Beaver Pond Trail

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INTRODUCTION

The Beeslick woods, land owned and maintained by Hotchkiss School, is home to three cabins, an old broken ski lift, mountain bike trails, and several miles of hiking trails. These trails are used by the school and public alike.

The Beaver Pond Trail in the Beeslick Woods was made by James Morrill, a former teacher at Hotchkiss. The trail used to be maintained for educational purposes, and included an interpretive segment with pamphlets that corresponded with posts along the path (Fig. 1). Due to change in management, the Beaver Pond Trail is no longer maintained, has several over growth issues and a broken bridge. To make the Beaver Pond Trail more accessible and enjoyable, this project provides a management plan for the trail's future.

Figure 1. In the left column, old posts from the pamphlet created by Mr. Morrill. In the bottom center is James Morrill teaching one of his classes at the Hotchkiss School. The two photos on the right side were taken while walking the Beeslick trail system.

ENGAGING ENVIROTHON

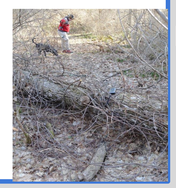
We hope to include the Housatonic Valley Regional High School Envirothon team, which Emerson is a member of, in the completion of this management plan. Having met with and presented to them, the team will, at a future date, help to complete tasks like geocache placement and the updating of the trail pamphlet.

MANAGEMENT PLAN

Debris Management

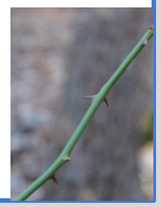
The trail is littered with plant debris, dead logs, and thick brush that needs to be cleared. Options for management:

- EcoDay project for Hotchkiss students
- Use a chainsaw to cut downed logs
- Use salvaged wood as new trail markers



Invasive Plant Removal

Different invasive plants have taken over, like honeysuckle, phragmites, and multiflora rose. To restore the trail, extensive removal of the invasives should be undertaken.



Bridge Repair

The bridges along Beaver Pond trail all pose a safety hazard for hikers. While reconstruction of these bridges is a greater project that could be handled individually, cleaning up the bridges and their approaches could be a way to expedite repairs. Ideally, Hotchkiss could hire a professional to sink new bases and build a more stable long lasting bridge system.

Flooding

Being near a marsh, the trail seasonally floods, which causes an impassable trail. Possible solutions include:

- Building small bridges for low trail points.
- Adding more stable substrate to the trails.

Geocaches

To make hiking the trail more interactive and popular, four geocaches will be placed. These geocaches will highlight points of interest, similar to those that Mr. Morrill originally included in trail brochures. Locations will include (Fig. 2):

- Trailhead
- Stink Pond
- Marsh Bridge
- Granite Outcrop

Educational Component

An updated trail brochure will be created for information about the Beaver Pond Trail, forestry, and the history of the woods. A meeting area for outdoor lessons and future geocaches could increase educational objectives.

Figure 2. (*above*) Aerial map of the Hotchkiss campus; (*below*) Map of the Beaver Pond Trail. Geocaches will be placed at the trailhead, Stink Pond viewing point, the marsh, and the granite wall outcrop section.

Scan here to check out the interactive map!

CONCLUSIONS

One of the first things we talked about at the NRCA Field Experience was how to get people to care about the environment. We were taught that getting people outside to experience and learn on-site builds connections and encourages them to care. Even if in a small way, by restoring this trail and making it more accessible and educational, could help build a land ethic for those that walk this path.

The management plan highlighted in this project will commence on April 25, 2019 for Hotchkiss' EcoDay. A group of students will begin the process by using their volunteer time to help revive the trail. In addition, the Hotchkiss school Committee on Conservation in the Environment has agreed to update the structure and foundation of the existing bridges.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Throughout this process, my mother and instructor in environmental science at the Hotchkiss School, Jennifer Rinehart, helped coordinate and made this project possible. I'd also like to acknowledge the Hotchkiss School for their willingness to meet the needs of this project.