

**Town of Tolland, Connecticut  
Conservation Commission  
Crystal Peat Conservation Area  
Management Plan  
Cook Road**



*A Passive Recreation Open Space Conservation Area*

**Adopted by Commission    7/24/2014**

**Adopted by Council        8/12/2014**

# **Town of Tolland**

## **Conservation Commission Property Management Plan**

### **Crystal Peat Conservation Area, Cook Road**

**Background** – The Tolland Conservation Commission is responsible for overseeing properties purchased by the Town of Tolland for conservation purposes and for preparing a management plan for each property. The management plans are based upon the environmental characteristics of the property and determine appropriate conservation and usage. Each plan includes a property description, an analysis of the unique characteristics and acceptable uses of the property, and a management program. The management program outlines the property management and improvement needs; the individuals and organizations to manage the property; and resource capabilities and protection needs related to the site. Each management plan is developed under the Commission’s management planning process.

#### **I. PROPERTY DESCRIPTION, RESOURCES, POTENTIAL, AND PROBLEMS**

**Property Description** – The Crystal Peat Conservation Area is a 30.5 acre parcel of land to the north and east of Cook Road and is located in the northern part of Tolland. On September 27, 2011, the Town Council approved the donation to the Town of Tolland of 30.5 acres owned by Crystal Peat Humus Company, Inc. (the Roncari family) as part of the Carriage Crossing subdivision set aside. It was donated to the Town of Tolland in September of 2013.



The property lies along the east side of the “old Cook Road”. On June 14, 2011, the Tolland Town Council discontinued, pursuant to Connecticut General Statute section 13a-49, a certain unimproved section of Cook Road. This road used to be the connection to Ladd Road and Route 140 in Ellington.

On the west side of the discontinued old Cook Road, is an open space set aside from the Crystal Ridge subdivision leading up a steep hill with a slope in excess of 20% (Town of Tolland Open Space & Conservation Plan, map 20). This property has frontage on the east side of Wildwood Road (between #30 and 50). Diagonally across from that access point, is an access point on the west side of Wildwood Road (between #41 and 55) to the Palmer Kendall Mountain Conservation Area. On the southeast corner of the Crystal Peat Conservation Area, there is another open space set aside from the Branch Brook sub-division giving access to the Amanda Way cul-de-sac.

The terrain of the land is very flat, mostly at an elevation of 690 feet above sea level. Most of the north and east sides of the Crystal Peat Conservation Area are wetlands, especially in the peat bog area and near the brook. In the middle of the property, there is a 0.3 acre pond surrounded by heavy undergrowth. Brooks Brook starts on this property and flows south, joining the Skungamaug River just before entering the Charter (Skungamaug) Marsh. Therefore this

property is in the northern section of the Skungamaug River Watershed. Brooks Brook is a stream of *Surface and Stream Water Quality Class A* (Town of Tolland Open Space & Conservation Plan, map 5). An *Aquifer Protection Area* comprises the majority of the land in this conservation area (Town of Tolland Plan of Conservation and Development, page 23).

The Crystal Peat Humus Company used this property many years ago to produce peat. A drainage ditch was dug around the perimeter and drained to the low side of the bog. The surface vegetation was removed. To reduce the moisture in the top layer of the bog, shallow parallel ditches that drain into the perimeter ditch were dug. This allowed the surface to dry enough that harvesting equipment could be used without fear of sinking. The fields between the parallel ditches were then profiled so that rain water would drain to the ditches. Production required the use of the sun and wind to dry the surface peat layer. An uppermost layer was usually harrowed, breaking capillary flow and enhancing the drying process. The dry peat layer was then collected and transported to a processing facility for screening and packaging. There remains a tall wall, that was used to load the peat for shipping, and two rectangular foundations.



