



May 15, 2004

Wolf Den Land Trust
David Schroeder, President
254 Crystal Pond Road
Woodstock, CT 06282

Dear Dave:

Enclosed is the completed Property Management Plan for the Merritt H. Gardner Memorial Forest. Please distribute copies to Vincent Deluca, Stewardship Coordinator, and the Trust's Directors (two additional copies of the locus map are included).

The Gardner's have reviewed and approved the plan; I will send them a copy. I am in the process of implementing some of the more routine tasks, including boundary maintenance and invasive plant control. *? Necessary*

Sincerely,

Dan Donahue

cc: Leon & Betty Gardner



NNATURAL RESOURCE**E**
CONSULTANTS LLC

PROPERTY MANAGEMENT PLAN

**MERRITT H. GARDNER MEMORIAL FOREST
ASHFORD, CONNECTICUT**

Prepared May 2004

Don Donohue

The main entrance to the Forest is on Route 44 near the parcel's northeast corner. A woods road enters the Forest in the midst of a small grove of relatively large oak and White Pine trees. A custom-made painted sign, commissioned and paid for by Leon and Betty, marks the entrance and identifies the property. The parcel has been surveyed to Class A-2 standards and iron pins are found at all property corners. Most of the boundaries follow the paths of fieldstone walls.

The Forest lies upon an irregularly shaped terrace of nearly level terrain about one hundred feet above the elevation of the Mount Hope River. The Mount Hope, one of the three rivers that feed the Mansfield Reservoir, is an ecologically important resource area that emerges from a largely forested watershed (including parts of the Yale-Myers Forest) and has been untouched by industrial pollution or significant agricultural runoff.

Gardner Brook, a perennial tributary of the Mount Hope River, runs through the south end of the Forest. The streambed is a wide swath of moss-covered rocks and crystal-clear pools. An unnamed tributary of Gardner Brook, originating from wetlands in the Norcross-Webster scout camp, meanders through the Forest in no apparent hurry, owing largely to the level terrain. Each of these stream corridors is forested; principal tree species are red maple and yellow birch. A light infestation of Japanese Barberry and Multiflora Rose can also be found here.

The unnamed stream has been further slowed in its passage through the Forest by the construction of two ponds about 1975. The smaller of the two ponds (e.g. less than 1/4 acre) lies just inside the main entrance and upstream of a larger pond. Appearing to be designed for emergency use by local volunteer fire fighters, it lies behind a shallow dam created by the woods road. A small culvert in this road conveys water from the small pond to the large.

A few hundred feet downstream is the visual centerpiece of the property, a 1.5-acre wildlife pond. Personnel from the USDA Soil Conservation Service (SCS) designed the pond, incorporating ideas that Leon had as a result of his many years' experience working for the SCS. The dam, overflow structure and emergency spillway were all expertly designed and, to this day, continue to function with little maintenance. There are a number of small, vegetated islands and solitary rocks that provide numerous choices for waterfowl that prefer to nest on islands so as to avoid predators. Most years a pair of Canada Geese will raise a brood of goslings here.

The large pond is almost entirely encircled by a narrow band of dense, young trees and shrubs. Native shrubs commonly found here are Spirea, Highbush Blueberry, Speckled Alder, Sweet Pepperbush, Swamp Azalea and Winterberry.

An irregularly shaped area of 30 year-old trees, some growing on unimproved deposits of soil dredged from the ponds, occurs around and between the two ponds. This area was cleared of trees to facilitate construction of the ponds. These stands are composed of vigorous 30-year old oak, White Pine, Black Birch, Red Maple and Sugar Maple trees. Pioneer species such as Quaking Aspen, Grey Birch and Black Cherry are also present. All these trees are about 4" – 9" DBH (i.e. pole-sized).

I. INTRODUCTION

A. The Donors

Leon R. and Betty M. Gardner donated the subject parcel of land to the Wolf Den Land Trust (i.e. the "Trust") in November 1997. The principal purpose of this generous gift was to establish a permanent memorial to Leon's brother, **Merritt H. Gardner**, who was killed in action in the Korean War.

