

9.0 OPEN SPACE, COASTAL RESOURCES AND RECREATION

This chapter addresses Tiverton’s preserved open space areas, its coastal resources and recreational facilities. Continued efforts to preserve high value open space is emphasized, along with developing means for the sustained stewardship of public land. Other high priority objectives include updating the Town’s Recreation, Conservation, and Open Space Plan, and developing long-term strategies to protect farmlands and coastal resources from rising sea levels.

9.1 Existing Resources

Rhode Island public support for open space and recreational resources has remained strong, with the passage of many state bonds over the past thirty years for that purpose. Tiverton has taken full advantage of the bonds, with the town securing multiple open space acquisition grants from RIDEM through the efforts of the Open Space Commission. These successes were supplemented by additional properties protected by the Tiverton Land Trust, made possible by private donations from Tiverton citizens, and by the Rhode Island office of The Nature Conservancy. These joint efforts have resulted in the consolidation of Weetamoo Woods, the acquisition of Pardon Gray Preserve, Basket Swamp, Highland Woods, and the Pocasset Ridge Conservation Area.

This effort should continue, using a strategy that balances with other community needs – housing, economic opportunity and active recreation facilities. Open space provides critical environmental benefits (clean water, flood control) to the community that would cost millions to replace if the land were developed. It also is an engine for the local economy in preserving scenic natural areas that have become regional attractions.

The development of new recreation facilities at the Town Farm and Bulgarmarsh Recreation Area-Skate Park have also been made possible by public funding. Several groups provide recreation programs, including the Little League and Boy Scouts. The town employs a Recreation Coordinator to assist the Recreation Committee expanding year-round programs. The coordinator serves as liaison between public agencies and private groups for the utilization of town facilities.

Public beaches in the community offer diverse summer activities. Each has distinct characteristics to be protected. Fogland Beach is intensively used for recreation but its barrier beach dune and salt marsh is also a sensitive natural area needing protection. Those competing interests have been successfully represented by the Fogland Beach Oversight Committee, a partnership between the Conservation Commission, the Open Space Commission, and the Recreation Committee. Grinnell’s Beach, next to the Stone Bridge abutment, is used for swimming, and fishing from the bridge abutment is popular year round. Both town beaches will be adversely affected by sea level rise in the coming years and many decisions will need to be made about their future.

In 1989, the Recreation Committee modified the Tiverton Recreation, Conservation and Open Space Plan. That revision helped obtain grants for new recreational fields at the Town Farm, but it is now 25 years old. A complete review and revision is needed to guide planning for the best use of resources to provide a broad range of recreational facilities.

There is a continuing need for more open space and recreational resources in the northern sector of Tiverton. Unfortunately, that sector of town, with its high population density, has the least amount of available undeveloped land. Moreover, grant funding to acquire land is generally available only for properties with significant wildlife habitat value. Nonetheless, every opportunity should be explored to create more public green space in North Tiverton.

