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Paddlers, painters and picnickers – Public gains access to Pickerel Pond

By RICK GREEN, THE LACONIA DAILY SUN
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Laconia Conservation Commission member Mike Foote looks out over land the city purchased along Pickerel Pond for public use. He said it will be attractive for hikers, kayakers and others. (Rick Green/The Laconia Daily Sun photo)

LACONIA — Conservation Commissioner Mike Foote looks at some overgrown land the city purchased along Pickerel Pond and sees a haven for kayakers, hikers, picnickers, photographers and painters.

On Wednesday, Foote provided a tour of 15 acres of trees and bushes that gently slope into a wetland and the soft shore of the 77-acre pond.

“The water is not always accessible in Laconia,” he said. “Some people can’t get to the lake. That’s the philosophy behind the purchase.”



Private development along many of the region’s lakes make it a challenge for the average person to enjoy all the area has to offer.

“This pond was privately owned all the way around. There was no public access at all,” Foote said.

His goal is to allow people to be able to enjoy nature near where they live.

“The real idea is that you shouldn’t have to get in your car and go to Gunstock or North Conway for a hike and the water isn’t just for the people who can afford a condo at The Weirs or have a boat,” he said.

“It would be nice to be able to ride your mountain bike without having to drive somewhere. I like to open trails.”

Foote also said the city has an interest in protecting the water that flows into the pond and then into Collins Brook and finally into Lake Winnisquam.

“This is all sensitive land that filters the water,” he said.

It’s been almost two years since the city purchased the land at 409 and 411 Pickerel Pond Road for \$238,000. The money came from the Laconia Conservation Commission, which derives funds when land is taken out of current use status.



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Three structures on the property have been torn down.

A popular snowmobile trail cuts through the land and can continue to operate now. If the land had been sold to a developer, there likely would be no public access and private landowners might be expected to object to the trail.

Japanese knotweed and buckthorn cover a portion of a path leading to the pond.

“In the end, you’d see this mowed and maintained,” Foote said. “You know, park your car. Have a sign that says Pickerel Pond Conservation Area.”

Perhaps a small boardwalk could eventually be built.

It’s a short walk, but along the path and a grassy access road are huge boulders brought to the area when the region was covered in glaciers. There are beech, white oak, pine, hemlock. Red leaf maple provides a splash of color.

“You could take your kayak on a tug behind along this little road here,” Foote said.

“It would be a carry-in, carry-out mentality. You don’t put a garbage can and an outhouse out here.

“What’s the value in it? You’re protecting the headwaters. There is a place to come, set up your easel, paint a picture, take a canoe out.

“This is what protects aquifers. This is what gives corridors for wildlife, areas where wildlife can travel unimpeded by highways.”



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