

Ashland Town Forest & Cowassock Woods

Ashland Town Forest and Cowassock Woods is approximately 714 acres of forested open space located in Ashland and Framingham. The area has a natural wealth of granite outcroppings, upland forest and lowland swamps, vernal pools, variety of forest types and several open pit quarries.

Location and Access – Located in the northern Ashland and southwestern Framingham, Ashland Town Forest and Cowassock Woods offer over 10 miles of trails accessible from six parking areas on Oak Street, Oregon Road, Salem End Road and three on Winter Street.

Trails - Most trails are level or of moderate grade. Trail surfaces are rough with protruding rocks and roots. Sturdy footwear is recommended. In Spring, be prepared for wet trails.

You will find 2 types of trail markers. The Bay Circuit Trail and Sanctuary Cave Loop are marked by round white markers. Colored diamond markers identify the rest of the trail system. Numbered rectangular location markers at intersections and other points along the trails correspond to numbers on the trail map. They serve as location indicators for trail issues or if you are injured.

History - "Cowassock" means "the place of pines", and the area was the spring and summer campground of the Magunkook Indians. Brooks, forests, and fields met in ideal combination for fishing, hunting, nut gathering, and planting. There is evidence of prehistoric habitation as well.

The Colonial history of the area is the stuff of legend. Following the executions of her sisters Rebecca and Mary for witchcraft, and having also been convicted, Sarah Towne Cloyes (later Clayes) and her husband Peter, fled Salem and sought refuge in the now-collapsed caves in this forest. After receiving a gift of 800 acres from Thomas Danforth (one of the original judges in the witch trials) they were joined by Towne and Nurse family members and established the settlement of Salem End in 1693. (Salem End Road follows the original 17th century Native American trail.)



As farming moved west, colonial pastureland and farms were replaced by trees. Homesteads were purchased by wealthy families, and the land was used as a hunt and riding club.

In 1942, Henry Warren, town benefactor and inventor of the first synchronous electric clock, purchased 508 acres and gifted them to the town to serve as a Town Forest and woodlot.

During the next 8 years, the emerging young forest was aided by the planting of more than 40,000 trees by the Boy Scouts.

Cowassock Woods was created in 1984 when Sudbury Valley Trustees acquired 7.5 acres of land off Salem End Road in Framingham, and 43.5 more acres in Ashland in 1992. The Town acquired 5 additional parcels totally 101.7 acres, and together with the SVT purchased 54 acres in 2025, bringing the total to 714 acres.

Habitat - Flora include many ferns, Canada lily, jack-in-the-pulpit, blue flag iris, sweet pepperbush, spicebush, swamp azalea, black gum, highbush blueberry, virgin's bower, marsh marigold, lady's slipper, starflower, Indian cucumber root, Indian pipes, birds foot violets, shinleaf, pipsissewa, partridge berry, nodding trillium, and basswood. Two stars on the list are large whorled pogonia and American black currant, both considered relatively rare in Massachusetts.

Animal life include deer, red fox, grey fox, coyote, bobcat, racoon, possum, fisher and a wide variety of birds including pileated woodpecker, blue birds,

woodcock, wood thrush, turkeys, red-tailed hawk, turkey-vulture, ruffed grouse, and various warblers. An inhabitant of special interest is the rare, blue-spotted salamander.

Other Features - Located in the southwest portion of the Town Forest, off Oak Street, are several quarries that provided granite blocks for Ashland building projects.

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The Ashland Town Forest is managed by the Ashland Town Forest Committee (ATFC).
email. TownForest@AshlandMass.com

For more information go to:
<http://www.ashlandmass.com/TownForest>

Cowassock Woods is owned and managed by Sudbury Valley Trustees (SVT).
<http://www.svtweb.org>

