

The Crane Swamp Conservation Area includes 2,225 acres of open space straddling the borders of Northborough, Westborough, Southborough, and Marlborough. The centerpiece is a high quality 400-acre red maple swamp. The swamp is surrounded by a complex of open fields, wet meadows, ponds, pine plantations, and oak-pine forests, with Cedar Hill to the west and Walnut Hill to the northeast. Such a diverse, high quality and expansive conservation area is a unique treasure in Metrowest Boston.

The properties are owned by a variety of Massachusetts state agencies as well as the Sudbury Valley Trustees (SVT). SVT protected 101 acres of Sawink Farm Reservation at the border of Northborough and Westborough in 1992 and the 88-acre drumlin of Cedar Hill in Northborough in 1993. The Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) owns Crane Swamp, Little Crane Swamp, and much of Walnut Hill, just north of Sawink Farm Reservation. Westborough State Hospital land extends from Lyman Street to Chauncy Pond, and the Massachusetts Division of Fish & Game owns land which runs west to the Assabet River. Furthermore, the protected watershed helps to preserve the public water supply for 2.5 million people.

This mosaic of different habitats provides for a rich array of plants and animals, including state-listed species, interior-sensitive forest birds, and species which need to range some distance throughout the year for survival. Wildlife species known to inhabit the conservation area include bobcat, coyote, Red fox, Eastern Cottontail rabbits, Snowshoe hare, White-tailed deer, Barred Owl, Ruffed Grouse, American Woodcock, Spotted turtles and Monarch butterflies.

The four communities of Marlborough, Southborough, Westborough, and Northborough, together with Sudbury Valley Trustees and the Westborough Conservation Land Trust (WCLT) worked with the Massachusetts Water Resources Authority (MWRA) to develop an interconnected trail network. Prior to construction of MWRA's new water treatment plant at Walnut Hill, SVT maintained a connecting trail around the north end of Crane Swamp. As part of the plant construction, the MWRA recreated

and improved the trail connection around the north side of the swamp. SVT and the WCLT are working on a cooperative agreement with the DCR to establish additional connector trails across the top of Walnut Hill.

CULTURAL HISTORY

The Assabet River powered mills and factories produced wool, cotton, shoes, hats, and bicycles; however, most of the landscape was devoted to agriculture. These were farming communities into the 1930s. Dairies, apple and peach orchards, market gardens, and later greenhouses for carnations were the dominant agricultural commodities.

The four small hills in the area are drumlins, elongated hills of glacial drift. These hills were more commonly used for grazing and fruit trees because the soils are too stony and poorly drained for good crop production. The more level soils, particularly those that remain open today, were probably crop or hay fields supporting local dairy farms and market gardens.

The tract of land now known as Sawink Farm was deeded to Edmund Brigham by his father in August 1762. The son built a house, barn and other buildings there, creating one of early Westborough's primary farms. The farm included pastureland for cows, some cropland, and perhaps a wood lot – typical assets of a subsistence farm at the time. The farm went through a succession of owners, including the Walker family, who gave their name to the street that bisects the farm. Michael Sawink inherited the farm from his parents in the late 1940s. Michael wanted to see his land remain as open space. He gifted 35 acres in Northborough to SVT. SVT purchased 66 acres in Westborough with funds provided by Lawrence Walkup, another local farmer. The old house and outbuildings on the two acre tract in the middle of the SVT property are still owned by the Sawink Trust.

CONSERVATION MANAGEMENT

You will observe radical habitat alterations on the south slope of Cedar Hill. Sudbury Valley Trustees is restoring and maintaining early successional shrub habitat on 18 acres. This habitat management is for the benefit of birds

that prefer shrub habitat for nesting and feeding. This management will also benefit other wildlife, butterflies and insects.

Historically in New England, disturbances like wind, fire, flood, and activities of Native Americans and European settlers – burning, farming, grazing and logging- created large and small forest openings. Grasses or shrubs dominated during early succession. Many wildlife species, especially birds, require shrubland habitat for foraging, nesting, and cover. Shrublands were part of a dynamic landscape of diverse habitat types. As one opening reverted to forest, another was created, so shrubland bird populations were maintained. Availability of early successional shrubland habitat in New England is declining, as former agricultural lands succeed to forest or are developed. These shrubland species are experiencing more consistent declines than species that breed in mature forest. For example, six of the ten most rapidly declining bird species in Massachusetts, according to the National Breeding Bird Survey, are early successional species (Brown Thrasher, Eastern Meadowlark, Eastern Towhee, Northern Bobwhite, American Kestrel and Field Sparrow). Birds benefiting from this management at Cedar Hill include the Eastern Towhee and the Blue-winged Warbler.

