

Reading Adopt-a-Trail Handbook



**2008 Adopt-A-Trail Program
Reading, MA**



Reading Trail Adoption Handbook

1. INTRODUCTION

Among the many charms of Reading are twelve dedicated conservation areas with hiking trails. Maintaining these trails is critical to insuring everyone can enjoy them and all they have to offer. Reading's Adopt-a-Trail program is a great way for residents, community groups and others to give back to the community and continue the legacy these trails and conservation areas have to offer. In cooperation with the Reading Trails Committee, Reading Town Forest Committee and the Reading Conservation Commission, the Adopt-a-Trail program is open to people and groups of all ages and abilities.

2. OVERVIEW OF ADOPT-A-TRAIL PROGRAM and BASIC RESPONSIBILITIES

Volunteers who adopt trails are asked to walk the trails several times a year, to carry out routine maintenance activities and to report larger problems to the Trails Committee. The Trails Committee will organize periodic work projects to address larger problems and will invite adopters and other volunteers to help. Routine maintenance activities that adopters perform include:

Trail Safety – insuring the trails can be used enjoyably and safely.

Drainage Maintenance - cleaning waterbars and drainage ditches of dirt and debris.

Trail Marking – posting signs at trailheads and junctions, and maintaining trail blazes.

Vegetation Control - clearing blown down branches and limbs, clearing brush to maintain a passable trail corridor.

Treadway Definition – maintaining trail surfaces and edges to prevent development of widened trails and multiple treadways.

Litter Control – removing litter

Reporting – reporting trail condition, trail work maintenance completed, trail work needed and any illegal trail usage

Enjoying the Trails – being a trail ambassador by talking to people about proper uses, interesting scenery and wildlife, historic areas, and other benefits, including conducting organized walks if you enjoy such activities.

3. ADOPTER EXPECTATIONS

- a. Make a 1 year commitment
- b. Inspect adopted trail(s) at least 4 times a year
- c. Complete a simple Trail Status Report for each inspection and send it to the Trails Committee.

4. SAFETY WHILE WORKING

Knowing the proper use and safety techniques of tools is essential in doing trail work. Not only will knowledge of these skills increase your efficiency in trail work, but it will also reduce your chances of being injured or of injuring someone else. Use the right tool for the job, clear the work area of other people, ask for help to handle heavy branches and materials, use work gloves, boots, and protective eye and head gear.

In addition, be aware of plant hazards like poison ivy and poison oak as well as insects like ticks and mosquitoes. Simple precautions like wearing long pants and sleeves and use of insect repellent can reduce exposure risks. See the *Additional Information* section for more specific details on hazardous plants and insects in Massachusetts.

5. BASIC TRAIL MAINTENANCE

Before undertaking trail maintenance, it is very useful to take an inventory of your trail, noting the number and location of signs, trail blazes, waterbars, rock steps, unique or endangered vegetation, bridges and boardwalks, etc. At trail entrances, look for parking areas, sign boards, posted rules and maps and other features that identify the trail entrance and invite visitors. Also note any problems such as wet areas, erosion, fallen trees, lack of signs, poison ivy, improper use, etc. Your inventory will serve as a baseline for future reference and will help you monitor your progress.

Basic maintenance, besides providing convenience for hikers, makes a major contribution to protecting the trail environment. The program requests a minimum of 4 trail visits per year, as follows:

Late Winter/Early Spring – End of March or early April after snow melt

- Check for winter storm damage to trail and surrounding area
- Remove downed branches blocking trail and any litter
- Note spring flooding, standing water or seasonal wet trail areas
- Sketch or flag wet areas or potential routes for trail relocation
- Identify potential projects for trail improvements
- Record any interesting natural or human made features that are visible before spring plant growth
- Update information posted on trailheads or kiosks and clear any parking areas
- Fill out an Inspection Report and send a copy to the Trails Committee

Late Spring - Prior to Memorial Day

- Clear trail and treadway of any brushy growth and overhead branches (see diagrams below)
- Remove downed branches blocking trail, tripping hazards and any litter

- Ensure that trails are clearly marked with blazes and that new growth does not obscure any trail markings
- Clear existing drainage devices of any leaves or other blockage that may cause trail flooding
- Report noxious plants and inventory invasive or endangered vegetation
- Update information posted on trailheads or kiosks and clear any parking areas
- Fill out an Inspection Report and send a copy to the Trails Committee

