

**Report on a Potential Trail Route  
Between Trapelo Road and Beaver Street  
in Waltham, Massachusetts**

Submitted to

**Waltham Land Trust**

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by

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## Introduction

This report presents results of an effort to identify a potential route for a publicly-accessible walking trail between Trapelo Road and Beaver Street in Waltham, Massachusetts. Interest in developing a trail in this area is largely motivated by ongoing planning for the Western Greenway, an effort to create a connected ring of trails running through natural areas in Waltham, Belmont, and Lexington (Figure 1). Existing trails on a variety of properties allow visitors to explore nearly the entire Western Greenway circuit on paths through forests and meadows. However the stretch between Trapelo Road and Beaver Street in the vicinity of the Fernald Center lacks a well defined trail.

I visited and thoroughly explored the study area pictured in Figure 2a and Figure 2b on May 29<sup>th</sup>, June 25<sup>th</sup>, and June 26<sup>th</sup>, 2007, using a handheld gps unit and digital camera to document potential trail routes. In proposing a preferred trail route, I considered the experience of a person walking the trail as well as the needs and interests of property owners and residents.

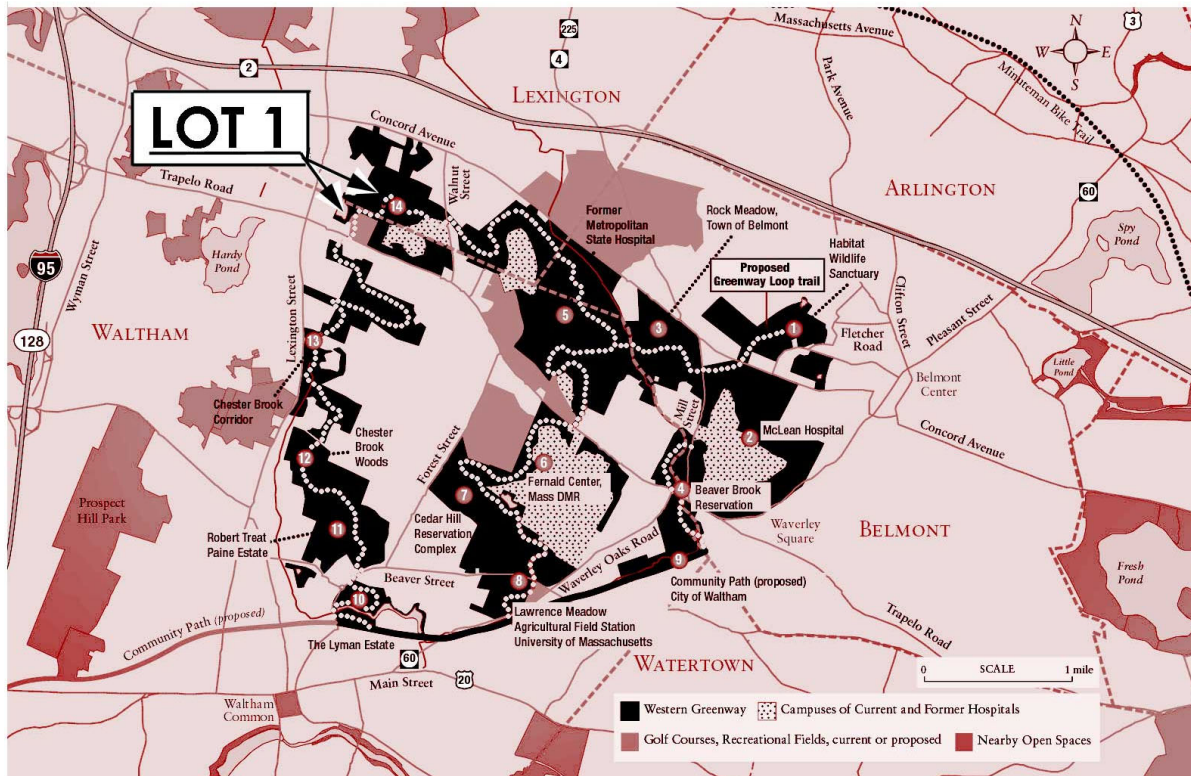


Figure 1. The Western Greenway with proposed trail route from [walthamlandtrust.org](http://walthamlandtrust.org).

