



Memorandum: Open Space Planning in Casco

To: Casco Select Board

From: Matt Markot, Loon Echo Land Trust

**Background:**

Loon Echo Land Trust (LELT), in collaboration with the Casco Bay Estuary Partnership (CBEP is part of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's National Estuary Program) is working with communities across the Lake Region to support land use planning activities that have the potential to benefit water quality, open space conservation, public access to the outdoors, and climate resilience. To support this effort, LELT has been awarded funding from CBEP to support consultant-facilitated Open Space Planning efforts in two Lake Region Communities. LELT, and the Casco Open Space Commission, are seeking support from the Selectboard to move forward with the development of an Open Space Plan for Casco.

**Details:**

\$50,000 is available to the Town of Casco to acquire consultant assistance for the development of an Open Space Plan. No additional match funding is needed/required from the Town. Open Space Plans typically follow the direction of a Comprehensive Plan but take a deeper dive into the natural resource concerns and issues that matter to residents. For instance, an Open Space Plan in Casco might focus on strategies for protecting water quality, securing public access to important community spaces, and connecting motorized and non-motorized trails systems. Open Space Plans can be different from community to community, and are intended to reflect a vision for open space use across the community, and recommends strategies for implementation. Like Comprehensive Planning efforts, Open Space Plans also include robust opportunities for community engagement and feedback. Recent examples of Open Space Plans that have been adopted by Selectboards in the Sebago Lake Region include Windham and Bridgton. A practical consideration for Open Space Plans is that future funding and grant requests for projects or programs aligned with an adopted plan will be more competitive.

**Potential Next Steps:**

LELT has discussed this opportunity with the Casco Open Space Commission and the Town Manager. There is great enthusiasm from the Open Space Commission to help lead and support this planning effort. Proposed next steps:

- Town Manager to develop an RFP for consultant services
- LELT is willing and able to be the fiscal sponsor, meaning that invoices for consultant services can be paid directly by LELT, saving time and resources for the Town.
- Town Manager and Open Space Commission will recommend whom to award the contract and final contract awarded by the Selectboard
- Expected timeline for development and delivery of draft Open Space Plan to the Selectboard is March/April - December 2025/January 2026.