Merritt was born on Sunday, October 2, 1928. A graduate of Windham High School, he was enrolled at the University of Connecticut and had completed his first semester when the government drafted him to serve in the U.S. Army. He loved the arts, theater and music. He expressed his interest in art by drawing, including numerous creations that he used to adorn the covers of his textbooks. He also sang in the church choir and was an amateur actor.

Merritt was a very religious man. While serving in Korea, he wrote a letter to the minister of the Baptist Church in Ashford. "I feel I have the best protection in the world", he said. "If anything should happen we all know it is the will of God . . . I want you to know that I feel I am prepared for whatever may come. I think of you often." He was just 24 years old and serving as a gunner on a 50-caliber machine gun position when both he and his ammunition carrier were killed by Chinese Communist artillery/mortar fire on the morning of Friday, July 4, 1952. His tour of duty was nearly complete and he was scheduled to return to the United States just five days later. Merritt was the only U.S serviceman from Ashford to die in combat in Korea. In an effort to show its gratitude, the Town of Ashford has established a special memorial, an engraved plaque on granite. Merritt was laid to rest in the Westford Village Cemetery in Ashford.

Leon and Betty intend that the Merritt H. Gardner Memorial Forest (i.e. the "Forest") be permanently conserved and protected from development or neglect; and that it be maintained primarily as a wildlife sanctuary for the benefit of native flora and fauna and secondarily to benefit the public. Leon and Betty want the public to feel welcome to visit the Forest and enjoy a walk, some good bird song and a quiet moment. The Forest can also be used to benefit the public in general and, small woodland landowners in particular, by demonstrating ways to maintain and enhance wildlife habitat.

B. The Land

The Forest is located on the south side of Route 44, about one-quarter mile easterly of the intersection of Routes 44 and 89 in the town of Ashford, Windham County, Connecticut. It lies in close proximity to other permanently protected land i.e. the Josias Byles Sanctuary, owned by Joshua's Tract Conservation and Historic Trust, and the June Norcross Webster Boy Scout Reservation.

The Forest was once owned by the Josias Byles family. Bert Henry Gardner, Leon's grandfather, acquired the property around 1900 and used it for pasture for many years.

The remaining acreage is occupied by an immature, mixed hardwood forest growing upon moderate slopes of glacial till soil and small, stratified drift deposits. Relatively small tree stumps can be found throughout the Forest; these are evidence of past fuelwood cutting when this was part of a much larger ownership. Although hardwoods are dominant, seed-bearing White Pines are scattered throughout. Oaks dominate the patches of upland forest while Red Maples are the predominant species in the wetlands. Hickory, White Pine, Black Birch, Red Maple, Yellow Birch and Sugar Maple are commonly found scattered throughout the forest. Common shrubs include Witchhazel and Highbush Blueberry. Scattered open-grown trees, some living and others long dead, attest to the agricultural history of the property.

II. MANAGEMENT ISSUES

A. Property Boundaries

1. The property has been surveyed to A-2 standards

B. Pond Maintenance

1. Excessive road sand is washing into the large pond from Route 44
2. There is likely some salt contamination occurring during the winter season

C. Entrance, Parking, Signage and Access Roads

1. Storm water runoff from Route 44 is running down the main access road
2. Traffic on Route 44 can be heavy at times and there is no defined parking area
3. Excess runoff from the small pond has caused erosion to portions of the road
4. Currently, nothing prevents a visitor from driving a vehicle well beyond the main entrance area

D. Wildlife Habitat

1. Waterfowl using the large pond to breed and rear their young can be disturbed by excessive human intrusion

E. Invasive Species

1. Phragmites, Multiflora Rose, and Autumn Olive are all present

F. Neighbor Issues

1. There is evidence of encroachment by the Forest's two closest neighbors, the Satriano's (west side of Forest) and the North Veterinary Clinic (east side of Forest).
2. The Satriano's report that some visitors to the Forest have inadvertently wandered onto their property.
3. Excess sand from the North Veterinary Clinic's parking lot is being deposited beyond the property boundary onto the Forest.

