

Conservation Restriction Monitoring Report

Fall 2013



Prepared for
The Newton Conservators
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Summary

I visited 8 properties on which the Newton Conservators hold a Conservation Restriction on September 24 and 26, 2013 to conduct monitoring visits. I was joined in the field by Newton Conservator board members, who will begin monitoring the properties in the future, to review our procedures: taking photographs, notes and GPS locations. I conducted a previous monitoring visit in March of 2012. Both monitoring visits were based on initial summary baseline report prepared in the spring of 2010.

Overall, the properties remain in good condition; some concerns raised in previous years persist while others have been resolved. Limbs from storm damage sustained over the intervening years can still be found most of the properties. Removal and/or pruning of vegetation to prevent damage from such natural forces as storms, fire and disease is allowed on most properties. We again suggest that the Newton Conservators consult with a Massachusetts certified arborist to evaluate trees in declining located within the properties to prevent potential harm to visitors or property.

The Conservators may also want to consider developing ecological management plans for the properties, especially those which are infested with alien, invasive species such as Prospect Park and the Awtrey property. Invasive plants threaten the biological diversity of conservation land, and their abundant growth can significantly alter the natural aesthetics of an area, thereby limiting somewhat its enjoyment by human visitors.

We also recommend that the conservators erect property and boundary signs to greet visitors, inform them about the property and the organization, and identify boundaries at all the properties. Proper signage can be designed to enhance the visitor experience, build visibility for the organization, and to help manage and protect the properties.

The following pages contain a narrative and photographs of conditions observed in the field during the fall of 2013. Each narrative highlights conditions that are inconsistent with the conservation values and purposes of the Conservation Restriction, or are otherwise of interest to the Newton Conservators. We include a plan of each property, indicating where each photograph was taken. Below we provide an overview of our findings.

Summary Findings – 2013 Monitoring Visit

Angino Farm

- Vegetable stand re-built.
- Chicken coop, cold storage and port-a-potty outbuildings added.
- Barn undergoing renovations.

Wilmerding

- Wood chips on trail abutting property unstable, washing into intermittent stream.
- Possible dumping of organic debris.

Ordway

- Good condition. Suggest chipping downed limbs and placing on pathways.

Newton Commonwealth Golf Course

- Unknown out building, likely for irrigation.
- Dumped organic debris and construction materials.
- Crossing structure and armored drainage collapsing.
- Renovated bridge.

Awtrey

- Gardening equipment stored on property has been removed.

Prospect Park

- Robust growth of Norway maples inhibiting native vegetation.

Webster Park

- New trail overlooking bluff.
- Dumped organic debris along fence on eastern boundary persists.

Crystal Lake

- Clearing along shoreline.
- Boundaries still unclear not marked in the field.
- Sale of abutting property may terminate Fountain Easement.

Angino Farm

Remains of the burned vegetable stand were removed and a new, handicapped accessible stand constructed in its place (Photos 1 & 2). A chicken coop and small poultry yard were added to the property, though eggs are primarily consumed by the resident farmer and his family (Photo 3). A cold storage locker has been added to the property to improve processing vegetables for consumption. A port-a-potty has also been added for convenience (Photo 4). The barn was also undergoing extensive renovations, and all work was being performed on the existing structure (Photo 5). Lastly, a row of thriving fruit trees, planted along the western boundary in honor of former Conservator Carol Lee Corbett (Photo 6).

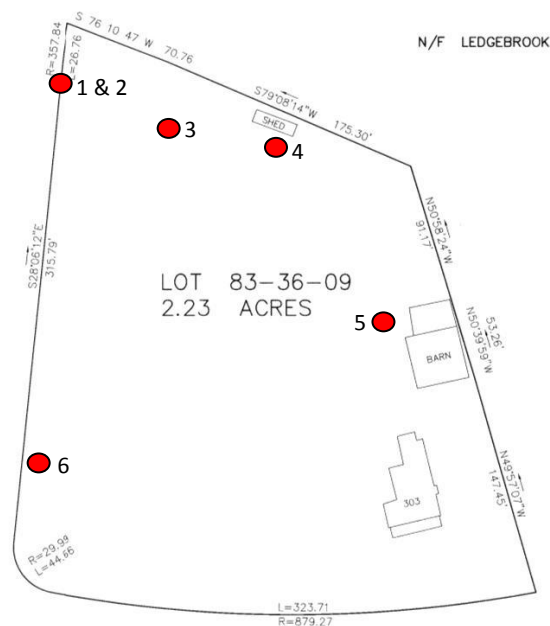


Photo 1. New farm stand.