SVT is also working to combat the invasion of alien plants. We will be doing selective herbiciding of invasive plants in the newly cleared area. Our ultimate goal is to foster growth of native shrubs, such as Arrowwood and Highbush blueberry. You may notice a cleared patch in the woods on the north slope of Cedar Hill, near large Sugar maple trees. This is an area in which we are experimenting with the removal and control of Japanese barberry, an invasive shrub.

LAND PROTECTION NEEDS

Despite the thousands of acres of protected lands within and around Crane Swamp, the development of other lands in the vicinity could put the area's environmental integrity at risk. Because of the locations of major traffic arteries like I-495 and Routes 9 and 135, the towns of Westborough, Southborough, and Northborough have been experiencing tremendous development pressure in recent decades. Some of the most heavily developed areas of Westborough exist in very close proximity to the swamp, and pollutants ranging from roadway and parking area fluid runoff to lawn chemicals take their toll on natural areas. Atlantic white cedar swamp habitat, which is rare in Massachusetts, may be particularly susceptible to the pollution caused by adjacent land uses.

Private land to the northwest of Cedar Hill is vulnerable to development, as is land to the south and southeast of Sawink Farm. Protection of these would create an additional buffer to the most sensitive habitat areas within this complex of lands.

Sudbury Valley Trustees (SVT) is a regional land trust dedicated to the protection of the natural resources and wildlife habitat of the Sudbury, Assabet and Concord river basin. SVT carries out its work through land acquisition and stewardship, advocacy, and education throughout a 36-town region. SVT protects and cares for over 100 properties of conservation land that include wetlands, sensitive habitats, trails and other open spaces. SVT reservations are open to the public free of charge. Please consider joining SVT as a member. For more information see www.svtweb.org.

RULES AND REGULATIONS

We welcome you to enjoy the trails for walking, skiing, snowshoeing, nature study, photography, and other quiet activities. Please carry out everything you carry in.

In order to protect this natural area, the following are prohibited:

- Motorized Vehicles
 - Hunting or Trapping*
 - Camping
 - Bicycling**
 - Fires
 - Disposing of Trash or Yard Waste
 - Cutting or Removing Plants
- * Hunting is allowed on state Fish & Game land
** Bicycling is allowed on state Fish & Game land

DIRECTIONS

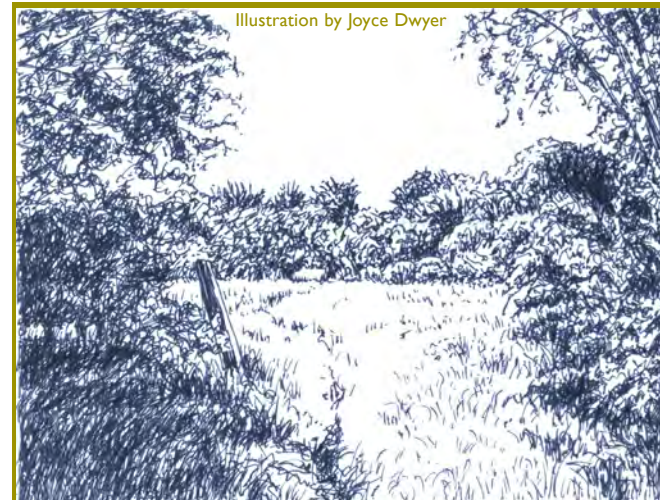
Cedar Hill, Marlborough/Northborough

For the north entrance, take Route 495 to exit 23C (Simarano Drive exit). Continue to the lights at the end of the exit ramp. Take a left at the lights onto Simarano Drive. Continue to another set of lights and take a right onto Cedar Hill Street. Parking for the reservation is at the Scholastic Book Fairs at 360 Cedar Hill Street. The entrance will be on your left across from Forest Street. There is ample parking, labeled with SVT signs, immediately on your right. A trail easement, marked by posts and SVT markers leads around the wetlands and to a kiosk behind Scholastic Book Fairs.

Sawink Farm, Westborough

From route 495 take the route 9 west exit 34B. Follow route 9 west approximately 1.1 miles to the route 30 east (E. Main St.) exit. Bear right onto East Main Street. Continue approximately one mile to Walker Street on the left. Turn left on Walker Street and continue down the hill to the SVT sign and a small grass parking lot on the right.

