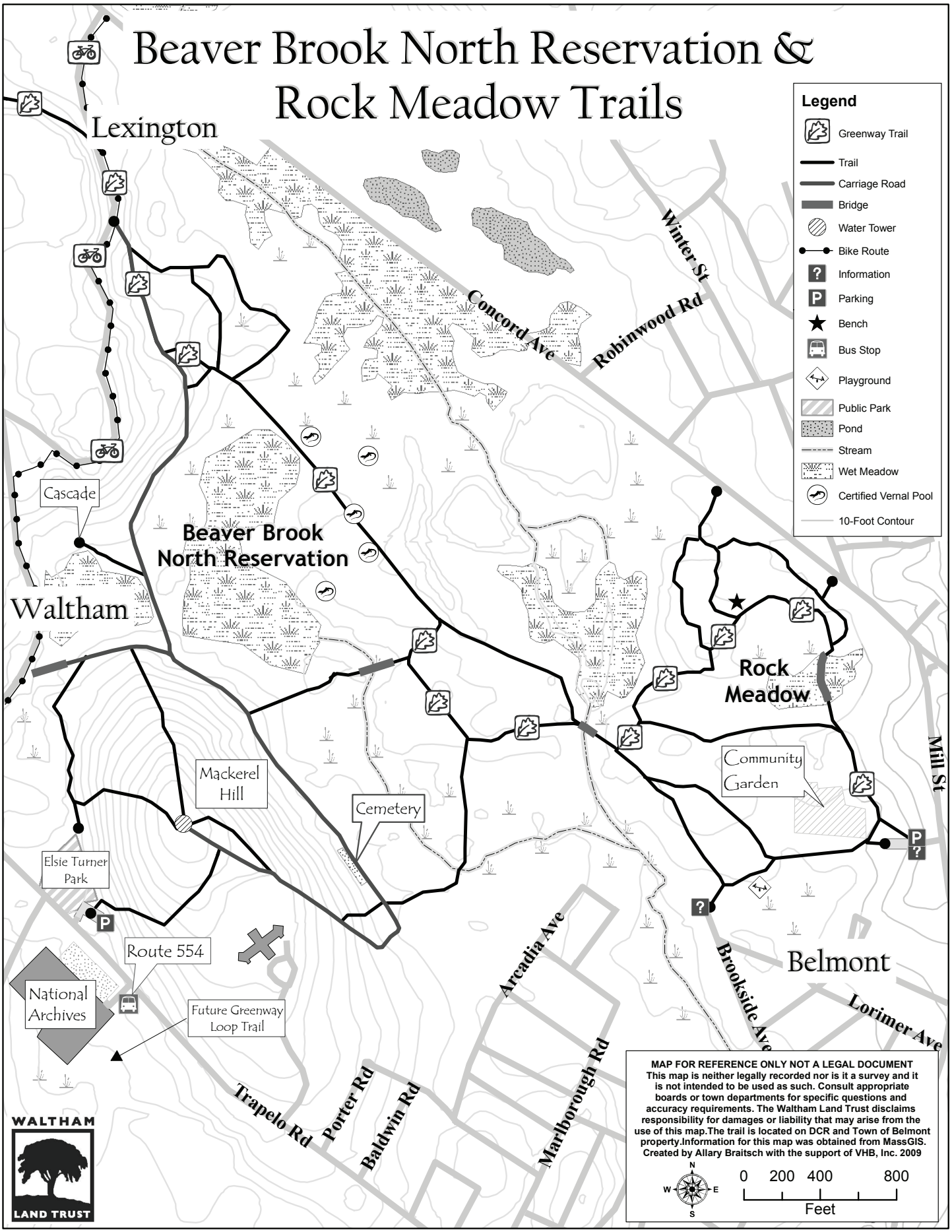
Beaver Brook North Reservation & Rock Meadow Trails



WALTHAM LAND TRUST

Waltham Land Trust Guide to Open Spaces

Beaver Brook North Reservation

Park Overview

Located between Trapelo Road in Waltham and Concord Avenue in Lexington and Belmont, **Beaver Brook North Reservation** covers 254 acres and crosses the borders of Waltham, Lexington and Belmont.

The reservation features a variety of plant habitats, including meadows, new-growth forest, mature oak-hickory forest, red maple swamps and cattail marches. Among the wildlife are great horned owls, red-tailed hawks, mink, red foxes, and many migratory birds. From the top of Mackerel Hill, views of Boston and the Blue Hills can be seen.

The Reservation's numerous carriage roads and by-paths are conducive to passive recreation activities, such as hiking, bird-watching, and cross-country skiing.

History

Massachusetts Bay Colony Governor John Winthrop commissioned an exploration of Beaver Brook in the winter of 1631–32. Many of the Reservation's place names originated between 1632 and 1650: Rock Meadow, West Meadow, and Mackerel Hill. Though heavily wooded in the 17th century, by the mid-19th century most trees in the area had been cut down for tillage and pasture lands. Some of the last, in the Mackerel Hill pine forest, were chopped down in 1892.

Between 1915 and 1930, the Commonwealth purchased this farmland and opened the Metro¬politan State Hospital, which at its peak served almost 2,000 patients. The hospital built up the carriage roads, drained the marshes, established orchards, and ran a dairy until the 1960's. When farming ended, the natural areas gradually rebounded — today we find mature second-growth oak-hickory forest, red-maple forested swamps, cattails marshes, and upland meadows.

In 1992 Metropolitan State Hospital closed — 254 acres were turned over to the Department of Conservation and Recreation, creating Beaver Brook North Reservation. The remaining land is being developed for affordable and market rate housing units.

Site Facts

Owner: Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation

Acreage: 254-acres and 54 acres under conservation easement. Located mostly in Waltham, but crosses borders into Belmont and Lexington.

Terrain: Large wooded site with significant wetlands, groomed trails, cinder paths, and dirt roads.

Trail rating and elevation gain: Easy–Flat groomed trails. Insignificant elevation gain (about 50 ft) except for Mackerel Hill.

Highlights: Largest contiguous woods in Waltham. Geological features purported to be glacial eskers. Good views from Mackerel Hill. Cultural remnants of former Metropolitan State Hospital, and patient cemetery.

Hazards: Unprotected access to waterways. Poison ivy in a few areas. Eroded paths on slopes.

Special rules: Dogs must be on leashes. Off limits to all motorized vehicles including ATVs.

Access & Parking: Entrances and trails are not marked. Parking is adequate at Elsie Turner Field, 421 Trapelo Rd., Waltham; and Rock Meadow, Mill St., Belmont.

Handicapped accessibility: No paved roads.

Public transportation:

- Bus #73 (Harvard Station – Waverley Square) — get off at last stop in Waverley Square.
- Bus #554 (Downtown Boston via Newton Corner and Waverley Square) — get off at Waverley Oaks Rd opposite Brookfield Rd.
- Commuter Rail — Fitchburg/South Acton line (Waverley Station stop).

Contact: MA DCR, (617) 484-6357; mass.parks@state.ma.us

Thanks to **Norcross Wildlife Foundation** for support of the **Waltham Land Trust** Guide to Open Spaces series of informational trail maps.

The **Waltham Land Trust** invites you to join in helping preserve, protect and maintain Waltham's open spaces.

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