

## CHAPTER 5: RECREATION



Photo Compliments of: Leigh Sharps, Little Squam Lake, Ashland, NH

## 5.1 INTRODUCTION

The town of Ashland offers a range of recreational opportunities to year-round and seasonal residents. With Ashland's excellent parks, its immediate access to Squam Lake and a number of wooded areas, the Town is a unique and highly desirable place in which to live.

The Town has been generally supportive of funding proposals for recreational activities that have come up for Town Meeting votes. Land and Water Conservation Funds and donations have been used to set up a number of recreation facilities and programs in the past.

## 5.2 PARKS AND RECREATION

### 5.2.1 Staff

The Town appoints a Park and Recreation Director who makes policy level decisions to manage the programming, the part-time and seasonal personnel, the town beach and campground, L.W. Packard Field, and the Booster building. Seasonal employees which may include lifeguards, swim instructors, camp counselors in the summer, and a Program Assistant to manage the After School Program during the academic year.

An advisory board was established for the Parks and Recreation Department consisting of five community volunteers to assist the Director in developing programs and with fundraising efforts. Scheduled to meet monthly, the committee has not actively met since 2008. Community members are encouraged to participate and get this committee reactivated. Currently in its place, the Ashland Area Recreation Association formed in 2009 primarily to raise funds and install lights in the playing fields. It has been instrumental in continuing fundraising efforts for other projects and assisting with the upkeep and maintenance of the fields and beach.

### 5.2.2 Programs

The two major programs that are provided by the Parks and Recreation Department are the After School Program and the Ashland Summer Camp Program. The After School Program meets Monday through Friday for the entire length of the school year. As part of this program, a Vacation Day Camp is offered during school vacation breaks. The Summer Camp Program is offered from early July through August and has a high level of participation at both the town beach and L.W. Packard Field.

### 5.2.3 Parks and Facilities

## L.W. Packard Field and Beach-Booster Recreation Facility

This seven-acre park located on 99 Main Street (US Route 3) is the principal recreational complex in town. The Beach-Booster recreational building consists of a meeting hall, kitchen, basement room, restrooms, storage rooms, and office space. Built in the 1940s as a seasonal building, upgrading is required to meet the needs of the community. Figure 5.1 provides a detailed breakdown of the number of days per year the building is occupied by programs and events. As indicated, the facility serves as a community center and hub of community activities.

In 2008-09 an assessment was done and a ramp was installed to make the Booster facility wheelchair accessible. A Renovation Committee actively sought and received funding to get the kitchen up to current building code. The porch area was converted to office space.

Outside facilities include two tennis courts and a basketball court with lights, two ball fields, playground equipment, a bandstand, and a seasonal skating rink. In addition to Ashland Park and Recreation programs, the L.W. Packard Field is utilized by the Pemi-Baker Youth Soccer, Babe Ruth Softball and Cal Ripkin Baseball; all programs for area elementary-aged children. The ball field and courts are open for use by residents and their organized sport teams. A 2010 project of the Ashland Recreation Association is raising funds to install seasonal restrooms by the ball field. In the winter season, the Ashland Fire Department installs and maintains the ice skating rink on the field.

## Edward N. Doggett Beach and Campground

This 3½ acre site is located on Leavitt Hill Road on the shores of Little Squam Lake. Facilities include a beach with approximately 350 feet of lake frontage, a small play area and picnic facilities, a bathhouse with toilet and changing facilities, and a parking area for about 25 cars. The campground facility offers 23 seasonal mobile trailer sites in a wooded area with water, electric, and sewer hookups.

Planning for future expansion, in 2010 the Parks and Recreation Director began the process to permit and fund the erection of a building at the beach. Its use as storage for canoes and kayaks for programs and rental would create additional educational and recreational opportunities at the beach. Partnering with the NH Fish and Game Department to coordinate with its Future Fishermen program would include training in canoe and kayak use and safe boating courses to be offered for summer camp participants and residents.

**Figure 5.1:** Booster Facility Usage

Program/Event	Number of Days per Year
After School Program	194
Food for All	104
Grange	15
Rebekahs	20
Summer Camp	40
Rentals (average)	20
Scouts	10
Classes	25
Fundraising Events	8

## Memorial Park

This one acre site is located in the center of downtown Ashland with frontage on Squam River. This is a well-landscaped pedestrian park with a gazebo, benches, and litter receptacles. This park is governed by the Memorial Park Trustees. Visitors can park along Riverside Drive (US Route 3) where seasonal space is provided for about seven cars.

