DelCarte Open Space Area

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DelCarte
Conservation Area

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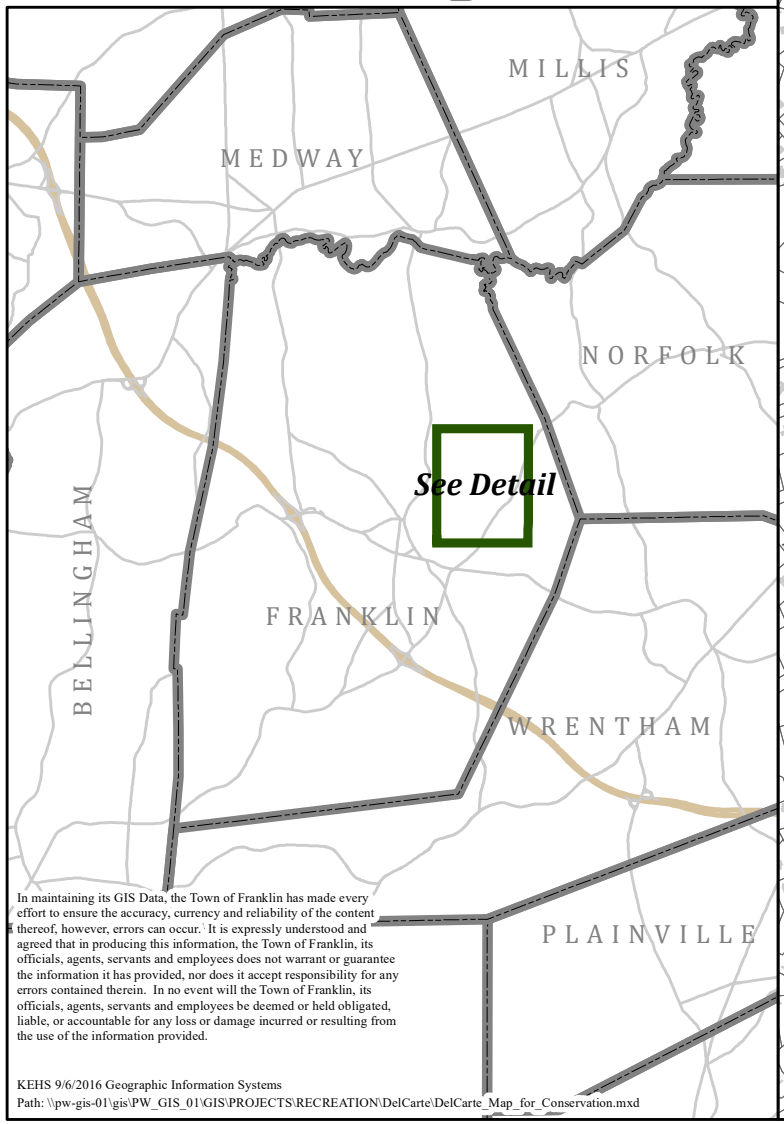
DelCarte Conservation Area
Structure
Railroad
Parcel Line
Water
Municipal Boundary



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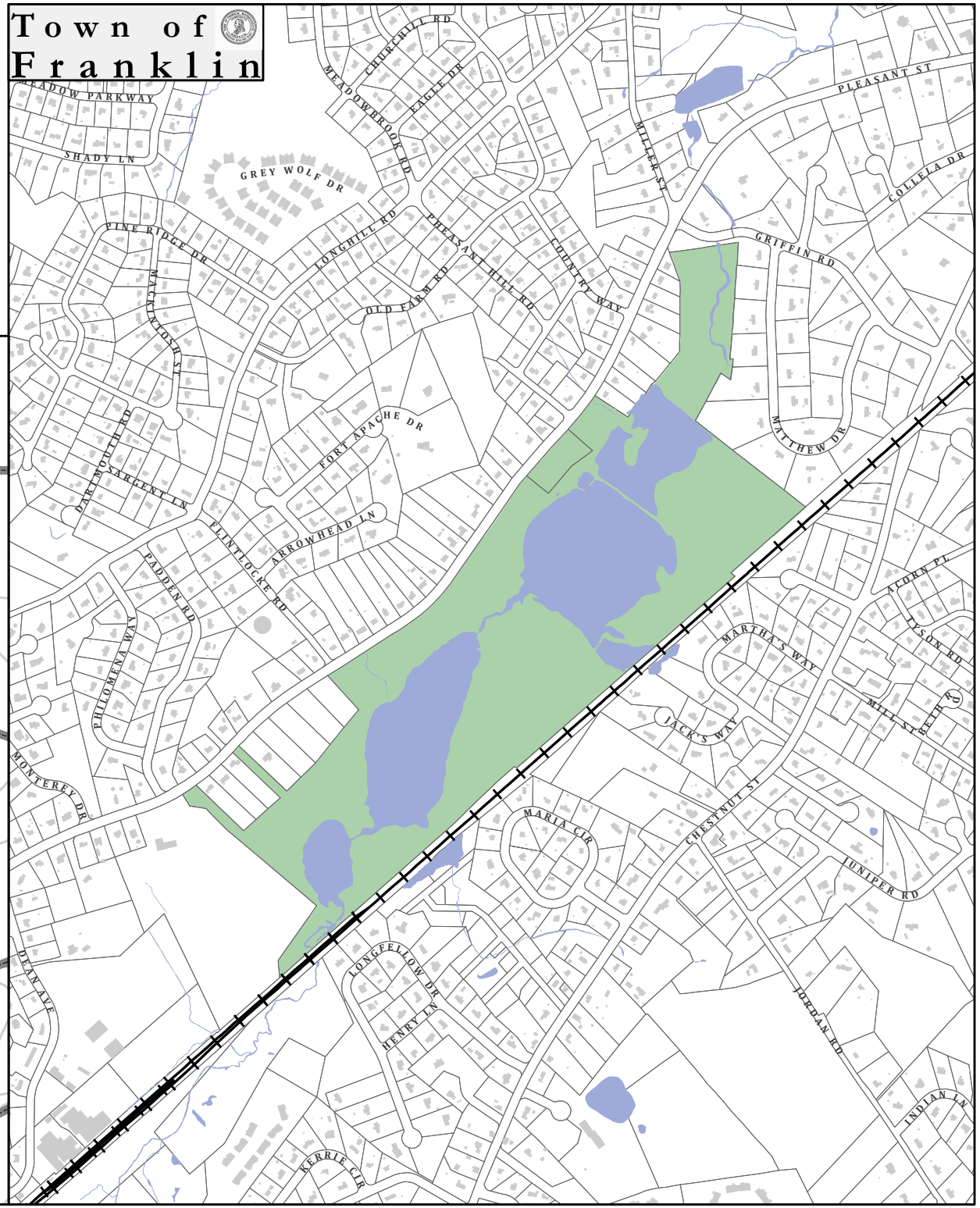