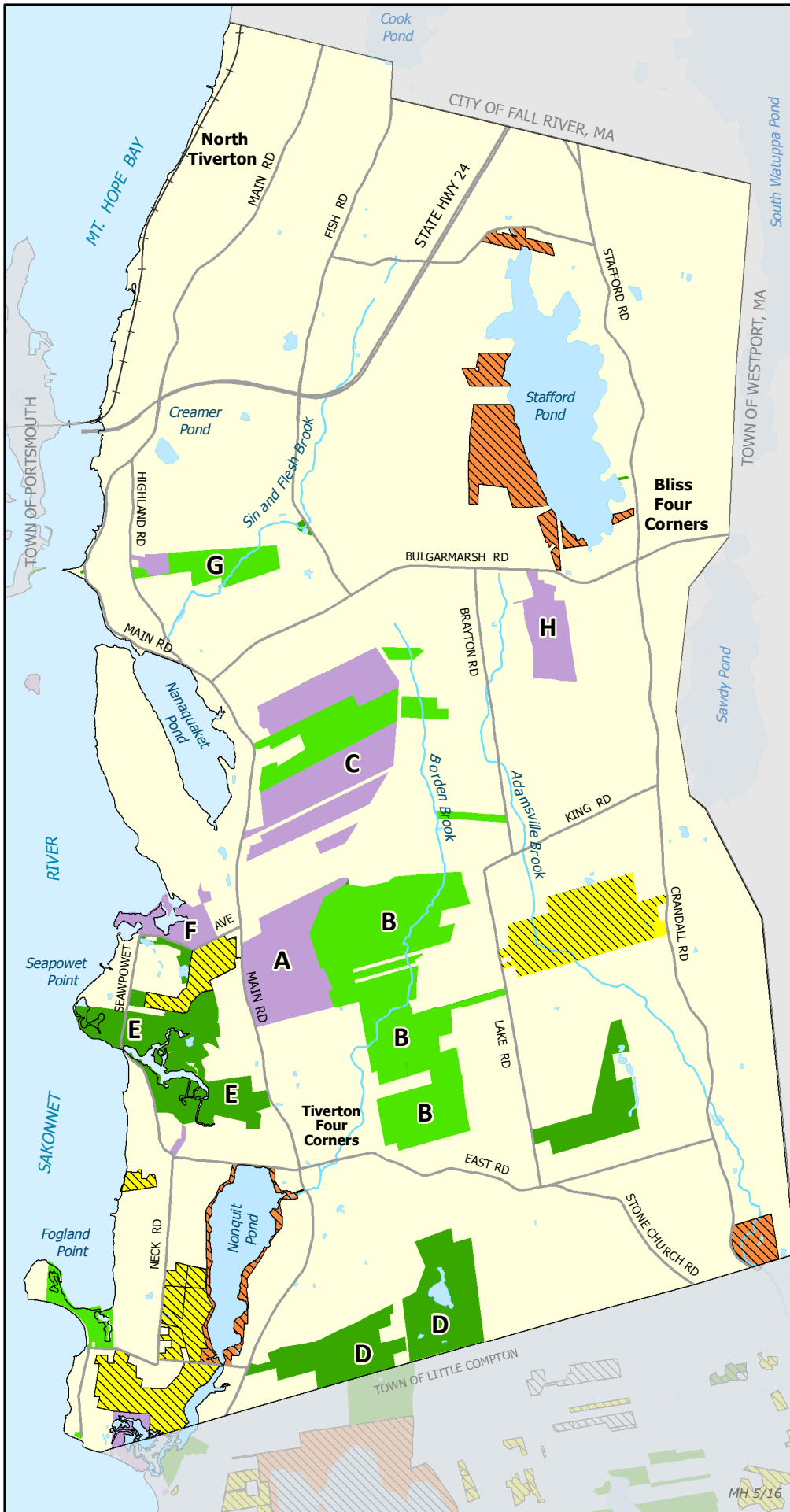
Tiverton’s open space, coastal access, and recreational resources are shown in the following tables and maps.

TABLE 9-1: Publicly Accessible Open Space

Map Key	Open Space Area	Acreage	Jurisdiction
A	Pardon Gray Preserve	230	Tiverton Land Trust
B	Weetamoo Woods	610	Town Open Space Commission
C	Pocasset Ridge Conservation Area	541	Note 1
D	Eight Rod Farm Management Area	337	RIDEM
E	Seapowet Marsh Wildlife Refuge	342	RIDEM ²
F	Emile Ruecker Wildlife Refuge	45	Audubon Society of RI
G	Fort Barton-Highland Woods	80	Tiverton Land Trust and Town Open Space Commission
H	Basket Swamp	93	Tiverton Land Trust
I	Fogland Beach Conservation Area	25	Fogland Beach Oversight Committee
J	High Hill Point ³	1.4	Town ^{Open} Space Commission

Notes:

1. Owned and managed cooperatively by Open Space Commission, RI Nature Conservancy, Tiverton Land Trust, and the RI Department of Environmental Management.
2. RI Division of Environmental Management.
3. No parking; access only by foot/bicycle



CONSERVATION AREA OWNER - LAND MANAGER

- TOWN OF TIVERTON
- RI DEM
- WATER AUTHORITIES (Tiverton, Newport, Fall River)
- ENVIRONMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS (Tiverton Land Trust, The Nature Conservancy, Audubon Society of RI)
- PRIVATE LAND (preserved by easement)

PUBLIC ACCESS STATUS

- NO PUBLIC ACCESS

KEY TO MAJOR CONSERVATION AREAS

- A PARDON GRAY PRESERVE
- B WEETAMOO WOODS
- C POCASSET RIDGE CONSERVATION AREA
- D EIGHT ROD FARM MANAGEMENT AREA
- E SEAPOWET MARSH WILDLIFE REFUGE
- F EMILY RUECKER WILDLIFE REFUGE
- G FORT BARTON WOODS
- H BASKET SWAMP

- MAIN ROADS
- RAILWAY
- MAJOR STREAMS
- PONDS, OPEN WATER

Source: 2014 State and Local Conservation Lands courtesy of RIDEM and Tiverton Open Space Committee (2015).

Note: Public access to open space is subject to compliance with various rules and regulations.



