

## SEA CALL FARM CONSERVATION AREA

### ■ Introduction

The Town of Orleans acquired the 6.35-acre Sea Call Farm Property in 1987 at a cost of \$1,650,000.

In accordance with Book 5868 Page 72 of the Order of Taking, the June 15, 1987 Special Town Meeting Article 1 states: *Written ballot, Yes - 787, No - 299, motion carries by 2/3<sup>d</sup> that the Board of Selectmen is hereby authorized to acquire by purchase or otherwise or to take, by the Town of Orleans power of eminent domain, for conservation, open space and recreation purposes, the real property together with the improvements thereon situated in the Town of Orleans known as the Sea Call Farm (Gertrude Fiske property) on Tonset Road.*

In 1988, the Town applied for a Self-Help Grant from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts Executive Office of Environmental Affairs, Division of Conservation Services, but the application was denied.

Several subsequent Town Meeting Articles have addressed the future of the property and its buildings and funding to renovate the buildings as follows:

- Article 64 at the May 8, 1989 Annual Town Meeting proposed that the Town “*sell the property at public sale or at public auction for a purchase price of not less than \$1,650,000...*”, this Article was defeated by a Standing Vote of 78 For and 327 Against.
- Article 29 of the May 7, 1990 Annual Town Meeting proposed that the Selectmen be authorized “*to raise and appropriate and/or transfer funds...to dispose of the existing house located on the Town property known as Sea Call Farm*”, The Sea Call Farm Supporters asked Town Meeting for more time to explore other options for the property. A motion to indefinitely postpone this Article was made and carried unanimously by voice vote. Article 5 at the October 15, 1990 Special Town Meeting reconsidered this proposal and this Article was defeated by a Standing Vote of 116 Yes and 258 No.
- The Sea Call Farm Supporters proposed taking over the management of the property and Article 7 at the October 7, 1991 Special Town Meeting “*authorized the Conservation Commission to enter into a lease not to exceed five (5) years with the Sea Call Supporters, Inc. for the purpose of managing Sea Call Farm...*” and was carried unanimously.
- Based on an engineering site assessment, use study and renovation cost estimate prepared in February 1998, at the May 11-12, 1998 Annual Town Meeting, Article 51 proposed that the Town “*raise and appropriate and/or transfer...\$140,000 to rehabilitate the dwelling at Sea Call Farm on Tonset Road for suitable public use,... said funds to be spent under the direction of the Board of Selectmen and with the Conservation Commission to continue all management and control of the Sea Call Farm*

*property*". This Article carried by a voice vote majority. The Sea Call Farm Building Committee was appointed by the Selectman in June of 1998 to oversee the renovation plans. The Committee was disbanded in 2000 after spending \$19,450 on plans with the remainder transferred to the General Fund.

- At the same 1998 Town Meeting, Article 52 *"authorized the Conservation Commission to enter into a lease not to exceed ten (10) years for the purpose of assisting the Conservation Commission in maintenance and operation of the Sea Call Farm property"*, but this Article was indefinitely postponed.
- After contracting for architectural design services in the amount of \$19,450 and receiving a bid of \$239,000 for the proposed renovation project, Article 4 at the December 6, 1999 Special Town Meeting requested additional funding for the *"ongoing renovations at the Sea Call Farm Property...in addition to the \$140,000 appropriated"* in 1998. A motion to indefinitely postpone this Article was made and carried unanimously by voice vote.
- At the May 8, 2000 Special Town Meeting, Article 7 proposed that *"a sum of money be added to the funding voted at the May 11, 1998 Annual Town Meeting...for the renovations of the existing dwelling at Sea Call Farm..."*, but this Article was indefinitely postponed as well.
- At the May 7, 2001 Annual Town Meeting, Article 25 proposed that *"\$142,000.00 to fund the ongoing renovations and annual maintenance costs at the Sea Call Farm Property ...be added to the funding... appropriated under Article 51 of the May 11, 1998 Annual Town Meeting for this purpose..."* and Article 26 proposed that the Town *"authorize the Conservation Commission to dispose of the existing farm building located on the Town property known as Sea Call Farm using currently available funds for site renovations..."*, but these Articles were both indefinitely postponed to investigate a current proposal by the Supporters to renovate the farmhouse for use as seasonal housing.
- At the May 13, 2002 Annual Town Meeting, Petition Article 46 submitted by the Sea Call Farm Supporters proposed that the Town *"raise and appropriate and/or transfer.... \$29,000 to fund the cost of Town-mandated lead paint removal at Sea Call Farm..."* This Article carried by a voice vote majority. All but \$1,517.30 of the money was spent for lead paint removal. The Conservation Commission also spent \$380.00 from The Conservation Fund for a lead paint inspection.
- At the 2006 Town meeting Article (FY07) Article 4, Project for the Community Preservation funds allotted \$21,670.00 to Sea Call Farm Supporters to restore the main building at Sea Call Farm.
- At the 2007 Town meeting (FY08) Article 4, Project 1 for the Community Preservation funds allotted \$17,095.00 to Sea Call Farm Supporters to continue the restoration of the main building at Sea Call Farm.
- At the 2008 Town meeting (FY09) Article 4, Project 2 for the Community Preservation funds allotted \$31,000.00 to Sea Call Farm Supporters to restore the greenhouses.