Photo 2. View from stand into CR.



Photo 3. Outbuildings, including cold storage and port-a-potty.



Photo 4. Poultry yard.



Photo 5. Barn renovations.



Photo 6. Fruit trees along boundary fence.

Wilmerding

The Wilmerding property abuts the Chestnut Hill Reservation which lies to the east. One access to the reservation and the Wilmerding property is off of Elgin Road. A small intermittent stream, Thomasville Brook, flows through the Wilmerding CR. It passes underneath the trail a short distance from the entrance, and flows to the northeast contributing to the Hammond Pond catchment area. Wood chips recently placed on the trail have washed into the stream bed, and appears to occasionally clog the small culvert/pipe through which the stream flows under (Photos 7 & 8). The wood chips pose a potential erosion problem as water may get backed up into the stream bed, which could flood the Wilmerding CR and the trail. We suggest the Conservators work with the Newton Conservation Commission to address trail maintenance at this location. It may be possible to plant some wetland tolerant shrubs to help slow the flow of water from the trail into the stream bed, curtailing erosion and flooding problems.

A small area along the steep, western boundary was denuded of the ground ivy that carpets most of the property (Photo 9). It is possible that dumped organic debris was placed here and later washed away: it is difficult to tell. We recommend that future site visits include monitoring for dumped leaves, grasses and other yard waste, and that the conservators maintain open communication with abutters to discourage any dumping since it is prohibited in the terms and conditions of the C.R.