Summer - *July or August*

- Perform same tasks as in late spring
- Work with Trails Committee and volunteers on any trail improvement projects that they have organized

Fall - *October or November*

- Perform same tasks as in late spring and summer
- Work with Trails Committee and volunteers on any trail improvement projects that they have organized

6. GENERAL MAINTENANCE DETAILS

Drainage

Some trails have water bars, culverts, ditches and other devices installed to let water flow off the trail surface and into the adjacent forest. If leaves, branches and other debris have accumulated in these devices, such materials should be removed by hand to restore the free flow of water. Natural materials can be scattered in the surrounding forest, while man-made debris should be carried out and put in the trash. Please do not install any new drainage devices without first consulting the Trails Committee and the Conservation Commission.

Where bridges or boardwalks cross natural stream channels, debris may get caught on the footings of the structure and block stream flow. Such materials should be also removed. However, most stream channels have natural deposits of leaves and vegetation that provide food and shelter for aquatic life, and soil stabilization for the stream bed. Be careful only to remove excess materials that are blocking flow, and not to take the entire natural habitat.

Do not alter beaver dams – it is against the law. Please report new beaver dams or other activities to the Trails Committee and the Conservation Commission.

Blazing

A properly blazed trail helps make hiking a safe and pleasurable experience. In addition, by helping keep hikers on the trail, blazing reduces impact on the environment. Adopters should inspect the state of the blazing on their trails. Walk through your trail blazing in one direction and then at the end turn around and blaze in the other direction. Trim brush that may obscure the blaze. Blazes that are of the wrong color or which have faded should be replaced.

The main trail through a conservation area should be blazed white, and side trails should be blazed other visible colors (orange, yellow, bright blue). Blazes should be painted on trees approximately six feet high. Each blaze should be about 6 inches high and 2 inches wide. Blazes should be close enough together so that hikers can follow them, but not so close that they detract from the natural appearance of the trail. Mark trail junctions with double blazes, one on top of the other, on the last tree before the junction. This is the standard sign for hikers to proceed cautiously and to be aware of where the trail goes. When the trail crosses an open area such as a roadway or meadow, be sure a blaze is clearly visible on the opposite side of the opening. Otherwise, hikers may not cross in the right place and will lose the trail.

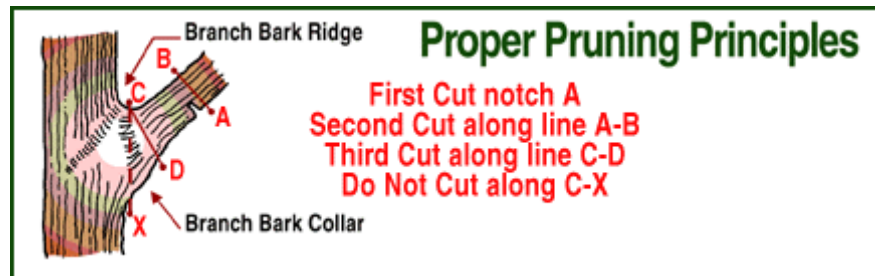
Vegetation Control

Another important task of adopters is clearing brush intruding along the sides of trail. Without regular brush clearing, even a heavily used trail can become overgrown in a few years. A properly cleared trail is one upon which a large hiker can walk without touching trees, limbs or brush, the line of sight is unobstructed, and the footing is clear. The correct height and width (trail corridor) for a cleared trail depends on the terrain and vegetation. A four foot width is sufficient for most wooded trails. The trail should be cleared to a height of eight feet or as high as one can reach. The most commonly used tools in trail brush clearing are hand clippers, pruning shears or loppers, and bow saws.

In order to make a proper pruning cut, you, you must first locate the branch collar (see diagram below). The branch collar is an extension of the main stem of the tree where the branch joins the main trunk. Cutting into the branch collar allows decay to expand into the main trunk of the tree and thus should be avoided.

- Always make pruning cuts on the outside of the branch collar
- Do not leave long branch stubs that could snag clothing or backpacks.
- Use sharp hand tools designed for pruning and wear safety equipment
- Do not paint wounds with pruning paint. It does not prevent decay and may interfere with wound closure

- Never climb a tree to prune limbs or attempt to prune limbs near overhead power lines
- Never remove more than 1/3 of the live crown in a single pruning.



