What is a Wildlife Sanctuary?

Pileated Woodpecker

Lost Pond Sanctuary is one of Brookline's three wildlife sanctuaries. It is owned by the Town and managed by the Brookline Conservation Commission. Brookline sanctuaries have been set aside to maintain habitats for wildlife and to protect the Town's groundwater resources. People also need our wildlife sanctuaries, whether for studying nature or for quiet moments in a natural setting.

Sanctuaries are different from parks. They protect ecosystems—tangled networks of living things which depend on each other—that cannot survive the mowing, raking and planting that are needed in parks. Nor can they tolerate the disruptions caused by intensive recreational use.

Brookline sanctuaries contain wetlands, including ponds, streams, and vernal pools. These resources are valuable for holding floodwater and replenishing ground water. Since 1972, wetlands have been protected under the Massachusetts Wetland Protection Act.

Moccasin Flower

Button Bush

The Friends of Lost Pond

Friends of Lost Pond was formed in 1981 to cooperate with the Conservation Commission in its efforts to protect the Lost Pond natural area. It was instrumental in helping to secure Sanctuary status for the land by assisting in the Conservation Commission's efforts to acquire responsibility for the Lost Pond natural area. The friends group acts with the Conservation Commission to safeguard the Sanctuary's ecological health.

If you are interested in helping the Friends of Lost Pond maintain and improve the Sanctuary, please contact the Brookline Conservation Commission at (617) 730-2088.

Brochure design: Marian Lazar
Wildlife Drawings: ©1999 Zackery Zalinak

Please respect the Sanctuary by:

Visiting quietly
Keeping pets out
Parking bicycles outside the Sanctuary
Staying on marked paths
Not feeding the wildlife
Picnicking elsewhere
Leaving plants and animals undisturbed
Enjoy your visit!

Water Strider

Lost Pond Sanctuary

Brookline, Massachusetts

Natural History

The Lost Pond Conservation Area is located in the extreme northwest corner of Brookline. This 30-acre tract of natural, undeveloped land adjoins the Kennard Park and Conservation Areas in Newton and the State's thirty acre Lost Pond Reservation. Together, these properties contain over one hundred acres of open woodland, marsh, bog and stream, and Lost Pond, one of the few natural ponds remaining in Brookline.

Great Horned Owl

Lost Pond, a "kettle hole" pond, formed around a mass of ice left by glacial activity 17,000 years ago. A quaking peat bog has developed on its northern edge. Peat bogs, which often occur in deep glacial lakes, are formed by the gradual decomposition of plant material in highly acidic, poorly drained areas. The peat forms a floating mat over the water and provides a base for acid-tolerant vegetation which grows in from the edge of the pond. This mat is not solid; it quakes and can collapse if walked on.

Because peat can accumulate in deposits twenty to forty feet deep it provides naturalists with excellent data on the ecological history of an area. The underlying peat preserves pollen fossils from the plants that have grown there over the last 10,000 to 15,000 years.

Social History

Lost Pond is described in Metropolitan Parks Public Document No. 48 from 1911:

> *Hidden in a swamp growth of trees is a remarkable and charming pond, known as Lost Pond, which is almost inaccessible, and surrounded by a natural growth of hemlock, pine and white cedar, and the margin of the pond is covered with a growth of shrubs, some of which are rare to this region. The land about this portion is low, very wet.*

The Town of Brookline acquired the land which is now Lost Pond Sanctuary in 1945 for use as a landfill and incinerator site. The incinerator went into operation in 1952, and the ash was dumped on what is now the meadow. In spring, 1975, the incinerator was closed and the landfill operation ceased. Trash is now hauled out of town for disposal.

In 1982, Brookline Town Meeting voted to transfer the control and management of 30.2 acres from the Department of Public Works (DPW) to the Conservation Commission for conservation and passive recreational use. This important step was the direct result of a cooperative effort between the Brookline Conservation Commission, the Friends of Lost Pond, the DPW and Town Meeting. It recognized the need to protect and preserve this important natural wetland and watershed area for future generations.

Plant and Animal Life

Bogs are characterized by evergreen trees, shrubs, grasses and mosses that are adapted to the wet acidic environment. Among these, Sphagnum Moss plays an important role in shaping the bog landscape. It grows on the edge of the pond, forming bright green hummocks. Grass-like plants called sedges colonize the hummocks, stabilizing them with their roots. In time shrubs and trees move in.

White Cedar was once common in wet sections of Brookline. The edges of Lost Pond are one of the few places in town where these trees can still be seen.

