

Mt. A Viewscape Project Information Bulletin
January 18, 2012

View cutting at the summit of Mount Agamenticus is complete. All Trails are Open- though some will remain “under construction” until the next thaw and field season when clean up and rerouting to the summit parking or grass area can continue.

This is part of a scenic landscaping project that restores and enhances views of the eastern seacoast, inland ponds and distant mountain ranges. It also provides valuable habitat for many wildlife species. The “viewshed” will be allowed to revegetate and will be maintained as beneficial early successional shrubland. In addition, a gentle scenic path identified in our trail plan will guide visitors around the perimeter.

Here is a recap on the viewscaping project process/history:

- 1600s-1800s Mt. A region cleared for farmland, pasture and lumber- see history section in photo gallery
- 1941 Mt. A summit clear cut and developed for army installation, barracks/radar tower- see history section in photo gallery
- 1964-1974 Big A Ski Area cleared mountain top and ski trails & enhanced summit access road- see history section in photo gallery
- 1979 Mount Agamenticus U.S.D.A. Cooperative Study, 18 month study collected, organized, and analyzed information to assist the communities in making decisions about the future concerning ownership, land management, and residential development. Fish & Wildlife Resources Appendix recommends cutting to improve habitat for many species of wildlife including deer, grouse, hare, upland furbearers, and a wider variety of birds of prey and song birds.
- 1980 Town of York purchased summit area of Mt. A for public benefit and appreciation of its vastness, scenic landscape and recreational opportunities in response to a proposed large scale residential development
- 1980 Wright-Pierce Engineers develop Handbook: A Guide to the Passive Recreation Potential of Mount Agamenticus recommends making improvements to maintain the summit view.
- 2000-2011 Annual Visitor Use Surveys indicate one of the top comments/concerns is that the view is getting obscured by encroaching vegetation
- 2004 Conservation Plan for the Mount Agamenticus Region identifies summit views (among many others in the area) as conservation value and target. Plan also emphasizes need for early successional habitat
- 2008 Summit Guidelines for Usage, a planning document resulting from nearly 2 years of research & discussion prepared and published by Mt. A Steering Committee, town and local planners, natural resource professionals, members of the public and Southern Maine Regional Planning Commission. The Summit Plan identifies the summit views as one of Mt. A’s most notable features and makes recommendations to develop and maintain a viewshed.
- December 2008 Mt. A Steering Committee/Conservation Partners present major recommendations of Summit Plan to York Board of Selectmen and post copies at York Library, Town Clerk’s Office, Parks & Recreation Dept. and on both Agamenticus & Parks Dept. websites.

- February 2009 York Board of Selectmen hold public hearing for Summit Plan. York Water District Trustees review plan around same time period
- 2010 began discussions with certified forester about project feasibility & procedure
- June 2011 Notice sent to Selectmen regarding plans to move forward w/viewscaping project in the fall
- August 2011 secured funding from Nathaniel Wheeler Trust to implement project
- September 2011 Report to Selectmen that funding was secured and that a clear cut would take place this fall to open view.
- November 2011-January 2012 Forestry operations accomplished at Mt. A summit. Cutting completed; ~14 acres of the nearly 7,000 acres collectively owned and cooperatively managed are cleared.

Early-Successional Forest and Shrub Habitat:

Shrubland habitats contain thickets of bushes and young trees mixed with scattered grasses and wildflowers. Typical plant species that colonize these areas include dogwood, speckled alder, meadowsweet, and blueberry. Due to these plant species ability to quickly take hold in disturbed areas, they are often referred to as “pioneer species”.

Many species of wildlife require early successional shrubland habitat for annual life needs. Ruffed grouse, American woodcock, and New England cottontail rabbits for example utilize the protective dense cover for shelter or raising young. The plants growing in these areas also provide an abundance of berries and fruit, eaten by many different birds and mammals.

There has been a drastic decline of early successional forest and shrub habitat over the last 100 years due in large part to land-use change (farm abandonment), human development, fewer large beaver impoundments, fire suppression, and natural forest succession. As a result, those species of plants, mammals, birds, amphibians, and reptiles that require this habitat for survival are becoming increasingly rare.

Shrubland Species of Greatest Conservation Need in Maine:

American bittern	Eastern kingbird
American woodcock	Eastern towhee
Black racer (Maine endangered list)	Loggerhead shrike
Blanding’s turtle (Maine endangered list)	New England cottontail (Maine endangered list)
Blue-gray gnatcatcher	Olive-sided flycatcher
Blue-spotted salamander	Ringed boghaunter (Maine threatened list)
Blue-winged warbler	Prairie warbler
Brown thrasher	Spotted turtle (Maine threatened list)
Canada lynx (Federal threatened list)	Swamp darter
Chestnut-sided warbler	Whip-poor-will
Clayton’s cooper (Maine endangered list)	Willow flycatcher
Common nighthawk	Wood turtle

Information adapted from “Wildlife Needs Shrublands; Conserving Habitat in Maine” brochure developed by Rachel Carson National Wildlife Refuge and Wells National Estuarine Research Reserve.

What's next?

Plan to maintain shrubland:

- The recently cleared area will be maintained as green space/early successional shrubland. Stumps & branches will be left to control erosion and help new plants establish.
- Stump re-sprouting and pioneer plant species like grasses, forbs, and some shrubs & young trees such as birch, pin cherry, alder, and aspen are expected during the first growing season.
- Additional plantings of native shrubs that benefit wildlife & don't grow taller than ~10' to maintain the view may occur to speed up the development of shrubland.
- Larger areas (>5 acres) provide a better buffer against predation and will be maintained by periodic cutting over time. A rotation schedule will be set up to cut smaller sections every 3-5 years or as needed.
- Outreach materials will be developed to identify needs and highlight the importance of shrubland habitat.

Plan to build summit loop trail:

- In addition, a new scenic loop trail will be developed and, pending ADA requirements and funding, will be handicap accessible.
- This gentle, rolling trail will guide visitors along the summit perimeter, connect with re-established trail heads, and provide wildlife viewing and scenic opportunities.
- There may be an opportunity to create picnic areas or install benches along the route.

In summary the viewscaping project will:

- allow us to showcase decades of successful land conservation efforts in the region
- promote a declining shrubland habitat type (thru example/demonstration)
- in turn promote more diverse plant & wildlife habitat
- dramatically increase birding opportunities
- improve visitor experiences overall
- restore Mt. A as a valuable scenic resource