

Thompson Trail Closure – Frequently asked questions

Why didn't the Woodlands Office consult the Town about closing this trail?

In May of this year, there was a meeting between Steve Eisenhaure, UNH Land Use Coordinator, Office of Woodlands and Natural Areas, and a member of both the Durham Conservation Commission and the Durham Land Stewardship Committee, who had knowledge about the users and origin of the trail, and the Town's Land Stewardship Coordinator. During that trail walk several on-the ground instances of why the trail was undesirable were discussed, including an unpermitted wetland crossing and the fact that the trail was running through several permanent inventory plots. Further conceptual justification included wildlife habitat and research management as to why it was inappropriate to have trails in these locations. The intended message was that if the trail (or some version of it) was to remain the UNH Woodlands Committee would have to review it. This was followed up with correspondence from UNH stating that any trails that weren't on the University's published maps would be closed and a deadline was given for the end of June 2021 for any proposals.

Since efforts in past trail closures to reach users through signage have mostly failed the steps described above were taken as an alternate strategy for transferring the University's message to the public and to the users of the trail. In this instance there has not been a response to the request for a proposal.

Unfortunately, this trail is not an isolated incident. There is continuous unauthorized trail building and use, on University lands, sometimes by people who are well-aware of the policy. Unmanaged and unplanned trail building is an unsustainable and unrealistic burden to place on the University, the land, and its resources. A good example is College Woods, where we have inherited miles of trails that were not planned well and in places where trails probably should not be. Unfortunately, people become tremendously attached to the trails, whether or not they were appropriately established, but sometimes have unrealistic expectations of what a property can bear in terms of impact.

Does UNH cooperate with the Town of Durham on trail planning?

Yes. The UNH Woodlands office frequently cooperates with the Town and Durham residents. Here are few examples of trail projects:

McDonald Lot: Blazed the trail, upgraded maps and bridge structures to accommodate increased traffic from the bridge over the Oyster River. Allowed an unauthorized trail on MacDonald Lot to remain at the urging of trail users.

Stevens Woods to Doe Farm: The trail that connects through Stevens Woods all the way to Doe Farm would not be possible without newly constructed spur trails on the University's East Foss Farm. This trail was cooperatively blazed and maps were revised to reflect this.

College Woods and Oyster River Forest: Cooperatively blazed and signed the Oyster River trail so there is a comprehensive connection from Packers Falls road through the Oyster River Forest and UNH's College Woods to Mill Road.

UNH's East Foss Farm: Rerouted a loop trail on East Foss farm at the request of a local trail user.

Upgraded dog policy signs to help protect neighbors on East Foss Farm.

Woodridge to UNH's West Foss Farm: Agreed to a connector from the Woodridge neighborhood onto West Foss Farm.

Why would UNH agree to the Woodridge neighborhood connection while closing off other trails? Why are wetland crossings there okay but not on the white trail?

The neighbors in the Woodridge neighborhood approached UNH with a proposal about the trail and about where the UNH portion of the trail would go. This trail does not bisect a large portion of land that would be useful for research. The close proximity of the University's West Foss yellow trail and the Woodridge park means it is already not possible to mitigate wildlife impacts from recreation. For these reasons the Woodland Committee approved this trail.

Wetland crossings are okay as long as they are thoughtfully designed and permitted by the State of NH. It is ultimately the Town's role to assess whether it is worth the investment into building the crossings on Durham property.

Doesn't this trail closure block access to private trails and put too much impact on the trails at Thompson Farm?

The trail connection to the Fogg easement from UNH's West Foss farm is open and allows access to the trails there. There are three separate entrances that UNH maintains on the Packers Falls side of Thompson Farm that are primarily for neighborhood access.

Within a 1-mile radius of the entrance to West Foss Farm, of which Thompson farm is included, there are more than 13 miles of roads and trails on UNH properties that are open for recreation and maintained by UNH. All of these properties tie into Durham and other lands providing many more miles of trails.

It's unrealistic for everyone who abuts UNH property to have a full suite of recreational trails that fit their specific needs. Horseback riders and ATVs are not allowed on these trails. Similarly, although mountain biking is allowed most everywhere, not all UNH trails are suitable for mountain biking nor is it appropriate to adapt all trails and properties for mountain biking.

Why does UNH have so many trails on College Woods yet the University chooses to restrict trail building on other properties?

UNH properties are multiple use. The multiple uses are primarily education and research, timber production, wildlife management, water quality management, and recreation. The woodland properties have over twenty miles of trails on them for people to use for recreation, of which Thompson Farm has more than three miles. In some cases, open spaces need to be maintained (without additional permanent trails) to balance other uses with recreation.

The University's College Woods is a property where there is high recreational use and the property is managed to accommodate that. This means that some other uses are not appropriate because of that imbalance. Although that's acceptable for College Woods, it wouldn't be desirable for all UNH properties. Although UNH absolutely supports recreation as one of its goals, such a use can be incompatible with other uses. There are many examples of this but one obvious one is where dogs chase wildlife or disrupt research plots.

In terms of broad wildlife management, interested individuals can learn more about the effects of trail density on wildlife by consulting *Trails for People and Wildlife*, which is available online. As an alternative, individuals can contact the NH Fish and Game Department.