G. Aesthetics

1. Excessive litter tends to accumulate along Route 44

III. MANAGEMENT PRACTICES SINCE 1997

In the spring of 2003 Ruth Cutler, long-time Ashford resident and Coordinator of Volunteers for the Quinebaug-Shetucket Heritage Corridor, organized a work party. Trees and shrubs were cut and cleared from the surface of the large pond's dam and emergency spillway. The outflow culvert from the small pond was cleaned out. The main access road and walking trail was cleared of encroaching vegetation.

IV. MANAGEMENT PLAN

A. Property Boundaries

1. 2004 - blaze boundary lines with yellow boundary-marking paint; place Wolf Den Land Trust signs or medallions where appropriate (if and when available)
2. Annually - walk boundaries and inspect for unauthorized activities (e.g. tree cutting, dumping, all terrain vehicle use, etc.)

B. Pond Maintenance

1. 2004 - inspect and replace (if necessary) wooden planks within the dam overflow structure of the large pond
2. Annually - inspect outflow culvert of small pond and clean as needed
3. 2007 - inspect dam and spillway surfaces and remove trees, if necessary

C. Entrance, Parking, Signage and Access Road

1. 2004 - access: consider a plan to improve off-road parking for up to two mid-sized vehicles
2. 2004 - consider installing a more permanent sign or plaque
3. 2004 - aesthetics: conduct a low thinning of overmature shrubs and small trees in order to reveal some of the large, stately trees that grace the Forest's entrance
4. Annually - pick up litter along Route 44
5. 2005 - restore access road surface using small bulldozer and gravel fill

D. Wildlife Habitat Management

1. The dense growth of native shrubs and young trees that dominates the shores of the large pond serves to provide important cover for certain species of wildlife, especially waterfowl during the spring nesting period. It also provides significant food and nesting cover for a variety of songbirds. Do not indiscriminately cut or mow any portion of this plant community, with the exception of the dam and emergency spillway. Individual trees growing close to the water's edge that are getting too large (e.g. larger than 8" DBH) should be cut and removed. Non-native invasive species should also be selectively controlled with a minimum of disturbance to the surrounding plants.
2. Non-commercial forest thinnings to enhance habitat values will be designed and marked by a qualified individual. Native trees, shrubs and vines (e.g. grape) that provide important sources of soft or hard mast shall not be indiscriminately cut.
3. Unusual features (e.g. a super-dominant White Pine tree destroyed by high winds during the winter of 2003-04) shall be maintained for their unique habitat values.
4. White Pine trees of all age classes should be encouraged due to their value in providing nesting and roosting cover, etc.

E. Invasive Species

1. 2004 - cut and treat with herbicide a small patch of Phragmites (i.e. Common Reed) that is growing at the northwest property corner and some Autumn Olive
2. Annually - inspect for populations of invasive plants (e.g. Phragmites, Multiflora Rose, Asiatic Bittersweet, Garlic Mustard, et al) and treat accordingly

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Merritt H. Gardner Memorial Forest

F. Neighbor Issues

1. 2004 - prepare a one-page listing of Wolf Den Land Trust policies regarding permitted uses of the Forest and distribute to two closest neighbors ✓
2. 2004 - correspond and meet with the Satriano family and the principals of the North Veterinary Clinic to seek collaboration and a halt to ATV use, inappropriate road sand disposal, etc.
3. Annually - make an effort to interact with the neighbors and invite them to participate in caring for the Forest

G. Walking Trails

1. 2005 - complete a loop walking trail and mark appropriately
2. Annually - inspect walking trail and maintain as needed (e.g. remove fallen trees, etc.)

