunn’s Corner Fire District and the Friends of the Quonochontaug Grange.

Access: Parking lot off of Rt. 1

Trails: N/A.

Recreation: The grange is used for aerobics and yoga classes, community theater, dance parties and other recreational uses in addition to being a meeting place.

Description: After the end of WW II, grange members (known as the “Patrons of Husbandry”) from the Charlestown area embarked on the design, construction and opening of the Quonnie Grange. Dedicated in 1948, the grange continues as a community resource, meeting place and centerpiece of local history and community camaraderie.

Condition: Good.

Maintenance: Managed by the Friends of the Quonochontaug Grange, Inc.

Recreation Features with Multiple Ownership

Pawcatuck River

Designated by Congress as a “Wild and Scenic River,” the Pawcatuck River forms the entire northern border of Charlestown and serves as Charlestown’s primary blue trail. From the border with South Kingstown in the Great Swamp, through the industrial-age villages of Shannock and Carolina shared with Richmond, and eventually to Hopkinton, the river offers a major recreational resource as it passes along both public and private land.

There are points along the river on both sides that provide public access for fishing or to launch a canoe. The Wood Pawcatuck Watershed Association organizes canoe trips as well as educational programs and serves as the major advocate for protection of the river and its wildlife. See Map REC-1 for access points to the river.

Salt Ponds

Charlestown’s salt ponds, the easterly portion of Quonochontaug Pond, all of Ninigret Pond and the Allen Cove area of Green Hill Pond, are local and regional attractions, with great recreational value.

The ponds are used for recreational boating – power boating and sailing, waterskiing and wind surfing, and paddle boating such as canoeing, kayaking and stand up paddle boarding. Power boaters face the difficulties of extremely shallow water in the salt ponds and strong currents in the breachways, along with consistent ocean swells that make navigation in and out of the breachways difficult. However, the salt ponds offer the only realistic boat access, as launching into the surf of Block Island Sound would be quite difficult.

The ponds are also used for fishing and shellfish harvesting, aquaculture and swimming and wading. The shallow salt ponds offer quiet waters suitable for small children to wade in. Most areas along the salt pond margins are available for passive recreation such as walking, bird watching, clamming, crabbing and fishing.

Public boat access to Ninigret Pond is available at the Ninigret National Wildlife Reserve, the Town Dock in Cross Mills, the boat launch area at Charlestown Town Beach and the state boat ramp at the Charlestown Breachway. Boat access to Quonochontaug is provided at the Quonochontaug Breachway boat ramp. The ponds are bordered by a mix of public and private land. The Salt Pond Coalition, a private non-profit group whose purpose is to protect and enhance the health of all of the salt ponds from Watch Hill in Westerly to Point Judith in Narragansett provide programming and events for the public. The coalition organizes kayak and canoe paddles, the children’s Salt Pond safaris and other activities to promote and protect the ponds. See Map REC-1 for public access points.

Appendix REC-3

Ninigret Park Management Obligations by US Fish and Wildlife Service

The following is a summary attached to a letter dated February 23, 2012 to the Charlestown Town Council from Charles E. Vandomoer, Refuge Manager of the RI National Wildlife Complex:

Introduction

In 1973 the U. S. Navy announced a realignment of Naval bases in Rhode Island, and found that the Charlestown Naval Auxiliary Landing Field (CNALF) was excess to their needs. Consequently, the U. S. General Services Administration (GSA) initiated the process of determining the disposition of this federal property.

This effort culminated with the Town of Charlestown (Town) and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) now owning portions of the CNALF (Figure 1). Town property was acquired in two parcels, one 182 acre (approx.) parcel transferred directly to the Town from GSA, and another 55 acre parcel purchased from GSA. Collectively, the two parcels are now referred to as Ninigret Town Park (Park).

The Service manages remaining portions of the former CNALF as part of the National Wildlife Refuge System, Ninigret National Wildlife Refuge (Refuge), and includes lands originally intended for the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) by GSA. GSA made transfer of lands to the Town subject to an obligation that subsequent uses on Town property be consistent with management of the Refuge.