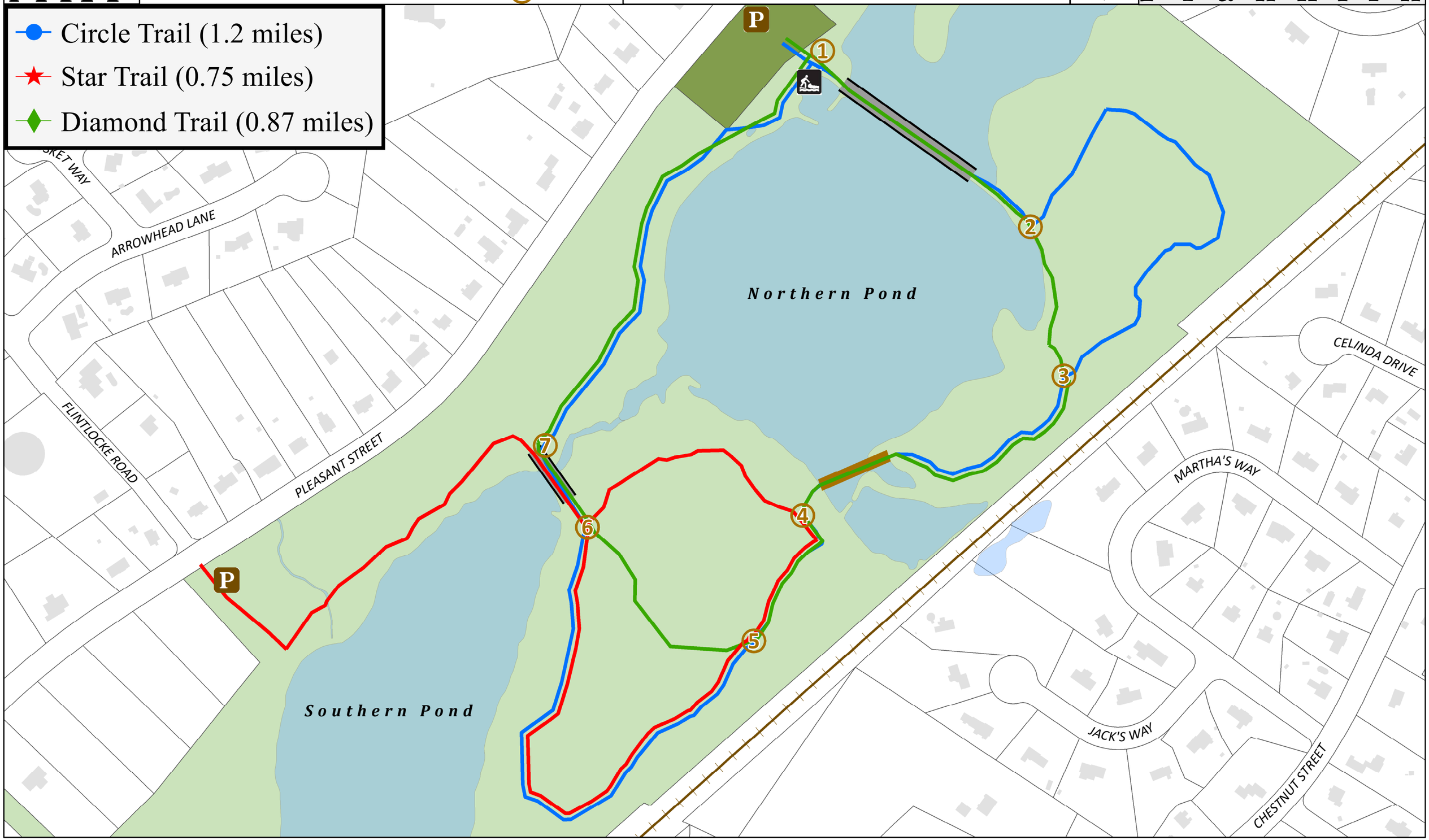
TRAIL MAP

DelCarte Conservation Area
DelCarte Playground
Parking Area
Boat Launch
Boardwalk
Dam
Railroad
Parcel Line
Trail Junction

Meters: 0 50 100 200
Feet: 0 250 500 1,000

N

Town of Franklin



Narrative

As I pull up to the parking lot near the northern pond, I start to envision the incredible wildlife I will encounter on this sunny summer day. I walk by the playground and hear the call of a Baltimore Oriole, distorted by the happy screams of playing children. I stand in front of the massive Eastern White Pine trees adjacent to the playground and a flash of brilliant orange appears before my eyes.

I keep moving onward, crossing the graveled dam. I spot numerous birds as I continue- Blue Jays, Black-capped Chickadees, Tufted Titmice, Red-winged Blackbirds. As I reach the bridge crossing the back of the pond, I notice a beaver den off to my left. All of the sudden, I hear a splash. I look out towards the center of the pond and, to my delight, I see an Osprey. The Osprey flies into the sky and flaps its wings to keep still above the water while scanning for prey. On my walk through the forest to the southern pond, I take notice of the different species of trees- White Oak, Red Oak, Red Maple, Sassafras, White Birch, and the dreaded Poison Ivy. I hear the

call of a Red-bellied Woodpecker, and spot the bird flying from tree to tree in search of bugs.