## **Management**

- The **Orleans Conservation Commission** is responsible for the overall management of the property, including periodically reviewing usage, issues and problems and recommending improvements.

- The **Orleans Parks and Beaches Department** provides maintenance and improvement to the grounds, and oversees the rental to their employees.

Land held under Conservation can only be used for conservation purposes so that the **rental** of this property must be to persons that are furthering conservation purposes for the Town such as an Employee working for the Parks and Beaches Department. The Supervision of any employees of the Parks and Beaches Department using Sea Call Farm housing will be under the Park Superintendent. The main dwelling has been restored and was rented seasonally in 2007 and 2008. Heat and water are included in the rental fee. Other utilities, such as electricity, phone and cable, are the responsibility of the renter. Fees from the rental are paid into a 53E ½ Conservation Department fund #2476171-524100 and are used for utilities and other expenses under the jurisdiction of the Conservation Commission.

- Sea Call Farm was nominated to the **National Register of Historical Houses in 2007**. Any subsequent major renovation work on the dwelling that could compromise its place on the National Register must also be reviewed and approved by the Cape Cod Commission. Removal of the building would only be considered under a hardship to maintain the building. Major changes to the grounds such as new buildings or parking lots would have to be reviewed by the Cape Cod Commission.

-The **Sea Call Farm Supporters**, a non-profit organization, are responsible for maintenance and restoration of the Sea Call Farm buildings and limited mowing and trash removal in accordance with the 1-year Contract Agreement dated March 15, 2008. The Supporters must also maintain liability insurance for working on the property.

The initial **Contract** with the Sea Call Supporters was signed in December 1991 and renewed annually to 1999. A 5-year License Agreement was signed in July of 2000, which allowed the Supporters to maintain the grounds and the buildings, including renovation of the main floor of the dwelling for seasonal housing. The Agreement with the Supporters was terminated in May 2002 due to unsafe conditions in the dwelling from lead paint. In July 2002, a new 1-year License Agreement was signed that allowed the Supporters to mow around the house, the field and the community gardens, and pick up trash on site. In 2005 after the lead removal project had been completed, the Supporters submitted a plan for the restoration of the dwelling. This License Agreement has been renewed and updated annually. Under the License Agreement construction plans must be submitted by a Construction Supervisor or Architect currently licensed in Massachusetts and must detail the renovations to be done and the estimated time allotment. The Construction Supervisor will apply for the Building Permit and any other permits required. The Construction Supervisor will inspect and supervise the work as is customary in the building industry for like projects. The Construction Supervisor will report to the Commission on the work accomplished. All such renovation shall be in accordance with the rules and regulations pertaining to Conservation, Building Codes and Zoning.

Major **capital expenses for the restoration** of the dwelling are to be borne by the Supporters through existing funds or through fund-raising. No Town monies

other than for lead paint removal have been appropriated for use for any expenses involved in such renovations except through the Community Preservation funds. The Sea Call Supporters have a Community Foundation Grant fund to pay for extraordinary expenses on the property, for example, the extra cost of roofing.



## Site Description

The Sea Call Farm Property provides an example from a commercial agriculture venture of the last century. The center of the Sea Call Farm property is maintained as a **cultural area**. It includes the community gardens, an herb garden, a green house (to be restored), a detached single-car garage and the main dwelling. The main dwelling was built in 1921 and has a greenhouse entrance to the cellar that is being restored. The area around these features is kept mowed by the Sea Call Supporters.