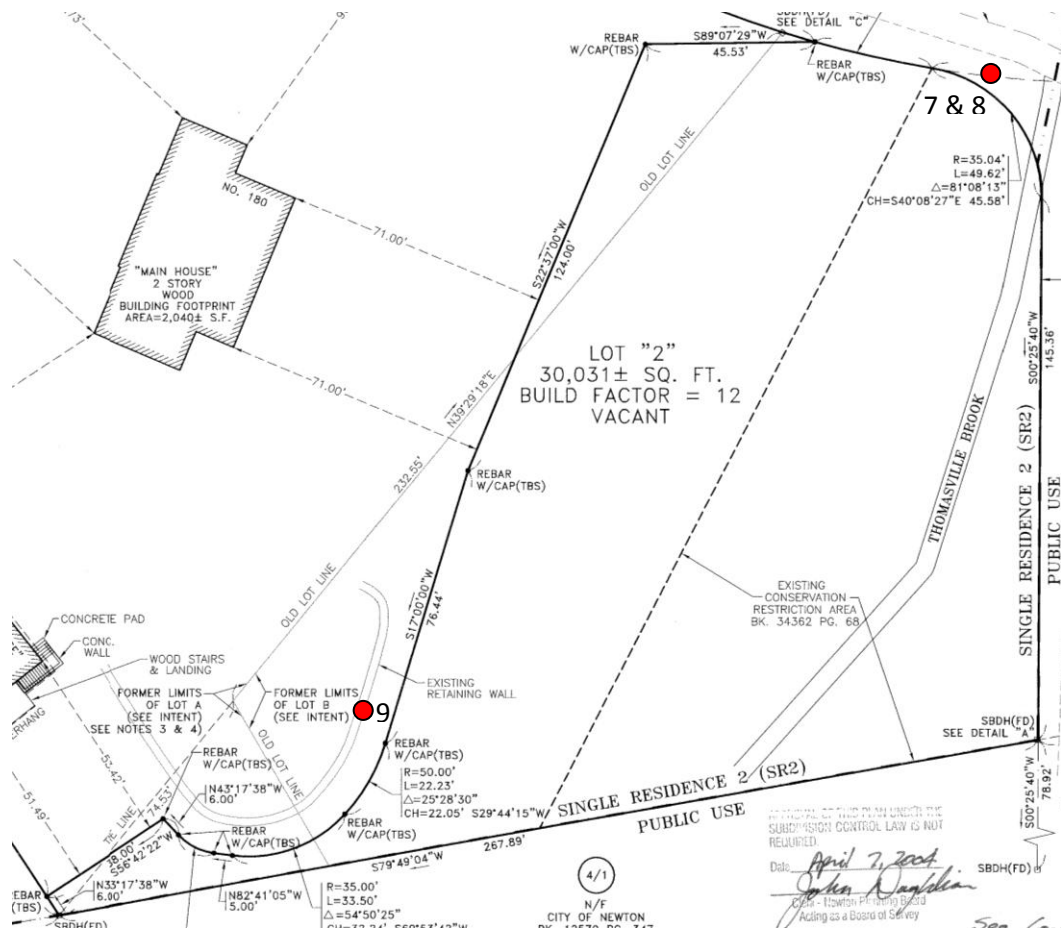




Photo 7. Wood chips washing off trail.



Photo 8. Culvert clogged with wood chips and debris.

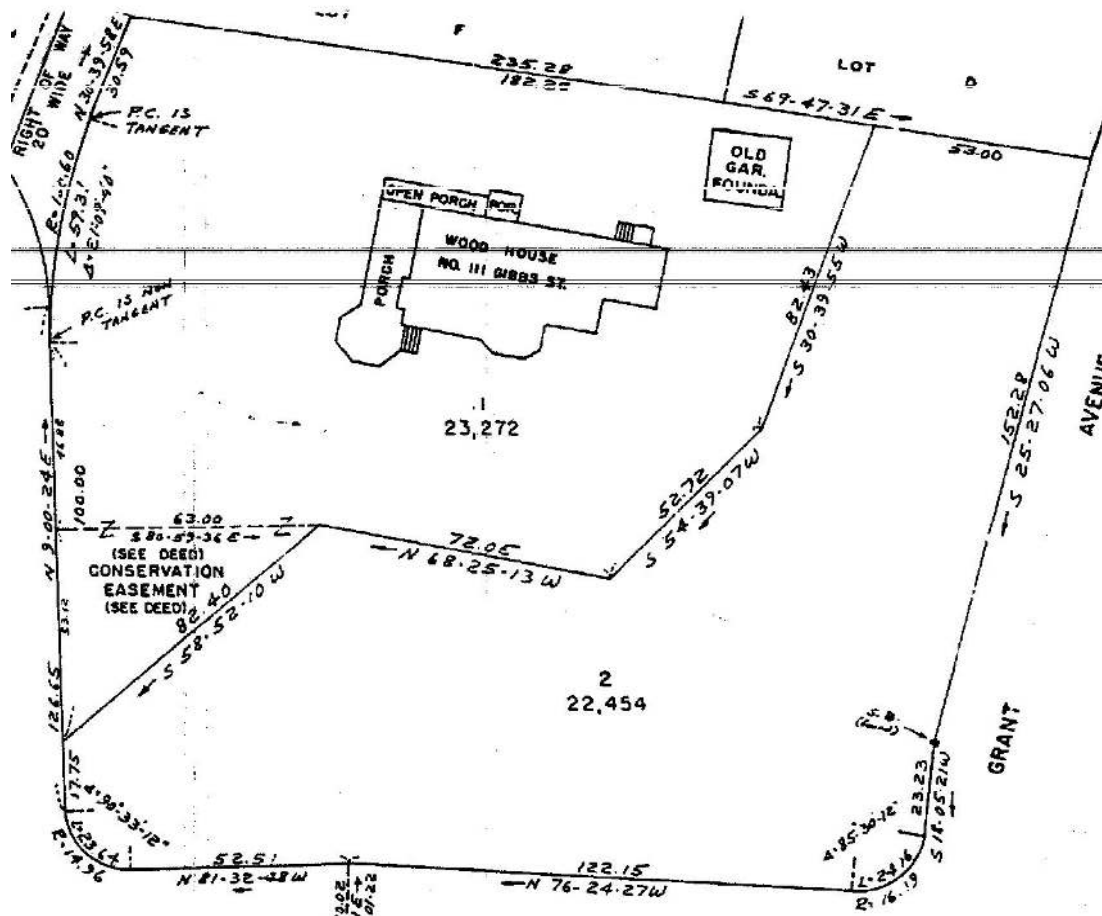


Photo 9. Erosion or debris on slope.

