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Open Space Committee Playbook

In January of 2024 the Town of Casco passed a new Comprehensive Plan. The Plan provides a “guiding vision for future town process” and creates a plan to preserve and protect the woods, waters and open spaces of Casco and safeguard them from overuse.

Using the Comprehensive Plan’s Implementation Matrix, which assigns various town committees a task driven priority list for realizing the vision outlined in the plan, the Open Space Commission held a number of workshops to create a Playbook to begin this work.

The majority of the Open Space Playbook outlines priorities, partners and actions based on the priority ranking within the Comprehensive Plan* The Open Space Playbook does not include all of the tasks assigned in the comprehensive plan but includes most of those that are considered by the plan to be “High Priority in the Short Term”.

In addition to the work outlined in the Comprehensive Plan, our work is guided by our foundational commitment to protect vulnerable open spaces, provide public enjoyment and recreation, and promote community

well-being.

*Comprehensive Plan Matrix (CPM) page number and item number are footnoted within the action plan.

PRIORITY # 1:

Explore ways to expand monitoring of Casco's surface water quality and aquifers maintain healthy lakes. (Comprehensive Plan Implementation Matrix (CPIM) Pg 169/ 02)

1. Support and advocate for the Casco Water Quality Committee:

Casco Recreation Department
Comprehensive Plan Implementation Committee
Lakes Environmental Association (LEA)
Crescent Lake Water Association
Pleasant Lake/Parker Pond Association
Raymond Woods and Water
Portland Water District
Loon Echo Land Trust
Lake Smart
Lake Stewards of Maine
Thompson Lake Environmental Association
Thomas Pond Improvement Association
Casco Bay Estuary Partnership
Cumberland County Soil and Water Conservation District
Maine Warden Service

2. Funding:

- a. Local, state and federal grants (project specific)
- b. Town of Casco - planning services

3. Action plan: Support and work with the Water Quality Committee to:
- a. Create a map of Casco's lakes, ponds, streams, aquifers, wetlands and water systems and develop a database of water quality
 - b. Identify holes in current monitoring/quality (Comprehensive Plan Implementation Matrix (CPIM) Pg 169/ 02)
 - c. Monitor and document invasive species and work to help coordinate remediation (CPIM Pg #169 / 04)
 - d. Work with water quality partners, listed above, to educate residents and businesses on practices to and importance of groundwater and surface water protections (CPIM pg 166 / 07 & 08)
 - e. Encourage the comprehensive development of courtesy boat inspectors on Casco lakes/ponds

PRIORITY # 2

Map, expand and protect Casco's open spaces and recreational trail network

Map / trail potential partners:

Casco Recreation Department
Lake Region Snowmobile Club
Lakes Region ATV Club
Mountain Biking Club
Hancock Lumber Company
Casco Timber Company
Private landowners
Sebago Lake State Park
Casco Running Club
Casco Safe Streets Committee
Bicycle Coalition of Maine
Loon Echo Land Trust
Raymond, Otisfield, Naples, Poland, Oxford, Harrison (regional partners)

Specific open space parcels to be protected:

Rattlesnake Wilderness
Owl Pond Wilderness
Seventy Acre Wood
State Park Wood 50 acre parcel
Berry Park Property

Funding:

- a. Local, state and federal grants (project specific)
- b. Town of Casco -
 - i. Professional services: map development and grant writing
 - ii. Trailhead signage and designated, managed parking

Action Plan:

Short Term:

- a. Meet with Hancock Land, Lakes Region Snowmobile Club and other regional partners to develop working relationships with private landowners to expand and protect the trail system. (CPIM pg 145/05 ; CPIM pg 144/04 , 07 & 08)
- b. Work with trail partners to inventory existing trails/open spaces, including utilizing existing maps, and continue work on creating a comprehensive on-line and printed map to include: motorized(ATV/snowmobile), non-motorized (hiking, walking, dog-walking, biking and cross-country skiing. (CPIM pg 144 /03)

Longer Term:

- a. Seek public funding through the recently passed 30 million dollar Maine Trails Bond.
- b. Use funding to expand and support trail systems in Casco including trail development to connect Casco's village areas, open spaces, with intention to connect regionally with other neighboring areas. (Pg 144 / 05)
- c. Explore creating conservation easements to protect town's open spaces and parks.
 - 1.Enhance wildlife corridor (CPIM pg pg 146 /06)
- d. Support Loon Echo Land Trust's work to protect Owl Pond Wilderness (Pg 144 / 05)
- e. Install signage along trails and water access points to aid in navigation and property use. (CPIM Pg 145 / 02)
- f. Expand community engagement by working with the Recreation Department to host events to explore Casco's trails and open spaces. Including: Owl Pond Wilderness, Jugtown Community Forest, Seventy Acre Wood, State Park Road 50 acre parcel.
- g. Create logo for Open Space Committee
- h. Work with trail partners to support maintenance of existing trails.

PRIORITY # 3

Expand and Protect Public Water Access.

Water Access Potential Partners: Casco Selectboard
Casco Recreation Department

Loon Echo Land Trust
Private LandOwners - Boat Ramps / Trails
State of Maine
Natural Resource Council of Maine

Funding: Town of Casco
Local, State and Federal Grants (project specific)

Action Plan:

Short Term:

- a. Berry Property: work with the Recreation Department and Selectboard to formalize water access to Parker Pond for spring of 2025. Including parking & signage.
(CPM pg 175 / 02)

Longer Term:

- a. Inventory existing water access points and identify needs for additional sites.
- b. Secure agreements with private landowners to protect water access.

PRIORITY # 4

Assure Casco's capacity to implement our plan

Partners: Selectboard

Funding: Town of Casco

Action Plan:

- a. Request an annual contribution by the town of Casco for an "Open Space Fund" to be used to purchase and protect vital natural resources and open space in Casco Including conservation, trail/park maintenance and public access easements. (CPIM pg 146 / 03)
- b. Work with town manager and select board to establish ongoing mechanism for acquisition of critical properties or easements
- c. Create momentum in the community that recognizes protection of open space requires investment (planning, mapping, maintenance, improvements and acquisition)