### 5.2.4 NH Municipal Recreational Standards

The NH Office of Energy and Planning maintains a *Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan* (SCORP). The most recent plan, prepared in 2007, contains a list of suggested recreational standards for New Hampshire municipalities based on population size. These standards are developed as a result of: review of the State of New Hampshire Recreation Plan; review of materials which examine the recreation situation in the Lakes Region, e.g. town comprehensive plans, responses from Recreation Surveys, and discussions with public officials. Figure 5.2 compares these standards with current municipal recreation facilities in Ashland.

**Figure 5.2:** Comparison of State Recreational Standards with Existing Ashland Recreation Facilities

Recreational Amenity	Suggested Standard for NH Municipalities	Ashland Suggested Standard based on 2011 Population	Booster Recreation Facility	Memorial Park	Edward W. Doggett Beach and Campground	L.W. Packard Field	Ashland Elementary School	Total	Meets or Exceeds NH Suggested Standard?
Ball fields	1 per 1,000 population	2.1	2					2	✓
Tennis Courts	1 per 1,000 population	2.1	2					2	✓
Hard Courts	1 per 1,000 population	2.1	1					1	
Playgrounds	1 per 1,000 population	2.1	1					1	
Parks	10 acres per 1,000 population	20.8	4	1				5	
Picnic Areas*	2 acres per 1,000 population	4.2			1/2	1/2		1	
Beaches **	300' frontage per 1,000 population	622.8			350			350	
Indoor Swimming Pools	1 per 1,000 population	2.1						0	
Gymnasiums	1 per 2,000 population	1.0					1	1	✓
Recreation Centers	1 per 2,000 population	1.0	1					1	✓
Town Forests	50 acres per municipality	50.0						0	

Source: NH Outdoors 2008-2013 State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan, Ashland Recreation Department

Currently the town of Ashland meets the New Hampshire suggested municipal standards for ball fields, tennis courts, gymnasiums, and recreation centers. The town may wish to consider providing additional recreation opportunities in other areas that do not currently meet the suggested standards. However, recreation standards should be utilized with caution. Such standards are meant to be general guidelines in the development of municipal recreation plans. Because they have been developed for regions, the standards are not necessarily reflective of the particular recreational needs of an individual municipality. On the other hand, the

standards represent a good place to begin a discussion about the adequate provision of municipal recreation services and can be fine-tuned to serve individual community needs.

In some instances there may be reasonable recreational opportunities through other sources. For example, while the town does not currently own and manage a town forest, there is an abundance of conserved forest land in Ashland that provides recreation choices. The I. Frank Stevens Memorial Forest owned by the New England Forestry Foundation (NEFF) is actively managed for: forest products, wildlife habitat, biological diversity, and educational opportunities. Access to this forest from Leavitt Hill Road has a sign indicating “We Invite Respectful Public Visits”. Use of the forest is dependent on individual user’s commitment to care for a resource that offers a remote, wilderness experience with no amenities such as a drinking fountain, groomed trails, waste receptacles, etc. In contrast, a well located town forest, adjacent to a downtown might provide greater accessibility and convenience, in addition to potential amenities such as public restrooms, a dog park or dog waste receptacles, a source of community firewood, or other benefits to residents and visitors alike. The upkeep costs for such resources must be weighed against user and economic benefits these amenities can provide and the type of experience offered.

Other shared opportunities may exist as well. The School Forest is a 15-acre tract owned by the School District located between Highland and School Streets adjacent to Ober Elementary playground. The School District was successful at getting a grant to develop trails for nature study during the school year. According to school officials the trails are open to the public provided they sign in during school hours and parking is available..

In addition, efforts should be made to work with surrounding towns for a regional plan to enhance conservation and provide recreational opportunities around the lake and river corridor. Seeking cooperation with the state and cycling organizations for the development of safer biking routes on state highways would add to the range of recreational offerings. These opportunities could also serve pedestrians. A frequently used 2.5 mile on-road walking loop currently exists from River Street, to Leavitt Hill Road, over the covered bridge, and returning to town by way of US Route 3. The loop contains a mix of shoulder widths and varying traffic volumes and speeds that could impact safety. Opportunities for enhancements might include signage that identifies the route such as painted directional signage on the pavement, mile markers, etc. Safety conditions should be assessed and addressed as appropriate as well.