******Very Important*** Please do not cut any branches more than 3" in diameter. Report these branches to the Trails Committee.***

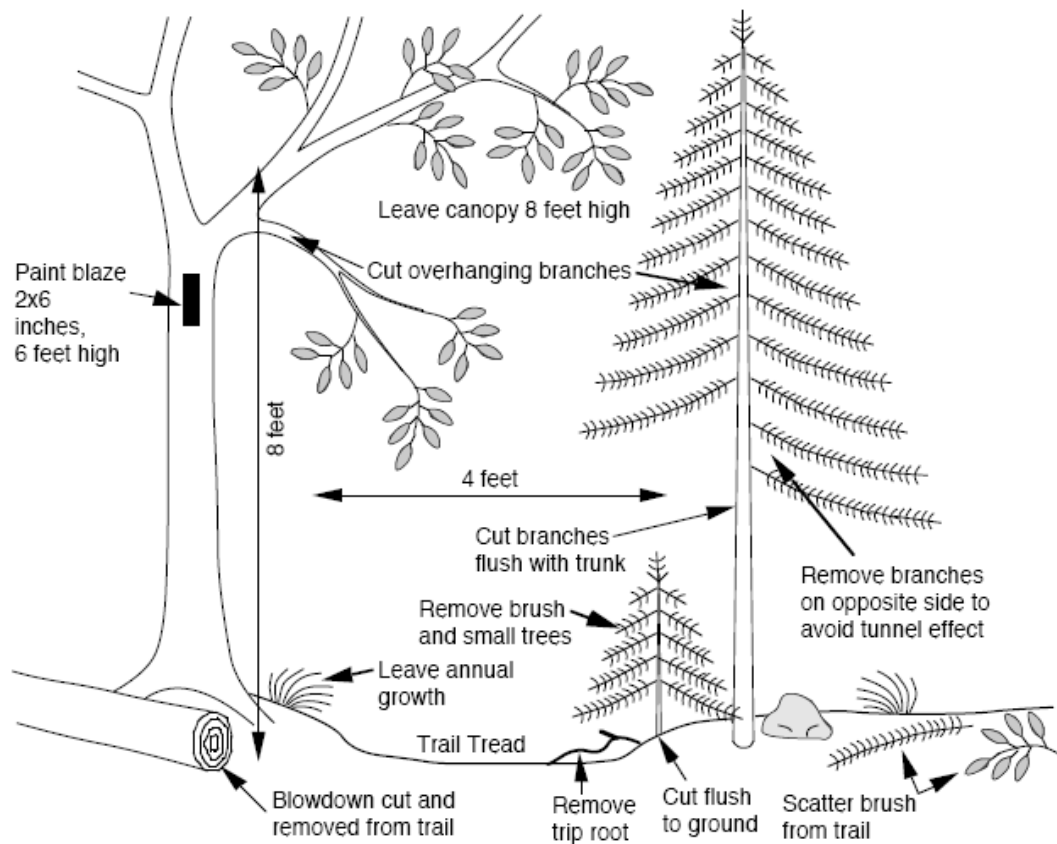
Special attention should be paid to the lateral branches of softwoods alongside the trail. When wet or covered with snow, these extend down into the trail, reducing both its width and height. Adopters, if possible, should walk their trails in rain or just after a rain storm to gain a good appreciation of how much brush clearing is needed. Branches growing toward the trail should be cut back to the limb growing away from the trail. Please do not remove all branches above a trail, because the shade from a canopy left over the trail at a height of eight feet or more will suppress underlying growth.

Low shrubs and young trees which tend to come in at the sides of the trail should be cut flush with the ground for aesthetic and safety reasons. Avoid leaving pointed stumps which are dangerous if stepped or fallen upon. Avoid widening the trail if it exposes fragile plants and mosses to trampling. Remove all dead trip roots from the trail. Do not cut trees and undergrowth heavily on the inside of a corner as it will encourage hikers to shortcut the corner. Also, do not cut edges heavily in boggy areas or hikers will widen the trail.

After brush cutting, it is very important to remove all branches and debris from the trail. Brush left in the trail can obscure roots, rocks, and holes in the trail. It can also result in hikers slipping on steep sections. In rain, brush will move down the trail clogging waterbars and drainages. Pick up all branches, trees, and debris and scatter them off the trail. Piles should be avoided because they are unsightly and can create a fire hazard. Downed trees should be dragged butt first until the top is completely off the trail. This helps conceal the tree. Large limbs and small trees can be thrown clear of the trail, provided they do not hang in the branches of shrubs and trees next to the trail or stick up butt first. Be sure not to throw brush into drainage ditches or their outflows. This will clog ditches and seriously affect proper drainage.