**Potential Uses** – Because of the conservation easement, the uses of the property must be passive recreation. Accepted uses include:

- Hiking
- Snowshoeing and cross-country skiing
- Dog walking under owner’s control; town ordinance requires dogs to be on a leash
- Mountain biking
- Habitat and wildlife studies
- Nature study

Utilizing the *Conservation Commission Standards for Mountain Biking and Horseback Riding Use of Trails*, for horseback riding, the standard of not traversing frequently wet areas or watercourses is not met so horseback riding is not allowed. All standards for mountain biking are currently met so mountain biking is allowed.

**Problems and Concerns** – The Crystal Peat Conservation Area, being a remote property, shares common problems with other remote privately and Town-owned areas. There has been evidence of unauthorized, illegal use of the property. Nighttime use, ATV use, dumping, and hunting are of concern and require corrective action as conditions warrant.



**Future Plans** – A connecting trail going west up the slope to Wildwood Road and then continuing further onto the Palmer Kendall Mountain Conservation Area should be considered in order to increase the connectivity of these areas. Historical interpretive signage should be posted near the wall, foundations, and bogs.

**Use Restrictions and Visitor Responsibilities** – Visitors are reminded to use the property in a manner consistent with land use guidelines and protecting open space resources. The following guidelines are the standards for use and are identified on signage on the property:

- Dogs must be leashed.
- Leave no trace.
- No littering. Carry out what you carry in.
- No motorized vehicles or other means of motorized transport.
- No horseback riding.
- Do not disturb vegetation or wildlife.
- Visitors shall stay on marked trails and roads.
- No hunting or firearms allowed.
- No setting of fires.
- Respect the rights of other visitors.
- Area is closed from sunset to sunrise. Night use is by permit only.
- Notify the Conservation Commission of organized group activities.

## **II. OPEN SPACE MANAGEMENT PLAN**

**Management Objectives** – The principal objectives are to conserve the property and protect wildlife habitat while providing access and passive recreational opportunities for the general public. While the Conservation Commission, acting as an agent of the Tolland Town Council, is ultimately responsible for property management, implementation of a management program is a shared responsibility with the Tolland Conservation Corps, property steward, and a variety of Town agencies and resources in accordance with the *Open Space Management Guideline and Process*.

Specific objectives for this parcel include:

- Follow best property management processes.
- Maintain the approved trail system.
- Maintain the parking area.
- Continue initiatives to block unauthorized vehicular access.
- Conduct a natural resource inventory.
- Pursue educational, documentation, and protection opportunities for habitat, wildlife, and unique features.
- Maintain the stream crossings.
- Maintain property boundaries.
- Develop historical background summary.
- Manage the woodlands following the guidance of a professional forester.

Although it is not the intention of the Conservation Commission to manage this property for timber production with periodic commercial harvests, it may be necessary, from time to time, to carry out certain silviculture practices to maintain the health of the forest or to maintain the property in a particular stage of succession in order to encourage a particular habitat. Such management activities, if deemed necessary, will be done in consultation with a professional forester to insure that the appropriate practices are implemented.

**Management Plan and Program** – Tasks required to assure that management objectives are achieved shall be overseen by the Conservation Commission and implemented by the Head Steward and the Property Steward. Tasks include:

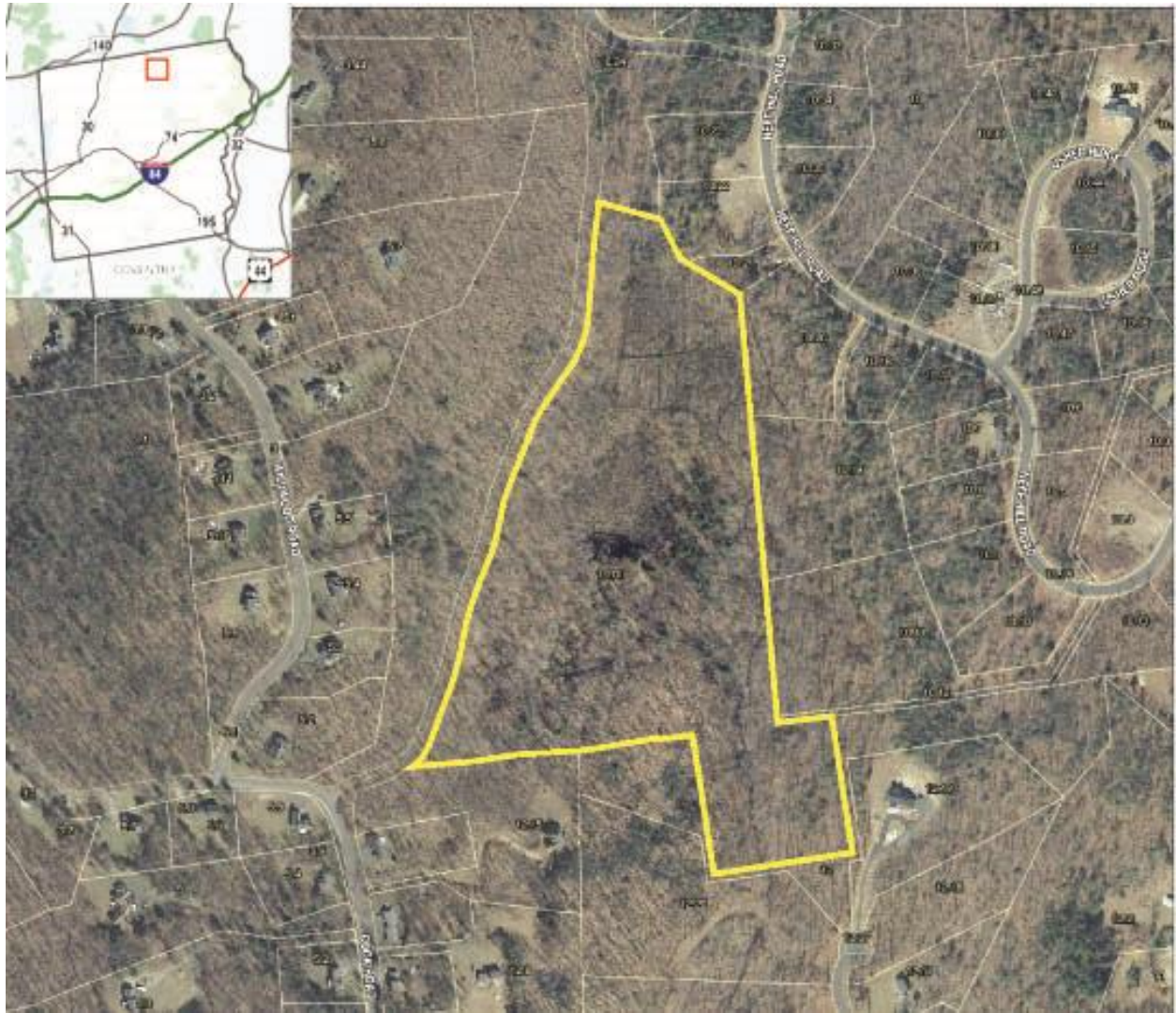
- Maintain the approved trail system.
- Maintain the stream crossings.
- Maintain trail markings and signs.
- Maintain map containers and keep supplied with property brochures.
- Maintain cleared area by pond.
- Perform litter patrol as needed.
- Inspect for illegal dumping and illegal motorized use.
- Maintain parking area and blockades.
- Trim foliage to maintain a line-of-sight at parking area.
- Install and maintain property boundary markings. Conduct a yearly walk of the boundaries.
- Manage the woodlands following the guidance of a professional forester.

#### Attachments

- Aerial map with location map insert
- Topographical map
- Aquifer Protection Area map
- Nearby Conservation Areas
- Trail map

The temporary steward of the property is Bob Rubino.