I reach the southern pond and immediately notice a family of mute swans and a pair of Great Blue Herons. As I patrol the bank, looking for a good place to cast my fishing line, I am startled by a large Northern Water Snake. Trying to catch my breath, I notice that the snake has a small Bluegill Sunfish in its jaws. I move away, attempting not to frighten the creature as much as it frightened me.

I finally cast my line and after about 10 minutes, I get a hit. I reel up a sizable Chain Pickerel, roughly a foot in length. I unhook the slimy creature and release it back into the pond, where it darts back towards the safety of the open water.

I leave the area and begin my journey to the parking lot. As I approach my car, I take a look back at the water. I see Painted Turtles basking on a log, Tree Swallows maneuvering across the water with extreme speed and precision, and a little chipmunk frantically gathering food underneath a mighty White Oak. I look out over the area and I feel proud to have such a unique natural area in my town.

Background

The DelCarte Open Space Area, sometimes referred to as the Franklin Reservoir, was donated to the town of Franklin by Ernest DelCarte after his passing in October 2000. In addition to this generous 136-acre donation, DelCarte is remembered for his work as the owner of a tackle shop located directly on the northern pond behind the boat launch. Locals reminisce of the care that DelCarte felt over the area, which ultimately resulted in the donation of the land as a conservation area to prevent development on the ecologically unique landscape.

Since 2000, the Conservation Commission of Franklin has worked on many projects in the area, including clearing trails, refurbishing dams, developing a playground, and adding attributes for easier access for recreation, including a floating boardwalk and two canoe launches.

General Information

The DelCarte Open Space is part of the Charles River Watershed. The area is fed directly by Miller Brooke, which

eventually connects to the Charles River. There are two main ponds- the pond with the playground adjacent to the water is referred to as the northern pond. The northern pond is slightly larger than the southern pond. The dominant substrate type (material layering the bottom) of both ponds is muck. The average depth of the two ponds is roughly 3.5 feet, with a max depth of about 4 feet in the northern pond and 5 feet in the southern pond. The average temperature of the ponds is 55°F, with warmer temperatures during wet weather. There are two parking lots at the area, a paved northern lot and a gravel southern lot. The pond is undergoing a significant invasion of exotic aquatic vegetation, with Variable Milfoil and Water Chestnut comprising the main invasives.

Purpose of Area

The DelCarte Open Space Area provides the town of Franklin with various recreational opportunities, including fishing, birding, trail walking/running, nature watching, and canoeing. Although the town has many other conservation sites, DelCarte offers a range of ecosystems, such as wetlands, shallow ponds, and deciduous and evergreen forests. In addition,

the area controls possible flooding on Pleasant Street and surrounding residential areas by collecting rainwater during heavy rain events.

Responsibilities for Recreation

DelCarte offers beautiful and safe recreation opportunities, and in order to ensure continued enjoyment, responsibility is placed on the individuals utilizing the area. There are certain rules that, when followed, benefit the health and aesthetic of DelCarte. By the trailhead of the dam on the northern lot, there is a list of “do’s and don’ts” posted, so please read this sign before entering the trails. The most crucial phrase for any person in a natural area to remember is “leave no trace”- that means nothing left behind- including litter and dog poop. This rule also explains not to clear any trails, destroy any aspect of the land, or take anything from the natural area. In addition, please be conscious of private property signs, especially when utilizing the Green Triangle trail.

Ecosystems

Wetlands

Wetlands are areas where soils are covered by water, or where water is present at or near the surface of soil all year or during seasonal periods including the growing season. Wetlands are an important ecosystem not only to the DelCarte Open Space Area, but also to the general health of the earth. Wetlands provide natural filtration from pollutants and sediments, filtration that is essential to the health of DelCarte due to the busy road parallel to the ponds.

Wetlands bring a large potential for biodiversity (variation of living things). They provide nursery for many spawning fish, and because of their quality for cover, resting, nesting, and foraging, wetlands also attract many mammals, amphibians, birds, and reptiles.

Wetlands have attributes that are unique to this specific ecosystem, including cattails and skunk cabbage. Some of the most prevalent plant and animal species creating and occupying

the wetlands at DelCarte are Red-winged Blackbirds, Great Blue Herons, the American Mink, Cattail, and Common Reed.

Lentic/Pond

The ponds are characterized as a different ecosystem, a freshwater pond or lentic ecosystem. Lentic means slow-flowing waters. The pond ecosystem houses a variety of aquatic plants, fish, and provides food and home for many mammals, birds, reptiles, and amphibians. The bottom of the food chain includes algae and plankton, while the top consists of large fish (i.e Largemouth Bass) and herons.

Mixed Forest

Also included in the DelCarte Open Space Area is a forest ecosystem. The forests consist of deciduous and evergreen trees- primarily oak trees, maple trees, and pine trees- and small shrubs. It contains mature trees, saplings (immature trees), shrubs, and snags (dead trees), which reflects a range of conditions suitable for many forms of life. Having a diverse range of ages and species of trees allows for the extensive biodiversity in the area. Mature trees offer food in forms of seeds and acorns, saplings demonstrate that the soils are fertile

enough to produce life, shrubs contain fruits for birds and tender shoots for mammals, and snags are a popular destination for nesting birds and woodpeckers. The forests provide many animals with food and shelter, including beavers, raccoons, deer, squirrels, chipmunks, snakes, and a wide variety of bird species.

Trails

Blue Circle

The Blue Circle trail loops around the northern pond, giving walkers both an aquatic and forest experience. It can be accessed from the northern parking lot and also connects to the Red Square trail at Trail Junctions 1, 5, 6, and 7. Along the path are a variety of tree and shrub species, including Red Maple, Eastern White Pine, White Oaks, ferns, and Black Huckleberry bushes. The trail has many clearings along the pond for viewing pleasure where Painted Turtles, Great Blue Herons, beaver evidence, and Tree Swallows can be seen. The “back end” of the trail by the train tracks has sandy soils full of impressive Eastern White Pine trees. The path has a boardwalk that goes over the northern pond, and is a good spot to see White and Yellow Lily. After the

boardwalk is crossed (heading towards the southern pond), the path meanders into a more wooded area where a large patch of Black Huckleberry bushes and White Oak trees can be observed.