Treadway Definition

In order to maintain the pleasurable hiking experience, ensuring the trail treadway does not increase in size or have multiple paths, the adopter must watch for widening trails and trail off-shoots. Common causes of trail rerouting are muddy trails or an impassible object on the trail. Proper maintenance of the trail will greatly aid in trail definition. If off-shoot trails develop, use branches, logs or stones to clearly indicate a closed trail. For areas that have an immoveable object (large tree down) or consistently wet area, work with the Trails Committee for potential trail rerouting. Report any sections of trails that are getting too wide due to usage or erosion.



Litter Control

Remove any debris that would not be naturally found around the trail. Always exercise caution when picking up glass or metal, due to sharp edges. Carry out all litter and make sure to dispose of it legally. If any items are too large for you to handle alone, or if you are unsure how to dispose of an item, please contact the Trails Committee for help.

7. REPORTING

Please use the standard Trail Status Report Form in the appendix each time you perform routine inspections and trail work. A copy should be submitted to the Trails Committee so that they can plan and coordinate special projects that are identified by Adopters:

Town of Reading
Attn: Trails Committee
16 Lowell Street
Reading, MA 01867

You can also submit the information using the on-line reporting form on the Town website - ReadingTrails@ci.reading.ma.us. Please report any imminently hazardous conditions (leaning or snagged trees that might fall on hikers, broken structures, etc.) to the Reading Department of Public Works at 781-942-9092 and the Conservation Commission at 781-942-6616. Be sure to clearly document the condition and location.

Please report any vandalism or illegal activities directly to the Reading Police Department at 781-944-1212. Never, under any circumstances, try to intervene if witnessing any vandalism or illegal activities. When reporting to the police, try to make note of as much detail as possible including descriptions, clothing, location, closest trail entrance, etc. This can assist the Police in finding and in identifying perpetrators.

8. TRAIL IMPROVEMENTS

If you see a need for relocating or cutting a new trail, building a new bridge, installing a new drainage control device, or making other new improvements, please e-mail the Trails Committee ReadingTrails@ci.reading.ma.us. Recommendations will be reviewed and you will be contacted by a committee member. Please do not carry out such work until the Trails Committee has produced a final design. The Committee will also recruit volunteer labor and help with funding for materials as needed.

9. TRAIL AMBASSADOR

Part of maintaining trails is being an ambassador to others who are using them. Feel free to approach hikers in a friendly manner and offer information about trail routes, rules for use, etc. It is a great opportunity to point out interesting features like unique plants or animals, interesting views, or historical features on your trail. Letting other people know about the trail and what it has to offer is a good community service. In addition, letting hikers in your area know how to avoid damage to endangered plants and animals by staying on trails and preserving soils and vegetation will help to protect them.

Enjoy your trail and have fun while maintaining it!!!

We greatly appreciate your efforts to make Reading a Walkable Town!

Appendix - Additional Helpful Information

Please read and be familiar with the *Rules and Regulations for Use of Conservation Lands*

http://www.ci.reading.ma.us/Pages/ReadingMA_Conservation/lands/rules

Reading, MA Trails

http://www.ci.reading.ma.us/Pages/ReadingMA_Conservation/conservationindex

Poisonous Ivy and other Plants

http://www.fda.gov/fdac/features/796_ivy.html

http://www.umassgreeninfo.org/fact_sheets/plant_culture/poison_ivy.pdf

Lyme Disease

<http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvbid/lyme/>

Any Questions, Comments or other request can be e-mailed to the following:

ReadingTrails@ci.reading.ma.us

**Rules and Regulations for Use of
Town of Reading Conservation Lands
Effective Date: August 16, 2008**

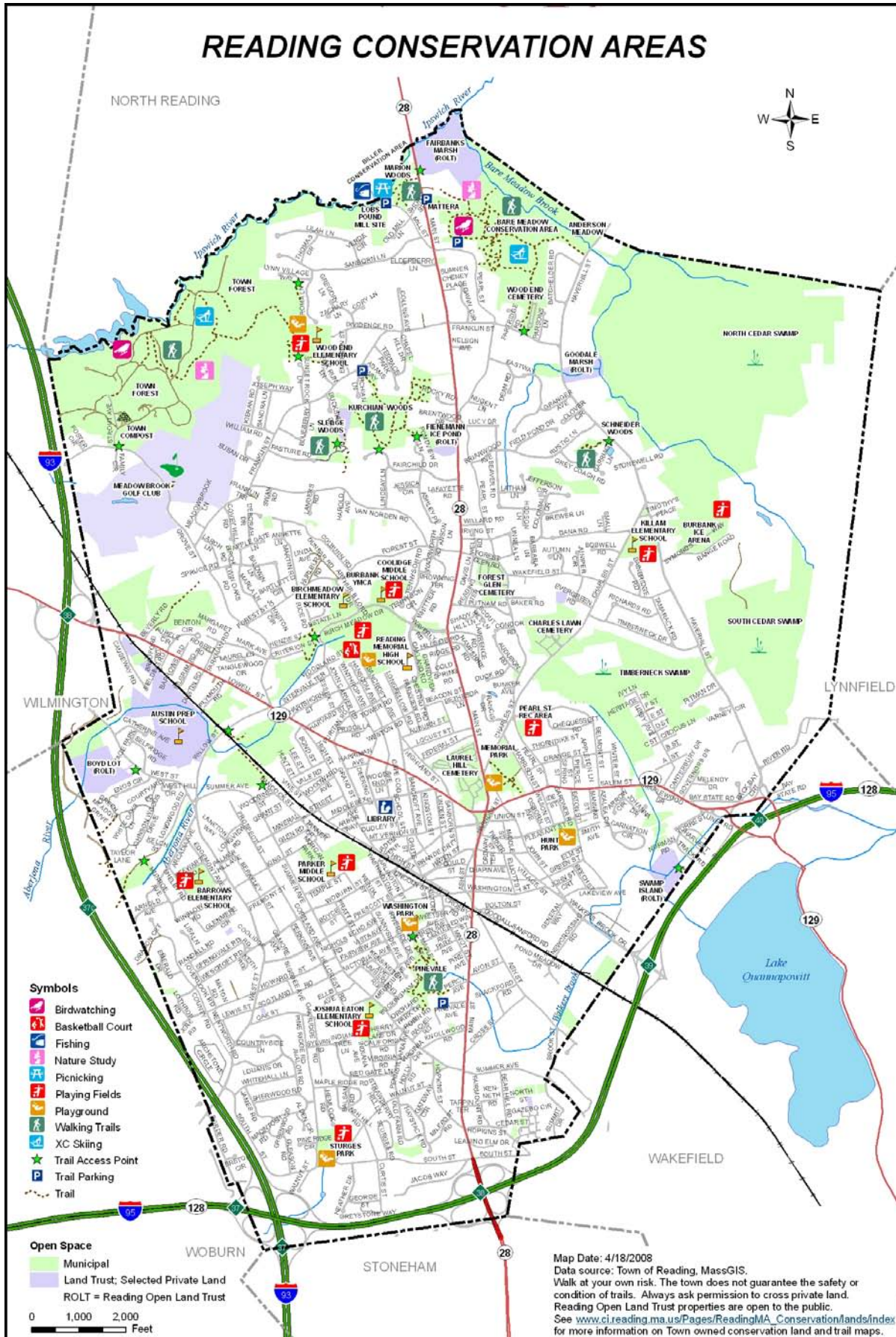
1. Everyone is welcome to enjoy the Reading Conservation Lands at no charge from dawn to dusk.
2. Hours of use may be extended for a specific event or use if written permission has been obtained from the Conservation Commission for the specific extended time. Applications for the extended time must be made at least 21 days in advance of the event or use. The written permission shall be carried by the person in charge of the event at all times during the event.
3. Organized commercial or group activities on Conservation Land require prior written permission by the Conservation Commission. Applications for the activity must be made at least 21 days in advance of the activity. The written permission shall be carried by the person in charge of the activity at all times during the activity.
4. No work of any type shall be carried out on Conservation Land without prior written permission from the Conservation Commission. "Work" includes but is not limited to trail clearing, trail maintenance, excavation, filling, building structures, and posting signs.
5. Smoking is prohibited. Fires and camp stoves are prohibited.
6. No person shall cut, break, remove, deface, defile, or ill-use any structure, fence, or sign, or have possession of any part thereof. No plants (including trees, bushes, grasses, or flowers) shall be defaced or cut. This prohibition applies to dead as well as living vegetation.
7. Discharge of firearms is prohibited in the Town of Reading, including Conservation Land. Discharge or carrying of BB guns, pellet guns, paintball guns, airsoft guns, and similar non-lethal weapons is prohibited in Conservation Land.
8. Hunting of deer with bow and arrow by persons licensed by the Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife is allowed only during deer hunting season (except Sundays) and only in the following Reading Conservation Lands: North and South Cedar Swamp and the northern parts of Bare Meadow Conservation Land as shown on the attached map. Hunting as allowed above must also comply with the following:
 - A. Hunting shall be conducted in compliance with Massachusetts law.
 - B. No hunting is allowed within 500 feet of any structure or within 150 feet of any road (per Massachusetts law).
 - C. Only deer hunting is allowed.
 - D. Hunting is allowed during deer hunting seasons only.
 - E. No hunting is allowed on Sundays (per Massachusetts law).
 - F. Portable tree stands may be used under the following conditions:
 - No tree stand may be attached to any Atlantic White Cedar tree;
 - Trees stands and steps shall be installed in a manner to avoid or minimize damage to tree bark and limbs;
 - Tree stands shall be secured to trees with no more than one locking tee-nut;
 - Tree stands and steps shall be removed at the end of deer hunting season; and