Disclaimer: This map is not the product of a Professional Land Survey. It was created by Mapping and Planning Services for general reference, informational, planning and guidance use, and is not a legally authoritative source as to the location of natural or manmade features. Proper interpretation of this map may require the assistance of appropriate professional services. The Town of Tiverton or MPS makes no warranty, express or implied, related to the spatial accuracy, reliability, completeness, or currentness of this map.

TIVERTON COMPREHENSIVE COMMUNITY PLAN



**Figure 9-1
EXISTING CONSERVATION & OPEN SPACE AREAS**

TABLE 9-2: Private Land Protected by Easement

Area (map reference)	Acreage	Owner/Easement Authority
Stone Bridge Fire District Watershed (orange on map)	171	Water Authorities
Mill Pond (orange, South Crandall Rd.)	35	City of Newport
Middle Acres Farm (yellow, Crandall Rd.)	235	TNC ¹
Hathaway Farm (yellow, Main Rd.)	72	RIDEM ²
Nonquit Pond Watershed Protection Area (orange, Nonquit shore)	30 +/-	City of Newport
Ferolbink Farm / Fogland Marsh (yellow, Neck Rd. Nonquit vicinity)	90	TNC / RIDEM
Rod & Gun Club Conservation Area (green, Lake Rd.)	142	RIDEM

Notes:

1. The Nature Conservancy
2. RI Department of Environmental Management

Weetamoo Woods was dedicated in 1990, after aggregating several parcels purchased with a matching grant from the state of Rhode Island. More parcels have been added to the original area, including a 12-acre meadow now preserved as grassland habitat. Adding to the ecological value of the large forest, and integrated with the public trail network, is the adjacent Pardon Gray Preserve, protected by the Tiverton Land Trust. That property includes 65 acres of farmland, an historic Gray family cemetery, and 155 acres of forest with trails that integrate with those in Weetamoo Woods.



Slab bridge on Eight Rod Way in Weetamoo Woods



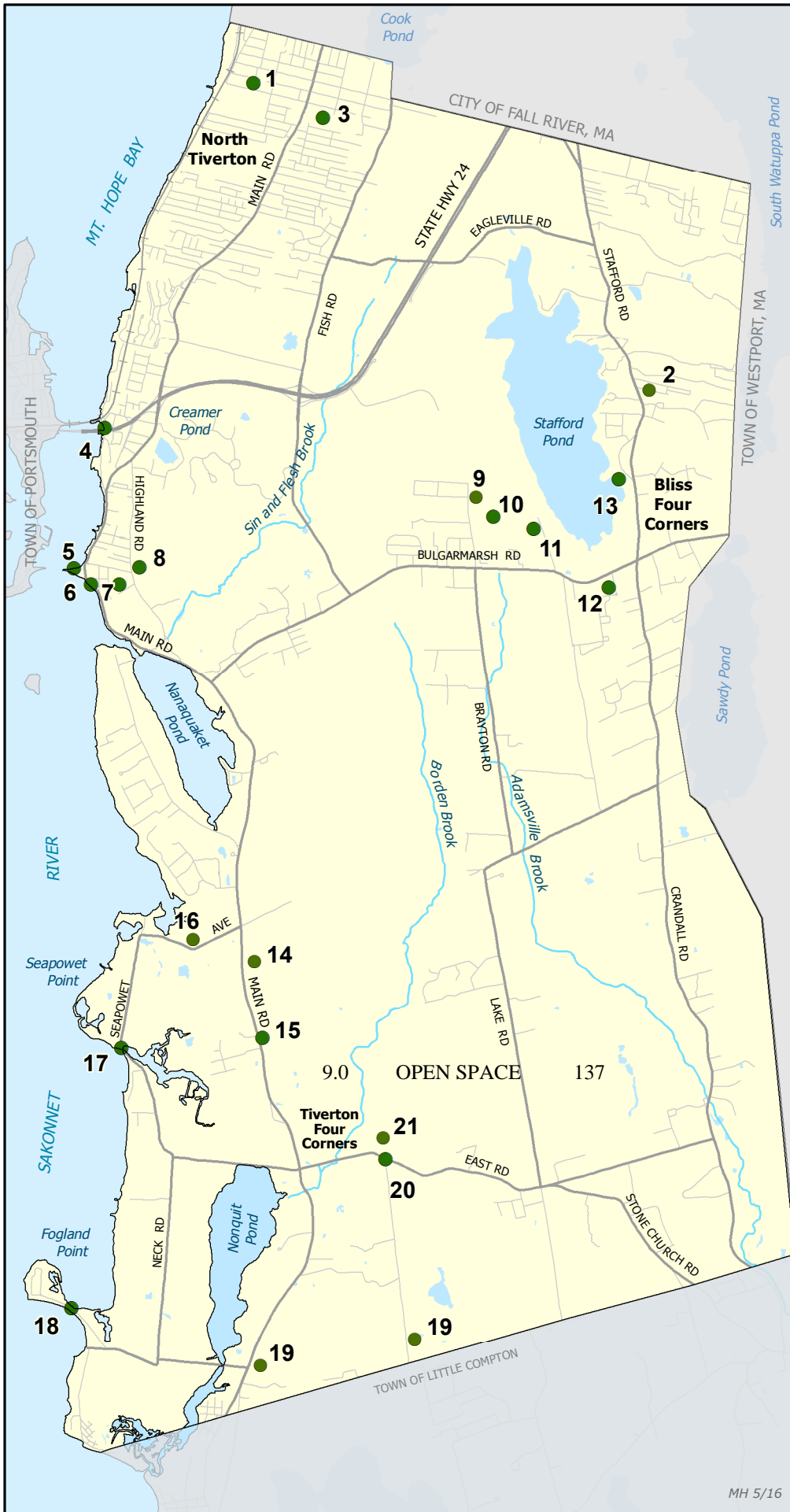
Late season haying in Pardon Gray Preserve