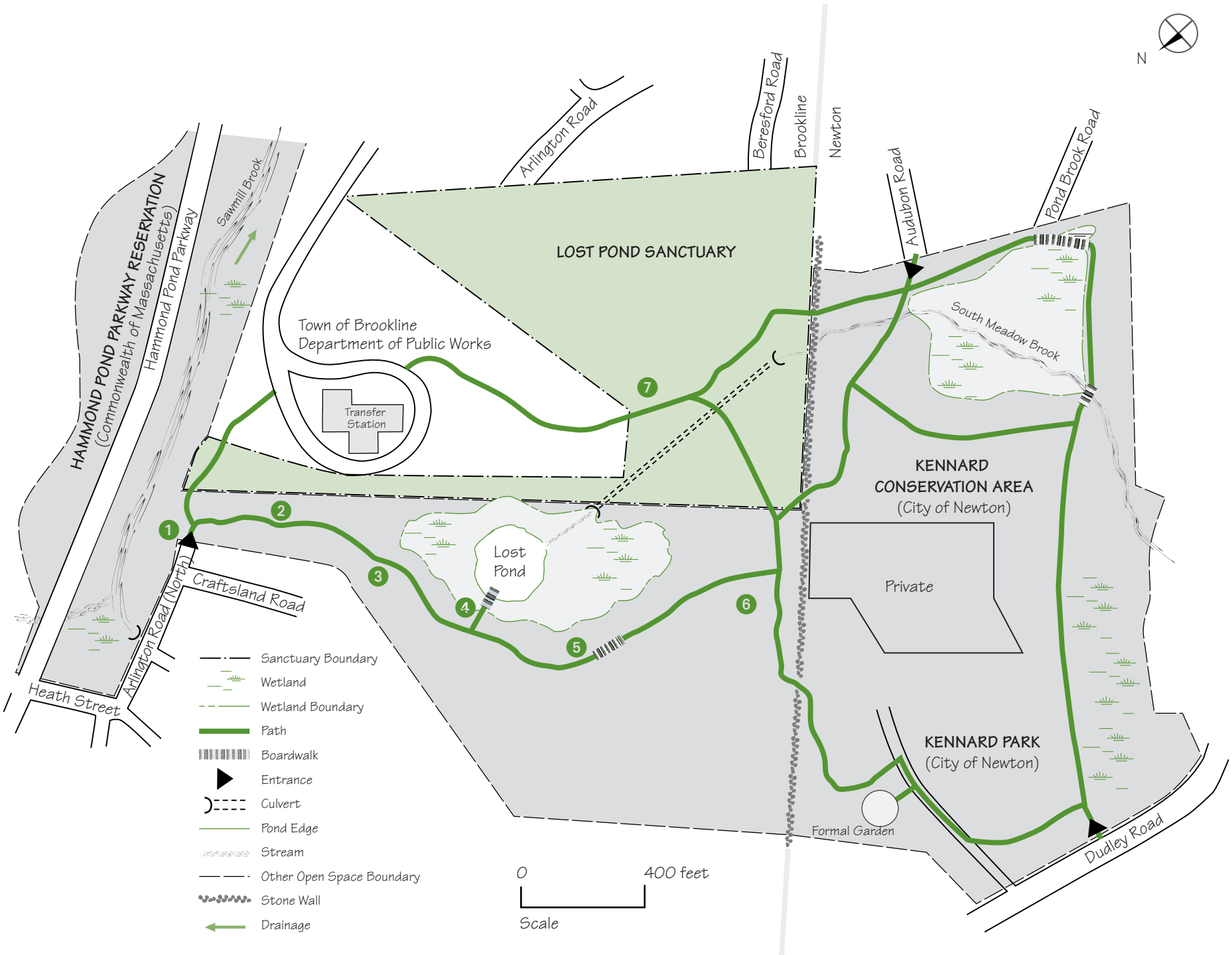
Pitcher Plants and Sundews, carnivorous plants that digest insects, are commonly found in pristine bogs. Although these have not been found recently, a visitor to Lost Pond recalls seeing pitcher plants here in the mid 1940's.

The predominant shrubs in the wet areas around the pond are Sweet Pepperbush, Swamp Azalea and High Bush Blueberry. In shaded areas of the Sanctuary, a visitor can find Jack-in-the-Pulpit, Cranesbill, Jewelweed, Pink Ladyslipper (Moccasin Flower), Skunk Cabbage, Day Lily, Poison Ivy and various ferns. In early May, the woods are carpeted with Canada Mayflower, a small white low-growing flower with shiny green leaves.

Birds frequently seen in the woods include the Yellow-shafted Flicker, Black-capped Chickadee and White-breasted Nuthatch. Song Sparrows, Mocking Birds, hawks and owls are often seen or heard in the open meadow. A flock of wild turkeys can sometimes be found in the woods or on the meadow.

Many small mammals live at Lost Pond. You may see a few of them when visiting the sanctuary. Among the most common are rabbits, chipmunks, squirrels, foxes, raccoons, woodchucks and skunks. In addition, deer and coyotes have also become established.