## Results

The preferred trail route (Figures 3, 4a and 4b) crosses the Fernald Center, the Girl Scouts' Cedar Hill Reservation, and the University of Massachusetts Lawrence Meadows. It runs through existing meadows, former meadows, and forests and takes advantage of existing and former trails and a stretch of paved road within the Fernald Center. The preferred trail route would involve: constructing approximately 1,650 feet of new trail, mostly through woods with a fairly

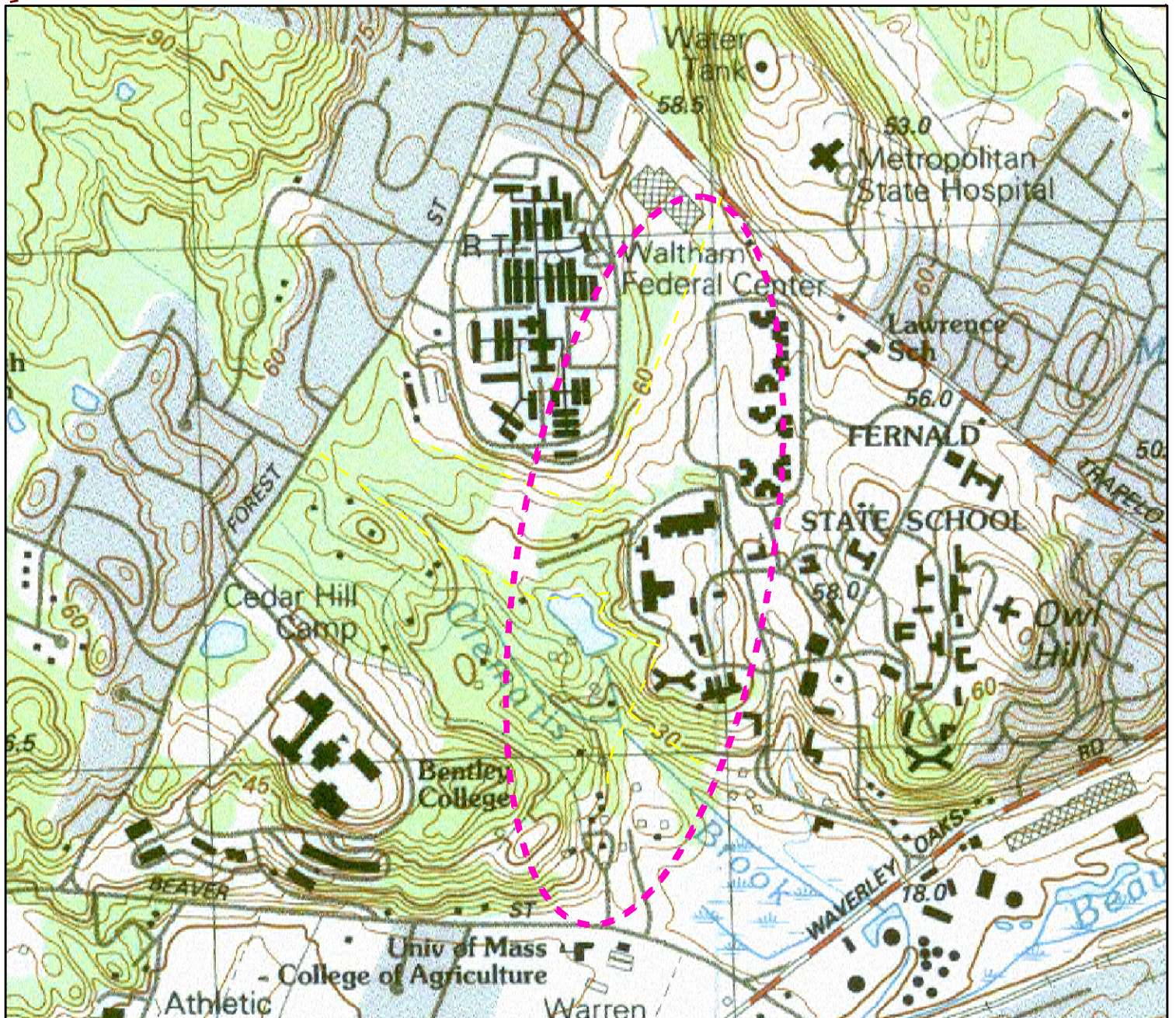
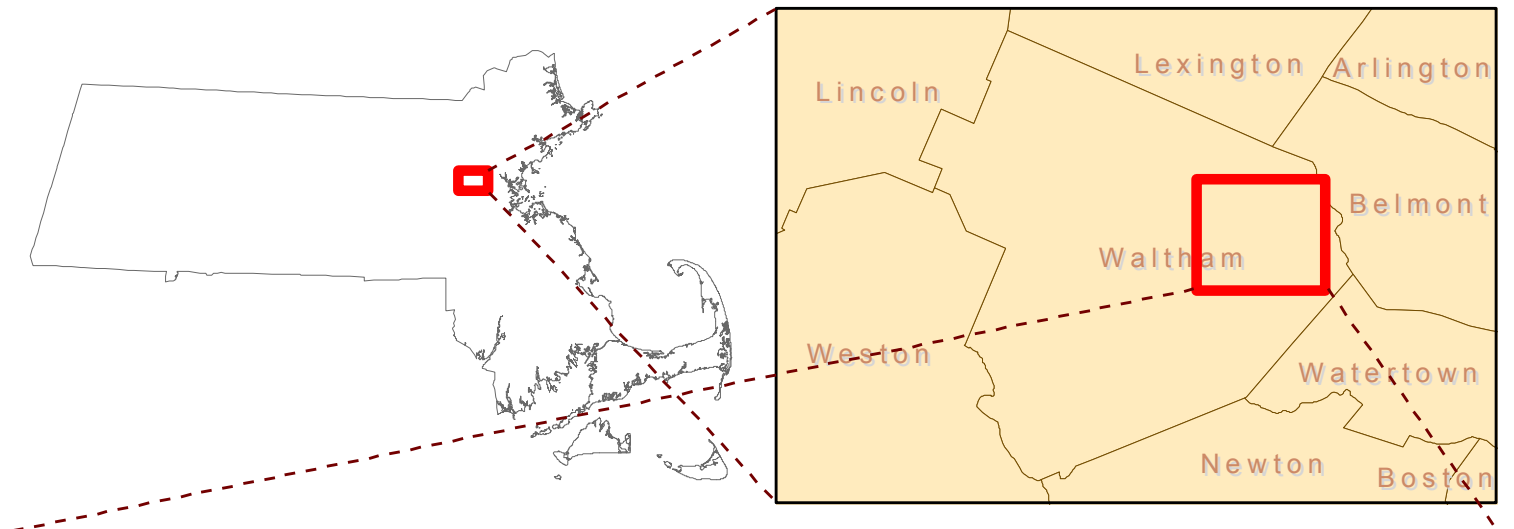
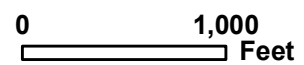