Green Triangle

The green triangle path allows trail walkers to experience a less aquatic, more wooded ecosystem. The trail can be accessed at Trail Junctions 3 and 4, which are connected to the Blue Circle trail. The area that the trail loops around has an abundance of Eastern White Pine trees, and therefore the floor of the forest is a thick mat of pine needles. There are also many White and Red Oak trees. Since this section is more wooded, squirrels and chipmunks gather here for food and shelter. Many American Robins also occupy this area. The area is not densely populated by underbrush vegetation, allowing for an unobstructed view of a forested landscape.

CAUTION: The trail has an unmarked path that leads to an old concrete dam, which is somewhat unsafe.

Red Square

The red square path does a semi-circle around the southern pond and overlaps with the blue circle path in some areas. The trail can be accessed from the southern parking lot. The section of path closest to the southern lot allows for great views of the pond. A family of Mute Swans occupies the southern pond and can be seen from the path. There are many beaver lodges along the back of the pond that can be observed, and many slides and pointed-stumps along the banks display evidence of beaver activity. Frogs and turtles can be seen along the banks of the pond, and the trail has various clearings with views of the water. The path also passes by the huckleberry section near the boardwalk. In the more wooded area, garter snakes can be seen as well as squirrels and chipmunks.

General Health

DelCarte Open Space Area provides the town with great recreation activities and also houses a vast collection of biodiversity, so the health of the area is of top priority for the conservation department. A recent study of the area was done by

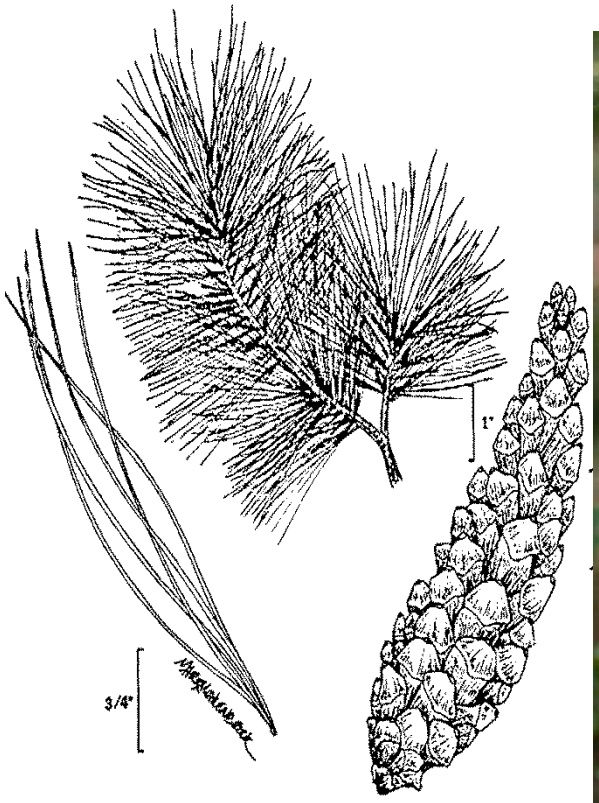
ESS Group on the ecological health of the open space. Overall, the area is moderately healthy, but the invasive aquatic plants are compromising the integrity of the ponds. The rapid success of variable milfoil and water chestnut is a major problem- they occupy the areas of the pond that could be providing native species with space, food, and nutrients.

Management Efforts

The Franklin Conservation Commission is currently working with BETA Engineering, the Environmental Protection Agency, and wetlands scientists to carry out the recommendation to obtain herbicides to control the invasive vegetation in the ponds. The efforts should be implemented by the end of summer 2016.

Inland Vegetation

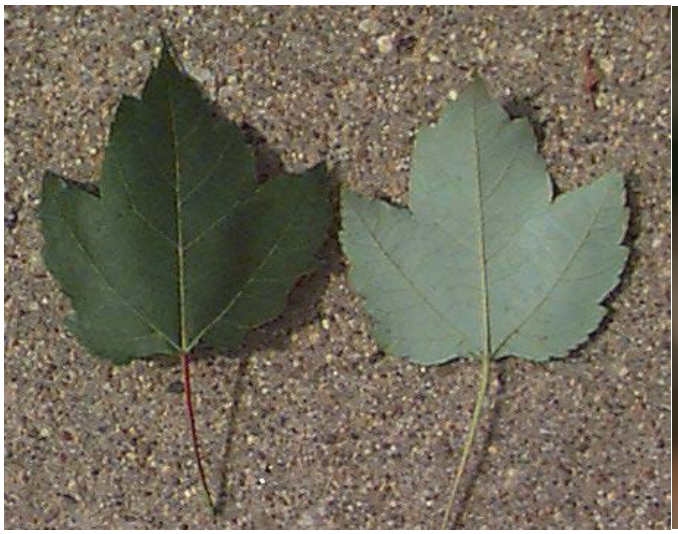
Along the ponds, there are many native and naturalized tree and shrub species. Some of the most common species are Red Maple, White Oak, Eastern White Pine, and Sassafras.



