

IPCAR NATURAL PRESERVE MANAGEMENT OPTIONS

by the Georgetown Conservation Commission

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BACKGROUND

The Georgetown Conservation Commission is responsible for the management of Georgetown's two town-owned forests: the 33-acre Ipcar Natural Preserve and the 30-acre Round-the-Cove Forest (Figure 1).

In 2012, the Conservation Commission received a small grant from "Project Canopy," a program administered by the State of Maine to help connect communities to their forests (www.projectcanopy.me). A portion of Georgetown's grant was used to hire a professional forester to produce a forest assessment of each parcel. Such an assessment would provide the Conservation Commission with data on the health of the two forests, and outline possible forest management options. These assessments were conducted by Barrie Brusila, a licensed forester, in the summer of 2013. She presented her results at a public meeting at the Georgetown Community Center on September 26, 2013. Brusila's more detailed assessments for each forest tract are available on the Conservation Commission's web site (www.gtownconservation.com) and in the Town Office.

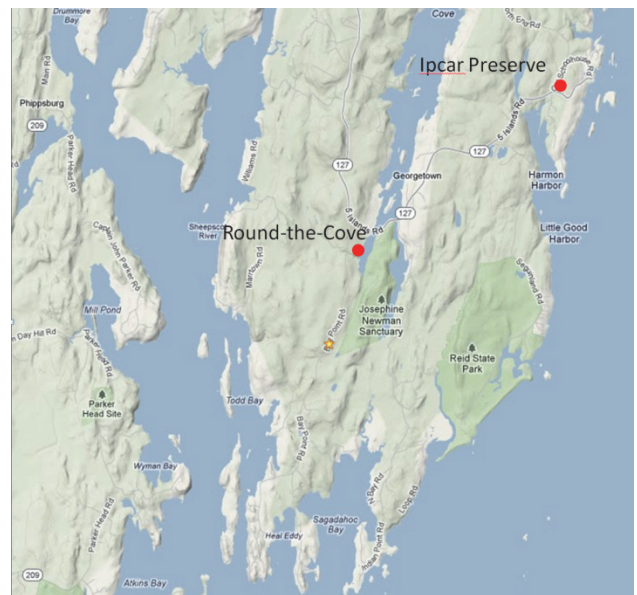


Figure 1. Location of two town-owned forests: Ipcar Natural Preserve and Round-the-Cove Forest.

Management options for the two sites differ because the sites have largely different forest types. The Ipcar Preserve is dominated by spruce growing on thin soils, and the Round-the-Cove tract is dominated more by hardwoods on deeper soils. **The purpose of this document is to outline the management options for Ipcar, and to explain to town residents the advantages and disadvantages of these options.** The Ipcar site presents more of a management challenge to the Commission because the mature spruce trees that dominate the site are beginning to blow down. The Conservation Commission has not yet reached a conclusion about which option would be best for Ipcar (see "Next Steps" below).

There is no one "correct" management choice for Ipcar. Science and forestry provide us with knowledge and tools to accomplish our goals, but we (the community) have to be clear about our goals. Sometimes reaching two different goals requires different, mutually exclusive, management actions. So, first being clear on our goals for Ipcar is vital, before a management plan can be developed and implemented.

Table 1 lists some of the common goals (or values) people have for forests. Certainly any two individuals in Georgetown might have different goals for Ipcar Preserve. But even a single individual might have conflicting goals. For example, an abutter to Ipcar might like the forest just the way it is now, but at the same time be increasingly concerned about the growing fire risk as the mature spruce in Ipcar blow down. It is typically impossible to maintain *all* the public's values simultaneously. It's the Conservation Commission's responsibility to generate and carry out a management plan for Ipcar that best balances the array of public values.

Table 1. List of commonly held values people have for forests.