Disposal of Surplus Federal Lands to the Town

With declaration that CNALF was excess GSA acted under authority of the Federal Property and Administrative Services Act of 1949 (63 Stat. 377, as amended; “FPAS”) to determine the disposition of property. GSA completed an Environmental Impact Statement (GSA 1979a) to evaluate various alternative actions, and issued a Decision Paper which documented the decision and rationale for transfer of CNALF lands, including statements of how these lands were to be managed (GSA 1979b, see Appendix A). This process was completed consistent with the National Environmental Policy Act (42 U.S.C. 4321 et seq.).

The Decision Paper issued by then Acting GSA Administrator Paul E. Goulding allowed for transferring portions of CNALF to (a) EPA for purposes of environmental research (60 acres), (b) the United States Department of the Interior for management of lands as a part of the National Wildlife Refuge System (307 acres) under the Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act (16 U.S.C. 667b), and (c) 237 acres to the Town for “passive” recreation purposes (GSA 1979b).

Acting Administrator Goulding stated his decision thusly:

“ACCORDINGLY, after analyzing the record on this matter and pursuant to my authority under the circumstance, for the reasons set forth in this decision document, I hereby approve the transfer of 307 acres to the Department of the Interior for the benefit of wildlife and waterfowl to be managed in its natural state and to be administered as a portion of the National Wildlife Refuge System; 60 acres to the Environmental Protection Agency for its Environmental Research Laboratory in the interest of furthering research related to the waters of Foster Cove and Ninigret Pond, such use not to be inconsistent with the use of the 307 acres by the Fish and Wildlife Service; and the remaining 237 acres to be disposed of, if possible, to the Town of Charlestown to be used substantially in accordance with its proposal as set forth in the FEIS as alternative 5. Such use is not to be inconsistent with the use of the other 367 acres transferred to the Department of the Interior and the Environmental Protection Agency.”

This decision by GSA was subsequently challenged in United States District Court by the New England Power Company, who desired to construct a Nuclear Power Plant on the property (New England Power Co. v Goulding, No. 79-1889; No 79-1953; GPO 2012), with the Town entering as an intervener in support of GSA. In the Court Opinion regarding this challenge (see Appendix B), Judge Green discussed the legality of transferring lands to the Town, and found that the Acting Administrator’s decision was appropriate since the Town’s proposal “further effectuated the federal uses “ of the remaining portions of CNALF as a wildlife preserve and for environmental research. Judge Green cited 40 U.S.C. 484 (k) (2), which states that the Secretary may transfer surplus property “when it will promote the most effective use of the property consistent with the purposes of this part or if having a lease is otherwise in the best interest of the United States, as determined by the Secretary”.

The interpretation that lands transferred to the Town should be managed consistent with adjoining federal lands was cited by Koslowski (1982) in the May 1982 Law Review which states that “the remainder of the lands [referring to the Town land] was to be used in a manner consistent with the conservation purposes of the federal tracts”.

Recognition by Town of Obligation to Manage Park Consistent with the National Wildlife Refuge

Following the court decision, the obligation of the Town to manage lands consistent with the refuge was reiterated on several occasions. In February of 1980 the Town had been in discussions with GSA regarding alternative uses of the property, including light commercial activity. In a letter from J.W. O’Connell, Director of the Real Property Division for GSA to the Town of Charlestown, GSA stated that GSA would entertain any uses for the Town Park – as long as they were compatible with the adjacent National Wildlife Refuge (Sun 1980). In an interview given to the Chariho Times, Mr. James Buckley, Assistant Commissioner with GSA, indicated that some commercial or industrial uses may be found compatible with the refuge (Chariho Times 1980).

In a meeting held on August 29, 1979 at the Charlestown Town Hall, several representatives, including Town staff, discussed how the former CNALF would be managed. In that meeting, Town officials recognized that any common boundary with the Refuge would have to be kept in passive recreation (USFWS files 1979).