Eastern White Pine

Red Oak

Red Maple, *Acer rubrum*



Identification: Three distinctive points on leaf; red stems on branches and leaves; red buds
Soil type: Moist, well-drained, clay/loamy soils
Human uses: Ornamental and shade tree
Wildlife uses: Fruits and shoots eaten by birds, squirrels, and deer
Range: Across the United States due to ornamental planting
Height: mature tree reaches 40-60’; medium to fast growth with 13-24” per year
Fun fact: The red maple is the Rhode Island state tree, and Rhode Island in Dutch translates to ‘Red Island’

White Oak, *Quercus alba*

Identification: Leaves are simple and alternately arranged; leaves have rounded lobes; white/light grey bark
Soil type: Deep, moist, well-drained, with medium fertility and slightly acidic soils; sensitive to floods
Human uses: Widely used for lumber and interior hardwood flooring
Wildlife uses: Acorns eaten by many animals, including blue jays and squirrels
Range: Maine to Minnesota southward to Florida and Texas; wide range of soil types allows for wide range
Height: Mature tree reaches over 100’
Fun fact: DelCarte is home to both Red Oak and White Oak trees; the species can be differentiated by looking at the color of the bark, color of the stem on leaves, and the shape of the leaf

Eastern White Pine, *Pinus Strobus*

Identification: Rough scaly bark; needles instead of leaves; five needles per bundle (can use W.H.I.T.E. as a way to differentiate between pines; five needles, five letters)
Soil type: Sandy, well-drained soils
Human uses: Ornamental, mulch, buffer zones, wind breaks, and lumber
Wildlife uses: Popular tree for wildlife nests; various birds and other wildlife eat pine seeds in pinecones
Range: Southern Canada to southeastern Minnesota and northeastern Iowa; east from northern Illinois to New Jersey; south mostly in the Appalachian Mountains to northern Georgia and northwestern South Carolina.
Height: 50-80’; fast growing around 24” per year
Fun fact: Eastern White Pine trees can live up to 400 years

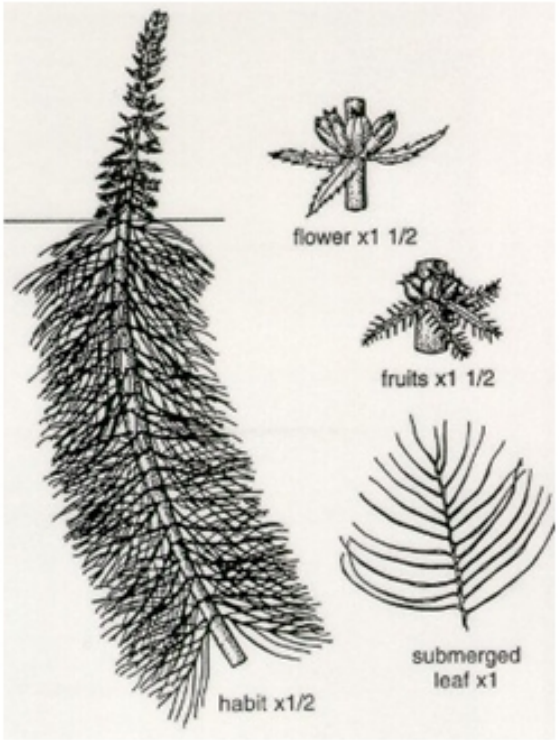
Sassafras, *Sassafras albidium*

Identification: Mitten-shaped leaves with three rounded points; grows as a single tree or dense thickets
Soil type: Acidic and moist soils
Human uses: Pleasing aroma for perfume; used by native Americans to cure almost all ailments
Wildlife uses: Leaves and shoots eaten by deer and hosts butterflies
Range: Maine west to New York; southwest in Illinois, Missouri, southeastern Kansas, eastern Oklahoma, and eastern Texas; and east to central Florida
Height: Up to 30”; size varies greatly and depends on nutrients available, grazing, and sunlight
Fun fact: Sassafras oil is still widely used today, and is mostly put in perfume and tea

Aquatic Vegetation

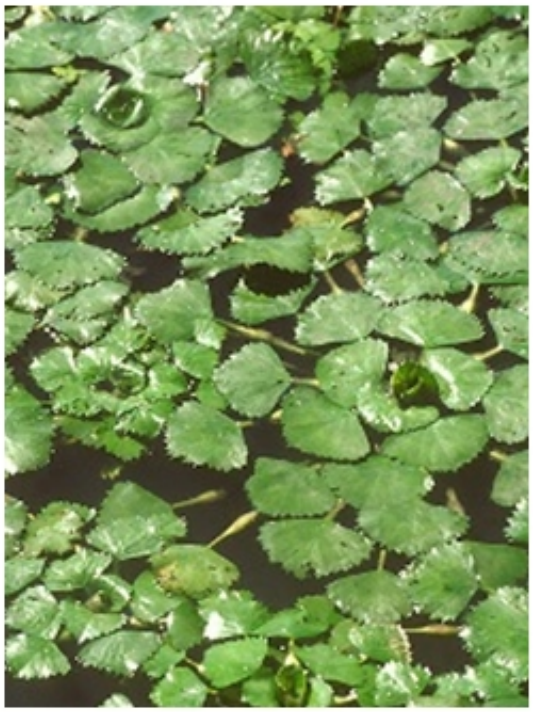
The most prevalent aquatic plants at DelCarte also happen to be the biggest threat to the health of the area. The ponds are overrun with two particular invasive species- Variable Milfoil and Water Chestnut. The most common native species found is the White Water Lily.

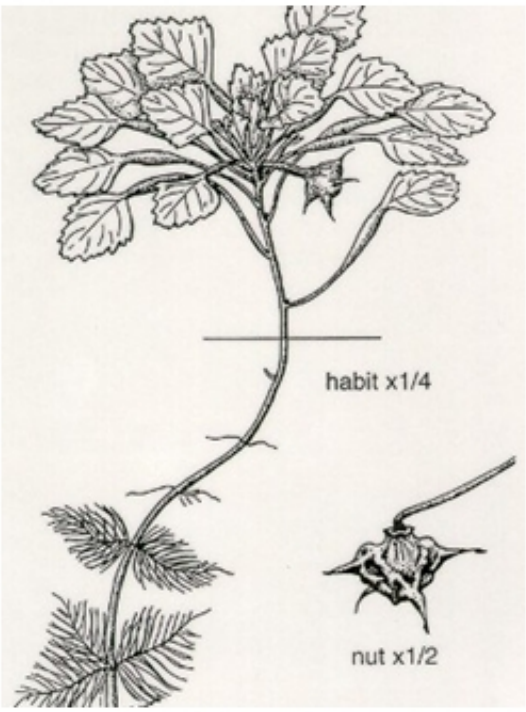
(Invasive) Variable Milfoil, *Myriophyllum heterophyllum*



Identification: Dense mat rooted in pond bottom; stems with leaves that resemble pipe cleaners or feathers
Habitat: Slow moving water; can survive in most conditions; Native in the southern states of the United States, and is spread by animals (mainly birds) and the bottoms of boats; Plagues the eastern United States and west until the Dakotas;
Issues: Highly competitive and outcompetes native plants; occupies mass areas; various forms of reproduction to ensure success; decaying mats lower dissolved oxygen levels; hinders recreation such as fishing and canoeing; reduces biodiversity
Management at DelCarte: Planned management options to stop the reproduction of the species by killing it with an herbicide.

