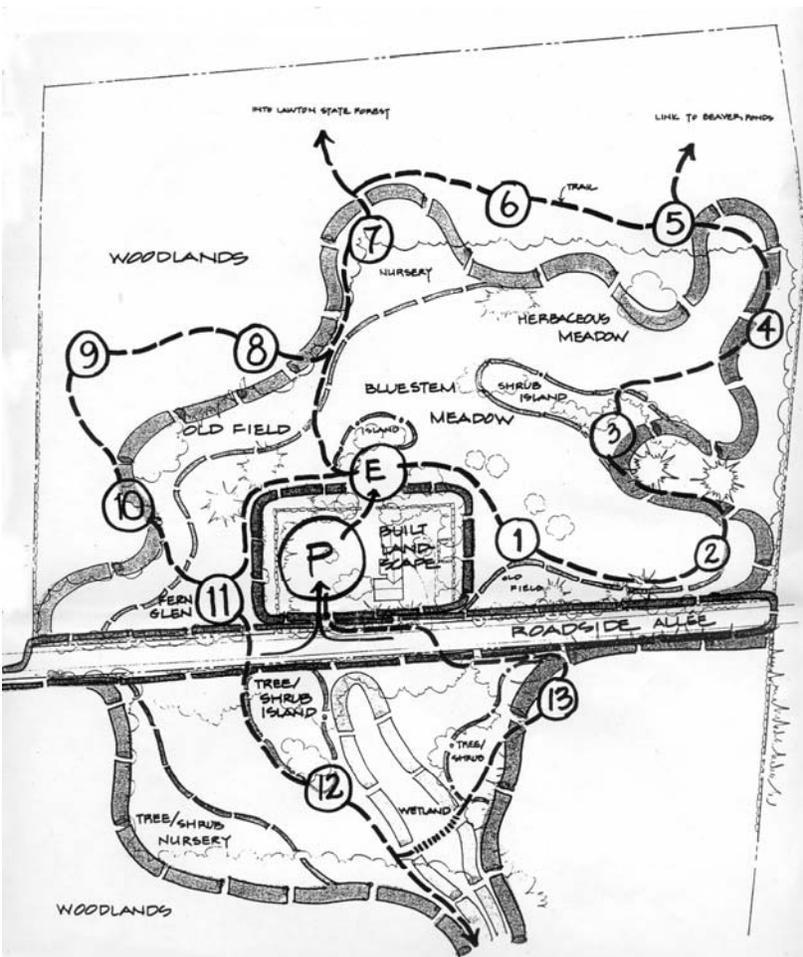




Mature woodlands and open meadow characterize this magnificent site.



Preliminary plan, presented to board and abutters in September 2001, illustrates a circuitous trail layout and 13 interpretive stations, with management recommendations for nine distinct zones within the central ten-acre core of Skyfields.

Skyfields

Mount Grace Land Conservation Trust
Athol, MA

Completed 2002

Walter Cudnohufsky Associates, Inc.
Ashfield, MA

When Margaret Power-Biggs bequeathed her Athol, MA, home to the Mount Grace Land Conservation Trust, she intended the rolling, west-facing, 40-acre property to become a native plant arboretum, open to the public. The land trust, which focuses its efforts in north central Massachusetts, hired WCA to create a master plan that would incorporate the new headquarters for Mount Grace, design trails and interpretive stations, and establish guidelines for volunteer implementation and management.

Not an arboretum in the conventional sense, Skyfields is a transitional native landscape that celebrates the agricultural history of the region as well as a native successional landscape. Management goals focus on increasing wildlife benefit and ecological diversity, interpreting the landscape for visitors and demonstrating sustainable stewardship of the land. Guided by subtle but distinctive character zones, WCA established management strategies and design criteria to guide the master plan. First steps include:

- Identifying and removing invasive non-native species
- Allowing successional growth to vary the woodland edge
- Selectively cutting back into the woodlands for trails and alcoves
- Enhancing the little bluestem meadow
- Directing runoff to low-lying areas to increase wetland diversity
- Hosting workshops for volunteers in aspects of land management



Young saplings and other **successional growth** obscure the original stone walls around Skyfields. Management recommendations include exposing and stabilizing the walls, but allowing succession in controlled areas for wildlife benefit.



Identifying and eradicating **invasive plants** such as this buckthorn must be a first step.



A rich carpet of haircap moss, wintergreen, and star flower typify small glades within the woodlands at Skyfields.



The contrast between mixed woodlands and the open bluestem meadow provides dramatic beauty. Colonizing species such as goldenrod must be managed through controlled burns to preserve bluestem dominance.