In a letter to Deputy Regional Director Ashe of the Service from Town Council members dated February 7, 1980 (see Appendix C), the Town indicates that, based on consultation with the Attorneys whom represented the town throughout the litigation and Town staff who had developed the proposal wrote:

“...that the integrity of Mr. Gouldings decision must be upheld”, and that “...we intend to act in accordance with the obligations outlined in the Goulding decision, which clearly states that the 172 acres is to provide a buffer for the Fish and Wildlife Refuge, and is to be used for recreational uses”.

In another letter dated February 7, 1980 Town Council members to John W. McCormack of GSA referenced their intent to follow original plans for the 55 acre tract since otherwise proposed uses would conflict with uses on Fish and Wildlife Service lands (Appendix C). The Service reviewed the proposed plans submitted by the Town in 1980 to the Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service and found them to be compatible with the Refuge (USFWS files). This plan developed by the Town included areas of site seeding and re-vegetation with the purpose of speeding up plant succession “especially in the area adjacent to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, to act as a buffer for conservation” (Town 1980).

Submission of Park plans was made a requirement as per the deed transferring these lands to the Town (Appendix D).

In 1981 and 1982, the Town was discussing alternative uses of the Park. Local media reported federal agency workshops were to be held with the Town, and included statements that any uses must be compatible with the Refuge (Sun 1981). In discussing what concession activities could take place in the Park, the Town evaluated some proposed uses which were discarded because they were not compatible with Refuge needs (Sun 1982).

Other federal agencies have recognized that there was an obligation to manage the Park consistent with the Refuge. In 1983 the Town entered into partnership with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Soil Conservation Service (SCS) to improve a small pond (now referred to as Little Nini pond) in the Park for swimming and other recreational uses. In the Environmental Assessment and Finding of No Significant Impact completed by SCS related to creating improvements on the Town lands (USDA 1983), the agency states:

“According to the Agreement which transferred Ninigret Park to the Town of Charlestown, future use of the area must be compatible with the abutting 376 acres Ninigret National Wildlife Refuge managed by the U.S. Department of the Interior, Fish and Wildlife Service. The town has reviewed several alternatives with the U.S. Department of the Interior-Fish & Wildlife Service and has selected a management and development plan agreeable to both.”

A record of coordination with the Town to insure that activities on the Park remained compatible with the Refuge exists. In a letter dated August 5 1985 from Refuge Manager Blair to Town Park Commissioner Bliven, Mr. Blair makes it clear that while it is the goal of the Service to “accommodate all compatible activities on the park” that action had to be taken by the Town to eliminate incompatible uses. In a formal letter on Town letterhead dated May 1, 1985 to a model airplane group who had been using the Park, Mr. George Bliven, Park Commissioner, reiterated the fact that any activity on the property of the Town of Charlestown must not impact the federal wildlife refuge. Related to this activity, Service records indicate that the Town and the Service conducted joint law enforcement actions relative to this obligation when Town Police and a Refuge Law Enforcement Officer ordered the cessation of model airplane flights (USFWS Refuge files 1985).

In 2000 a decision was made by the Town to provide a vegetative buffer along the Refuge boundary for purposes of buffering the refuge and a historical cemetery from recreational uses on the Park (Andres personal communication, USFWS files 2000). Until recently Town proposed actions on the Park have been generally consistent with the obligation that Park uses are compatible with the Refuge, including requesting permission for fireworks (granted), effectuating land exchanges for the benefit of Park activities, sharing of event calendars, and agreement to provide buffers adjacent to the refuge on Park property (USFWS Files).

Summary

The records indicate that requiring the Town to manage the Park consistent with uses of the adjacent federal parcels was very much a part of the rationale for allowing the transfer of land to the Town, in order to meet Federal requirements to emphasize the use of federal lands in FPAS. This expectation was specifically stated in the decision to allow the transfer of property, and this requirement had been cited in the courts opinion upholding the land transfer and determining the legality of transferring lands to the Town. The Town had recognized and accepted this obligation, and there has been a long history of interactions with the Town which demonstrates intent and general adherence to this requirement.