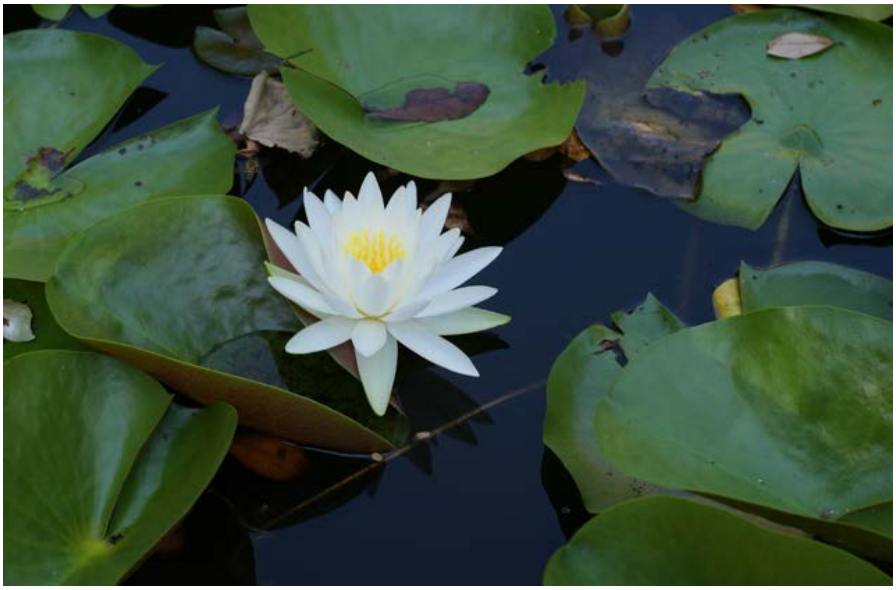
(Invasive) Water Chestnut, *Trapa natans*





Identification: Triangular green leaves with rigid leaves that form rosettes; upper side of leaves are waxy and shiny; underside of leaves are hairy; small white flowers with four pedals emerge from July to first frost
Habitat: Nutrient rich waters; can survive in slow moving waters; native to Asia, Australia, tropical Africa, and the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans, and is spread by animals and boats and canoes/kayaks; infestations from Vermont to Virginia..
Issues: Highly competitive and outcompetes native plants; hinders recreation and aesthetics; reduces biodiversity
Management at DelCarte: Water Chestnut can be controlled with herbicides, but long term management involves hand harvesting during the peak reproduction season

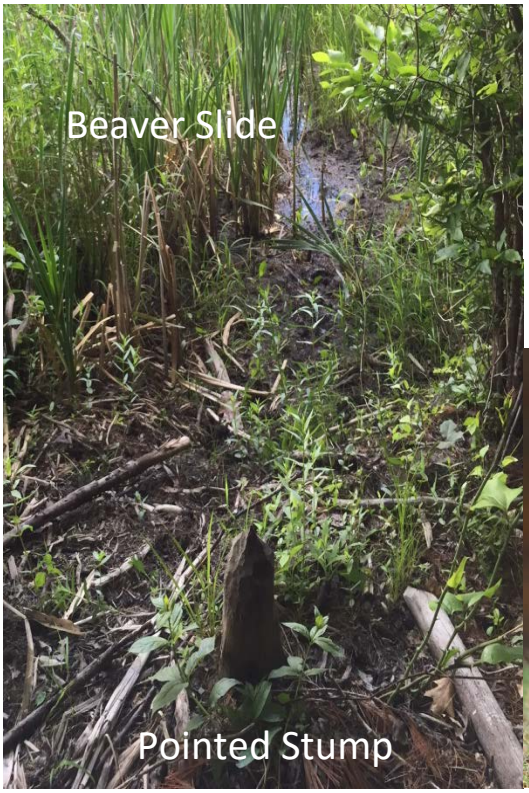
White Water Lily, *Nymphaea odorata*



Identification: Green round leaves (pads) connected to flexible rhizomes (stem) are 6-12” in diameter with a slice 1/3 down the middle; flower has white or pinkish pedals with yellow center
Habitat: Any shallow pond bottom
Human uses: Aromatic, ornamental
Wildlife uses: Micro and macro organisms (bacteria to turtles) attach to species and then are eaten by fish and other aquatic creatures; seeds are eaten by waterfowl; leaves are eaten by deer and muskrats
Fun fact: Water Lilies display their flowers during the beginning and middle of the day, but close around 3 P.M. or 4 P.M.

Mammals

DelCarte acts as a home to various species of mammals. Like most vegetated areas in Franklin, the area has an abundance of the common gray squirrel, white-tailed deer, and chipmunk. Mammals that occupy DelCarte that are not as commonly seen are the North American Beaver, Muskrats, and the American Mink.