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1. aesthetic / spiritual value
 2. recreation use (e.g., hiking)
 3. wildlife habitat
 4. hunting
 5. property values of adjacent private lots
 6. economic value from timber sales
 7. forest health
 8. fire hazard to adjacent private property
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Background on the Ipcar Natural Preserve

In 1973, through the efforts of Adolf Ipcar and others, private and public monies were raised to purchase the 33 acres of what is now called the Ipcar Natural Preserve. Federal funds from the U.S. Department of Interior Land and Water Conservation Fund were awarded to Georgetown through the State of Maine Department of Conservation. The only requirement for receiving this funding was that “the property be retained and maintained by the Town in perpetuity for outdoor recreational use.” After the purchase, the Georgetown Board of Selectmen assigned legal management responsibility of the Preserve to the town's Conservation Commission¹.

The Ipcar Preserve is actually two parcels. The West Lot is an irregularly shaped parcel of about ~14 acres on the west side of Old Schoolhouse Road. The larger, 19-acre East Lot, includes much of the land within the loop formed by Old Schoolhouse Road (see Figure 2).

A Brief Ecological History of Ipcar Preserve

The smaller West Lot was impacted by a fire in 1937 and then cut about 40 years ago, not long before the land was purchased by the town. The larger East Lot, dominated by mature, 90-100 year old spruce today, appears to have escaped the 1937 fire. Both lots were open pastureland in the late 1800s, like much of Georgetown at that time.

Because the spruce dominating the East Lot today were established when the pasture was abandoned about 100 years ago, most of the mature spruce are basically the same age. Although spruce can live to be several hundred years old, this species does not persist that long when growing on thin soils, such as characterized by the East Lot of Ipcar. In fact, the mature spruce in the East Lot are beginning to blow down, which is obvious on a short walk through the Preserve. Today, this is typical of many of Maine's coastal island forests that were established when pastures were widely abandoned a century ago. “Even-

¹ Conservation Commission Report, p. 59 of the 1973 Town Report states: “Administration of the 33 acres of open space in Five Islands is the legal responsibility of the Conservation Commission.

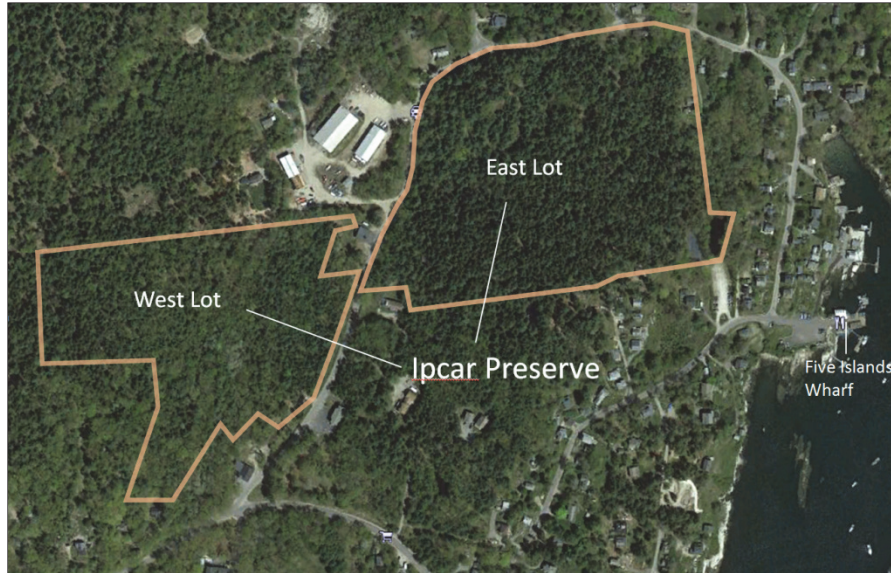


Figure 2. Location of the West Lot and the East Lot of the 33-acre Ipcar Natural Preserve. The East Lot is dominated by even-aged mature spruce that is beginning to blow down.

aged” mature spruce stands like Ipcar often succumb to severe wind storms, where the whole forest stand blows down at one time. There is no way to predict when such an event might occur in Ipcar. It could be next week, a year from now, or ten years from now.

Management Options for Ipcar Preserve

There are three options for managing Ipcar going forward:

Option 1 is to simply allow Mother Nature to take her course. The mature spruce will continue to blow down over time, increasing the fire hazard. The more the canopy opens up, the more vulnerable the remaining trees will be to wind damage. The Conservation Commission will need to find a way to remove the growing fuelwood load in Ipcar to protect the local community from a potential forest fire.