Figure 2a. Study Area

Notes: 1984 USGS Lexington quad from MassGIS.



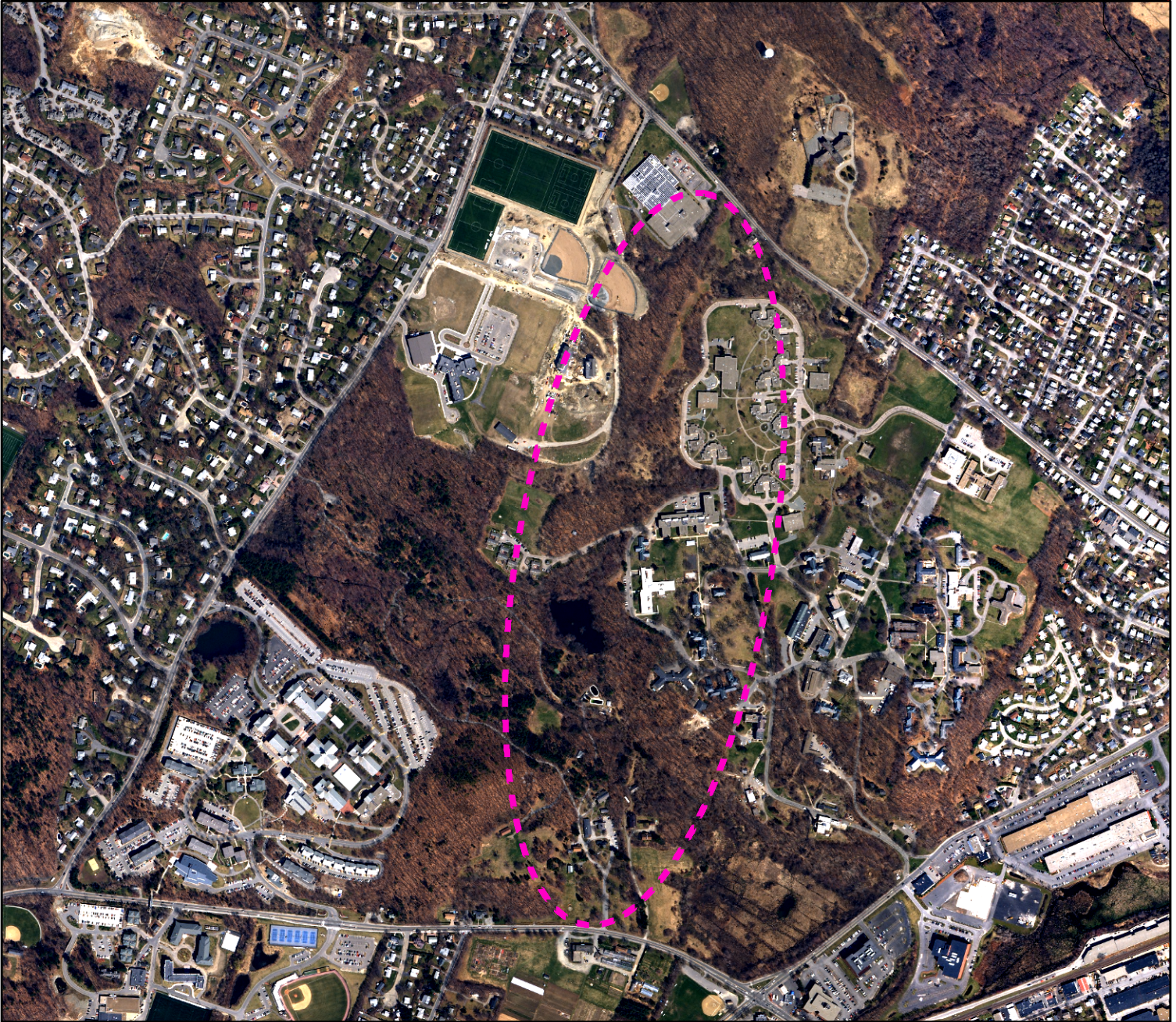
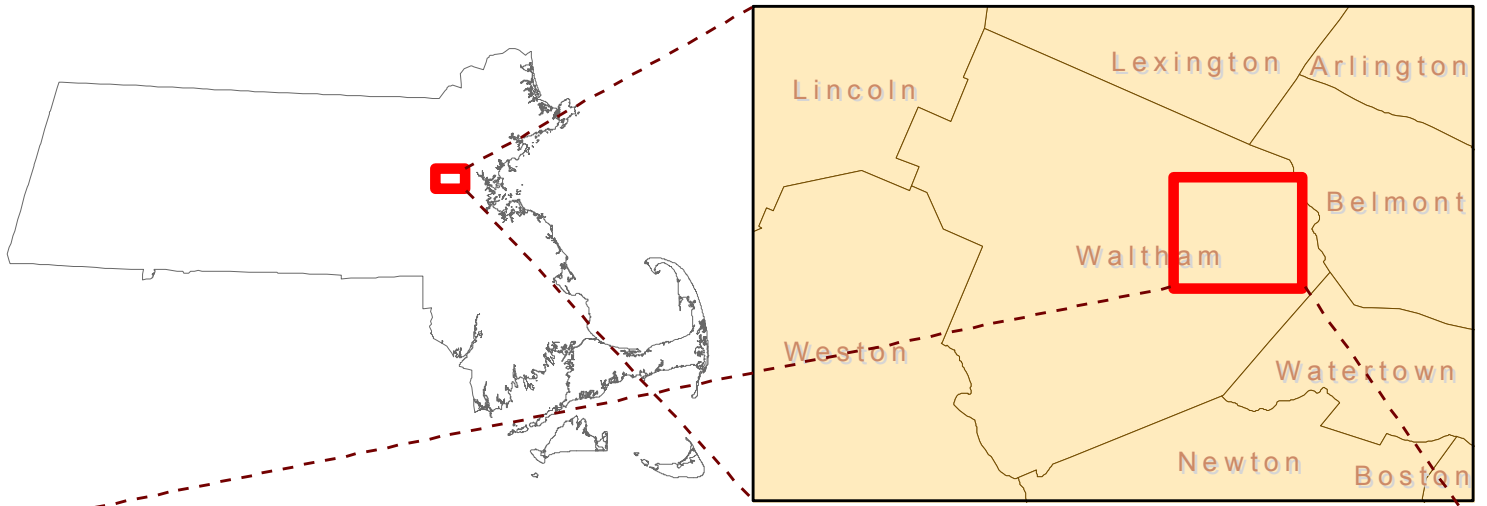


Figure 2b. Study Area

Notes: 2005 aerial photograph from MassGIS.

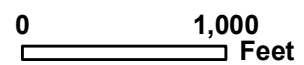




Figure 3. Proposed Trail Route

- Preferred Trail Route
- - - Alternative Trail Route

Notes: 2005 aerial photograph from MassGIS.