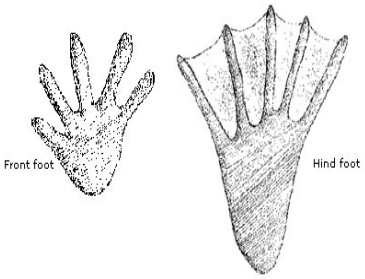
Beaver Evidence

(on site)

Muskrat

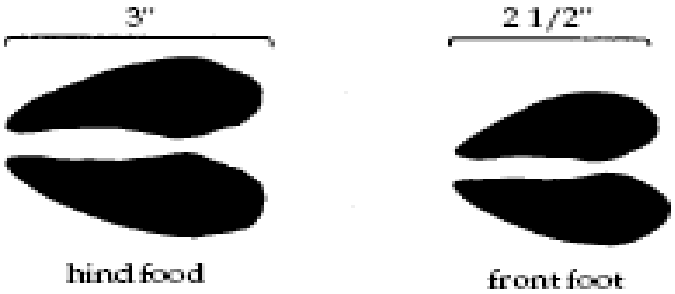
Raccoon

North American Beaver, *Castor Canadensis*



Identification: Large rodent with muscular build and brown pelt; flat, scaly tail
Habitat: Slow moving streams or rivers with successional growth trees on banks
Evidence of species: Various dens in southern pond; stumps of trees along waterfront eaten to a triangular point; slides for beavers to enter/exit the water can be noticed along the banks
DelCarte: Look for dens on the southern pond; look for tree stumps with a point; look for slides along vegetated banks
Diet: branches and woody debris; fond of maple and cottonwood
Lodges: Consists of eating chamber and nesting chamber; underwater entrance to avoid predation; frozen pond acts as barrier for entrance/exit during hibernation
Tracks: Front paws have five long fingers while hind paws are bigger and have webbing between fingers
Fun fact: Beavers are considered keystone species, meaning that their presence shapes the ecosystem that they inhabit

White-tailed Deer, *Odocoileus virginianus*



Identification: Tan to brown color; stands average 5’ tall; large body with long neck and short tail; adult male will have antlers
Habitat: Thrives in areas with fragmented forests and heavy vegetation
DelCarte: look for deer in the deeper wooded areas
Diet: Herbivores; stomachs allow them to eat most plant matter (sticks, buds, leaves, fruits) and some fungi
Tracks: Hooves with two distinct pieces roughly 3” in length
Fun fact: ‘White-tailed’ comes from the patch of white on the animal’s tail; often seen when tail is flicking when they sense danger is near

American Mink, *Neovison vison*

Identification: Weasel appearance; brown to black fur; long and slender body with a long thick tail; stubby legs; long neck; 13-18 in. in length; 1-3 lbs.
Habitat: Lives in areas with forest near bodies of water
DelCarte: Look for along the banks of the pond and wooded paths near banks; can also be seen swimming and climbing trees
Diet: Carnivore; eats whatever it can catch by biting prey's neck (muskrats, fish, birds, mice, chipmunks, frogs, snakes)
Tracks: 1" in length; 1 pad and 5 fingers with claws
Fun Fact: American Minks purr like cats when pleased

Birds

DelCarte houses a wide array of birds, including common species such as Blue Jays, Catbirds, Red-winged Blackbirds, Song Sparrows, Baltimore Orioles and Black-capped Chickadees. Waterfowl in the area consist of Canadian Geese, Mute Swans, Great Blue Herons, and Mallards. There are also various birds of prey, including Ospreys, Red-tailed Hawks, and Turkey Vultures.

Great Blue Heron wading
in cattails

(on site)

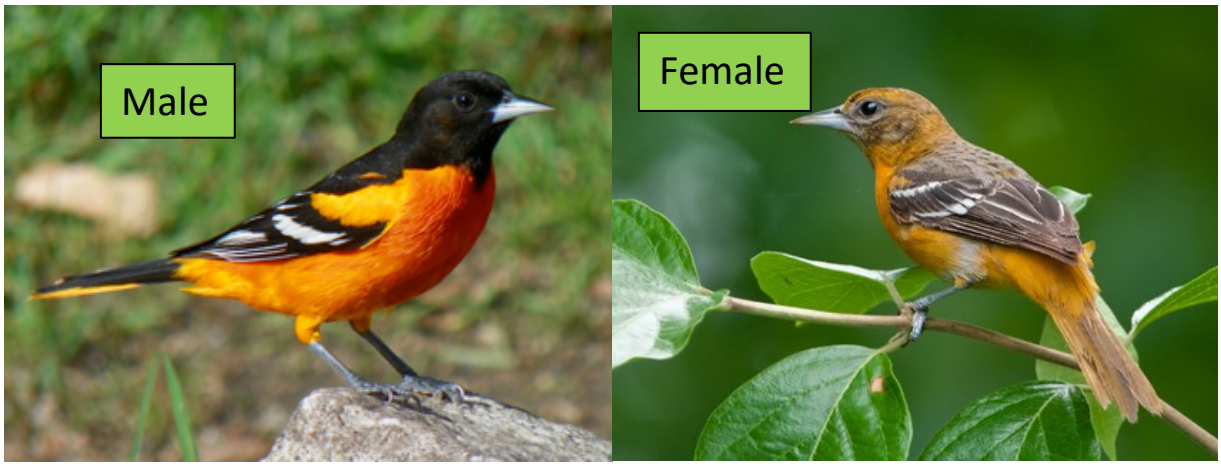
Osprey, *Pandion haliaetus*

Identification: Large raptor; brown and mostly white, distinctive brown streak near eye; kink in wing-shape to form an 'M'; female is slightly larger than the male; wing span 60-70 in.
Habitat: Near water with food source (fish); open areas for nesting; summer breeding spanning across Canada, migrates over United States, winter non-breeding across most of South America
DelCarte: Look for this bird fishing on the northern pond
Diet: Mainly live fish; sometimes small mammals or birds
Fun fact: Ospreys are considered one of the best anglers in the world

Great Blue Heron, *Ardea herodias*

Identification: Tall slender bird; bluish white color; black streak above eye; long legs; sinuous neck, dagger-like bill; resembles a pterodactyl when in flight
Habitat: Shallow bodies of water or coastlines; found year round across entire United States; some individuals migrate, summer breeding in southern Canada, winter non-breeding in northern South American countries
DelCarte: Look for this bird among the tall grasses on the shore of either pond
Diet: Fish and other small creatures in water, such as frogs; fishes by standing like a statue in water and moving very slowly until attacking lightning fast, which is called wading
Fun fact: Despite their comparatively massive size, Great Blue Herons only weigh 5-6 pounds

