Trials Creating Trails

Paul Funch

MRTC and Groton Trails Committee

What's Ahead

- **Background & Context**
- **Types of New Trails**
- **Issues with New Trails**
- **Mitigating Resistance**

My Background

- **Founding member of Groton Trails Committee (1998)**
- **Chairperson, 2002-2005, 2011-present**
- **Member of MRTC, 2013-present**
- **Advisor to Groton Conservation Trust, 2014-present**
- **Led the development of the Groton Trails Vision that was approved by the Select Board in June 2013**
- **Took "Sustainable Trails for All" Workshop in September 2013, led by Peter Jensen (professional trail builder) and Janet Zeller (U.S. Forest Service, National Accessibility Program Manager) at Crotched Mountain, NH**
- **Took DCR-sponsored chainsaw safety workshop in Leominster, March 2014**

Groton Trails Context

- **110+ miles of trails (more than roads!)**
- **Major landowners:**
  - ✓ **Groton Conservation Commission – 1900 acres**
  - ✓ **Groton Conservation Trust – 1500 acres**
  - ✓ **New England Forestry Foundation – 1000 acres**
  - ✓ **APRs and CRs – 1000 acres**
  - ✓ **DCR and Mass Wildlife – 700 acres**
  - ✓ **Town Forest – 500 acres**
  - ✓ **Mass Audubon – 400 acres**

Types of New Trails

- **Completely new**
  - ✓ **Single use (e.g., for mountain bikes, equestrians, or snowmobiles)**
  - ✓ **Multi-use**
  - ✓ **Connection between existing trails**
- **Replacement of existing trails**
  - ✓ **Sustainability (e.g., rerouting to mitigate erosion)**
  - ✓ **Accessibility improvements (e.g., rerouting to reduce slope or obstructions or to include bridges)**
  - ✓ **Correcting encroachment of existing trails across private property**

Issues with New Trails

Landowner-related Issues

- **Incompatibility with intended land use (e.g., conservation vs. recreation)**
- **Increased use by less desirable users**
- **A perceived high density of trails on property already**
- **Concerns about maintenance responsibilities**
- **Decline in (private) property value; bad reactions from abutters**

Abutter-related Issues

- **Increased number of people near their home/business**
- **Increased number of people on “their” trail**
- **Trash, dogs, drugs/alcohol, noise, etc.**

Issues with New Trails, continued

Broader Public-related Issues

- **Impacts to hunters (e.g., trail and people's impacts on wildlife; increased number of people disturbing hunting)**
- **Attracting larger numbers of people onto connecting trails**
- **Accessibility guidelines and requirements (not a hindrance, but a consideration)**
- **Cost**
  - ✓ **Land purchase best, but most expensive**
  - ✓ **An easement (e.g., conservation restriction [CR]) is relatively easy and inexpensive to record but price is difficult to negotiate, particularly if landowner is hostile**
  - ✓ **Accessibility requirements can greatly increase costs**

Mitigating Resistance

- **Develop good relationships with landowners**
  - ✓ **Understand their goals, concerns, and needs**
  - ✓ **Work out Memoranda of Agreement/Understanding**
  - ✓ **Help them with their goals that overlap with your interests**
- **Increase community involvement in trails**
  - ✓ **Encourage local stewardship of trails by neighbors**
  - ✓ **Encourage participation of more people in hikes and trail projects**
    - ✓ **Mobility impaired (build more accessible trails)**
    - ✓ **Children and youth (Boy/Girl Scouts, community service, etc.)**

Mitigating Resistance, continued

- **Develop good relationships with conservation and recreation groups (e.g., mountain bike clubs, Groton Turtles, running clubs, Greenway Committee, Park Commission, Sustainability, Friends of Nashua River Rail Trail, Squannacook Greenways)**
- **Develop good relationships with schools (e.g., XC teams, science departments)**
- **Obtain grants for some trail projects to ease cost concerns**
- **Publish articles in media to inform of trail-related activities**