Option 2 is to conduct a selection harvest. Unfortunately, there are no real advantages of such a harvest. A selection harvest will only *accelerate* the blowdown of the remainder of the stand, essentially resulting in de facto Option 3, only costing the town money instead of making a small amount of money on the timber.

Option 3 is to harvest the mature spruce in Ipcar in advance of a single large blowdown event or ongoing, chronic blowdown. The harvest would be what is called a “regeneration harvest” where all of the tall, mature spruce would be cut. With new sunlight reaching the forest floor, seedlings and saplings would grow fast and replace the mature forest over time. Ipcar East would be a very open site for ten to twenty years, before the young trees grow tall enough to look like a closed forest again.

Table 2 below is intended to serve as a guide for helping Georgetown citizens understand the tradeoffs of each option.

Prior to the 2013 timber inventory conducted by the licensed forester hired by the Conservation Commission, in 2011 members of the Commission walked through Ipcar Preserve with representatives of

Table 2. Forest management options for Ipcar

<p>Option 1: Let nature take its course: Do not harvest the Ipcar East Lot. If and when the stand blows down, we will deal with it then.</p>	<p>Advantages:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The community can continue to enjoy Ipcar the way it is now for an undetermined period of time. • Wildlife that like mature spruce will continue to benefit. <p>Disadvantages:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The fuelwood load (the fire hazard to the community) will grow each year. • At some point in the near future (1-5 years) the accumulating fuelwood (fallen trees) will need to be removed to reduce the fire hazard. • The town will lose the chance to make a small amount of money (~\$10,000) from the spruce timber, and instead have to pay to have the downed fuelwood removed. • The chance of a catastrophic blowdown will grow each year. • Keeping the hiking trails open will become a growing challenge as more trees blow down.
<p>Option 2: Selection harvest of the East Lot</p>	<p>Advantages</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • there are no advantages with this option <p>Disadvantages</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is probably not enough wood in a selection harvest to make it an economically viable harvest. Therefore, the town will likely have to pay for the selection harvest. • The mature spruce trees that remained after the harvest will likely blow down within a matter of a few years, requiring yet another costly timber removal. The fuelwood load will be too dangerous for the community if left in place. • The town will end up paying, instead of being paid, for what essentially ends up being a regeneration harvest (see Option 3 below).
<p>Option 3: “Regeneration harvest” of the East Lot: Harvest the mature spruce in Ipcar; leave the wind-firm hardwoods and white pines to provide seed for regeneration of the site.</p>	<p>Advantages:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The fire hazard to abutters and the community will be eliminated. • Because the harvest will be done with the trees standing, the town will make a small amount of money from the harvest. The revenue can be used for other conservation projects that benefit the town. • New wildlife, especially birds that prefer young forest, will begin to use the site. • Harvesting will allow the site to be managed for long-term forest health and productivity. <p>Disadvantages:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The current aesthetic appeal of Ipcar will be lost for several decades. • Although a visual buffer can be retained around the periphery, abutters’ “viewsheds” will change. • There is some risk of blowdown along the edges of Ipcar after the harvest, but that risk also exists with Option 1 (the “do nothing” option).

the Maine Forest Service. These foresters stated that if we do nothing in terms of management, the entire parcel (East) will probably blow down some time in the future.

Next Steps

Again, at the time of this report, the Conservation Commission has made no decision or recommendation regarding the three options listed above. The Commission needs additional feedback on this report from the community. The Commission has scheduled a public meeting for Thursday, April 24, 2014, at the Georgetown Community Center, 7-8:30 PM). We encourage anyone interested to attend this meeting. Also, you can send us your comments through our web site: (www.gtownconservation.com).

After the April 24 meeting, the Conservation Commission will come to a conclusion on which option to recommend. The Commission will present its recommendation at a Board of Selectmen's meeting in May, 2014. A decision on the management option for Ipcar will be posted on the Conservation Commission's web site in May (www.gtownconservation.com). If any harvesting is done in Ipcar, it would not take place until the fall of 2014 or winter 2014-2015.