Appendix
Management Practices Check List

Table A: Property Boundaries

Month & Year	X	Management Practice

Table B: Pond Maintenance

Month & Year	X	Management Practice

Table C: Entrance, Parking, Signage and Access Road

Month & Year	X	Management Practice

Table D: Wildlife Habitat Management

Month & Year	X	Management Practice

Management Plan
Merritt H. Gardner Memorial Forest

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Table E: Invasive Species

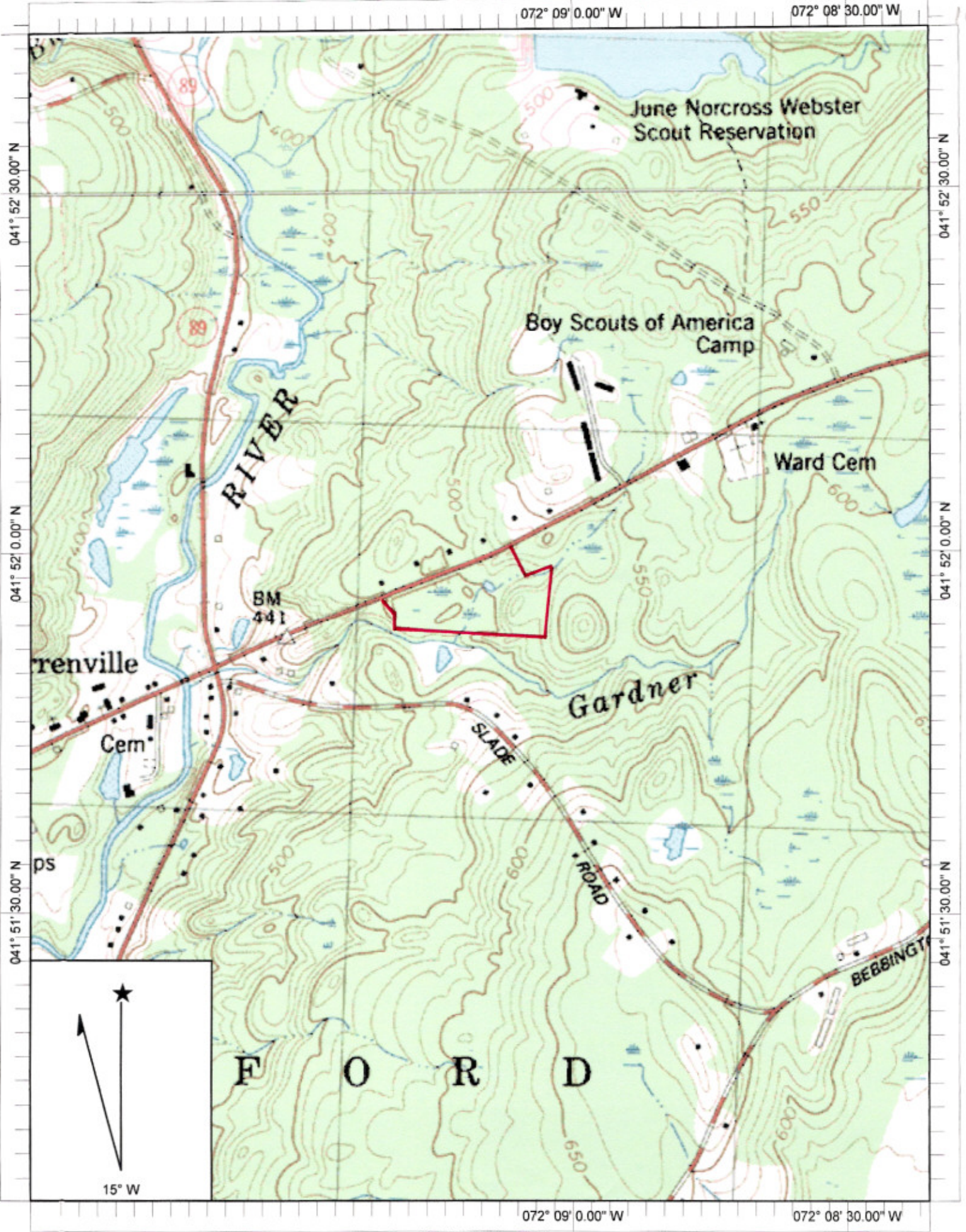
Month & Year	X	Management Practice

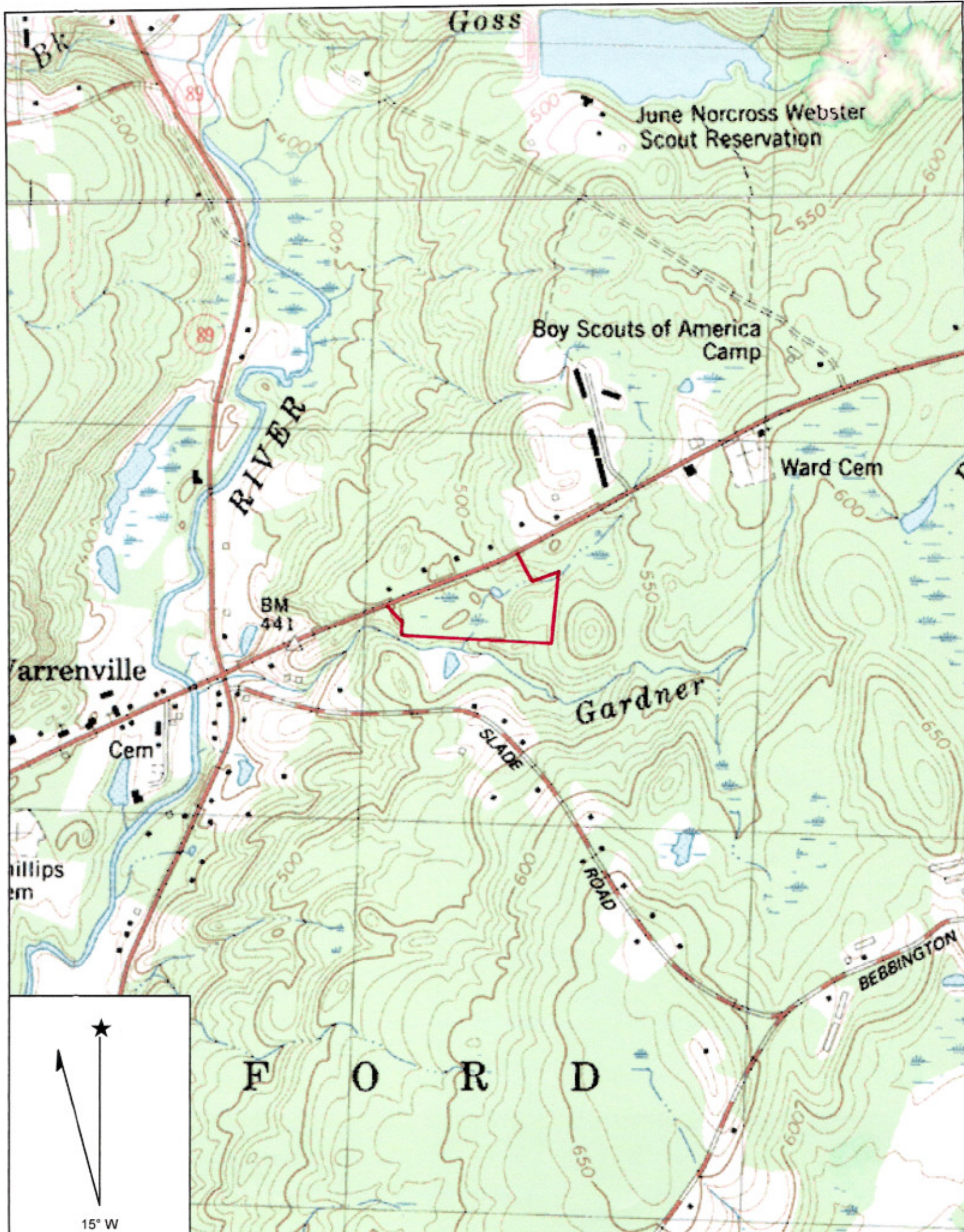
Table F: Neighbor Issues

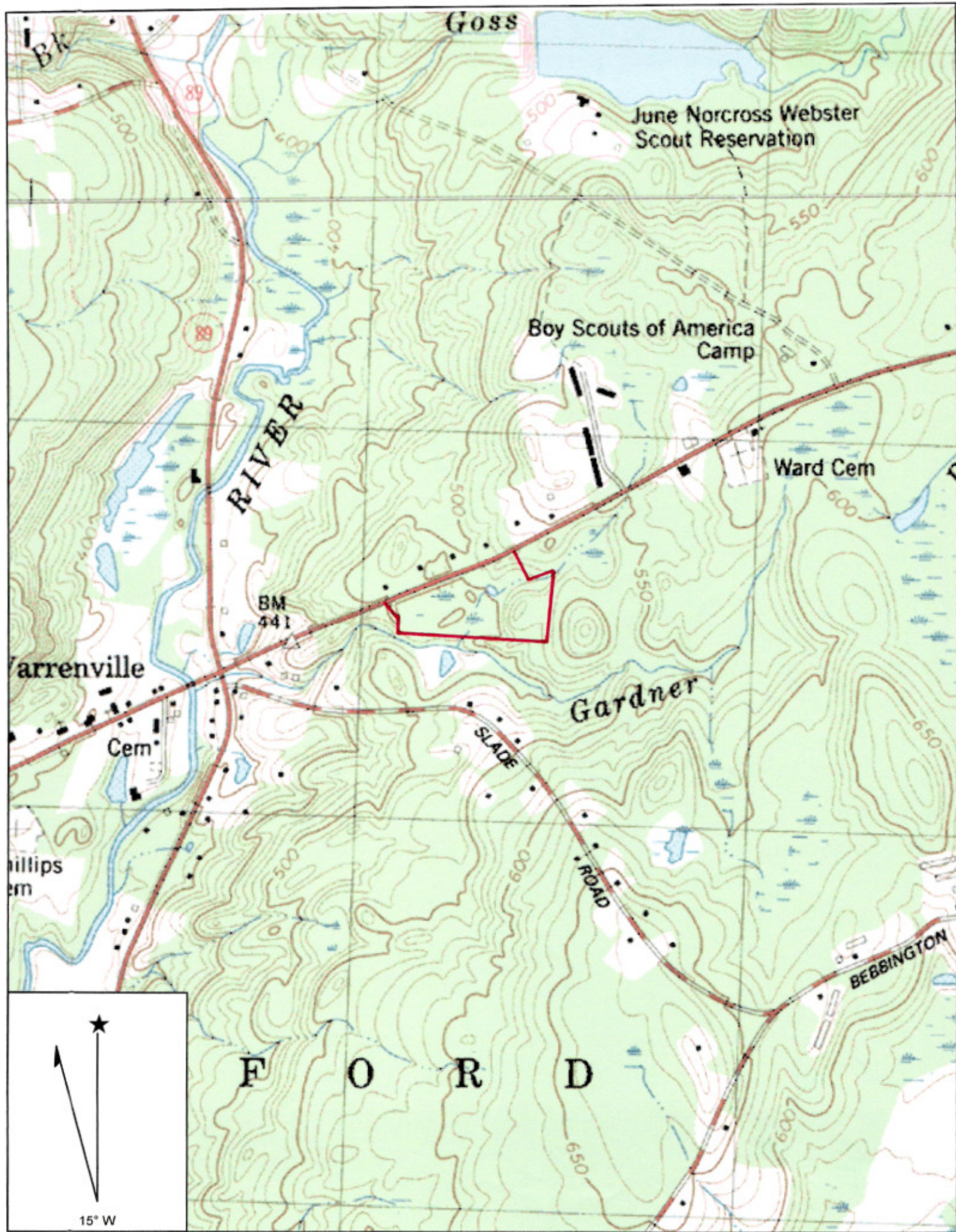
Month & Year	X	Management Practice

