

Phippsburg Conservation Commission
Basin Preserve Hike
August 21, 2007

The Conservation Commission met with Nancy Sferra of the Nature Conservancy on August 21 for a guided walk in the Basin Preserve. Only Jean Perkins and Jo Schuman attended, the others were unable to because of injury or prior commitments. However, we had about ten enthusiastic participants from Phippsburg who saw our notice on the Phippsburg TV announcements.

We wanted to familiarize ourselves with the area from the Basin Road down to Sprague Pond, which comprises a natural north/south wildlife corridor. Nancy led us on a trail that goes down from the west side of the Green Piece. An old trail is being closed due to overuse and a new trail, some of which was created that very morning, goes south and connects with a trail leading up from the Phippsburg Land Trust's land to the north of Sprague Pond.

Nancy pointed out many interesting things along the way. The Conservancy is creating 18 Ecological Reserve Monitoring Plots throughout the Preserve. These areas are carefully marked and the trees, shrubs, seedlings and saplings recorded. They will be followed over time.

We learned about many trees in the Preserve--Nancy pointed out white pine, red pine, and pitch pine, and how each can be identified by the number of needles in a bundle (five to white pine, 3 in pitch pine, and 2 in red pine.) She showed us the sad effects of the beech bark disease that has afflicted all the beech trees in the area. This is caused by a plant sucking insect combined with fungus. The Conservancy is also taking core samples from some larger trees. These samples can tell the age of the tree, climate changes over its life span, and also sometimes indicate the history of fires in the area.

The new trails are avoiding wet places where possible, but there will be some need for bog bridges, although this can be better assessed in the spring.

Several lesser-known plants were found: rattlesnake plantain, with its dramatic foliage, and broom crowberry. There was an abundance of more common plants such as reindeer lichen, wintergreen, partridge berry, several groups of "Indian pipes", trailing arbutus, the trailing ground pine ("princess pine") star flower, and others.

The trail leads through pine oak forest, and into areas of pitch pine forest, as well as stands of red pine. There is a dramatic sheer-faced rock outcropping along the way.

We learned a lot about this fine natural area and are very grateful for the wonderful job the Conservancy is doing in cleaning the area of refuse, creating trails, protecting the natural resources, and studying what is there. We hope that we can be of help to them--perhaps aiding in cataloguing the plants in the preserve. This could be part of our goal to create a natural history booklet for Phippsburg.