- The Conservation Commission and the Town of Reading are not responsible for use of tree stands or steps, or for their loss or damage, or for any injuries resulting from their use.
9. Conservation Land is closed to any type of motor-powered vehicle except in prepared driveways and parking areas, or vehicles necessary for emergency response by the Reading Police and Fire Departments, or with prior written permission of the Conservation Commission.
 10. Use of bicycles is prohibited on Conservation Land, except in prepared driveways and parking areas, or bicycles necessary for emergency response by the Reading Police and Fire Departments, or with prior written permission of the Conservation Commission.
 11. Alcoholic beverages are prohibited on Town property, including Conservation Land. Glass containers for any purpose are prohibited on Conservation Land.
 12. Dumping, littering, filling or any other deposition of imported materials, including but not limited to garbage, debris, earth, leaves or brush is prohibited in Conservation Land. (Please use the town compost area for yard wastes. Call the Public Works Department for information.) Users must carry out everything that they carry in.
 13. Dogs may enter Town Conservation Land provided that they are accompanied by and under the effective control of some person. The person accompanying the dog shall promptly remove feces deposited by the dog on Town Conservation Land.
 14. Violations of these rules and regulations may be punished by fines up to \$100 per violation under Massachusetts General Laws, Chapter 40, Section 8C, which is administered by the Reading Conservation Commission or its agents, including the Reading Police and Fire Departments.

Rules of the Town Forest :

1. The use of any weapon for any purpose in the Town Forest is prohibited.
2. No Fires without permission.
3. No dumping of rubbish or litter.
4. Motor vehicles excluded from roads.
5. No person shall cut down, dig up or destroy any tree, shrub, bush or plant, remove vegetation, soil, or stones from the Town Forest , except with the written permission of the Town Forest Committee.
6. No camping by groups or individuals without written permission of the Town Forest Committee.
7. The Town Forest Committee cannot assume the Town liability for injuries, damage to property, or other loss to persons on such areas, whom assume all risks involved.

READING CONSERVATION AREAS



Reading Adopt-a-Trail Work Report

1. Adopter Name:

2. Adopter's best mean(s) of contact:

3. Property and Trail Name:

4. Date Worked: 5. Hours worked:

5. Work Performed:

6. Description of any water problems such as flooding or erosion on trail (please include location, distance and depth of flooded areas):

7. Any suggestions for relocating trail around water problems:

8. Location and description of any problem tree or other obstacle that you couldn't handle such as a large fallen tree across the trail.

Reading Adopt-a-Trail Work Report

9. Any natural or human-made features including plants that other hikers should be alerted to look for.

10. Condition of trail markings and need for blazes or trail signs.

11. Condition of any trail structures such as boardwalks, bridges or trailhead kiosk, including the need for maps, rules and regulations, or other documents on the kiosk.

12. Any signs of vandalism, dumping, fires, litter, ATV use, paintball activity or alcohol containers.

13. Any known or suspected invasive plants such as Poison Ivy or Poison Oak, Buckthorn, or climbing vines. (Do not try to eradicate until the Trails Committee has identified the plants and the best means of control.)
