

# **Hitchiner Town Forest**

## **Fields Management Plan**

(approved at the MCC meeting of 3/13/14)

### **Introduction**

In the Fall of 2013, the Milford Conservation Commission (MCC) asked for suggestions as to how the old fields of Hitchiner Town Forest (HTF) might best be managed, with respect to wildlife and recreation.

Following the September, 2013, NH Coverts Workshop, NH Coverts Project volunteer, Yvonne Beran, met with MCC Commissioner Andy Hughes, and UNH Cooperative Extension specialist, Matthew Tarr (Extension Associate Professor/Specialist, Wildlife) and conducted a walkabout at the HTF, in order to determine the area's current status. After the walkabout, Matt Tarr outlined a few options for future management of the HTF fields. The management would be very straightforward, with little financial and labor input being necessary, and should bring wildlife and recreational benefits to this popular Town Forest.

### **Summary of HTF Assets**

There is a HTF Forest Management Plan, prepared by New England Forestry Consultants, Inc., in Sept., 2008.

From this report, some emergent points are:

Timber value is good, main hardwood = Red oak, main soft wood = white pine.

In general, wildlife value of habitats is low, with the exception of:

- Pitch pine/heath/Scrub oak forest on Burns Hill (Pitch pine is less common in this area); and
- open areas of grassland/shrubland (scrubland), which should be maintained/reclaimed under the New Hampshire Wildlife Action Plan (WAP, 2005) (Objective 501: Reclaim or maintain grassland and shrubland habitats, and Objective 502: Generate early successional and young forest habitats-

[http://www.wildlife.state.nh.us/Wildlife/Wildlife\\_Plan/WAP\\_pieces/WAP\\_Chapter\\_5.pdf](http://www.wildlife.state.nh.us/Wildlife/Wildlife_Plan/WAP_pieces/WAP_Chapter_5.pdf)).

The HTF old fields comprise three fields (approximate total acreage = 12, HTF Forest Management Plan, but this is given as 16 acres in the MCC Conservation Plan, 2005), a parking lot, and a picnic pavilion. The combined open field area is relatively small, and the surrounding land is mostly under forest or urban development, but it is still valuable, given the shortage of old fields/scrubland in NH as a whole (see map below).

### **HTF Plant and Wildlife Overview**

#### **Plants**

Currently, the HTF fields contain a good number of small trees and shrubs, which have wildlife value, mainly for shelter, but some are also good food sources. These woody plants should be left to grow. Some examples of desirable shrubs growing within, or around the edges of the fields include: Winterberry holly, Silky dogwood, Arrow-wood, Crab apple, High-bush blueberry, Wytch hazel, Grapevine. There are some invasive species mixed in with the natives and the old fruit trees, such as Oriental bittersweet, Multiflora rose, and Autumn olive, but it was suggested to leave these as they are, because the patches are small, and so intertwined with the desirable species, that it would be a cumbersome and counterproductive effort to try and remove them.

## New Hampshire WILDLIFE HABITAT LAND COVER 2010

Locations of known and potential critical wildlife habitat in the state.

- Floodplain Forest
- Grassland
- Pine barren
- Cliff
- Rocky ridge or Talus slope
- Coastal Island
- Dune
- Salt marsh
- Peatland
- Wet meadow/  
Shrub wetland
- Alpine
- Matrix forest**
- High-elevation Spruce-fir
- Lowland Spruce-fir
- Northern hardwood-conifer
- Appalachian oak-pine
- Hemlock-hardwood-pine
- shrubland; cleared; or light  
residential development
- Developed land cover

HTF 3 fields of  
interest for this  
Management  
Plan



A section of the map showing HTF (with the three fields circled in red)

(NH Fish and Game WAP—Town Maps:

[http://www.wildlife.state.nh.us/Wildlife/Wildlife\\_Plan/WAP\\_town\\_maps.html](http://www.wildlife.state.nh.us/Wildlife/Wildlife_Plan/WAP_town_maps.html)).

The map shows just how sparse grasslands are in the surrounding areas. Most of the other “grasslands” are lawns in the residential sectors.