Ordway

The Ordway property was again found in good condition. Wind-blown trash present during the last monitoring visit was absent, though it is likely problematic from time to time. Downed limbs from winter storms have not been removed from the property shown in diagram did not register in camera). It is possible that the limbs may be chipped on-site and placed on trails, a practice which is consistent with the terms and conditions of the CR.

Board members in attendance discussed the need to remove Poison Ivy from the property before volunteers could come in to help maintain the property, especially the wildflower gardens. These beds once bordered pathways winding along the eastern slopes of the properties, and there is interest in restoring these garden. Maintenance of plants and gardens would be allowed by the meager conditions stated in this older CR. (No photos taken.)



Newton Commonwealth Golf Course

Overall the property was in good condition. Board members from the Newton Conservators helped to identify several conditions that will need to be monitored closely on subsequent visits. First and foremost, a stone and cement crossing structure over the armored drainage running through the property has partially collapsed (Photo 10 - 13). We spoke with golf course personnel at the end of our visit, and they were well aware of the structural failures at the crossing. We highly recommend that the conservators follow-up with staff from the golf course, and that the conservators also notify the Newton Conservation Commission who has jurisdiction over the drainage under the Wetlands Protection Act. The City of Newton will likely be responsible for the repairs to the structure, and we also suggest contacting city engineers or the Department of Public Works.

Small amounts of organic debris and dumped materials which look to be tar and rocks (possibly from pathway and bridge improvements) were found along the northern perimeter fence (Photo 14), and organic debris in the far southwest corner of the property (Photo 15). These activities are prohibited in the CR:

PROHIBITED USES

3(f) ...the dumping on the Property of soil, refuse, trash, vehicle bodies or parts, trailers, rubbish, debris, junk, waste, or other such substance, whether or not generated on the Property.

A stockade fence found under a canopy of pine trees on the steep hill across from the club house shelters a small shed, pipes and valves, as well as several holding tanks (Photo 16). This appears to be a pump-house and machinery used for irrigation of the property.

The two large ponds on the property appear to be in fair condition with clear water quality and no noticeable odor. The Newton Conservators raised concern about these pools in the past, and we have provided photos of them (Photo 17 & 18). In addition to the ponds, we noted cracks in the foundation of the retaining pond near the pump-house at the center of the property. It appears repairs have been made in the past. Soggy turf at the base of this wall indicates that it still leaks. A structural failure of this wall could be a threat to the aquatic resources on the property if a large amount of water and sediment enters the system during an extreme event. We suggest the Newton Conservators work with the golf course operators and the City of Newton, including the Newton Conservation Commission, to see that the wall is repaired.

Finally, renovations to the bridge noted in the 2010 monitoring report are complete (Photo 20).



Photo 12. Collapsed armoring.



Photo 13. Collapsed crossing structure.



Photo 14. Dumped fill and tar.



Photo 15. Organic debris along fence.



Photo 16. Fence and irrigation equipment.