Pocasset Ridge Conservation Area

TABLE 9-3: Parks and Recreation Resources

	Facilities	Acres	Recreation Use
1	Bay Street Recreational Area	2.0	multipurpose playfield, playground
2	Florence Street Field	2.0	multipurpose field
3	Pocasset School	8.0	baseball, softball and soccer fields
4	Sakonnet Bridge Boat Ramp	0.5	boat ramp with trailer parking
5	Independence Park (Doughboy Green)	0.5	park
6	Grinnell's Beach	2.5	playground, fishing, swimming
7	Fort Barton Elementary School	3.5	playground and baseball field
8	Fort Barton Revolutionary Redoubt	3.0	park, scenic overlook, natural area, trails
9	Ranger Elementary School	4.6	playground and field
10	High School	18	track, football, playing fields, tennis courts
11	Middle School	5.0	baseball and multipurpose fields
12	Bulgarmarsh Recreation Area	11.4	skate park, basketball, softball,
13	Stafford Pond boat access	0.4	DEM boat ramp
14	Pardon Gray Preserve	219	natural area, trails, passive recreation
15	Town Farm Recreation Area	3.0	baseball, softball, soccer fields, walking track, tennis courts
16	Emily Ruecker Wildlife Refuge	51	natural area, trails, passive recreation
17	Seapowet Marsh Wildlife Refuge	316	RIDEM fishing beach
18	Fogland Beach	20	playground, swimming, fishing, wind surfing, kayaking, boat launch
19	Eight Rod Farm Wildlife Management Area	338	natural area, trails, passive recreation
20	South Field	2.0	baseball field
21	Weetamoo Woods	600	natural area, trails, passive recreation



SEE TABLE 9-2 FOR DETAILS

● OUTDOOR RECREATION AREAS & FACILITIES (PUBLIC)

- 1 BAY STREET RECREATIONAL AREA
- 2 FLORENCE STREET FIELD
- 3 POCASSET SCHOOL
- 4 SAKONNET BRIDGE BOAT RAMP
- 5 INDEPENDENCE PARK
- 6 GRINNELL'S BEACH
- 7 FORT BARTON ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
- 8 FORT BARTON REVOLUTIONARY REDOUBT
- 9 RANGER ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
- 10 HIGH SCHOOL
- 11 MIDDLE SCHOOL
- 12 BULGARMARSH RECREATION AREA
- 13 STAFFORD POND BOAT ACCESS
- 14 PARDON GRAY PRESERVE
- 15 TOWN FARM RECREATION AREA
- 16 EMILY RUECKER WILDLIFE REFUGE
- 17 SEAPOWET MARSH WILDLIFE REFUGE
- 18 FOLGLAND BEACH
- 19 EIGHT ROD FARM WILDLIFE MGT AREA
- 20 SOUTH FIELD
- 21 WEETAMOO WOODS

- MAIN ROADS
- MINOR ROADS
- RAILWAY
- ~ STREAMS
- PONDS, OPEN WATER

Sources: RIDEM (2014) Local and State Conservation Areas. Tiverton Open Space Committee (2015).