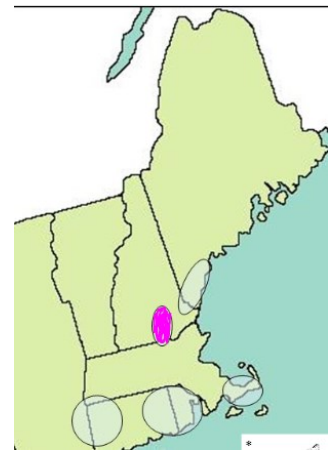
## Wildlife

Anecdotal observations of wildlife, or their signs or sounds within the HTF and neighboring area include: porcupine, wild turkeys, white tailed deer, moose, rabbit (Eastern Cottontail or New England Cottontail [endangered]), fox, fisher, Barred owl, Eastern Whip-poor-will, Raven, as well as a number of raptor, songbird and rodent species (such as red and grey squirrels and chipmunks). The MCC Conservation Plan (2005, Chapter 2) lists this type of wildlife, but in addition also includes ruffed grouse, snowshoe hare, weasels and mink.

## A Special Note about the New England Cottontail rabbit

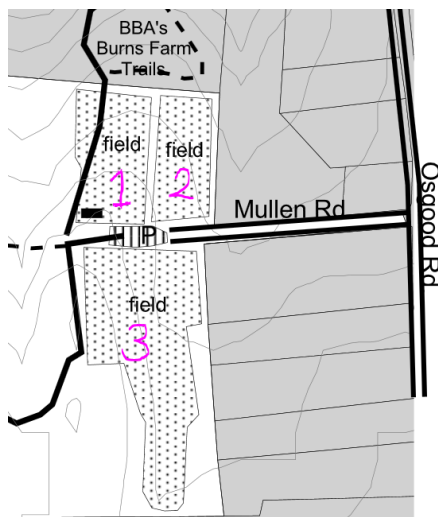
Milford appears to be adjacent (to the west) to the area where one of the last remaining populations of New England Cottontail (NEC)(*Sylvilagus transitionalis*) still have a hold in New Hampshire (see map). The following link has much useful information about the NEC (<http://newenglandcottontail.org/content/natural-history>), as well as a downloadable *Best Management Practices (PDF)* for the species. HTF fields and scrubland would seem very well positioned to help preserve this native rabbit. The following is a verbatim quote from the NEC link above:

"The New England cottontail is an "umbrella species." This means that when we make habitat for cottontails, we also make habitat that gets used by many other animals – mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians, and even certain insects and plants. "



## Field Management Details

For reasons of clarity, HTF fields have been labelled as Field 1, 2 and 3:



Below are figures showing the Field Management proposal for the three HTF fields. The good news is that management would almost entirely take the form of the **frequency of mowing** the various sections of the fields, as indicated by the color coding on the maps.

There are essentially three mowing categories:

**1. Mow 1 to 2 times per year to achieve short grass**



The areas in need of more frequent mowing are:

- Trails and the adjacent strip of land, to keep the trails open and neat, and to reduce the risk of picking up ticks;
- The area adjacent to the picnic pavilion, to facilitate a lawn for people to use for recreation and play.

**2. Mow every 2 to 3 years so that taller grasses and wildflowers can become established**



With less frequent mowing, meadows will develop and stabilize, as the plants are allowed to self seed. There is no need to add any wildflower seed. There are currently old and seemingly disused Bluebird boxes, which could be cleaned out and repositioned in the areas designated to become meadows. This might be of benefit to any Bluebirds looking for new homes.

**3. Mow every 4 to 5 years so that vegetation grows to become shrubland**



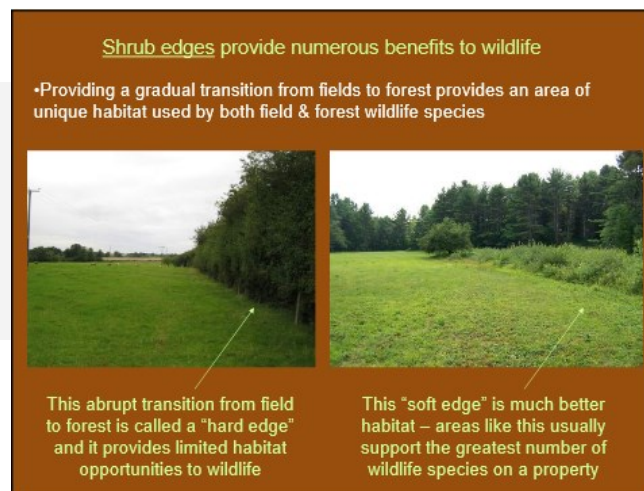
Do not remove any existing small trees and shrubs, as they have high wildlife value, especially in the transitioning period until the fields grow into shrubland. The only exception to this was in **Field 2**, where there is scope to remove one or more of the very large trees, as well as a large and unsightly (and invasive) Autumn olive shrub, growing near a paper birch.