The dwelling is situated at the high point of the property approximately 50' above sea level, 40' from the top of a coastal bank. There are foundation plantings next to the dwelling under a design by Connie Leclair. Next to the dwelling are 2 picnic tables shaded by an American elm that is cared for by the Tree Warden.

The area around the garage has recently been dug out where the soil had accumulated next to the building. Near the garage is a patch of the invasive species, English ivy. Large fruit trees are set to the north of the garage.

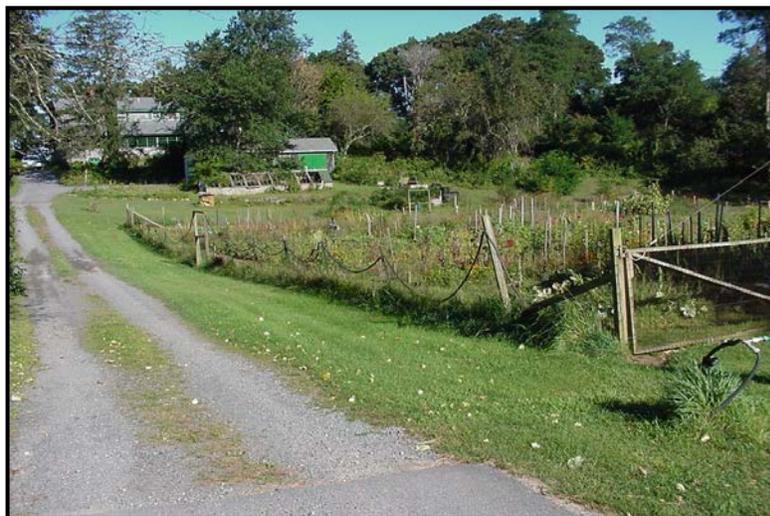


A path from the dwelling to the west between the top of the bank and a row of mature Norway spruce provides walking access to Town Cove. Several of these spruce trees are failing and some have already been removed. To reproduce a windbreak at some time in the future when more of these trees have declined, the entire row of trees will be removed and replaced with native white pines. There is approximately 430 linear feet of grassy shoreline on the southeast side of Town Cove. There are two old dilapidated buildings on the beach, one of which contains 1921 water pumping equipment.

There is an open meadow area to the west and woodlands to the east of the property and to the north on the coastal bank.

There is a circular driveway at the **entrance** at 82 Tonset Road. A gravel parking area for approximately 8 vehicles with a bicycle rack is located adjacent to Tonset Road. Other cars park in the grassy area in front of the gardens. A partially paved driveway extends to the farmhouse where there is limited space for parking next to the dwelling and the garage.

Below the house to the south is a **community garden** that contains thirty 20' x 20' plots. These plots are available to Town residents and employees for an annual fee, which generally covers the costs for maintenance, water, and roto-tilling. Financial oversight of the gardens is under the Conservation Commission with all of the collected fees paid into a 53E ½ Conservation Department Fund and any expenses incurred for maintenance of the garden plots processed through the Conservation Office at Town Hall.



## Naturalized Areas and Wildlife

Protection of naturalized areas and wildlife habitat will be the determining factor for any proposed change in use of the property. Consideration will be given to potential impacts on the natural communities of the site when proposing or increasing uses of the property, especially in environmentally sensitive areas, such as the salt marsh. Increased occupation of the dwelling may impact the grounds and the use will be monitored by the Conservation Commission.



Work has been on-going and is needed to maintain and improve the varied habitats on this site. The meadow and woodlands have aggressive non-native species such as bittersweet, Norway maple and blackberry that are reducing the biodiversity and available habitat. Work to improve the habitats and restore a native or naturalized community has gone forward under the Parks and Beaches Department, a Barnstable County Land Management Grant, the Tree Warden with Americorps, and the Sea Call Farm Supporters.

Vegetation alteration proposed by the Tree Warden or Parks Department can be approved with notification to the Conservation Commission. Vegetation alteration by the Sea Call Supporters can be approved according to their Licensing Agreement. Large projects would require approval of a Planting Plan and demonstration of necessary funding. Any other group that works on the Sea Call Farm Property must be able to demonstrate the necessary insurance and must do so at the invitation and request of the Conservation Commission.