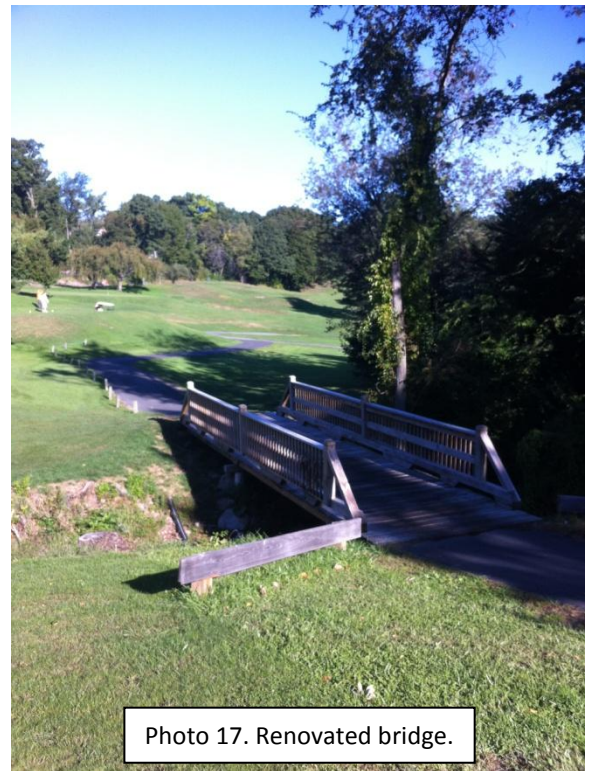


Photo 17. Renovated bridge.



Photo 18. Western pond.

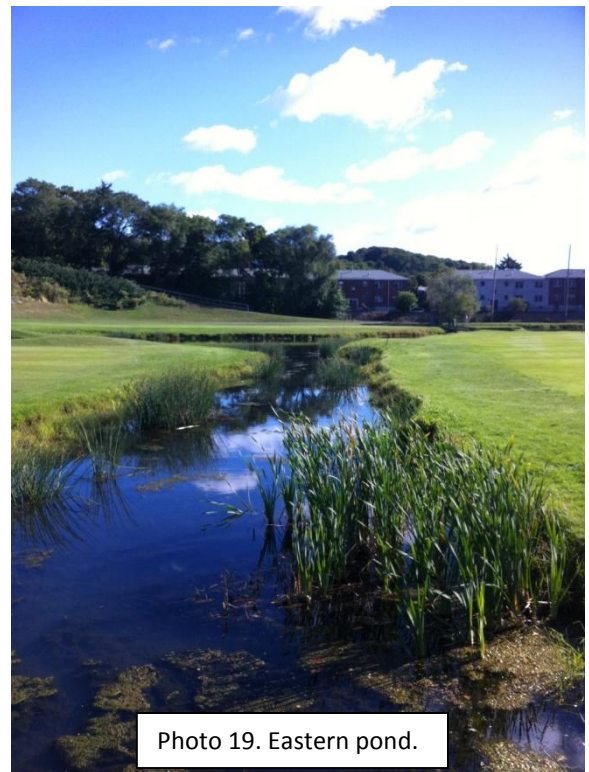


Photo 19. Eastern pond.

Awtrey

Conditions at the Awtrey property have changed little since the 2010 site visit. However, gardening equipment encroaching onto the southeast corner of the property noted at that time has been removed (Photo 20).

The Awtrey property is infested with alien, invasive plants. Norway Maples dominate the canopy, with few shrubs and saplings besides Shrub honeysuckle (also an alien, invasive) in the understory. The herbaceous layer is carpeted by Ground Ivy, like many other conservation properties in Newton. Although managing alien, invasive species would be allowed under the terms and conditions of the CR, the infestation is so wide-spread it is challenging to determine an appropriate course of action to re-habilitate the property. Removal of the Norway Maple canopy may be the best start. These trees were initially planted as urban street trees for their capacity to provide ample shade and subsequently seeded in to open lands. In a natural setting, shading from Norway Maples suppresses the growth of virtually all other species. Therefore, removing mature Norway will likely encourage the growth of native saplings, and begin the restoration process.



Conditions at Prospect Park have changed little since the last monitoring visit. Construction at an adjacent residential lot is complete (Photo 21). Norway Maple growth at this site is robust, as it is at other Newton Conservator properties (Photo 22 & 23). The infestation is significant enough that recommending an appropriate course of action to re-habilitate the property is challenging. Removal of the Norway Maple canopy may be the best start. These trees were initially planted as urban street trees for their capacity to provide ample shade. However, in a natural setting, shading from Norway Maples suppresses the growth of virtually all other species. Removing mature Norway Maples from the site will likely encourage the growth of native saplings, and begin the restoration process.

