

Public Access Policy and Procedures

Adopted April 29, 2020

Consistent with the OCT's mission—to preserve land and educate the public in order to sustain our natural resources and the character of our community for generations to come—OCT looks for opportunities to create and maintain walking trails and public access opportunities where appropriate. A list of the Orleans Conservation Trust's (OCT) publicly accessible trails, along with other public trails in Orleans, is available on OCT's website at <https://orleansconservationtrust.org/areas-with-trails/>. In addition to its walking trails, OCT maintains a handful of properties that allow for leisure and enjoyment of scenic views that OCT has preserved (i.e. a short path to a bench, often overlooking a body of water).

Rules for Lands Open to Public Use:

- Users must stay on marked trails.
- Well-socialized dogs are allowed on leash only. Dogs are not permitted off leash. Owners are required to clean up and remove dog waste. Exception: At the Whites Lane Conservation Area, no dogs are allowed due to its sensitive habitat.
- Fishing and shellfishing, conducted in accordance with state and local law, are permitted unless otherwise indicated.
- Hunting and trapping by any method are prohibited.
- Motorized vehicles, bicycles, and horses are prohibited.
- Running, cross-country skiing, and snowshoeing are permitted.
- Kayaking, canoeing, and paddle boarding are permitted; however, storage of any of these watercraft on OCT property is prohibited. Those stored illegally may be confiscated by OCT.

To guide decisions regarding the development of new public access opportunities, and maintenance of existing trails and public access infrastructure, OCT has formulated the following questions:

- Has the donor/seller of the land expressed in writing or otherwise documented their intentions about future public access prior to conveying a property?
- Does the property have a history of public access (formal or informal)?
- Are the topography and other physical characteristics of the land conducive to public access?
- Will the creation of a trail/public access opportunity have a substantial adverse effect on the land's ecological value and wildlife habitat?
- Does the property contain historic or cultural features (such as a building, farmland, or cranberry bog) or known archeological features (e.g., shell mounds) or known Native American sacred sites (e.g., burial grounds) that should be taken into account in developing public access opportunities?
- Will the creation of a trail/public access opportunity have substantial adverse effects on the neighborhood?
- Is there appropriate space available for parking in the vicinity?
- Does the proposed public access improvement provide positive opportunities for education, research, and/or recreation for the public?

Evaluating the answers to each of the above questions prior to acquiring new lands will contribute to a full understanding of the costs, feasibility, and ecological and social pros and cons of any proposed public

access. Specific parcels will also be evaluated from the standpoint of whether activities related to public access (e.g. dogs, fishing, camping, access for persons with disabilities, etc.) should be permitted. When acquiring new land or considering a trail on currently owned land, OCT will discuss public access issues with potential financial donors and land donors/sellers. In addition, OCT will attempt to educate neighbors who might be affected by such plans about OCT's policy on public access, and will post this policy on our website so it's available to the public.

It is the responsibility of the Land Management Committee to evaluate new trail proposals (which may be generated by OCT Trustees, staff, or members of the public) in a fair and transparent manner. The Committee will take into account the interests of various stakeholders before making a recommendation to the OCT Board. The Land Management Committee will regularly review the status and use of OCT's existing trails and public access to these trails, establish rules for their use, and recommend improvements to the trails themselves and to accessibility as necessary.