The large 1 acre grassy **meadow** at Sea Call Farm provides a valued and vanishing habitat. Even though native species are being planted to restore the meadow, under the classification of Natural Communities of Massachusetts this meadow would be listed as a Cultural Grassland due to the presence of non-native grasses. These grasslands support habitat for nesting birds and other animals. Bobolinks have nested in the field. Many hawks, including red-tails, hunt rodents in the field. Other species of birds that use meadows for nesting include sparrows and meadowlarks.

It has been an on-going project to remove the blackberry and bittersweet from the meadow. Under the Parks and Beaches Department the meadow has been burned, mowed and scraped. An herbicide was used with the Grant from Barnstable County. A native seed mix was added to the scraped area and came in well. In 2008 part of the field was roto-tilled and seeded with a native mix and oats as a cover crop as the blackberry had reduced the amount of grass in the meadow.

Surrounding the meadow is a mowed area for passage that should not be greater than 8 feet wide next to the hedgerow along the drive and can be 10 feet wide to the west for passage to the shore. The wider the mowed area the more vulnerable the wildlife is that passes through it. The Tree Warden with Americorps and the Sea Call Farm Supporters have removed invasive species and planted native shrubs to improve this hedgerow. The hedgerow has berries and nesting sites for other birds. There is a large juniper that should remain in the middle of the field for nesting birds.

The Sea Call Farm property has two major **wooded areas**, the coastal bank to the north and along the lot line to the east. The Coastal Bank presents a pitch pine/oak woodland with a large number of black locusts that are commonly seen around old house sites. The understory is poison ivy with a few huckleberry and other native understory species. A section of the coastal bank in front of the dwelling was pruned under the Parks Department and other parts of the coastal bank have been pruned and non-native trees removed with the Tree Warden and Americorps. There are many non-native species on this bank and the area would be gradually improved by removing invasive trees and shrubs and allowing the native trees and shrubs to grow in. If not enough native species are in the area new ones should be added. Major efforts have gone forward under the Parks and Beaches Department and the Tree Warden to improve the wooded area to the east. Many non-native invasive trees were removed and new native trees were planted including beech, oak, silverbell, coffee tree, and some white pines and hollies that were transplanted from another Conservation area. Patty Crow, a member of the Sea Call Supporters, has donated many trees including hazelnut and shadbush. Some non-native trees were left temporarily to shade the new young trees and are gradually being removed. The bittersweet was mowed in the understory and an herbicide was used. Any native trees on site such as oak or cedar are being encouraged by removing the non-native trees and bittersweet near them. Trees and shrubs from the Barnstable County Nursery were planted near the street under the Tree Warden.

Another major attraction to birds on this site is an old orchard. Baltimore orioles and orchard orioles have been seen in the apple and pear trees. The Tree Warden and Americorps have done some pruning of these trees and recently the area under the orchard was mowed by the Parks Department due to the invasive species blackberry. Native grass will be planted in the understory to provide habitat under these trees. Three new fruit trees were planted in 2008.

## ■ **Land Uses, Limitations and Prohibitions**

Conservation-managed lands are purchased for a variety of active and passive **recreational uses**. Prohibited activities and hours of use should be detailed and an informational sign posted at the area.

The Sea Call Farm Conservation Area features:

- Trail walking
- Bird watching
- Picnicking
- Gardening
- Scenic viewing

There are **limitations** on hours of use of the property and use by groups as follows:

- The area is closed from 10:00 p.m. until 7:00 a.m.
- Groups of more than 10 people require a permit from the Conservation Office.

In addition, certain activities **are prohibited** at all areas under the management of the Conservation Commission, including:

- Alcoholic beverages
- Littering
- Domestic trash disposal
- Unrestrained dogs
- Open fires and cooking
- Storing of small boats
- Erection of tents or camping
- Use of soaps, detergents or shampoo
- Discharge of firearms
- Damaging any structure or landscape
- Harassing wildlife

## ■ **Implementation Actions**

### **Action Required:**

- Mowing, trash pick-up
- Maintenance of community gardens
- Restoration of buildings
- Restoration of fields and woodlands

### **Party Responsible:**

Sea Call Farm Supporters  
Sea Call Farm Gardeners  
Sea Call Farm Supporters  
ConsCom/Parks