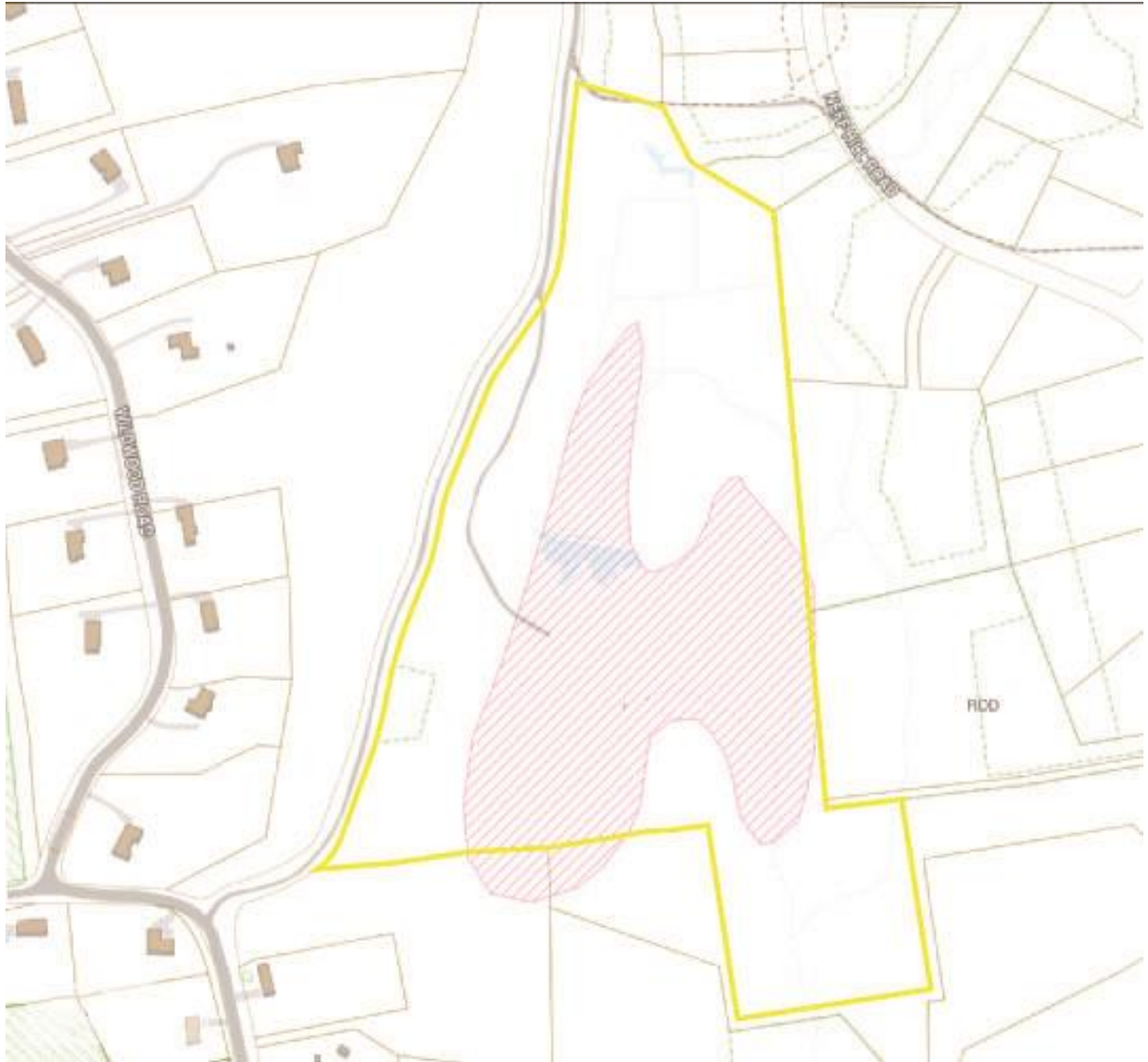
2012 Aerial map with location map insert



