

RFP: Master Site Planning Services for 1,000-acre Hidden Valley Nature Center



Midcoast Conservancy is soliciting proposals to provide Master Site Planning for its Hidden Valley Nature Center. The preserve is a centerpiece of the Conservancy's work in Midcoast Maine and draws 1,000's of visitors annually to explore 20+ miles of trails. The Nature Center is home to the Conservancy's Outdoor Adventure, Conservation Education, and Demonstration Forestry programs. Key natural and built amenities of the property include the following:

Natural Amenities

The Hidden Valley property encompasses over 850 acres of forest (85% of land cover), 368 acres of wetland (243 of which are forested), a mile of frontage on 119 acre Little Dyer Pond, two small ponds, one mile of frontage on Stearns Brook, and over 30 vernal pools.

Upland Habitats: Essentially all of the uplands at Hidden Valley are forested and support a variety of forest types. A ridge of granite runs north to south through the property and provides much of the topographic relief ranging from about 165 ft around the pond up to 350 ft. Shallow soils associated with the ridge support more stunted stands of red oak and white pine forest along the ridge top. The property includes areas of forest land that, prior to current ownership, experienced either no harvesting, high-grade harvest, or commercial clear cutting.

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Forest cover includes: white-pine mixed conifer, red oak-white pine, hemlock stands, northern hardwoods, and early successional forest with red maple (*Acer rubrum*), balsam fir (*Abies balsamea*), and bigtooth (*Populus grandidentata*) and quaking aspen (*Populus tremuloides*). A small but rare community dominated by red and white oaks occurs on a south facing slope in the south central portion of the property. The forest is divided into 12 forest stands for management, the largest of which is 436 acres of mixed wood pole timber on Lyman rock outcrop – Tunbridge complex soils. This stand was periodically harvested in the past. Dominant tree species are: red oak (*Quercus rubra*), Eastern white pine (*Pinus strobus*), red maple, white birch (*Betula papyrifera*), white oak (*Quercus alba*), American beech (*Fagus grandifolia*), and Eastern hemlock (*Tsuga canadensis*). Secondary tree species are red spruce (*Picea rubens*), sugar maple (*Acer saccharum*), yellow birch (*Betula alleghaniensis*), Eastern larch (*Larix laricina*), red pine (*Pinus resinosa*), black cherry (*Prunus serotina*), white (*Fraxinus americana*) and black ash (*Fraxinus nigra*). The second largest forest stand includes 135 acres of mixed wood pole and saw timber, in which six crop tree release areas are outlined. Eastern white pine and red oak are the dominant species, followed by red maple, red pine, white oak, and American beech

Wetlands: The property includes a complex of 243 acres of forested wetlands (Red maple swamp and spruce larch wooded bog), 66 acres of scrub/shrub wetland (a mix of bog and fen types), and 55 acres of open water wetlands (bordering Haybale pond, Little Dyer Pond, and Kidney Pond). The spruce larch wooded bog occurs around the edge of a kettlehole bog in the large wetland complex south of Little Dyer Pond. The kettlehole bog is easily accessible by a floating boardwalk that provides great opportunities for education. The property contains 33 vernal pools, 6 of which have been identified, mapped, and surveyed for amphibians.

Built Amenities

There is no power on the road at the entrance to the preserve and the nearest utility pole is located more than a mile away on Egypt Road. Water is available from a single hand pump located between the barn and the Hi Hut (see below).

Parking: Visitors to the property can arrive and park at the only public access point on Egypt Road in Jefferson. Egypt road intersects with Route 194 to the south of the property and route 25 to the east. The parking area is roughly graded and can accommodate about 25 cars if parked carefully. Parking spaces are not delineated.



Trails: The property has more than 20 miles of trail all originating from a rough service road. This access road is located adjacent to the parking area. A Gatehouse (small timber-frame structure) is located about 200 yards in from parking area. Visitors to the Center, walk down the service road to the Gatehouse at which point they can view and obtain trail maps and information about the Center and Midcoast Conservancy. Staff and/or volunteers are sometimes stationed at the Gatehouse during events, programs or other high use times at the preserve.



From the Gatehouse, visitors are encouraged to hop on Warbler Way Trail which leads to The Barn and Hi Hut which serve as the 'Core Area' and/or starting point for all programs and activities at the Nature Center. These facilities are located about 1/3mile from the parking area by way of the service road and trail and are located in an opening in the woods that has been cleared adjacent to Haybale Pond.

Buildings: We have 5 remote huts available to reserve including 2 yurts and 3 cabins along with 2 campsites. All require hiking into. In addition we have "The Barn" which is a large (2,100 sq ft) open air shelter that is used as an outdoor classroom for programming including multi-day timberframe classes offered several times a year. One end of the structure is insulated and enclosed (about 500 sq ft) and has a wood stove, it can be used as an indoor classroom and warming hut year round. The area above this classroom is accessible via a stair case and is generally used for storage.



Hi Hut, is mostly used by staff and is also located in this central clearing is a small, 12 x 20 structure with a wood stove, windows and loft. It is available for overflow for overnight stays when the other huts are unavailable.

In addition to serving as the gathering point for most programs at the Nature Center, this Core Area also serves as a staging area for demonstration forestry activities and equipment storage associated with Outdoor Adventure Programs. Forestry equipment is often stored at or near the core area. Lumber products are stored in this vicinity (e.g. planks, timber frame posts). Trailers with recreation gear are sometimes parked here and our two snowmobiles and groomers that are used for grooming cross-country ski trails in winter.

Overview of Deliverables

The final outcome of the process should be a visual landscape plan for the future that anticipates future use of the area, meets the needs of various user groups, and anticipate amenities needed to carry out programs users, developing a plan for the parking and core areas and travel between the two including the service road and trail connections.

With respect to the core area, we desire to create some separation between public program functions and demonstration forestry and equipment storage requirements. We expect that the Master Planning services will take into consideration permitting requirements. Engineering services may be requested with respect to the parking and service road design.

The design process should include consideration for input from stakeholders including our Hidden Valley Council, a voluntary advisory committee of Midcoast Conservancy, as well as others (e.g. the Town of Jefferson, educators, etc.).

Our goal is to have a Master Plan for the property completed by December 2019 and that can be implemented in phases as funding permits.