**Other Points:**

At the next timber harvest in HTF, it would be beneficial to take out some trees in the zones surrounding the fields, to thin out the mature forest, and to create “softer” edges to the fields, with a more gradual thickening of vegetation. The areas in **Field 1** shown in dark green are depicted by way of an example where the timber cuts would best be done.



This is a copy of a slide from the NH Coverts training session, Sept.2013, which illustrates the abrupt versus soft field edges.



**Forsythia patch**



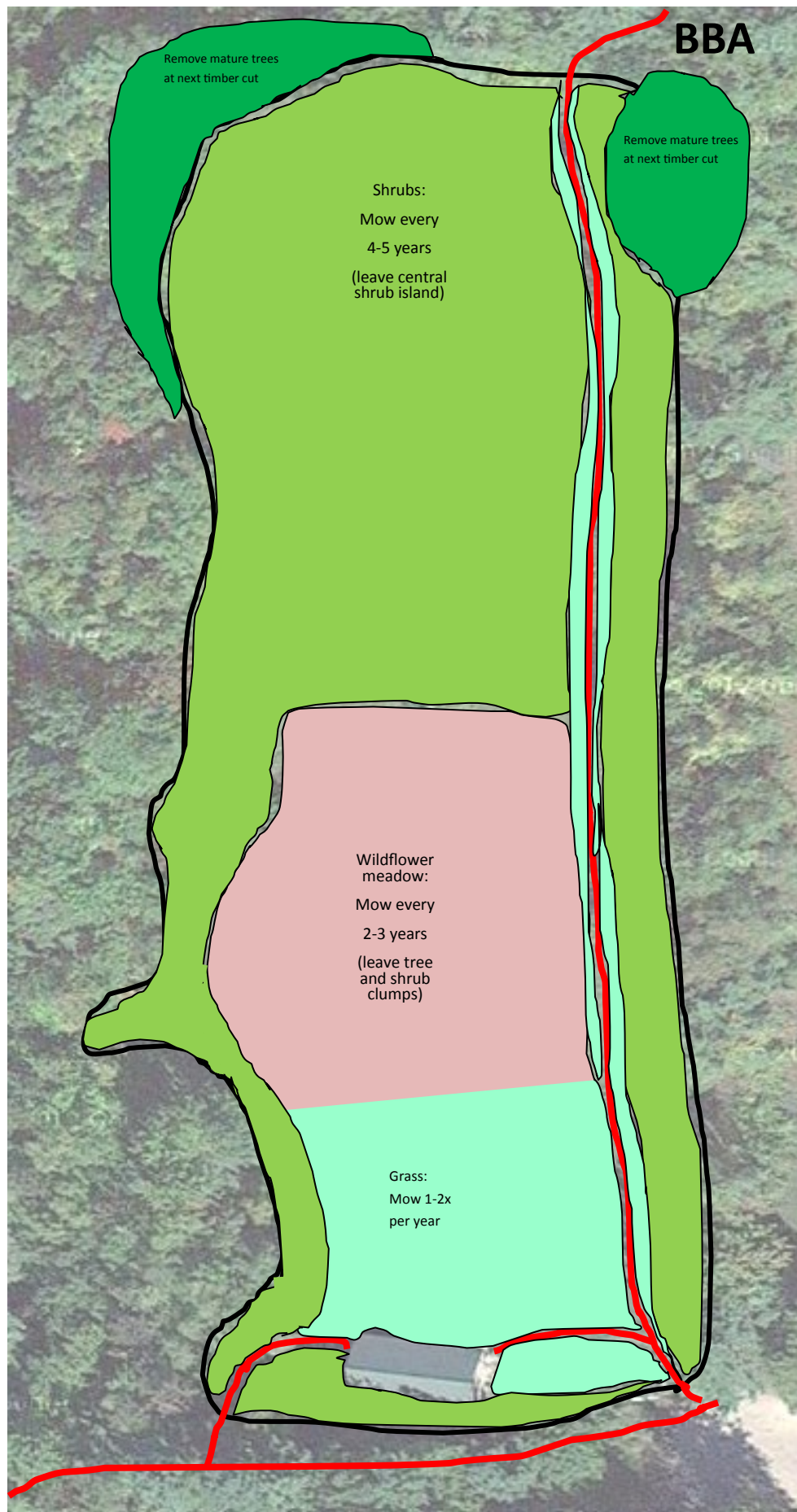
Even though this bush is non-native, it has a very high wildlife value. It provides an excellent shelter opportunity for many birds and other critters. Each spring, a pair of Northern cardinals like to take up residence there.