Baltimore Oriole, *Icterus galbula*



Identification: Male has vibrant orange belly with black head and black wings with one white bar; female has yellow-orange belly with black head and black wings with two white bars
Habitat: Deciduous forests, but not deep forests; prefers edge of tree line; spends most time in canopy; Eastern United States for summer breeding, South America for winter non-breeding
DelCarte: Look for this bird near the playground and at the back end of the southern pond
Diet: Insects such at caterpillars and grasshoppers; fruit such as raspberry and mulberry; nectar
Fun fact: Baltimore Orioles are picky eaters in regards to fruit and only pluck the darkest and ripest fruits

Red-Winged Blackbird, *Agelaius phoeniceus*

Identification: Male has a glossy black body with red-and-yellow shoulder patches; female is brown and streaky
Habitat: Occupies wetlands and fields; often seen on cattails and phragmites; spends fall and winter in agricultural fields
DelCarte: Look for near tall grasses; very abundant; distinctive call you can learn by watching
Diet: Mostly insects in summer, seeds and grains like corn and wheat in winter
Fun fact: Male blackbirds are attention seekers and often perch and call on high

Fish

DelCarte fosters various species of fish that are commonly found in ponds and lakes, including species of Sunfish, Largemouth and Smallmouth Bass, Carp, Chain Pickerel, White Perch, and Black and Brown Bullhead Catfish.

Green Sunfish

Catfish Species

Smallmouth Bass

Bluegill Sunfish, *Lepomis macrochirus*

Identification: Greenish olive color with lighter colors closer to stomach; black flap behind ears; spiny fin; typically 4-6” long
Habitat: Ponds and quiet bodies of water; native to eastern North America, but introduced all over country; create nests in shallow, sandy sections of water
DelCarte: Look for Bluegills along the shallow waters; there are three kinds of sunfish (Green sunfish have bright green markings near mouth, Pumpkinseed sunfish have dots of various colors)
Diet: Insects, zooplankton, small fish, worms, and human food such as bread and corn
Fun fact: The Bluegill population is so numerous that they can be found in almost every quiet body of water in the United States

Largemouth Bass, *Micropterus salmoides*

Identification: Dark green with distinctive black stripe along the fishes side; averages 18” long
Habitat: Clear, warm waters with abundant vegetation
DelCarte: Fish for this species where there is vegetation and fallen woody debris; is a top fish predator that controls populations of other fish species
Diet: Mostly smaller fish; sometimes eats insects and frogs
Fun fact: Largemouth bass are popular game fish because they fight and are smart enough to learn lures

(Invasive) Common Carp, *Cyprinus carpio*

Identification: Light brown color; two loarbels (whiskers) from mouth; forked tail; large, thick scales; can grow up to 4’
Habitat: Turbid ponds and slow-moving streams
DelCarte: Uncommon sighting; look for around less clear areas of pond
Diet: Bottom feeders; eats mollusks, seeds, insect larva, mud
Fun fact: Common carp were introduced to North America from Central Asia as a food source and game fish

Reptiles

DelCarte is home to various types of snakes and turtles. Snakes species include Garter Snakes, Northern Water Snakes, and Black Rat Snakes. Turtle species include Painted Turtles, Common Snapping Turtles, and Eastern Musk Turtles.

Garter Snake

Northern Water Snake eating Sunfish (on site)

Northern Water Snake, *Nerodia sipedon*

Identification: Can be a variety of colors, mainly brown, gray, reddish, or brownish-black; dark crossbands on neck and dark blotches on the rest of body
Habitat: Anywhere there is fresh water
DelCarte: Look for near the shallower sections of the southern pond; can be seen sunbathing on stumps or rocks
Diet: Small fish, birds, small mammals, frogs, worms, leeches, salamanders, young turtles
Fun fact: The Northern Water Snake gets darker in color with age

Painted Turtle, *Chrysemys picta picta*

Identification: Smooth black shell; yellowish-red markings on shell; yellow underbelly
Habitat: Lakes, ponds, marshes, slow-moving streams; prefer bodies of water with logs or vegetation to bask in sun
DelCarte: Seen basking on logs and rocks; also look for individuals swimming in the water
Diet: Eats vegetation such as duckweed, water lilies, and algae; eats insects, tadpoles, smalls frogs and fish, worms, leeches
Fun fact: Painted turtles do not raise their young, instead the babies hatch and fend for themselves

Common Snapping Turtle, *Chelydra serpentine*

Identification: Brown to black shells; shell is bumpy and somewhat pointy; long tail; large head with pointed snout; webbed feet with long claws
Habitat: Muddy lakes and ponds; slow-moving rivers
DelCarte: Mostly nocturnal; hunts underwater during the day
Diet: Aquatic plants, fish, frogs, tadpoles, salamanders, insects, snails, leeches, worms, snakes, small mammals, baby ducks and goslings
Fun fact: Common snapping Turtles can live to 40 years old and can reach up to 2 feet in length from head to tail

Amphibians

The ponds and wet soils in the DelCarte Open Area attract many frogs, newts, and salamanders to the area. Frog species such as the Green Frog and Pickerel Frog can be seen near and in the water, while Wood Frogs can be seen on vegetated paths.

Green Frog, *Rana clamitans*

Identification: Dark green or brownish color; extremely webbed toes with the second toe longer than the rest; pronounced tympanum (the circle behind the eye); 2-4in. length
Habitat: Widespread throughout the eastern United States; found in almost all fresh bodies of water and slow-moving streams
DelCarte: These frogs can be seen along the banks of the ponds and in small pools; easily frightened
Diet: Eats insects, spiders, and other tadpoles
Fun fact: Green frogs are also referred to as Bronze frogs

Wood Frog, *Lithobates sylvaticus*

Identification: Varying shades of brown and red; black marking over eye; smaller frog, about 2in. length
Habitat: Woodlands and vernal pools
DelCarte: Look for this frog species in the more wooded areas and paths
Diet: Eats insects, spiders, worms, snails
Fun fact: Wood frogs are the only frogs that live in the Arctic Circle

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