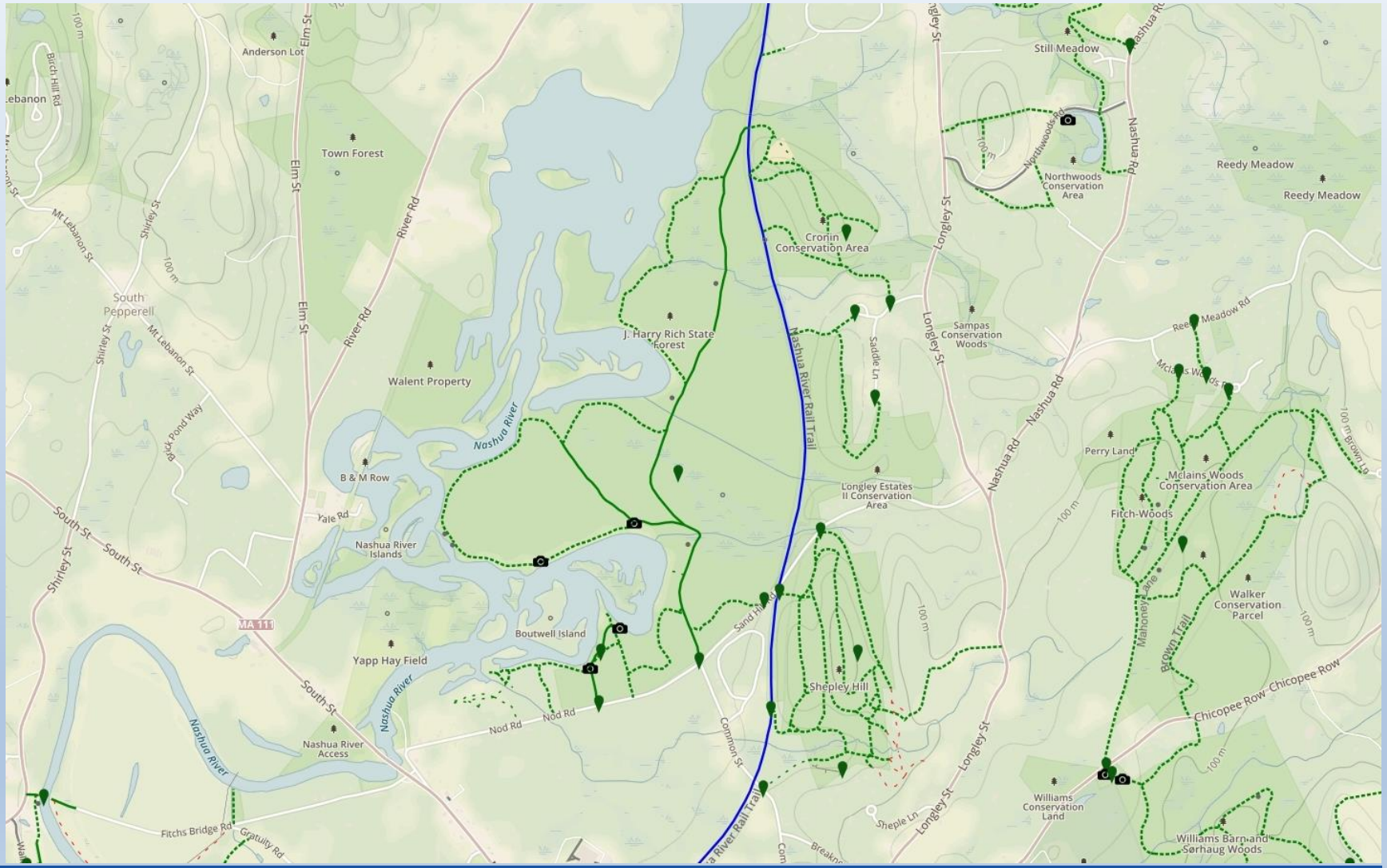
Case Study

Rocky Hill Rd
Rocky Hill Rd
Rocky Hill Rd
Old Dunstable Rd
Old Dunstable Rd
Old Dunstable
Old Dunstable Rd
243-28
Lot 2, 8.6 ac
Hoyts Wharf Rd
Hoyts Wharf Rd
B - ~0.1 ac
A - ~1.6 ac
248-36
Burnt Meadow Rd
Burnt Meadow Rd
Burnt Meadow