Concluding Thoughts

Forests change naturally over time. We don't often notice because forests change at such a slow rate, unless there is a major event like a blowdown or a forest fire. No matter what we do, Mother Nature will not allow us to keep Ipcar the way it is today. We can either harvest the mature spruce in an environmentally responsible way today, or let Mother Nature "harvest" the trees at her own pace. As you've seen above, there are tradeoffs for each option. Which option would you choose, and why?

No matter which option you choose, it's important to remember there is no "right" answer for what to do. The answer depends on the public's goals, and how much risk and how much cost the community is willing to bear. The Conservation Commission wants and needs input from a diversity of people within the town in order to manage Ipcar to best meet the goals of Georgetown residents, especially the citizens in the Five Islands community who both enjoy Ipcar but are also most vulnerable to the growing fire hazard.

Again, feel free to contact Conservation Commission member John Hagan if you have questions or comments about the management options (haganjohn@myfairpoint.net, or call 207-837-4868).

Some Frequently Asked Questions:

Why can't the Conservation Commission just remove trees as they fall over?

We can, but it will cost money to haul whole trees to the roadside for disposal. Also, the more trees that blow over, the more the remaining trees are likely to blow over. We can expect the rate of blowdown to accelerate in the next decade.

What was the intended purpose of Ipcar?

The purpose of purchasing the property in 1973 was to simply keep the site as open space, available for outdoor recreation. There were no other restrictions on how the site was to be managed.

What about erosion problems with forest harvesting?

It is unlikely that erosion will be a problem in Ipcar for four reasons: (1) the harvest would be supervised by a professional forester, independent of the logger; (2) the soils are thin and the site is naturally well-drained, and so not highly vulnerable to rutting and erosion; (3) harvesting would only occur during dry weather; (4) we would hire a logger who strictly follows Best Management Practices (BMPs) for erosion control.

If we log, why don't we use horse logging? Wouldn't that be better for the forest than heavy machinery?

We could, but horse logging can sometimes cause more damage to the forest floor than mechanized equipment, depending on the intensity of the harvest. Harvesting machines can "reach in," cut, and fell trees from 30 or 40 feet away, so logs don't have to be dragged so far over the soil. Although mechanized equipment can be heavy, the load is distributed by balloon-like tires. Ironically, mechanized equipment, when used properly, can actually protect the forest floor and the existing seedling layer, which is vital to establishing a new forest.

What time of year would harvesting take place?

Most likely in fall, when the weather is drier, or in winter when the ground is frozen.

How long would the harvesting take?

Probably about 4-6 weeks.

What would happen to the wood that was harvested from Ipcar?

Much of the mature spruce would go to make sawtimber—2x4s, 2x6s, and 2x8s—for construction lumber. Some of the lower quality (crooked or rotten) trees would go for either pulpwood or biomass energy production.

What would happen to the trails if we logged Ipcar?

The Conservation Commission would restore the trail system. Even though the site would look very different than before the harvest, the wildlife species that come in to the new habitat will be interesting—such as Dark-eyed juncos, White-throated sparrows, and perhaps Eastern Bluebirds (especially if we put up Bluebird nesting boxes).

Is the potential timber revenue driving the decision-making?

No. Virtually everyone would prefer to have Ipcar stay just like it is today. However, given that the stand is starting to blow down, keeping Ipcar like it is not an option. At this point it is a matter of whether the Town pays (Option 1) or gets paid (Option 3) for the management of Ipcar.

What would the town do with the timber revenue, if Option 3 were chosen?

This is up to the Board of Selectmen. However, the Conservation Commission would recommend that a special fund be established that the Conservation Commission can draw on to accomplish conservation projects for the town, such as removing invasive plants from Round-the-Cove forest,

maintaining trails and trail signage, or increasing knowledge within the community about use of sustainable energy and sustainable food.

Would trees have to be planted if Ipcar were harvested.

No. Most of Maine is blessed with abundant natural regeneration. Between the seed already in the soil and the understory seedlings already established in Ipcar, planting will not be necessary.

For more information, contact:

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or call 207-837-4868

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