**An additional proposed recreational feature:**



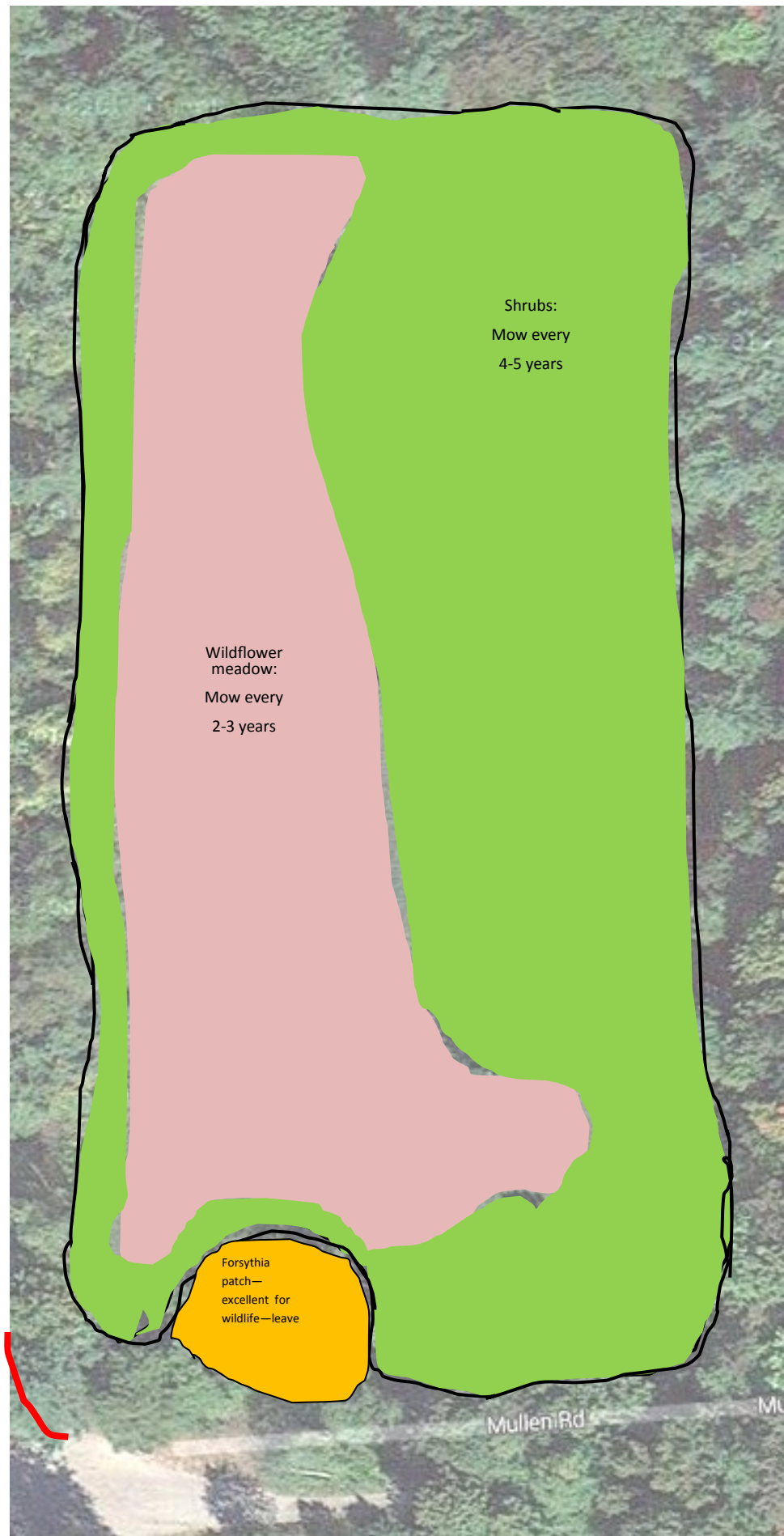
This would be in the form of an added trail in **Field 3**, which would allow hiking to the back of the meadow, and then backtrack to the main trail network via an informal path through the woodland, as shown on the map.