# Topographical Map

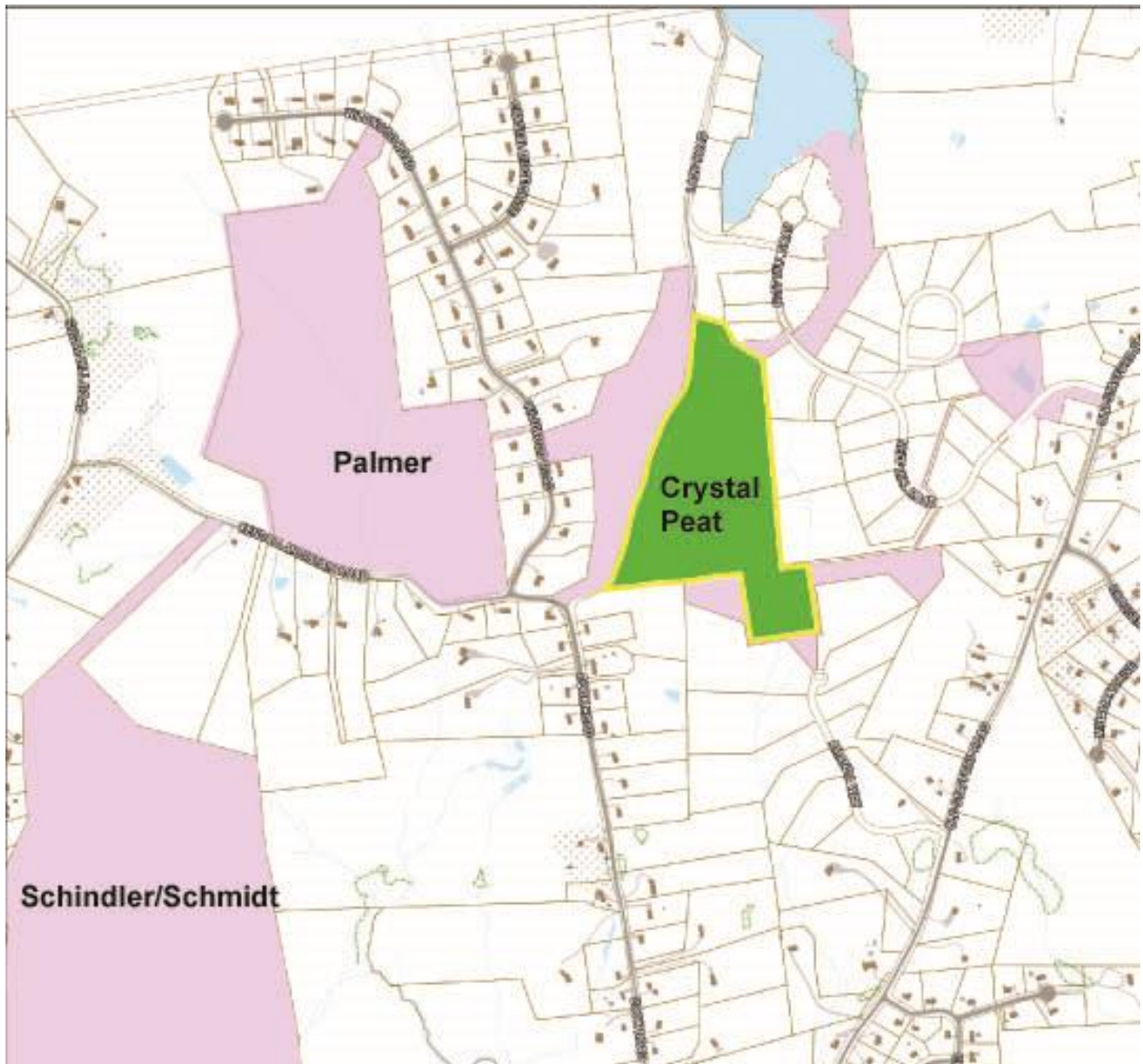


# Aquifer Protection Area

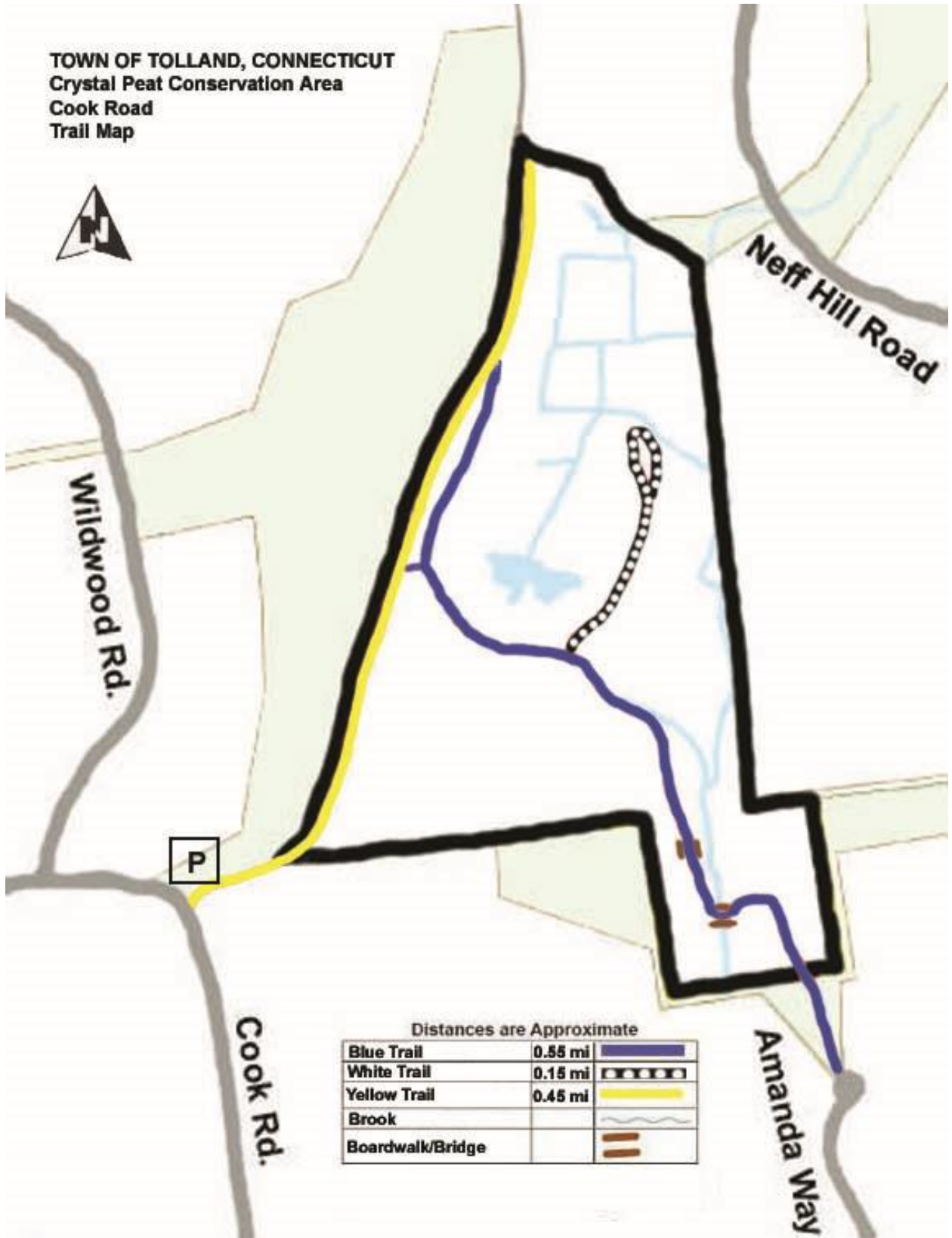






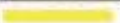

## Nearby Conservation Areas



**TOWN OF TOLLAND, CONNECTICUT  
 Crystal Peat Conservation Area  
 Cook Road  
 Trail Map**



Distances are Approximate

Blue Trail	0.55 mi	
White Trail	0.15 mi	
Yellow Trail	0.45 mi	
Brook		
Boardwalk/Bridge		