The pond is a good place to see amphibians and reptiles: Spotted Salamanders, Bullfrogs, Painted Turtles, and Common Garter Snakes. In early spring listen for the Wood Frog and Spring Peeper choruses.



Trail Guide

1 Entrance at Arlington Road North

Entering the Sanctuary from the end of Arlington Road North, a short walk leads to a kiosk with maps and information about the area. Take the right hand trail to the top of the small hill. The trees on the higher ground are predominantly Oak, with occasional White Pines. This was once a forest of American Chestnuts, until the trees were destroyed by blight. The old stumps still sprout saplings that reach a height of fifteen feet and die. Listen for Black-capped Chickadees and Tufted Titmice. Low Bush Blueberries grow here, but the undergrowth is relatively thin.

2 Approach to the Wetland

As the trail continues to the bottom of the hill, notice how the vegetation changes. There are still a few oaks but the dominant species are maples and Yellow Birch. Many trees have multiple trunks, and roots that grow above the ground. These are adaptations to growing in saturated wetland soil. The understory of this part of the forest is a dense mix of Sweet Pepperbush and High Bush Blueberry.

3 Traversing the Wetland

The ground may seem dry, not very different from the upland. However, this flat area remains muddy for long periods of time during wet seasons, because an impenetrable layer of soil lies close to the surface here. When it rains, water collects in the wetland and is released gradually, thus preventing flooding.

The trail winds through the woods. The tree roots in this section are exposed because the soil has been compressed by walkers. Please stay on the trail to limit the damage. After the trail straightens out, start looking for the path to Lost Pond. It is on the left side of the trail—overlooked by a very large Yellow Birch. Yellow Birch has silvery gray bark; older trees peel in curls that resemble onion skin.

4 Path to Lost Pond

Turn left along a short path to the pond. Emerald green mosses grow here on dead tree roots. The ground gets softer and wetter as you near the pond. The boardwalk allows visitors to approach the pond without disturbing the quaking bog that has developed along this edge. This area contains a fragile ecosystem that is easily damaged, so please do not leave the boardwalk. At its end you will find a wonderful place for watching birds, dragonflies, tadpoles and Water Striders. In the winter, look for Snow Fleas on the water and the snow. Snow Fleas are not fleas at all; they are called springtails because they jump by snapping an appendage under their abdomens. Starting in March, Red-winged Blackbirds and migrating warblers can be seen near the pond.

5 Continuing on the Main Path

Return to the main path and turn left. The trail continues through the wetland forest. Ferns, Spice Bush and High Bush Blueberries mix with the Sweet Pepperbush. In August, Pepperbush flowers perfume the woods. A boardwalk carries the trail over a boggy spot. In this section are several snags—standing dead trees, where Carpenter Ants have taken up residence and Pileated Woodpeckers have carved their signature, large oval holes. Many of the trees in this section contain large untidy clumps of leaves and twigs. These are dreys—squirrels' summer nests. Winter nests, where babies are born, are in tree cavities, such as those made by the woodpeckers. Look for shelf-fungi on fallen logs in fall and winter.

Near the end of the lowland, the underbrush on the left side of the trail changes to an impenetrable tangle of Catbrier (look for green tendrils with thorns). The shallow ditch crossing the trail is the original outflow from Lost Pond, which was diverted to flood a swamp further downstream. In the spring look for Skunk Cabbage and Jack-in-the-Pulpit to the right of the trail.

6 Climbing Out of the Wetland

The trail rises through a stand of hemlock trees, to pine woods floored with Low Bush Blueberry. Listen for the "peo-wee" song of peewees. A little further along is an intersection with an old bridle path. A right turn leads to Kennard Park and Conservation Area in Newton. Turn left to continue through the upland woods, where White Pine, Shag Bark Hickory and Low Bush Blueberry grow. In mid-May, Pink Lady Slipper (Moccasin Flower) blooms on the right side of the trail. Descend the hill and notice that old tires, bicycles and other debris appear among the trees. You have reached the edge of the former Town landfill. At this point the trail bears left.

7 The Old Landfill

The landfill has been closed for thirty years but the land still shows many signs of disturbance. Sumac and Black Locust grow here, as well as Poison Ivy and Stinging Nettle, plants which move into areas of disturbed soil. On the right, the trail from the Kennard Area rejoins the main path.

The trail leaves the woods and enters an open area, where ash from the incinerator was dumped until the facility was closed in 1972. Since then, the meadow has regrown. Meadows provide a unique habitat for birds and mammals that are not adapted to live in forested areas. Go directly across the meadow toward the DPW buildings. As you cross the meadow in the winter, you can see the pond below.

At this point, you can either retrace your steps or make your way through the DPW yard. Keeping the main buildings on your left, continue straight on the paved road, past the buildings and turn left. After about twenty yards watch for a trail into the woods on the right. Follow this trail back to the starting point on Arlington Road.