

Forest Stewards Guild at Mayor Baxter Woods, Portland, Maine

Mayor Baxter Woods, Portland, Maine

City of Portland

Mayor Baxter Woods provides a unique opportunity to examine the stewardship of one of southern Maine's oldest forests, uniquely situated in the City of Portland. Participants will explore mature oak, pine, and hemlock stands dominated by trees approaching and exceeding 200 years of age. Discussions will focus on conserving biodiversity, protecting sensitive natural resources, managing invasive species, and accommodating public use in an urban setting. The visit highlights how Percival Baxter's vision, long-term stewardship, community engagement, and careful management can sustain ecological values while providing recreation and environmental education.

Forest and Wildlife Habitat Management Plan

for

Mayor Baxter Woods

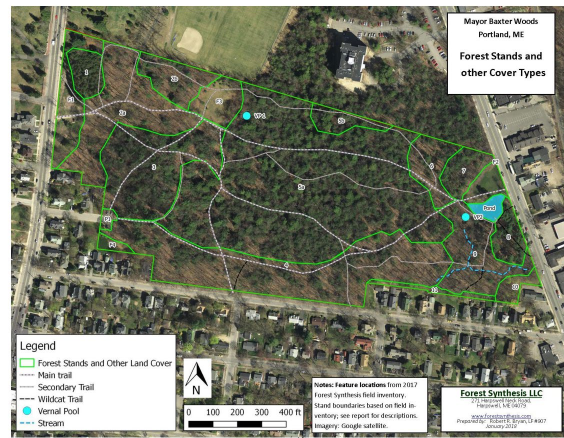
Portland, Maine

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Mayor Baxter Woods, Portland, Maine

- 32.46-acre municipal forest and park in Portland's Deering neighborhood, between Forest Avenue and Stevens Avenue.
- Predominantly old red oak, white oak, white pine, and eastern hemlock; dominant canopy trees in major stands are approximately 180-200 years old.
- Donated to the City of Portland by Governor Percival P. Baxter in 1946 for public recreation and education, while remaining in a natural wild state and serving as a sanctuary for wild birds.
- More than 81% of the forest area is in older development classes, an exceptionally high proportion for a Maine forest.
- The property includes two areas with vernal-pool characteristics, seasonal drainage features, trails, small open/shrub habitats, and a pond.

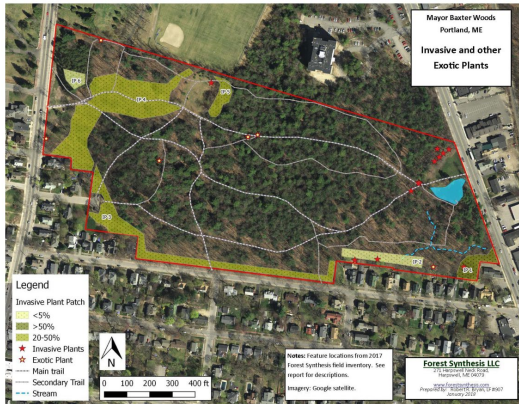
Late-Successional Forest Stewardship in an Urban Setting

- The central forest contains unusually old oak-pine-hemlock stands; some areas appear to have remained continuously wooded for centuries.
- Large trees, canopy gaps, standing and downed dead wood, and natural regeneration provide important late-successional habitat features.
- The management plan emphasizes allowing late-successional conditions to continue developing naturally while protecting native species and ecological processes.
- Baxter Woods is embedded in a densely developed city landscape, making recreation, trail use, neighboring properties, and public expectations integral to stewardship decisions.

Management Goals and Stewardship Priorities

The 2018 Forest and Wildlife Habitat Management Plan translates Baxter's deed into a set of integrated goals:

1. Promote recreational uses that are consistent with maintaining the property in a wild and natural state and as a sanctuary for wild birds.
2. Maintain a natural ecosystem based on native plant and wildlife species and natural ecosystem processes.
3. Protect soils and water quality, including minimizing trail-related compaction, erosion, and concentrated runoff.
4. Protect City property from encroachment and inappropriate use.
5. Promote educational uses consistent with the Mayor Baxter Woods deed.



Key Stewardship Challenges

- Invasive and exotic plants, including Norway maple, Asiatic bittersweet, bush honeysuckle, common buckthorn, Japanese barberry, Japanese knotweed, and Bishop's weed.
- Non-native forest pests, especially hemlock woolly adelgid and elongate hemlock scale, which threaten the extensive hemlock component.
- Balancing intensive public use with protection of ground-nesting and ground-feeding birds and other wildlife.
- A dense trail network that can contribute to soil compaction, erosion, runoff, and wildlife disturbance.
- Deed restrictions that sharply limit tree cutting, creating difficult choices when active intervention could improve resilience or habitat.

What Participants Will Explore

- How deed restrictions and a conservation legacy shape contemporary urban-forest management.
- How managers can protect old-forest structure, biodiversity, vernal pools, soils, water quality, and native regeneration while responding to invasive species and forest-health threats.
- How recreation and environmental education can be accommodated without undermining the forest's role as a wildlife sanctuary.
- How monitoring of birds, vernal pools, insects and diseases, invasive plants, trails, boundaries, and recreation can support adaptive stewardship over time.

Inclusive Forest Stewardship

Mayor Baxter Woods demonstrates that stewardship is not simply a choice between active management and preservation. Its long-term care requires ecological knowledge, legal and historical awareness, public engagement, monitoring, and careful decisions about when intervention is necessary and when natural processes should prevail. In this way, the Woods provide a distinctive example of sustaining old-forest ecological values that is applicable both in the middle of a growing city and in a rural setting.

Source: Forest Synthesis LLC, *Forest and Wildlife Habitat Management Plan for Mayor Baxter Woods* (2018).