0 1,000 Feet



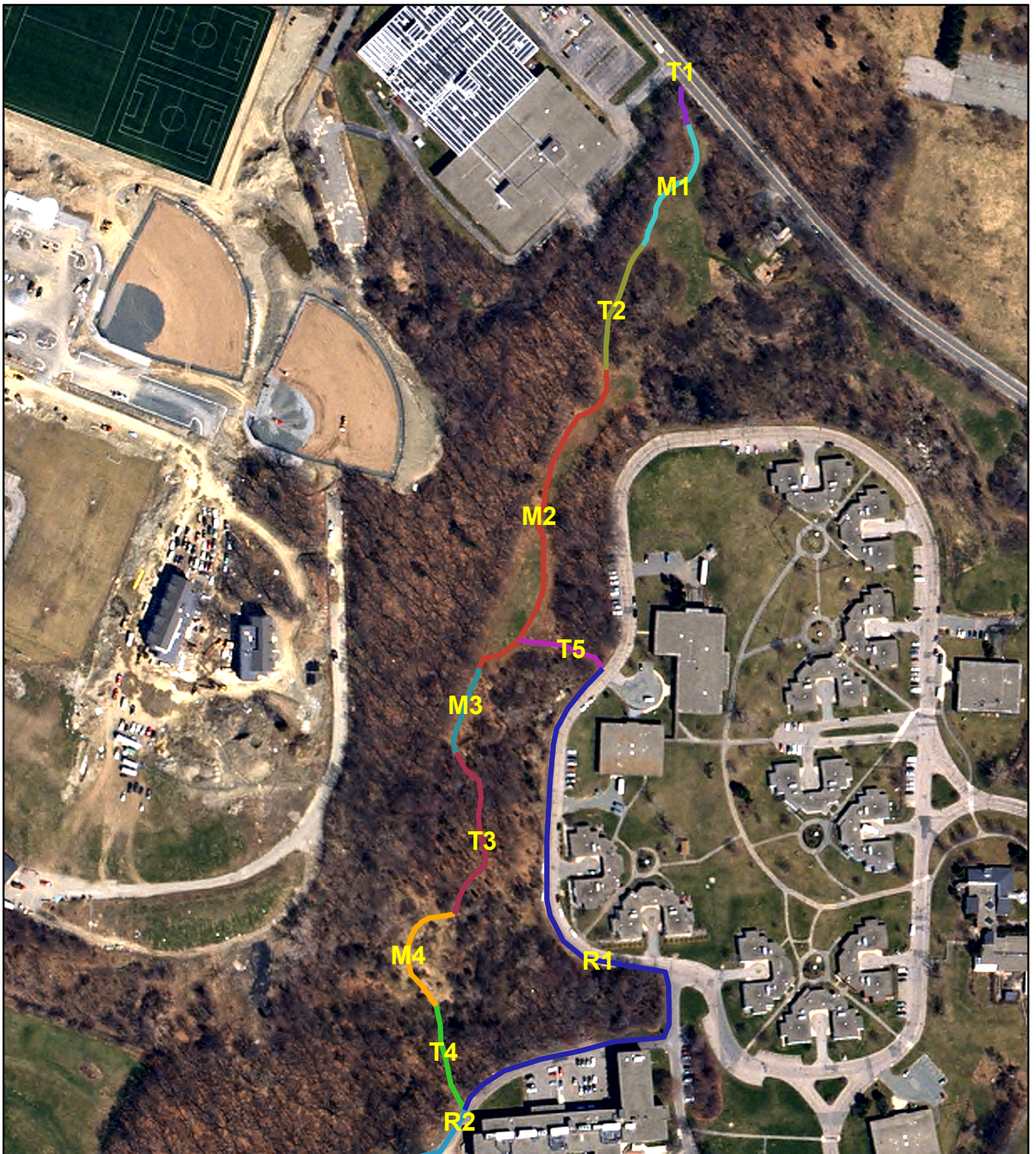
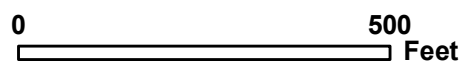


Figure 4a. Potential Trail Sections -- North



Notes: 2005 aerial photograph from MassGIS.