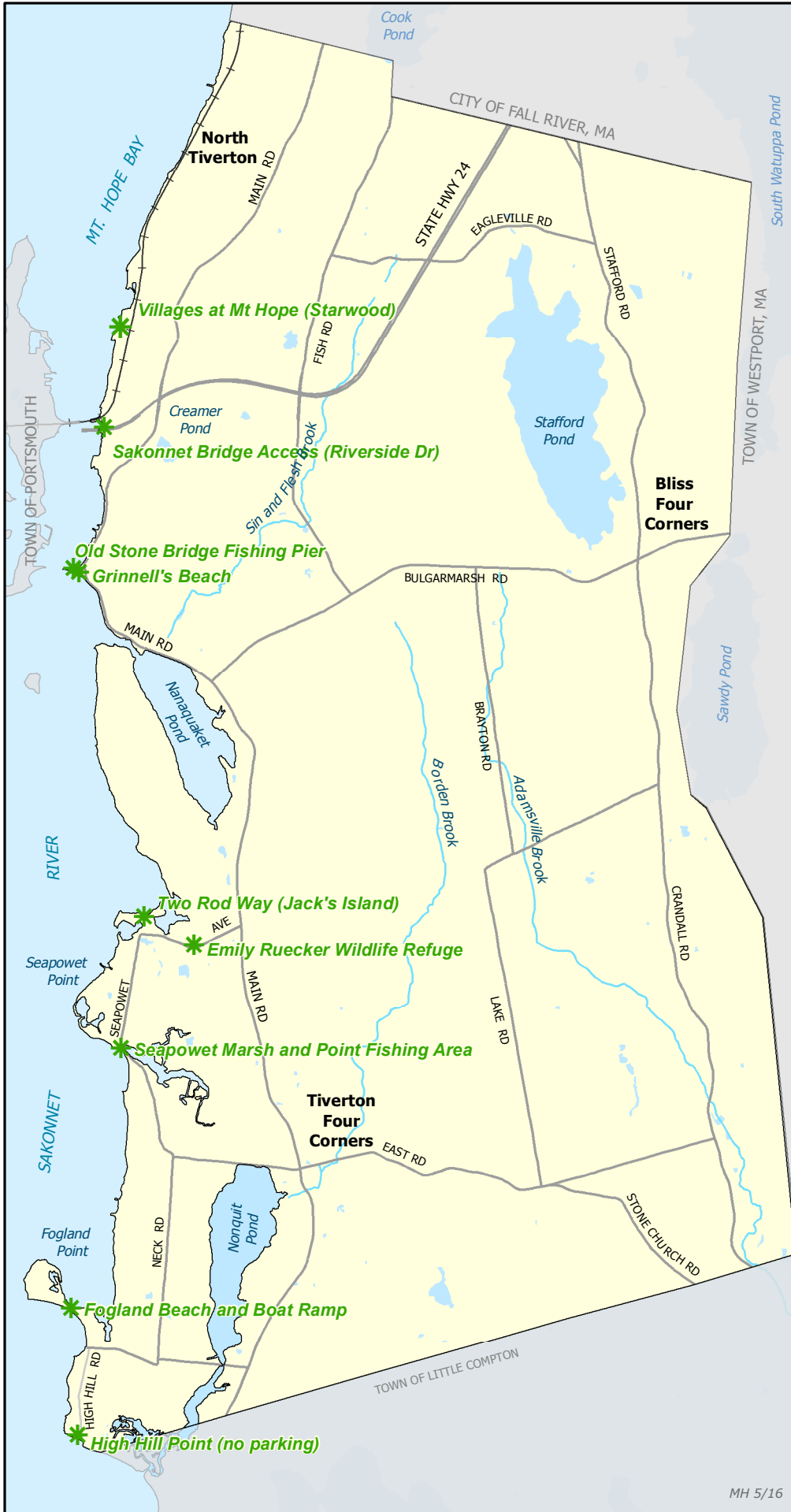


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TIVERTON COMPREHENSIVE COMMUNITY PLAN



**Figure 9-2
OUTDOOR PUBLIC
RECREATION RESOURCES**



- * COASTAL PUBLIC ACCESS LOCATIONS
- MAIN ROADS
- + RAILWAY
- MAJOR STREAMS
- PONDS, OPEN WATER

Source: RI CRMC Public Access Points (2003), courtesy of RIGIS and Tiverton Open Space Commission (2015).



