



September 21, 2023

Board of Selectmen  
Mann House, 16 Darling Hill Road  
Mason, NH 03048

Dear Members of the Board,

The Conservation Commission would welcome a chance to meet with the Selectmen to discuss the possibility for conserving town-owned tax title parcel A-13 through transfer to the Conservation Commission. This 66.6 acre parcel on Pratt Pond Road has numerous outstanding conservation qualities, meeting all the Commission's criteria to be a conservation priority.

- \* It lies in an area of great wildlife significance, a high-quality Priority Habitat Block connected by Primary Wildlife Corridors as mapped by NH Fish and Game.
- \* It connects two large protected open space tracts, Russell-Abbott State Forest and Bronson Potter's Overlook, and abuts the 236-acre Cuda hunting preserve (C-6) which is part of the same NH Wildlife Corridors prioritized habitat block. All this makes for an unusually large unfragmented wildlife habitat.
- \* It includes significant water resources – at least four year-round streams, headwaters of Spaulding Brook, with several types and sizes of associated wetlands.
- \* It has some good quality forest soils.
- \* It has open space recreational potential, with an old logging road that could provide a trail link between the Potter land and the State Forest.

If A-13 were to be developed, it could have serious impacts on long term town costs – particularly highway and school costs. As we are seeing on Scripps Lane, all the building here is causing the need for intensive town maintenance. Like Scripps Lane, Pratt Pond Road is a sloping dirt road, but narrower and winding, and crossed by several streams. Development here will create the need for major roadwork – widening, drainage, perhaps paving. Not much of this work would be covered by a developer since Pratt Pond Road is a Class V town road.

As for school costs, right now the town of Mason is in the unusual position of having only 0.25 school age children per household. The NH average ratio of children per household is 0.41, a 60% higher number. This data is from the 2020 census.

Assuming that families moving to Mason might be closer to the NH average in size, school costs may rise to a higher level than new houses would bring in in taxes. At present, the taxes each household pays are in reasonable balance with school costs, thanks to careful management by the Mason School Department and Board of Selectmen, and to the low ratio of students per household.

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A UNH report, “An Introduction to the Cost of Community Services Studies” concluded that usually “residential developments contribute less in revenue than they require in government expenditures while agricultural, commercial, industrial, and open space lands contribute more in revenue than they require in expenditures.” (Thane Harrison and Charlie French, UNH Department of Resources Economics)

The Commission strongly encourages the Board to consider conserving A-13. We believe it will be beneficial to the town in many ways, offering a great additional trail connecting to Mason’s wonderful trail network, as well as protecting our town’s water resources and some of New Hampshire’s highest quality wildlife habitat.

The Commission would be glad to cover all associated costs of a transfer.

We look forward to meeting with the Board for discussion.

Thank you very much for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Robert B. Larochelle".

Robert B. Larochelle