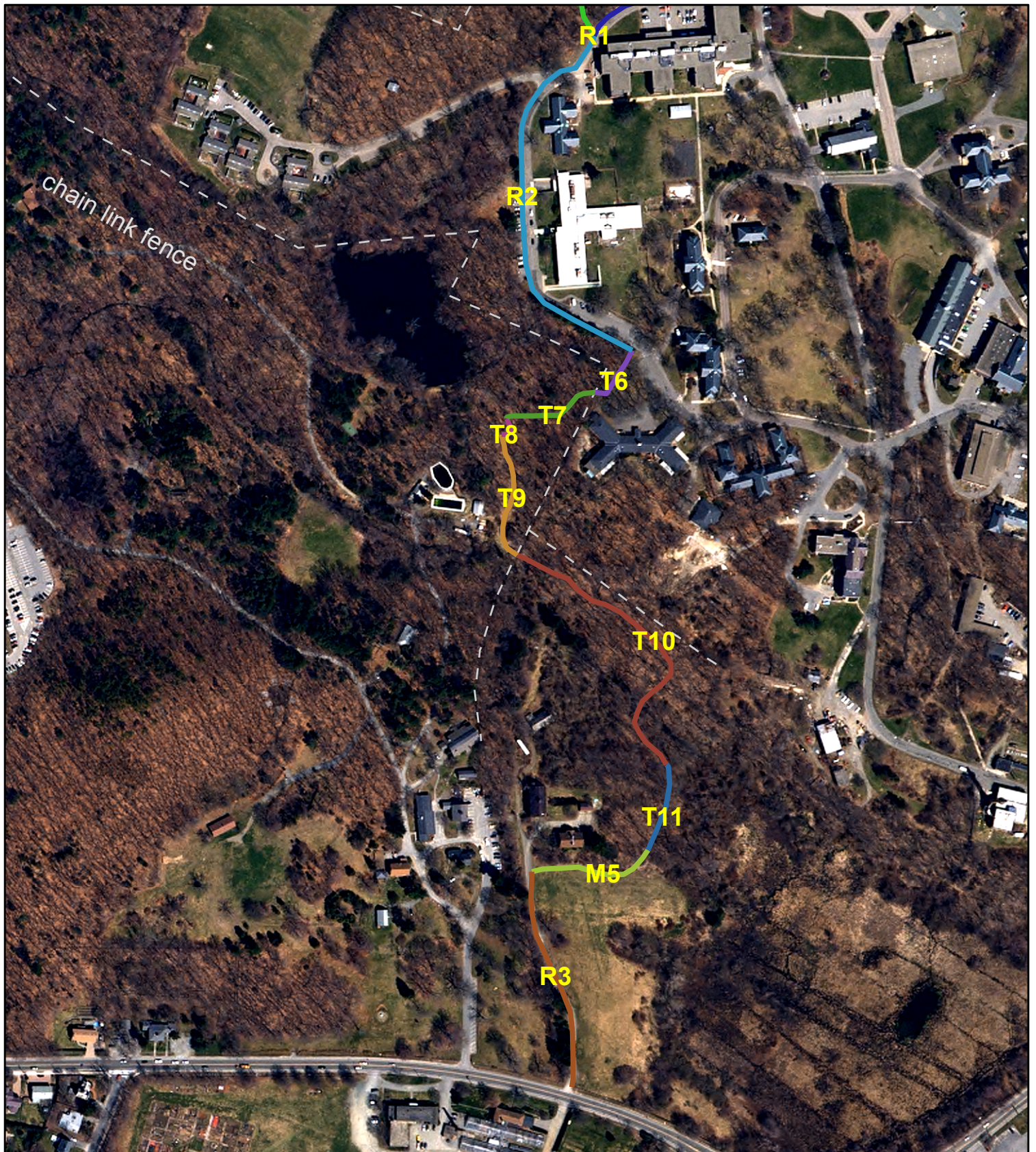
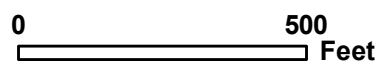


Figure 4b. Potential Trail Sections -- South



Notes: 2005 aerial photograph from MassGIS.

open understory; locating roughly 775 feet of new trail within former meadows; and restoring approximately 560 feet of former trail to passable condition. This route also runs along 1,180 feet of road and sidewalk within the Fernald Center road network, passing close by several buildings and a parking area, as well as 570 feet of dirt access road to the UMass Lawrence Meadows property.

The most problematic aspects of the preferred trail route are the chain link fence surrounding the Fernald Center and the heavy growth of poison ivy throughout the forested areas along the trail. The proposed trail route takes advantage of an existing break in the Fernald Center perimeter fence, but a more formal passage should be built to accommodate the trail. More or less coincidentally, this break in the fence actually is the most advantageous location for a trail between the Fernald Center and Girl Scouts land. Poison ivy will be a challenge in creating new trails through the forested areas and in the former meadows. Final trail routing should avoid the densest patches and regular trail maintenance should include a focus on poison ivy control.