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Photo 21. Completed construction area to south.

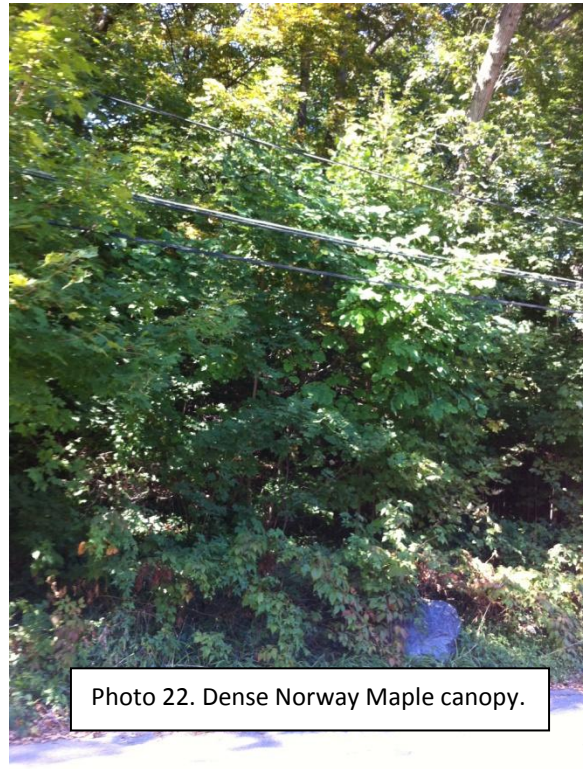


Photo 22. Dense Norway Maple canopy.



Photo 23. Deeply shaded steep slope.

Webster Park

The Webster Park property now features a trail overlooking the Dolan Pond Conservation Area. This trail was constructed by a youth from a local scouting organization and winds along a bluff lined with evergreen trees ending at a bench. The construction of this trail was allowable under the terms and conditions of the CR, but may have been done without consultation with the Newton Conservators. As noted earlier, erecting proper signage at the properties will raise the visibility of the organization and help to ensure best management practices.