Table G: Walking Trails

Month & Year	X	Management Practice







072° 09' 0.00" W

072° 08' 30.00" W

041° 52' 30.00" N

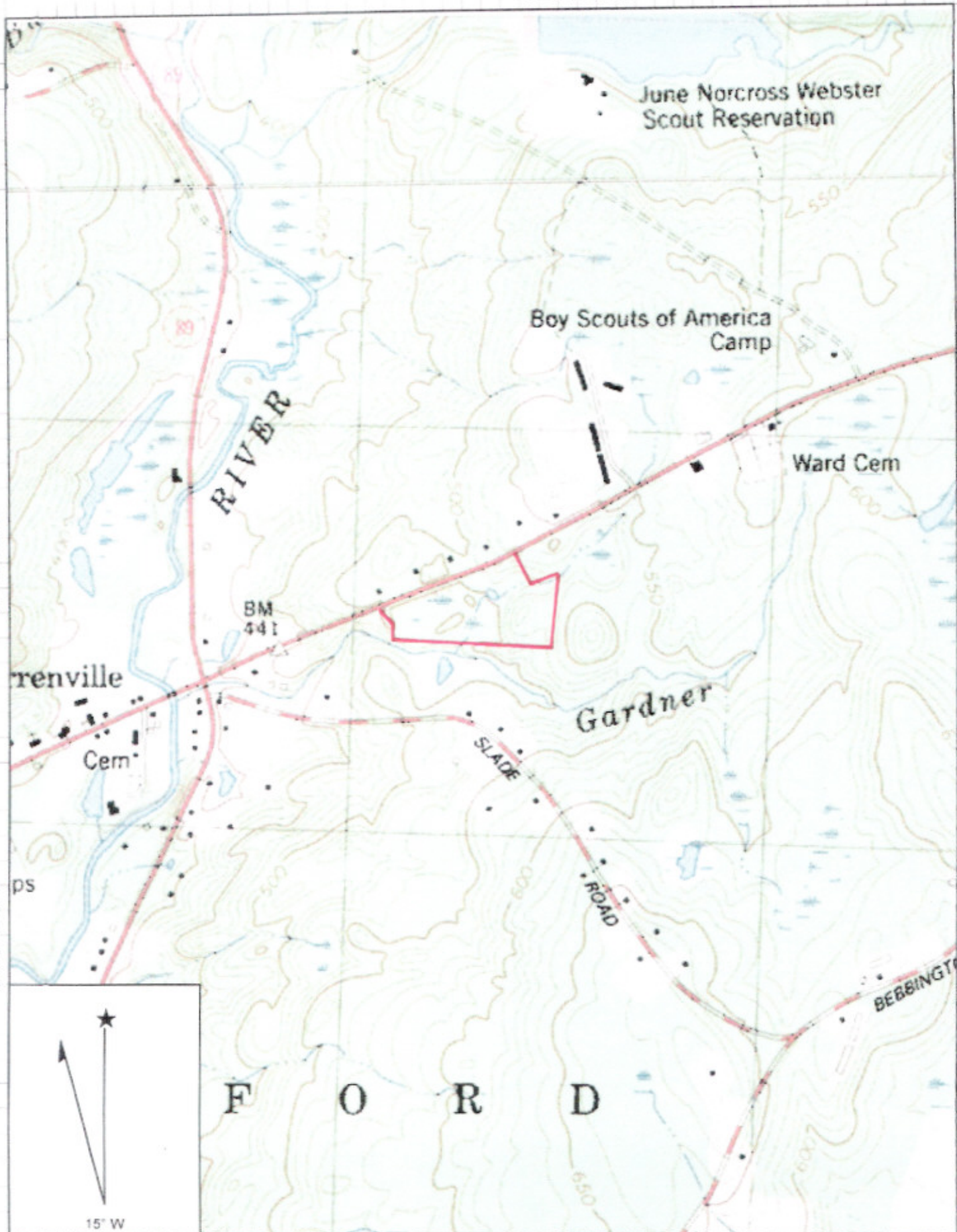
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