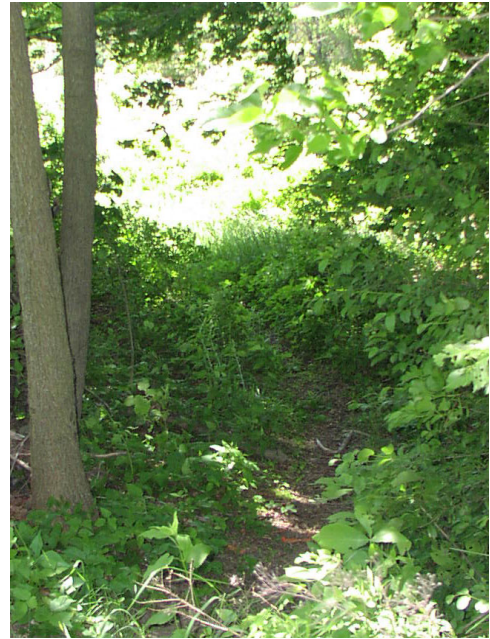
The preferred trail route avoids the main camping areas within the Girl Scouts' Cedar Hill Reservation. Trails, service roads, camp buildings, and tent platforms are largely located south and west of the reservation pond. Routing the trail to the northeast of the pond maintains separation between Greenway trail visitors and campers.

The trail passes through forests of black oak, pignut hickory, white pine, red maple, white ash, white oak and black cherry; former meadows and edges dominated by bigtooth and quaking aspen, staghorn sumac, multiflora rose, and apple; and meadows dominated by grasses. Black swallowwort, present in several of the meadows, is the most problematic of the invasive plant species present, which also include oriental bittersweet, tree-of-heaven, and glossy buckthorn. Poison ivy is a near constant component of the ground and shrub layers, and jewelweed is a close companion. Birds encountered include Baltimore oriole, common grackle, tufted titmouse, Canada goose, northern cardinal, gray catbird, red-eyed vireo, American robin, hermit thrush, downy woodpecker, blue jay, white-breasted nuthatch, northern flicker, herring gull, house wren, black-capped chickadee, and eastern towhee. Other wildlife observed include gray squirrel, eastern chipmunk, painted turtle, white-tailed deer (tracks), and mink (observed along T3).

## Trail Inventory

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Trail Section 1 (T1) – Enters northwest corner of Fernald property from Trapelo Road. Trapelo at this point has a sidewalk on the north side, and an informal dirt path on the south side. Path is inconspicuous from across the street since it drops down from the road level and is quite narrow. The ~2 foot wide trail runs roughly 25 feet from the roadside south to the meadow (M1). Poison ivy is common on the ground. The drop from road level is a steep, but very short section; steps would be very nice here. Trail should be widened a bit with special attention to clearing back some poison ivy.



*Trail Section 1 (T1) viewed from Trapelo Road.*

Trail Section 2 (M1) – The short trail from Trapelo Road (T1) leads to a very nice, small, open meadow. The meadow had been recently mown when I visited and appears to be regularly mown, although there is no marking or mowing pattern to indicate where a path leads. A few simple signs, or mowing of only the path, would indicate the path's route across the meadow and on to the next section. The daycare facility which backs up to the northeast corner of this meadow may be sensitive to pedestrian traffic in the vicinity of their play space. The logical route of the path would steer clear of this neighbor.



*Trail Section 2 (M1) viewed from north end.*

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Trail Section 3 (T2) – Roughly 250 feet of wide trail between two meadows. May be a bit wet at lowest point, after heavy rains. Large trees provide shade and a thick understory and shrub layer provide screening.



*Trail Section 3(T2) looking south.*

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Trail Section 4 (M2) – Very nice long meadow. Same problem as M1, where mowing of entire meadow confuses way-finding. Signage or mowing of a discrete path could help. A mown trail stretches east to the Fernald road system (T5). A short (30 feet) section of trail connecting south to another meadow (M3) has not been recently mown, but could be easily added to the current mowing plan.



*Trail Section 4 (M2) looking south.*

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Trail Section 5 (M3) – Unmaintained, small former meadow. Might require a brush hog or other heavy mower to restore towards grassy meadow, but in the long run could be managed as grassy meadow with M1 and M2.



*Trail Section 5 (M3) looking south.*

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Trail Section 6 (T3) – No trail or evidence of old trails here. Long-ago soil and trash dumping along southern edge of M3 creates uneven ground topped by thickets of shrubs. Clearing, some clean-up, and modest grading would re-establish trail out of the meadow. Beyond that thick edge, the middle of this section passes through open oak woodland over a grassy forest floor, passing attractive rock outcrops. The southern end of this trail meets another dense shrub layer at the edge of M4. Multiflora rose, *Rubus* spp., and poison ivy dominate. There is trash dumping throughout. This section would need substantial trail work, clearing, and poison ivy control for roughly 350 feet, with the bulk of effort being at either end.