### 5.3 CONSERVATION LANDS RECREATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

Within the town there are many permanently protected conservation areas that allow varying degrees of public access and a variety of recreational opportunities from snowmobiling to bird watching. Figure 5.3 displays each of these conservation lands with additional details about the types of recreational uses permitted and land ownership. The largest conservation area is the Homestead Forest which was acquired by the Lakes Region Conservation Trust (LRCT) through a donation of long-time Ashland residents Phil Preston and wife Peg Dobbie.

The Preston property represents the largest tract of land ever donated to the LRCT and occupies more than eight percent of the land area in the town of Ashland. Combined with the adjoining Stevens Memorial and Newsom Memorial Forests, which are partially in the town of Holderness, the three tracts total more than 850 contiguous acres of conserved land that provide public recreational opportunities.

Figure 5.3: Conservation Lands in Ashland with Recreational Opportunities

Name	Primary Protection Agency	Protection Level	Protection Type	Acres	Activities	Access Location
Church Hill Wildlife Management Area	New Hampshire Fish and Game	Permanent Conservation Land	Fee Ownership	151.4	Hunting and other outdoor activities	Peppercorn Road
Glidden Forest	Squam Lakes Conservation Society	Permanent Conservation Land	Conservation Easement	108.2	Hunting encouraged, some trails exist not published for public use.	Highland Street
Homestead Forest	Lakes Region Conservation Trust	Permanent Conservation Land	Fee Ownership	604	Hiking and natural area	Lambert Road
Newsom Memorial Forest	New England Forestry Foundation	Permanent Conservation Land	Fee Ownership	56.3	Hiking, snowmobiling, hunting and trapping	Stevens Memorial Forest
Owl Brook	Squam Lakes Conservation Society	Permanent Conservation Land	Conservation Easement	5.8	No planned public use, trail exists in northern corner of lot	No formal public access point
Scribner-Fellows State Forest	NH Department of Resources and Economic Development	Permanent Conservation Land	Fee Ownership	142 (Ashland - 50, New Hampton - 92)	Hunting, snowmobile trail (under power lines), no established trails - skidder paths may provide opportunities for active recreation.	Depot Street
Stevens Memorial Forest	New England Forestry Foundation	Permanent Conservation Land	Fee Ownership	194	Hiking, snowmobiling, hunting and trapping	Leavitt Hill Road

Sources: NH Granit, LRPC, local research

Figure 5.4 provides a comparison of conserved acres in Ashland and Grafton County as a whole. While 40 percent of the land area in Grafton County is conservation land, the largest portion (82.1 percent) is National Park Lands. No federally managed conservation lands exist in Ashland. Excluding federal managed lands, Ashland has a greater percentage of conservation land (15 percent) than Grafton County (11 percent).

Because Ashland is relatively small, with the least square miles of land area (11.31) of all Grafton County communities, the amount of conservation land can have a more pronounced impact on the tax base. While conservation land does not provide tax revenues comparable to developed land, studies show conservation lands demand far less municipal services, they often have an appreciative affect on other land and property values, they support industries such as tourism, and as discussed here, provide an important contribution to the recreational opportunities in Ashland. The Trust for Public Land (TPL) provides a new service called “Conservation Economics” that assists communities in determining the economic impact of investments in parks and open space. TPL studies have shown that conservation returns from \$4 to \$10 for every dollar invested.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.tpl.org/what-we-do/services/> accessed October 28, 2011.

**Figure 5.4:** Comparison of Grafton County and Ashland Conservation Lands**Grafton County**

Conserved Acres				
Municipal/County	11,889	2.7%	Total Land Area	1,093,612
Federal	358,378	82.1%	Percent Conservation Land	40%
State	32,283	7.4%		
Other Public	1,915	0.4%		
Private	32,071	7.3%		
	<b>436,536</b>	<b>100.0%</b>		

**Grafton County - without National Park Lands**

Conserved Acres				
Municipal/County	11,889	15.2%	Total Land Area (minus Federal)	735,234
Federal	0	0.0%	Percent Conservation Land	11%
State	32,283	41.3%		
Other Public	1,915	2.5%		
Private	32,071	41.0%		
	<b>78,158</b>	<b>100.0%</b>		