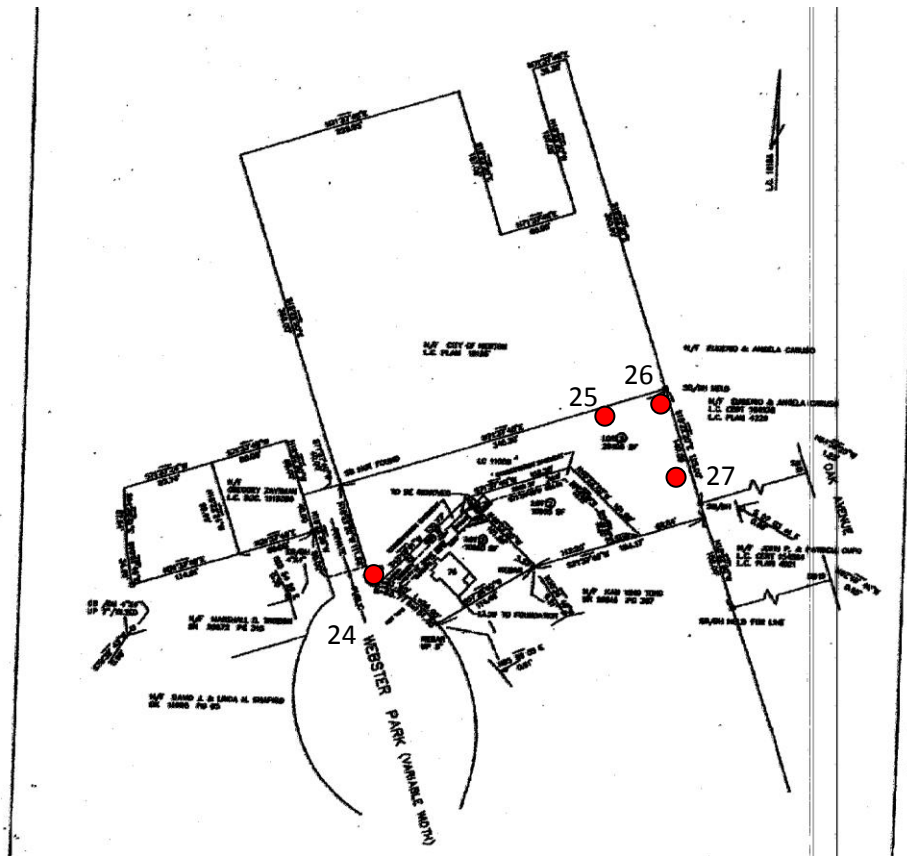




Photo 24. New trail along bluff.



Photo 25. Benches overlooking bluff.



Photo 26. Dumped organic debris on eastern boundary.

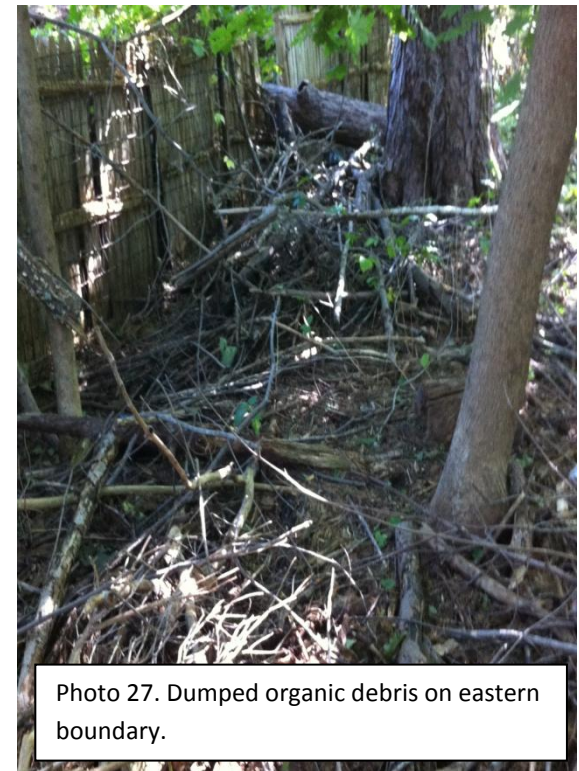


Photo 27. Dumped organic debris on eastern boundary.

Crystal Lake

Boundaries of the Crystal Lake CR are still not marked in the field. An unusual configuration, delineating the pathway behind the residence and portions of the fountain and garden, are difficult to ascertain precisely, and therefore activity cannot be accurately monitored. We again recommend that the Conservators mark the boundaries of this CR, perhaps with discrete steel rods such as those used by surveyors.

It came to our attention that the residence abutting the CR property is occupied by new owners. The fountain near the end of the path (Photo 28) is subject to a separate CR (Fountain Easement recorded at Middlesex South Registry of Deeds Book 57781 Page 239) which states that the easement would be terminated upon conveyance of the property:

Grant of Fountain Easement (6)

The rights, restrictions, covenants, obligations, easements and agreements provided herein shall run with the land and shall not be modified or released except by an instrument duly recorded with the Middlesex South County Registry of Deeds, which instrument is executed by the then current owners of both Lot 2, Newton, MA and 230 Lake Avenue, Newton, MA.; provided, however, that this Fountain Easement shall terminate upon Grantee's conveyance of 230 Lake Avenue.

We suggest the Newton Conservators retain legal counsel to investigate the sale of the property, and how this affects the Fountain Easement CR.

The remaining portion of the CR was in good condition, though clearing along the beach has increased (Photo 29).

Boundaries at this property are also unclear and unmarked in the vicinity of the gardens and water feature (Photo 29). Property protecting the property and ensuring the terms and conditions of the CR are upheld require a clear delineation of the boundaries. We suggest some discrete markings be placed at the boundaries of this property so that future monitors can conduct visits quickly, and that the property be.

