

Laurel Hill Conservation Area: Monitoring Reports

November 3, 1995 (visit associated with moving survey lines)

May 11, 2004

April 25, 2005

November 18, 2005 (counted as 2006 monitoring)

May 13, 2007

Monitoring file reports:

2008 cancelled by rain

2009 cancelled by snow

2010(?) scheduled but Association Representative was not available

2011 planned for early 2012

No report of any of those years on file.

There are no photographs in the computer files or Field Notebook (digital or film)

Report on Laurel Hill

On Friday Nov. 3, 1995 Lou Bannister, Al Shane, and Steve Schmidt viewed the Laurel Hill common lands where RGT holds a conservation easement. We drove up the road and stopped at lot #4 where Sidney Poritz has requested to move the lot lines, affecting the abutting common areas. S.P. had not provided us with a plot plan of the proposed changes, and we could find no survey marks, so we were unable to make any determination.

We then continued up the road to where lot #7 meets common area lot D, the large open field with expansive views to the west. We observed where S.P. has relocated the lot line into the common area to accommodate the house now nearing completion on the southern edge of lot #7. Compensatory land was added to the common area behind and below the house lot. Noted the building permit was issued in June, plot plan was dated in August. S.P. requested our approval of plan change in October.

At this point L.B. returned by car. A.S. and S.S. continued up the road and around the circle on foot. We returned via the old woods road onto North Leverett Rd. About half way down the hill in the middle of common lot G we encountered a series of freshly excavated holes several feet square and approximately 4' - 6' deep.

Stephen Schmidt

Al Shane

Lou Bannister

Laurel Hill Conservation Restriction

May 11, 2004

Present for the walk: Albey Reiner (for Laurel Hill), Glen Ayers, Peggy Sanders, and Mary Alice Wilson (for Rattlesnake Gutter Trust).

This was a much nicer day than our planned trip last fall which was snowed out! We met at the parking area beside the stream, walked up and around the circle and back. Last year, our monitoring had focused on the walking trails which are part of the Conservation Restriction. Our long-range plan is to walk all CR Lot boundaries - and the first step in this process is to make sure there are clearly marked boundary corners. Last year we noted those corner posts that we found - and some that we did not. Our goal on this trip was to identify those that we still could not find so that the Laurel Hill Association could either locate and mark them or, in a few cases, have them replaced. There is also a question about a wetlands protection Order of Conditions (see last paragraph).

A. We did not visit A this year. In the future, we need to walk the boundary. (One corner post should be directly across from a Lot B marker.)

B. Last year, we found only the second roadside pin and noted that it needed to be better marked. This year we could not find either one. The Association needs to find and mark both. And we need to walk the boundary.

C. We did find the second pin near the Split Rock Trail sign - last year we had found the other pin. The Trail is almost along the only non-road border (with Lot 1).

D. Last year we found the relationship between Lot D and its neighbors (Lots 4 and 5) very confusing. This year, after our walk, I went back to the Deeds office and found the changes in Lot 4 and Lot 7 which have changed the shape of D. (Attached) There was a shift in boundaries for septic system purposes with Lot 7 and Lot D. There was a similar shift in Lot 4 which was enlarged to the south i.e. into G (to provide for a septic field) and decreased on the north (adjoining Lot D.) It is possible that the driveway to the proposed house on Lot 4 is a "common" or shared drive that goes through the part of Lot D that had been part of Lot 4. We do need to have the driveway arrangement clarified and to know where the corner post is that marks the roadside corner of Lots 4 and D. We were also unable to find the corner marking D and 5 (now for sale.) These pins need to be found and/or replaced. Next year we will walk the boundaries of D (the upper boundaries at the cleared section are easy.)

E. We found 3 of the 4 corner posts. We did not find the southwest one (closest to the driveway). However, we did not pace with map and compass, so it may already be visible. We need to revisit next year.

F. This Lot is inside the road circle and therefore boundary marking is easy. The autumn olive on the corner has been removed. There is no trail on this piece.

G. There is still a question about the upper (eastern) road boundary markers for this Lot (where the upper end of the trail enters.) These may have been removed during the septic work (allowed by the CR), but the boundary markers need to be replaced. We were able to easily find the boundary markers at western (lower) roadside. The first is about halfway along the fence railing (well before the lower trail entrance at the end of the fence); the second is just at the beginning of the septic system (cleared area) for Lot 4. We have walked this lovely trail, but not the boundaries.

H. We did note the second corner post along the road and walked briefly by the water but not along the entire Lot. We need to walk this boundary in the future.