**We do our best to keep the trails clean and open.
Please report trails obstructions and other issues.**



Stay On
Trails



All Dogs
On Leash



Pick Up
The Poop



No
Smoking



No
Fires



Do Not
Litter



No
Hunting

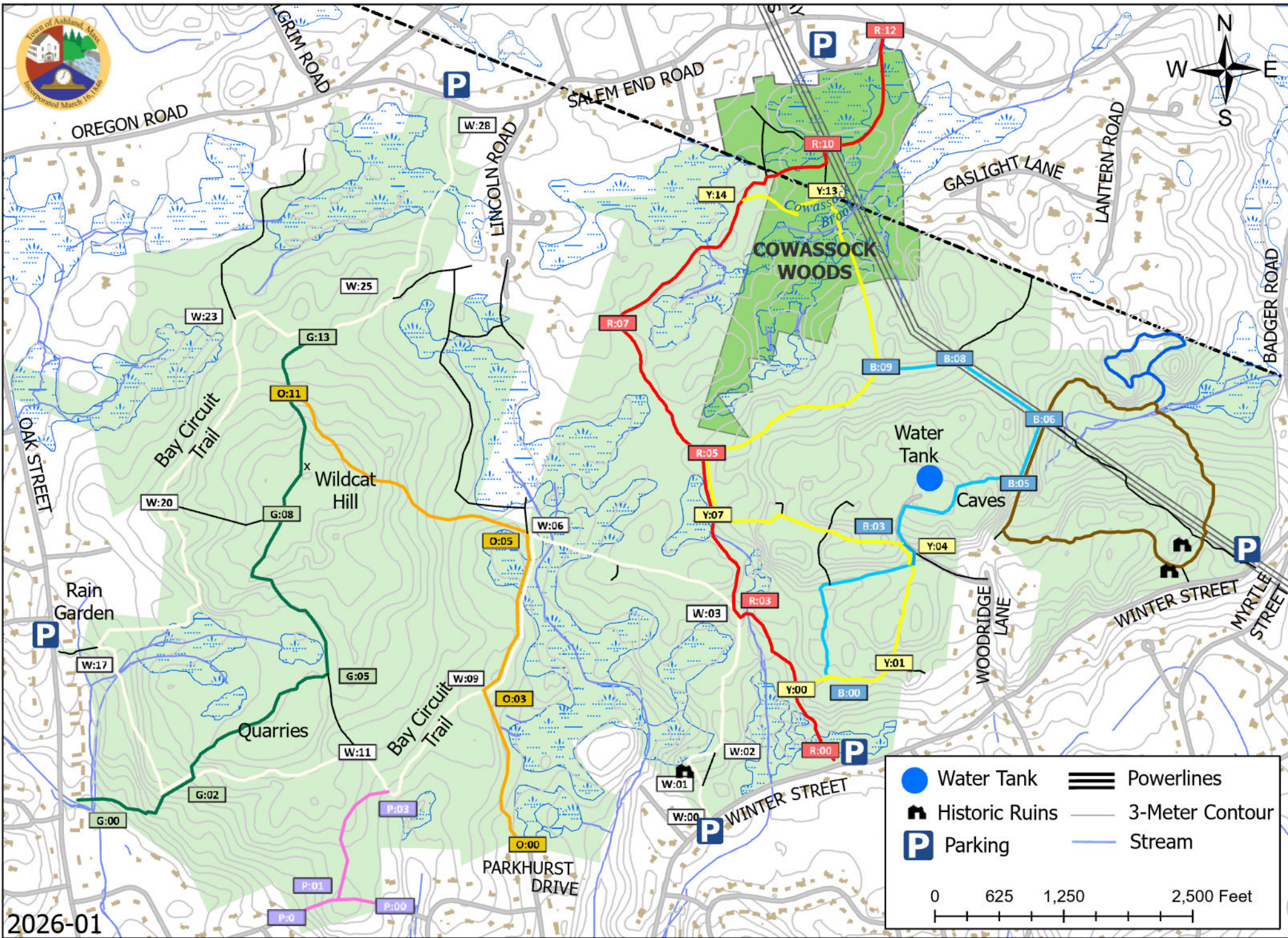
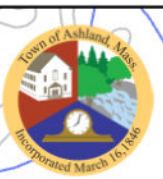


No Cutting Trees
Or Picking Plants



No Motorized
Vehicles

Ashland Town Forest and Cowassock Woods Trail Map



2026-01

| | | | |
|--|----------------|--|-----------------|
| | Water Tank | | Powerlines |
| | Historic Ruins | | 3-Meter Contour |
| | Parking | | Stream |

0 625 1,250 2,500 Feet