# Field 1

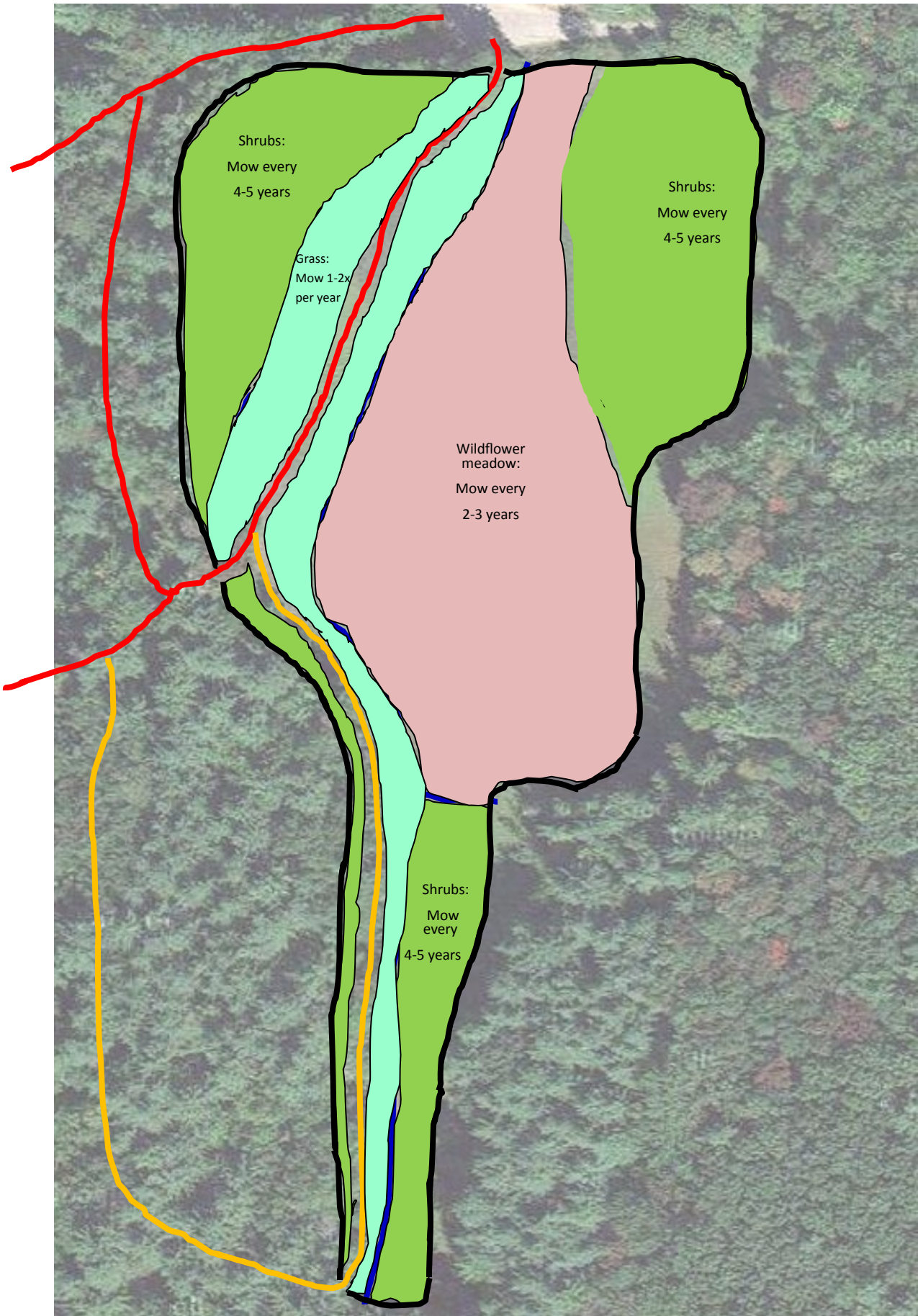




Field 2



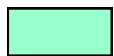
# Field 3



# Key:



**Shrubs:** leave area to turn to shrubs—mow every 4-5 years



**Short grass:** mow 1-2x per year



**Wildflower meadow:** mow every 2-3 years



**Selective timber extraction:** remove mature trees at next timber cut



**Forsythia patch:** excellent for wildlife—leave



Existing trails



Proposed trail