Literature Cited

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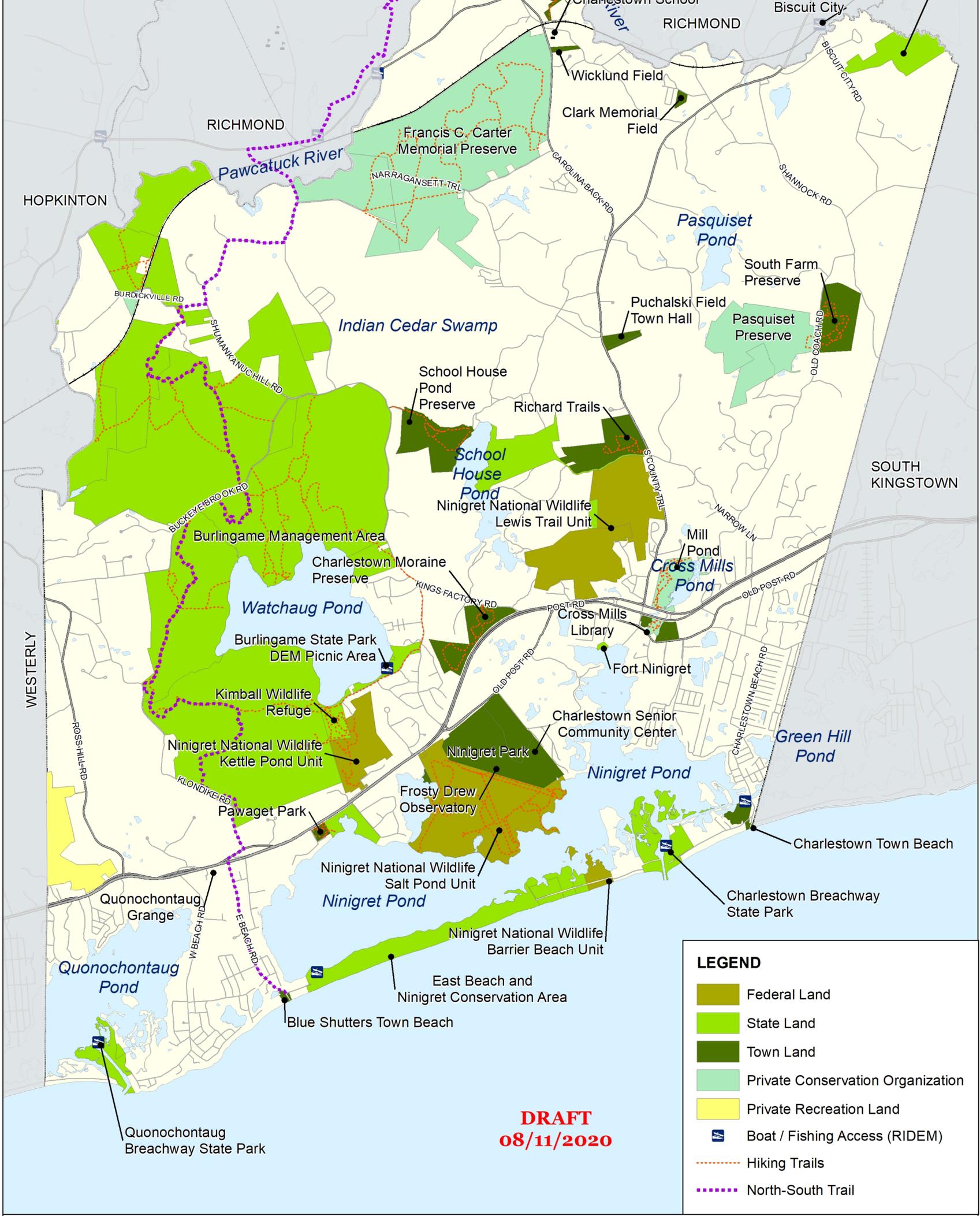
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LEGEND

- Federal Land
- State Land
- Town Land
- Private Conservation Organization
- Private Recreation Land
- Boat / Fishing Access (RIDEM)
- Hiking Trails
- North-South Trail

DRAFT
08/11/2020

Map Sources:



TOWN OF CHARLESTOWN
RHODE ISLAND



Prepared by:
Town of Charlestown

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN, 2020

RECREATION SITES