**Ashland**

Conserved Acres				
Municipal/County	0	0.0%	Total Land Area	7,188
Federal	0	0.0%	Percent Conservation Land	15%
State	206	18.8%		
Other Public	0	0.0%		
Private	889	81.2%		
	<b>1,095</b>	<b>100.0%</b>		

Source: Lakes Region Planning Commission

**5.4 PRIVATE LANDS RECREATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES**

Privately owned land that is in current use may provide recreational opportunities. Current Use tax reductions are available for parcels of land ten or more acres in size that are farms, forest or unproductive land. There are some exceptions to the ten acre minimum which include wetlands and tree farms of any size and land used for agricultural or horticultural products that generate an annual gross income of at least \$2,500. While having land enrolled in Current Use does not require a land owner to open the property to public use, there is an incentive for landowners who opt to allow some low impact public uses called the Recreational Discount. This incentive reduces the Current Use assessment by 20 percent for allowing the public to use private land for six low-impact uses: skiing, snowshoeing, fishing, hunting, hiking, and nature observation. No other recreational uses must be allowed, and the landowner can post their property to expressly prohibit any other uses.<sup>2</sup>

While not permanently protected recreational opportunities, there is a disincentive to take land out of current use. The amount of the tax penalty is ten percent of the fair market value

<sup>2</sup> SPACE – New Hampshire’s Current Use Coalition – <http://www.nhspace.org/faq.shtml>

of the land being removed which is assessed at the time of the change in use. Currently the town of Ashland applies 100 percent of the land use change tax to further conservation efforts in town.

## 5.5 OTHER RECREATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

Snowmobile trails through Ashland are largely maintained by two area snowmobile clubs: Bridgewater Mountain Snowmobile Club and Squam Trail Busters. The Bridgewater Mountain Club maintains more than 50 miles of trail with many miles existing within the town of Ashland. The town also has two state snowmobile corridors (Corridor 8 and Corridor 24) which pass through town and provide connectivity to other portions of the state trail network. The state snowmobile trail system in Ashland is served by a snowmobile parking area off US Route 3, one mile north of I-93 Exit 24.

Recreational opportunities in Ashland should be actively promoted by a Chamber of Commerce or a similar entity. Currently a six-panel, color brochure entitled *Discover Ashland New Hampshire* is available at the information kiosk located south of Memorial Park on Main Street. The brochure references the host of recreational opportunities offered in Ashland including: boating, hiking, fishing, skiing, camping, picnicking, hunting, ice skating, snowmobiling, and golf. While the brochure, developed by the Ashland Revitalization Alliance identifies the list of recreation types, it does not provide information on accessibility, only a link to the town website.

The town recently formed the Ashland Healthy Eating Active Living Coalition (Ashland HEAL Coalition). Group recreational activities include a weekly 2.5 mile loop walk around the Squam River which is currently hosted by the Town Administrator.

The Recreation Map Ashland, NH at the end of this chapter illustrates recreation sites, conservation areas, and snowmobile trails in town.

## 5.6 RECOMMENDATIONS

Suggestions for the improvement of facilities and opportunities for Ashland residents:

1. Provide shade, especially in the playground area around the Booster facility. Research options to either install awning over playground, or strategically plant shade trees.
2. Improve the bandstand area or find a more viable location better suited to use for concerts, events, rentals (e.g. weddings).



3. Build storage shed at the beach and follow through with coordinating programs with NH Fish and Game Department.
4. Upgrade/replace the Booster building to better accommodate the needs of the community. The changing demographic in town is fewer younger children and a growing teen population who lack a safe “hangout” space, and a growing senior population.
5. Revitalize the Parks and Recreation Board which has not met since 2008. This board serves a different function than the recently formed Ashland Area Recreation Association.
6. Further research may be needed to better understand the permitted recreational uses for conservation lands in Ashland. This would require discussion with organizations that hold the easements for the conserved parcels. If this work is to be conducted, it is recommended that the resultant information be provided to NH Granit to add in future conservation land and recreational lands mapping efforts.
7. The town website should have a recreational opportunities page with a map or references to recreation beyond municipal programs.
8. Work with State and other organizations to develop biking and walking routes and hiking trails.
9. Explore the Trust for Public Lands Conservation Economics or similar programs to quantify the economic value of conservation and recreational lands in Ashland.
10. Encourage exploring additional land suitable for protection for recreational use.



Figure 5.5: Recreation Map Ashland, NH