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TIVERTON COMPREHENSIVE COMMUNITY PLAN



**Figure 9-3
COASTAL PUBLIC ACCESS**

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Narragansett Bay and its tributary bays, Mount Hope Bay and the Sakonnet Passage, provide expansive opportunities for recreational boating. The Tiverton Harbor and Coastal Waters Management Plan (incorporated herein by reference) identifies a need for additional protected boat launch facilities. There is a public boat launch ramp at Fogland Beach and another one under the Sakonnet River Bridge. New public waterfront facilities are part of the Villages on Mount Hope Bay development, and the Harbor Commission was a planning participant in that project. Planning for expanded public use of the Stone Bridge abutment area is also underway (see Land Use and Circulation Chapters), as well as developing more public waterfront facilities in northern Tiverton.



Many of Tiverton's recreational opportunities center on its waterfront

9.2 Open Space, Coastal Resources and Recreation Goal and Objectives

Goal

Protect and maintain open space and coastal resources, and provide a wide range of recreational opportunities for the citizens of Tiverton.

Objectives

- Pursue open space acquisition within a comprehensive strategy that establishes criteria and priorities, accounts for the differing needs and opportunities of the various regions of the town, and coordinates the efforts of both public and private entities.
- Preserve farmland as an important element of town history and a growing segment of the local economy.
- Preserve the town's only public water supply by protecting the watershed of Stafford Pond through purchase of land or development rights by the Town; seek the support of the Tiverton Land Trust and The Nature Conservancy.
- Preserve groundwater resources and natural flood mitigation by protecting wetlands.
- Protect the environmental quality, recreational opportunity, and scenic virtues inherent in the town's coastal waters, shorelines, and woodlands.
- Plan for the eventual impact of sea level rise on the town's coastal areas.
- Develop new recreation playing fields and improve the quality of existing fields and their associated structures.
- Enhance current recreation programs and opportunities to include older age groups, in coordination with the Senior Center.
- Seek a stronger connection between Tiverton public schools and the extensive opportunities for learning that is inherent in the town's public open spaces and historic sites.

9.3 Open Space, Coastal Resources and Recreation – Implementation Actions

Open Space

General discussion. The importance of saving quality open space has increased dramatically as the demand for housing in Tiverton continues to increase. The town's rural character, abundant scenery, small-town intimacy, and quality schools have made Tiverton a desirable place to live. Demographic trends clearly indicate the urgency of preserving open space. A built-out Tiverton is conceivable within the time-line projection of this plan, and with each passing year saving open space becomes more difficult and expensive. But, there may be no public expenditure that achieves more strategic goals of this plan than preserving open space. Consider the following:

Quality of Life: Preserving open space maintains the town’s desirable rural character and scenic quality by saving forest, fields, and streams rather than permitting the town to develop into a continuum of residential subdivisions, stores, parking lots and malls.

Tax Burden: Although residential development expands the gross tax base, those new tax revenues are almost always exceeded by larger public expenditures for additional community services, i.e. schools, storm drainage, street lights, fire and police protection, etc. As a result, typical residential development eventually costs more to local communities than it provides in tax revenues. When the economics of environmental “services” (flood control, water purification, recreational benefits, agricultural activities, home values, is considered, the cost-benefit advantage of open space is even greater.

This calculus holds, even when open space and farmland receive preferential tax treatment. Indeed, taxing these properties at "highest and best use" can force landowners to sell out to developers. Many studies have proven this assertion. One study by the American Farmland Trust concludes that undeveloped land costs taxpayers less than one-third of what it takes to provide services for residential developments, as indicated in Table 9-4.

Table 9-4: Average Expenditures per Land Use

Land Use	Average Expenditures per \$1.00 Tax Revenue
Commercial / Industrial	\$0.27
Farm / Forest	\$0.36
Residential	\$1.15

Source: The Cost of Community Services: Making the Case for Conservation
American Farmland Trust, 2002

Water Quality and Flood Control: Open space has direct economic benefit by protecting ground water recharge areas. This purifies ground water and maintains it at sufficient levels to provide drinking water for approximately 40% of the town area in the south where wells are required. This eliminates the need for building a publicly funded water system. Open space also reduces and purifies surface stormwater runoff, which is important for flood control and critical to keeping the town’s estuarine marshes and harbors healthy.

Environmental Benefits: Preserving quality open space keeps a portion of the land in a natural condition, thereby preserving habitat for wildlife and promoting biodiversity. Studies at Harvard Forest show that an acre of forest absorbs about a ton of atmospheric carbon per year, and our forests serve as a huge cooling-filtering agent, improving the air we breathe. It is also well documented by studies that show salt marshes are a vital part of the natural filtering needed for healthy marine ecosystems. Tiverton can be proud that its preservation of open space is an example of “thinking globally, acting locally.”

