

**LAND USE and MANAGEMENT PLAN**  
for the  
**NICHOLS FIELD PROPERTY**  
of the  
**TOWN OF IPSWICH**

**60 Labor in Vain Road; Assessors' Map 43A Lot No. 2A**

**May 2000**

**Adopted by the Ipswich Conservation Commission  
in consultation with  
Essex County Greenbelt Association, Inc.  
Friends of Nichols Field  
Ipswich Recreation Department  
Ipswich Department of Public Safety  
Ipswich Department of Public Works  
Ipswich Department of Planning and Development  
Massachusetts Division of Conservation Services**

## **I. Introduction and Purpose**

### **A. Property Description**

Nichols Field is a quiet, peaceful, rural place of great beauty that has existed in its present state for many decades. It is a 14.8-acre parcel of undeveloped upland located in Ipswich and lying between Labor in Vain Road and the Ipswich River tidewater, near the junction of the River and Labor in Vain Creek. Largely open field, the property is fringed with woodland along its western and river frontages. Rectangular in form, it has over 1000 feet of frontage on the Ipswich River, consisting largely of coastal bank; and over 400 feet of frontage on Labor in Vain Road, designated as a Scenic Road by the Town. A prominent knoll rises about 15 meters above the river elevation, affording excellent views of the river, its marshes and of Great Neck.

Nichols Field provides wildlife habitat, particularly an increasingly rare large tract of the grassland habitat required by several threatened or stressed bird species such as the Eastern Bobolink. It lies adjacent to the salt marshes of the river and the creek, across the road from the Brewer Field property of Essex County Greenbelt Association, Inc. (hereafter ECGA), and less than a mile from the Greenwood Farm property of The Trustees of Reservations. Its maintenance as open conservation land will preserve an important component and link among the protected open spaces and habitat of the tidal estuary. **Nichols Field will be protected against conversion to another use, or disposal by the Town, through (a) designation by the Town as Conservation Land and assignment to the Conservation Commission, (b) the covenants entered into by the Town as conditions of the grant offer, and (c) the provisions of Article 97 of the Mass. Constitution.**

### **B. Acquisition and Ownership**

Henry G. and Ellen Ford Nichols of Essex, MA offered the land we call Nichols Field to ECGA for a truly bargain price of \$400,000. Using funds raised for this purpose by a local committee (the Friends of Nichols Field) and its own resources, ECGA was able to effect that purchase on March 31, 2000. The Town of Ipswich in turn will purchase title to the property from ECGA for the same price. It will be reimbursed 50% of the purchase price or \$200,000 by the National Park Service through a grant from the Federal Land and Water Conservation Fund, applied for and administered through the Division of Conservation Services of the Massachusetts Executive Office of Environmental Affairs. In addition, the town will be reimbursed for its 50% "local match" share of the purchase price by a transfer from ECGA of the funds raised by the Friends of Nichols Field.

### **C. Ownership and Management Objectives**

Nichols Field is to be owned and maintained in perpetuity by the Town as open space and conservation land for passive outdoor recreation and wildlife habitat, in accordance with the terms and conditions of the Land and Water Conservation Fund Grant. All uses and activities consistent with these objectives and commitments will be permitted, all those not consistent will be prohibited as specified in more detail below. There will be no discrimination among users based on race, color, national origin, religion, disability, age or sex.

The land management plan is designed and will be implemented to preserve the existing characteristics of the property and its present division into habitat types. Minimal

management is anticipated. The only management activities and usage restraints that will be undertaken and enforced are those necessary to maintain the fields and woods in their present locations and form, in acceptable condition, as free as practicable from invasive vegetative species, and clean and undamaged, and those limitations on use necessary to protect the property and ensure that passive recreation activities and wildlife are not compromised.

#### **D. Management Oversight and Advice**

Nichols Field is purchased by the Town as Conservation Land and placed under the control and supervision of its Conservation Commission (hereafter "the Commission") or successor agency, which shall be responsible for its care and supervision and shall exercise management oversight. The Commission will be assisted in its duties by the Public Works and Public Safety Departments of the Town, by the Friends of Nichols Field, and by ECCGA. There is established an advisory group to the Commission, consisting of representatives of the Friends of Nichols Field, of ECCGA, and of the Open Space Committee. This group will meet at the call of the Commission Chair as needed and at least annually; to consider the condition and use of the property, organize any special maintenance or cleanup effort, and recommend changes to the Management Plan.

## **II. Usage of the Property**

### **A. Overview**

The guiding principle and purpose of the Land Use Plan for Nichols Field is to preserve the property and its characteristics for the future enjoyment of the public and the benefit of wildlife. Its beauty and quiet rural character, the peace that can be found there, and its value as habitat are the assets we seek to protect.

### **B. Permitted uses**

The property will be open from dawn to sunset. Passive recreational activities, defined as walking and jogging, wildlife observation, vista enjoyment, photography, cross-country skiing, and snowshoeing, are permitted. Fishing from the banks is permitted. Kite flying is permitted except during the nesting season of grassland birds.