Because our focus this year was corner posts, we did not walk trails or boundaries looking for CR compliance. However, in general, the common land appears to continue to be kept in excellent condition. The corner posts (iron pins) mentioned above need to be marked or replaced by the Association.

The work on the road appears to be complete. While at the Franklin County deeds office, I checked to see if a "Certificate of Compliance" had been issued canceling the Laurel Hill/Rattlesnake Gutter Trust WPA Form 5 - Order of Conditions (a wetlands protection order during road construction) Book 3806, p.340-344. It has not. Presumably it is working its way through the bureaucratic system and will be issued soon. The Association needs to monitor that process.

As an aside, there were many beautiful wildflowers including fringed polygola and many songbirds even on a hot afternoon. We were able to watch 4 male Rose-breasted Grosbeaks in minor battle and a soaring/calling Broad-winged Hawk who may be nesting nearby. It is always a pleasure to walk the Laurel Hill conserved lands.

Report reviewed by RGT participants and sent to Laurel Hill Association in care of Albey Reiner, May 18, 2004

attachments: Plan Book 92, p. 47 and 93, p. 88

May 9, 2005

Sandy Southwick
29 Laurel Hill Drive
Leverett, MA 01054

Dear Sandy,

Thank you for taking the time to help us with our annual walk.

Enclosed is a report of the day. Please check it over - if we have made errors, please let me know so I can send you a corrected copy.

And now, a second favor. As we listed what we needed to do next spring, we realized that the corner post search is really separate from the annual walk. An ideal time to do that would be in the fall after the leaves have fallen (but before the snow - I think that gives us about a week!) I will be getting in touch with you in October to see if we can find a common time.

Again, thank you for your help - and a great walk.

Sincerely,

Mary Alice Wilson
Board member, Rattlesnake Gutter Trust

Laurel Hill Conservation Restriction
Report to the Board, Rattlesnake Gutter Trust
(Report corrected by Sandi and revised July 1, 2005.)

Annual Walk, 4-6:30 PM, April 25, 2005

Sandi Southwick, for the Laurel Hill Association (Don Southwick joined us for the last part of the trip); Jean Bergstrom, Al Shane, and Mary Alice Wilson for RGT.

A lovely cool day without black flies. Although we did not walk every inch of the CR, we took a long, zigzag walk checking on both trails and corner pins. This report will go through the CR lots in alphabetical order (not necessarily the order we visited them.)

A: We walked the lovely Hidden Springs Trail which winds along the stream and then near the Montague town line. The trail joins the road again near the northernmost curve of Laurel Hill Drive. There is no stake at the corner of Lots A and 20; it should be added.

B. Because we came in at the north edge of B, we did not check for the western stake. We did find the eastern stake and tied orange tape to it. Lot B does not have a trail. We have never found the other stake and need to find or establish it, probably by using the eastern stake, the survey map, and a compass).

C. We walked downhill through C at the end of our trip, taking the lower part of the Split Rock Trail. We could not find the eastern/uphill stake (It may have been buried when the electric unit was installed.) However, we did find the western/downhill stake and, again, with a compass and survey map we can (and should) re-locate the eastern stake.

D. This is always the most problematic lot.

The line between D and Lot 7 was changed 1995 with Lot 7 trading extra septic system land along the road (Lot 7A) and for a triangle of land at the back of 7 (Lot D2) See Plan Book 92, page 47. This change is well-marked (including an indestructible CD hanging at one corner!)

The line between Lot D and 4 is more complex. In 1995, a half-acre area bordering the road on the north (4A) was given to D in trade for a half acre bordering D on the south (4C). See Plan Book 82, p. 1 However, that change did not provide enough land for the septic system for Lot 4 and in 2004 a second trade was made: a jut of land above the road (4E) was taken from G and a triangle of

land (4D) at the back of the lot was added to 4A (which had earlier become part of D). See Plan Book 116, p. 70.

There is still the issue of the driveway to the house being built on Lot 4 which goes across D. The new owners are aware of the problem and are discussing it with the Association.

There is a lovely trail the D - the upper part of the Split Rock Trail including the split rock itself. (Sheila Seaman when asked, remember the rock; she assumes it would have been caused by frost action.)

E. We found both of the roadside markers. We did not walk the knoll this year, but have in the past.

F. There is no boundary question here since the land is entirely surrounded by road. There is no trail on this land.

G. We walked the upper trail from road entrance to road entrance (walking opposite to the direction we took at our annual meeting a few years ago).