There are two fundamental requirements for land to be protected as open space. It has to be “open” (not developed), and landowners have to be willing. Beyond that, the general imperatives for selecting land to preserve in Tiverton are as follows:

1. Augmenting existing major open space areas – Pardon Gray Preserve, Weetamoo Woods, Fort Barton-Highland Woods, and the Pocasset Ridge Conservation Area – for the following reasons:
 - Historic connections to Native American culture and to early town farm sites along Eight Rod Way.
 - Wetlands and exposed bedrock and glacial stone make those areas more valuable for biodiversity, more expensive for development, and less expensive for preservation.
 - The natural communities in those areas e.g. mixed oak – American Holly Forest, Atlantic White Cedar Swamp) are documented as rare forest types, a compelling argument for open space grants.
 - The high ecological value of these areas because of their large, continuous canopy forests. This important quality is documented by the Rhode Island Natural Heritage program and The Nature Conservancy, which provides compelling support for grant funding, and for managing them as “conservation areas” with minimal human disturbance.
 - A high level of public benefit – flood control, protection of Nonquit Pond and Stafford Pond watersheds, and the quality and quantity of regional ground water supplies.

2. Other open space preservation priorities:
 - Land in the watershed of Stafford and Nonquit Ponds.
 - Land with desirable scenic value or historic connections.
 - Land which would be part of a regional greenway.
 - Land that would create or enhance waterfront access
 - Land with high potential for passive recreation, educational value, or agricultural use.

Action 1: Pursue the preservation of open space in accordance with the criteria described above, and in coordination with the Tiverton Land Trust, The Nature Conservancy of Rhode Island, and the RI Department of Environmental Management (RIDEM).

The establishment of the Tiverton Land Trust has greatly increased the potential for protecting open space in the town. Private land trusts have funding opportunities and flexibility in financing land protection that is not available to public entities. Coordination between the Tiverton Land

Trust, the Tiverton Open Space Commission, The Nature Conservancy of RI, and RIDEM will significantly enhance the preservation of open space in Tiverton.

Action 2: The Open Space Commission shall work with community groups and the Recreation Committee to identify sources of funding, such as Community Development Block Grants, for acquiring open space in the more urbanized areas of Tiverton, to include the idea of establishing “pocket parks” on small parcels to provide neighborhood green spaces.

There is a long-standing need for public open space in parts of town with high population density. Unfortunately, those areas have little open space to acquire. Additionally, open space grants for such areas are rare because most of them are given by environmental organizations whose primary goal is the preservation of natural habitat. Nonetheless, town agencies must continue the effort to identify funding for acquiring green space in high population areas.

Action 3: Establish procedures in the subdivision review process to include a written report from the Open Space Commission regarding proposed open space areas of subdivision plans. Their report will include a review of the proposed open space area and its management plan.

Setting aside private open space is now provided for in the Rural Residential Development regulations of the Town’s zoning ordinance. Management plans are also required, and it is important for them to be environmentally positive, yet practical. These open space areas should be selected and managed to optimize linkages with open space areas in abutting developments, or other existing preserved open space. To this end, the Planning Board should receive input from the Open Space Commission on all subdivision proposals with open space set-asides.

Action 4: Encourage and assist owners of farmland in acquiring funding to preserve land that would remain in agricultural use, to include the acquisition of agricultural easements, and in promoting use of the Farm, Forest and Open Space Program that provides tax relief to land owners who wish to keep their open land undeveloped.

A primary cause of the loss of open space is the difficulty of retaining farmland for economically viable agricultural use. The problem is complex, with many factors outside the control of the town. There are state programs, however, for tax relief or development rights purchased from landowners who agree to retain land in agricultural use.

Action 5: Develop a long term strategy for the coordinated management of all preserved open space land in the town, to include the possibility of establishing a “conservation land manager” position, the cost of which could be shared by all the owners of protected open space.

The success over the past twenty years in protecting large areas of undeveloped, wild natural habitat in Tiverton has created an increasing burden on town volunteers to responsibly manage that land. This includes keeping them safe for public enjoyment, and preserving their ecological

integrity. Responsible stewardship of these properties has many challenges in preventing illegal activities and monitoring acceptable uses over an extensive area, much of which is without vehicle access. Add to this the complex job of preventing ecological degradation from invasive alien plant species and an increasingly over-populated deer herd. A coordinated effort and shared expense between ownership agents (Town, land trust, RIDEM, TNC) would be a major step in effective management of all the conservation properties in Tiverton.

Action 6: In cooperation with the Tiverton Land Trust, support the development of Highland Woods to enhance the value of Fort Barton as a destination historic site and a visitor-friendly natural area.