*Trail Section 6 (T3).*

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Trail Section 7 (M4) – Another overgrown former meadow, much more overgrown than M3. The meadow could be restored with a few years of mowing by heavy equipment. A trail could be located through this old field, as is, with some light lopping and clearing, and mowing of the trail route only for ~260 feet.



*Trail Section 7 (M4) looking south.*

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Trail Section 8 (T4) – A shrubby transition out of M4 dominated by 15-foot staghorn sumac, then a mixed oak forest. Roughly 215 feet of new trail could be easily routed through the relatively open understory.



*View north into Trail Section 8 (T4) from roadside.*

Alternative Trail Route – To avoid new trail building, or in the interim before new trails are complete, this alternative follows more of the Fernald Center road system.

Alternative Trail Section 1 (T5) – A 200-foot mown trail section running from M3 to the Fernald Center’s Cottage Street.

Alternative Trail Section 2 (R1) – A 1,350-foot section of Fernald Center’s Cottage Street and Pine Street.

Trail Section 9 (R2) – One thousand feet along Fernald Center’s Pine Street. Using this stretch of paved road is nearly unavoidable. Slopes, wet ground, fencing, and thick undergrowth limit the suitability of the wooded land to the west for a trail.



Trail Section 10 (T6) – A short (150 feet) sidewalk towards Fernald Center’s unused Seguin Building leads to a break in the six-foot chain link fence marking the boundary between the Fernald Center and the Girl Scouts’ land. The fence opening currently provides informal access between the two properties, and is actually at a good spot for a trail. Thick vegetation and wet soil to the makes passage difficult to the northwest.



*Sidewalk of Trail Section 10.*



*Existing break in chain link fence.*

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Trail Section 11 (T7) – 250’ of new trail needed on the Girl Scouts property. Final trail layout would need to be determined in the field, but this proposed route runs through relatively open forest understory and across a modest slope. Several patches of poison ivy would need to be avoided or managed.



*Trail Section 11 along forested slope.*

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Trail Section 12 (T8) – A short (100’) stretch along an existing Girl Scouts trail. The existing trail leads west to a spectacular view across the Girl Scouts pond.



*Trail Section 12 along existing path.*

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Trail Section 13 (T9) – An existing but overgrown stretch of trail leading to a maintenance area on the Girl Scouts land and then through overgrowth to a very old gate in the fence between Girl Scouts and UMass. The trail would need a significant amount of work with hand tools to restore from its overgrown condition.



*Overgrown former trail.*



*Old gate between Girl Scouts and UMass land.*

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Trail Section 14 (T10) – Eight hundred feet of trail running through very attractive woods across UMass land. No trail in place, but open understory would permit trail building on the higher sections. Lower section crosses small stream, but could take advantage of old foundation and stonework which crosses stream.



*Open woods in Trail Section 14.*

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Trail Section 15 ( T11) – Old cart path along flat terrace in woods, overgrown with garlic mustard, nettle, and poison ivy, but could be restored with some work.



*Overgrown cart path of Trail Section 15.*

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Trail Section 16 (M5) – Open meadow on UMass property. At time of visit, did not appear to have been mown for a year or two, although the stretch of meadow alongside the driveway had been recently mown. Would need a regularly mown path.



*Trail section 16 crosses open meadow.*

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Trail Section 17 (R3) – Driveway into UMass property. Trail could run through meadow, alternatively.



*View of Trail Section 17 south to Beaver Street.*

## **Conclusion**

The preferred trail route mapped and described above passes through a variety of natural communities and wildlife habitats which provide aesthetic attractions and opportunities for wildlife observation and nature study. On the Girl Scouts and UMass land in particular, a visitor will have the feeling of utter isolation even within the busy surrounding suburbanized landscape. The short stretches of trail along the Fernald Center roads detract only modestly from the natural quality of the trail, but the road network is extensive and could be confusing to a trail user. Clear signage would be necessary to assist visitors in following the trail along the road network.

Discussions with managers of the Girl Scouts property will need to include a focus on directing visitors along the Greenway trail and not onto the camp's internal trail network. Future use of the maintenance area east of the pools (Trail Section 13) could influence a final trail route through this area. Finally, location and maintenance of trails through the Fernald Center and UMass meadows will require coordination with property staff at each site to mow these paths.