### **C. Prohibited uses**

Access to and use of the property between the hours of sunset and dawn is prohibited. Hunting, and the carrying or use of firearms is prohibited. Fires and camping are not permitted. Possession and consumption of alcoholic beverages on the property is prohibited. Motor vehicles and other powered equipment, including but not limited to motorcycles, ATV's, ORV's, and snowmobiles are prohibited, except for the purpose of property maintenance by those authorized. Launching and retrieving of watercraft of all types and sizes is prohibited. Ball-playing and golfing are not permitted. Swimming is not permitted because of proximate motorboat operation in the Ipswich River. Littering, the placement of refuse or waste of any kind on the property, the damaging or removal of vegetation or of signs, walls, and fences, are all prohibited.

### **D. Precautions and Warnings**

Ticks, with the accompanying risk of contraction of Lyme Disease, are present in all vegetated areas in this region, and Nichols Field is no exception. Nichols Field grasslands and wooded areas support a heavy growth of poison ivy as well. The Commission does

not plan to undertake efforts at widespread eradication, and therefore users will be encouraged to stay on the paths to reduce the potential for exposure. Some of the coastal banks are quite steep, and particularly at high tide could present a danger especially to children playing on or at the top of these banks. Signage will be displayed at the site entrance alerting users to these risks, and warning that use of the property is solely at the risk of the user.

### III. **Maintenance of the Property**

#### **A. Maintenance activities**

Mowed perimeter paths and resting/viewing areas will be maintained by regular mowing as needed to keep the vegetation short, to encourage visitors to stay out of the unmown fields, and to reduce the likelihood of exposure to poison ivy or ticks while on the paths. If usage increases to the extent that wear and erosion of the paths becomes a problem, management options to be considered will include use of wood chips as a walkway surface, periodic relocation of paths, and identification and limitation of uses found to be creating the most wear.

The fields will be mowed annually, after the nesting season of grassland bird species, to maintain the health of the fields and limit the encroachment of shrubbery. Trees, limbs and branches that may fall or be blown onto the fields or into the river as it abuts the property will be removed. No other forestry management practices are currently planned or envisioned.

The designated parking area will be graded and resurfaced as necessary. The vehicle exclusion barriers, gates, and signs will be maintained or restored as necessary.

#### **B. Responsibility for and funding of ordinary maintenance**

The Town has nominal responsibility for maintenance of the property, and the Commission will exercise oversight. However, ECGA is seeking to raise sufficient funds to endow the cost of annual mowing of the fields, and if successful will contract for that work. The Friends of Nichols Field have indicated a willingness to maintain the mowed paths. The Town will also solicit voluntary contributions of services by landscapers or the support of maintenance activities by an Ipswich firm or firms (in a manner similar to support of roadway islands and edges).

The Department of Public Works will create and maintain the parking spaces and barrier, and will provide snow removal from the parking lot.

#### **C. Responsibility for and funding of extraordinary maintenance**

Extraordinary maintenance (e.g., restoration of paths, remediation of erosion, replacement or repair of signs and barriers, resurfacing of parking areas) will be undertaken by the Department of Public Works, or by the Commission using Open Space, Water Supply and Recreation Fund moneys.

### IV. **Parking**

Parking will be provided for six vehicles, with three spaces created on the property at the existing gap in the stone wall along Labor in Vain Road and three spaces cleared for parallel parking on the north side of the Road. A stone barrier will be erected to delineate the on-site parking and preclude vehicle access to the remainder of the property. A locked steel gate of the type used by the Trustees of Reservations will allow access to the property by maintenance equipment.

ECGA has authorized the use of the adjacent Brewer's Field frontage for overflow parking, should that be necessary.

**IV. Handicapped Access**

No barriers to access by handicapped persons will be created. No alteration of the current condition or state of the property is contemplated. The paths will remain roughly mowed paths, at grades determined by the natural topography.

**V. Signage**

**A. Land and Water Conservation Fund sign**

A permanent sign meeting the requirements of the Grant will be erected and maintained by the Town adjacent to the entrance to the property from the parking area off Labor in Vain Road. In addition to addressing the grant requirements, this sign will acknowledge the contribution of the Nichols family and ECGA in making this site available. A photograph of the erected sign is attached to the application for reimbursement.

**B. Other signs**

An additional sign at the entrance will list permitted hours of access and activities, and prohibited uses and activities. Small signs will be placed along the eastern and western perimeters of the property informing users of its boundaries and requesting respect for the adjacent private property and owners.

**VI. Enforcement and Public Safety**

The Ipswich Police Department will provide surveillance of the property and will enforce the posted regulations.

**VII. Signatories**

  
Board of Selectmen, Chair

  
Conservation Commission, Chair

  
Department of Public Safety, Director

  
Department of Public Works, Director

  
Essex County Greenbelt Association, Inc.

  
Friends of Nichols Field, by Executive Director

  
Peter V. Wickstrom

Attachments: Survey plan of land

Topographic and vegetation plan (from USGS quadrangle)