The purchase of Highland Woods by the Tiverton Land Trust has dramatically enhanced the value of the town owned Fort Barton historic redoubt and the adjoining Sin and Flesh Brook natural area. Access to both is now much easier, and the possibilities are exciting for developing the complex into a destination historic site and natural area.

Coastal Resources

Action 7: The Harbor Commission should develop a plan to identify public rights of way to the waterfront and erect markers or signage that clearly marks the public right of way and prevents abutting property owners from closing access.

The waterfront has always been integral to the history, culture, scenic beauty, and life-styles of Tiverton residents. As with all coastal communities, public access to the waterfront has become limited due to development and neglect of existing rights of way.

Action 8: Continue monitoring the health of Tiverton's coastal and freshwater bodies by sustained funding of water sampling and analysis as part of the URI Watershed Watch, or similar program.

The health of both our estuarine and marine ecosystems – salt marshes, salt water ponds, and beaches are under increasing threat from a variety of point and nonpoint pollution sources, including storm drainage from roads, high nitrogen runoff from residential lawns and livestock pastures, and failed septic systems. The only means for monitoring the extent of this pollution and its effect on the health of our waters is through the URI Watershed Watch program. This program uses local volunteers to sample, test, and report water quality parameters in fresh water ponds, streams, and coastal water bodies. It is extremely important that this program continues by funding it and recruiting volunteers.

Action 9: Appoint a task force to begin the development of a strategic plan that prepares the Town for future rising sea levels.

The threat of rising sea levels to Tiverton's natural ecosystems and built environment is profoundly disturbing. It is now widely documented, and accepted, that sea levels have begun to rise, with the only question being how much and how fast. The issue is extremely broad in its ramifications,

with few unaffected organizations in town. Fortunately, the University of Rhode Island and The Nature Conservancy have mapped projected flooding from rising sea levels. This will provide vital data to the town for strategic planning. It is extremely important, however, that Tiverton begins the planning to deal with sea level rise.

Action 10: Include in the planning for the Stone Bridge – Grinnell’s Beach Park complex the possibility of a public pier for free temporary boat dockage.

The planned renovation of the Stone Bridge abutment, along with the acquisition of the gas station property gives the town an unusual opportunity for developing a major scenic and recreational attraction. One option that should be considered is the construction of a public pier similar to the one that existed into the 1970s. This would provide free temporary docking space to permit access by boat to the beach and nearby businesses, to increase both public enjoyment and economic activity in this complex.

Recreation

Action 11: The Town Planner will, in consultation with the Open Space Commission and Recreation Committee, prepare a plan of action and timeline for completing a revision of the Recreation, Conservation and Open Space Plan.

The Tiverton Recreation, Conservation and Open Space Plan is in need of updating to reflect changes in both inventory of land and facilities, and the needs of the community since it was last prepared. The plan should address the management and improvement of town-owned properties. An up-to-date local recreation and open space plan is imperative for the Town to have a capital plan for future needs, and for the Town to be competitive in the obtainment of RIDEM grants for open space and recreational land acquisition and improvements. A properly prepared plan will take a major effort that would be greatly facilitated by assistance from a professional planner.

Action 12: Develop additional capacity by acquiring and/or improving land and developing facilities to meet the active recreation needs of Tiverton residents, with priority given to constructing athletic fields and associated facilities on land donated by the Stone Bridge Fire District.

Despite the absence of an updated recreation plan, the Tiverton Recreation Committee has documented the need for more baseball, soccer and lacrosse fields. The existing fields are used for more than one sports activity, which involves most of the calendar year. Such dual use leaves little time for the fields to rest and be properly maintained, resulting in higher maintenance costs. The Recreation Committee estimates that, at a minimum, an area equivalent to the Town Farm Recreation Area on Main Road is needed to develop additional playing fields and other recreational facilities.

Action 13: Pursue the planning, funding, and development of Independence Park, Grinnell's Beach and the Stone Bridge abutment to ensure high esthetic standards and maximum public benefit.

A substantial renovation is in the future for Grinnell's Beach, to include development of a plan for use of a former gas station property now owned by the town. Also, renovation of the Stone Bridge abutment will create opportunities for an integrated, multi-use public area that includes Independence Park, Grinnell's Beach, and the Stone Bridge abutment. This will be an opportunity for the community to protect and promote its valuable scenic and waterfront resources and provide maximum enjoyment for its citizens.

Action 14: Publish a town-wide map showing recreational and open space resources, picnic areas, trails and waterfront rights-of-ways and CRMC designated right of way.

A recreation and open space map available at the libraries and Town Hall would encourage use of the areas as well as build public support for open space and recreation programs.