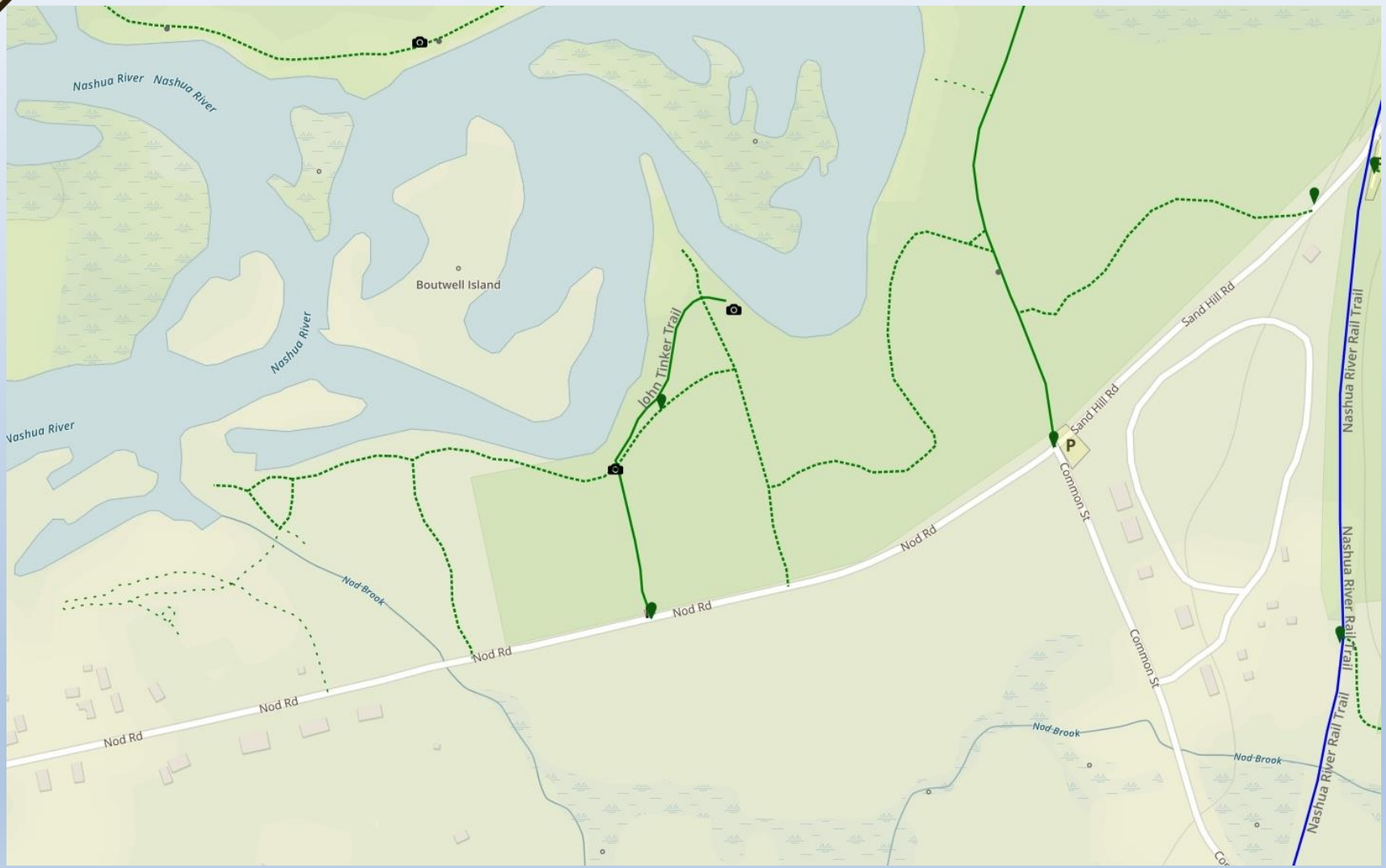
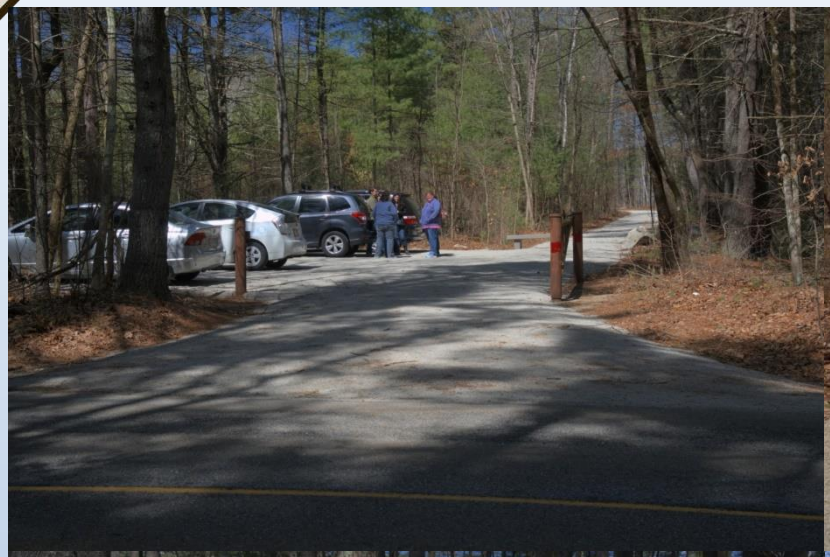
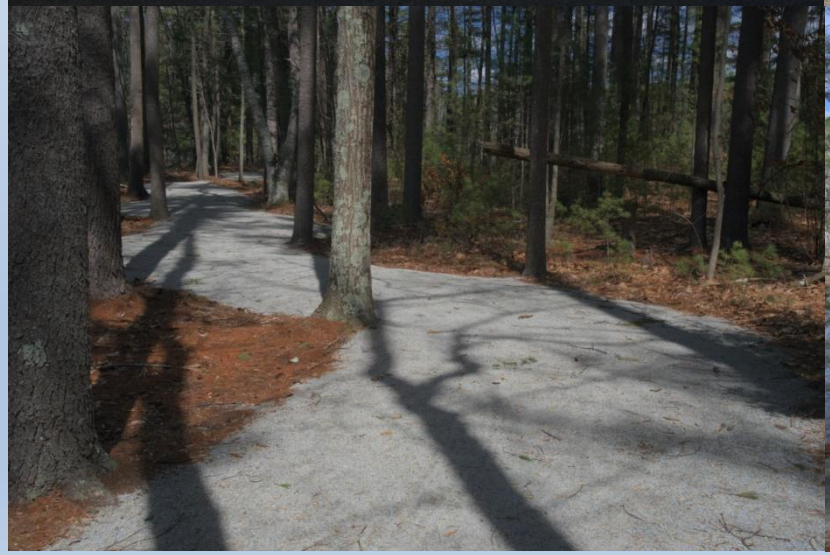
Case Study, continued

- **The existing trail, the only access to the Wharton Plantation from the east, was found to encroach on two private parcels in spring 2019**
- **In summer 2019, homeowner was trying to sell house but broker found that potential buyers were very concerned about proximity to trail**
- **Homeowner agreed to donate sliver of land to NEFF if trail was moved further from house and if donation could be completed by the end of October**
- **Owner of adjacent 8.6 acre parcel was asked to consider donating or putting CR on 1.6 acre parcel that was essentially entirely within wetlands**
- **Local land surveyor provided estimate of $2.8K**
- **Local abutter asked other neighbors to donate money and Trails Committee committed $1K**
- **Local land attorney offered to prepare documentation *pro bono,* and secured approval by NEFF's Board**
- **Ultimately, owner of 8.6 acre parcel declined all offers**

Rich State Forest



John Tinker Trail



John Tinker Trail Today