Illustration by Joyce Dwyer



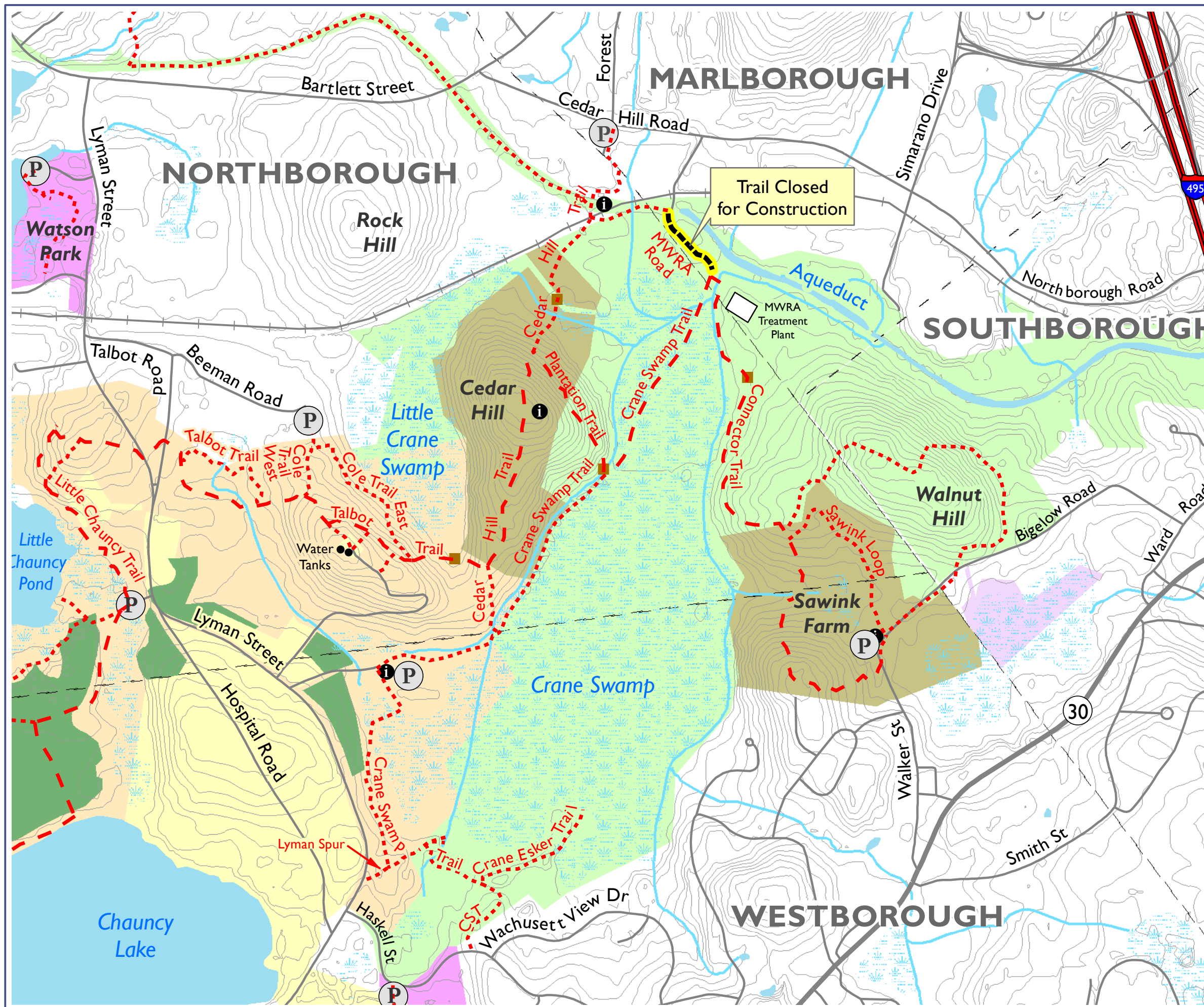
CRANE SWAMP REGIONAL TRAILS



SUDBURY
VALLEY
TRUSTEES

18 Wolbach Road
Sudbury, MA 01776
978-443-5588
www.svtweb.org

Crane Swamp Regional Trails



- Trail
- Westborough Charm Bracelet
- Temporarily Closed for Construction
- Parking
- Kiosk
- Bridge
- Railroad
- Pond
- Wetland
- Sudbury Valley Trustees
- Department of Fish & Game
- DCR-Water Supply Protection
- Dept of Agricultural Resources
- State Hospital
- Municipal
- Southborough Open Land Foundation

Map by Sudbury Valley Trustees
 March 2016 www.svtweb.org

SVT wishes to thank its partner, DCR, for permission to maintain trails through their property.