We did not look for pins for each of the lots bordering G on the north, although we saw at least 2 of them through the mountain laurel. We do need to walk the border lines next spring, especially since two of the lots will have changed owners. Next year we should walk the lower trail (just for the pleasure of spending more time on this hillside).

At the western/lower end, the old cutting problems are still obvious. Trees were cut by the developer to provide a view for Lot 11. More recently, the previous owner of Lot 4, cleared trees well into G all along Lot 4's southern boundary. The present owners have had their land surveyed, have marked the entire line temporarily with twine, and clearly understand where their line is.

At the eastern/upper end of G, the eastern stake (G/15) is visible. We have never found the western (G/14) stake. However, the southeast stake for Lot 14 is obvious and with the survey map and a compass we could (and should) locate and mark the road/G/14 stake. We can also anticipate some cutting on G as the developer is building a house on Lot 15 and will want to cut a view. It is our understanding that he has permission in the Association Covenant to clear trees for house views.

We did not walk the border between G and North Leverett Road. We were told that there has been some problems with motorized vehicles (snowmobiles or ATVs of both) and we should plan to check that border each year in the future.

H. We did not walk H (the inviting area down by the stream). In fact, we forgot about it. It is the area bounded by Chestnut Hill Road, Laurel Hill Road and lot 2. We have found the Laurel Hill/H/2 stake in the past. While there is no official trail, it is very inviting to walk and sit along the stream.

Additional thoughts.

Sandi reported that one (or perhaps two) of the new owners were confused about the Conservation Easement. Their lawyers had advised them that the Common Land was owned by Rattlesnake Gutter Trust. Obviously, it is not and the residents with more time at Laurel Hill know that. It should be noted that the term used in the Laurel Hill deeds is "conservation easement" not the term "conservation restriction" which is used in all our other properties. However, it points to the continuing need to educate both home buyers (and their lawyers/real estate agents) about the legal status of Conservation Restrictions and Conservation Easements.

Sandi suggested that, when we try to locate posts, we ask the Association representative to bring the maps that have all the utilities/culverts marked. This would make stake-finding much easier.

Given the ease of using GPS, having readings at each corner post would help us in the future. (We have already done GPS readings of other RGT Conservation Restrictions and properties.) If we also took some readings along the trails, the Association could add the trails to their own maps. We could easily do this after the leaves come off in the fall. Ideally two of us, each using two GPS units, would do this mapping.

The list of equipment for GPS mapping and re-locating posts would therefore include GPS units, the Association's utilities maps, compass, camera (so we would know what we are looking for next time), and the survey maps. It is probably more realistic to plan on GPS and stake locating half-day in the fall rather than trying to squeeze all of that into next spring's CR walk.

Finding the stakes at Laurel Hill

Friday, November 18, 2005, (corrected Jan 17 by Al and Mary Alice)

Glen Ayers, Jean Bergstrom, Al Shane, Mary Alice Wilson (9:30-11:30)

Our goal was to find the stakes that we can never find during our spring "official" walk. And we had great luck - thanks to those who helped us: Sid Poritz, Mary Barnett and Betsy Neisner.

Lot A. (above parking area at the bottom of the hill.) Three of us walked back down on the Hidden Springs Trail (from Lot B to parking area.) The hidden spring was gushing out from under tree roots - magical. In the past, we have found the pin on the SW corner of B which faces the SE corner of A. The notes written on November 18th are not clear if we actually found the pin on the SE corner of A. (Need to check in next monitoring.)

Lot B. (inside the northernmost loop of the road). With Sid's help, we found the location of the western corner (lots B and 6). On our way back down, with Mary and Betsy's help we found the stake at the eastern corner (also lots B and 6). We had found, and lost, this stake before. This time we put some orange marking tape on it.

Lot C. (inside the southernmost loop of the road) We found the northwest corner of the lot, which is very near the bottom on Split Rock Trail (marked at this end only by a board bridge over the ditch). After a brisk climb, and with Sid's help, we found the location of the Northeast corner (very near the Split Rock Trail sign). Sid will put in a stake.

Lot D. Since we have spent considerable time in the past on the changes in lines between D and 4, and since they are still well-marked at the bottom with tape and #4 is still marked with string, we hiked up the Split Rock Trail to the lovely view of western hills in the distance. We did not find the northeast corner (D and 7), but some large rocks effectively mark that corner (we know from past experience that the southwest corner of 4 with its extra little triangle of land is well-marked with a compact disk hanging from a branch. We did find and flag the southeast corner (D and 11).

Lot E. (high land with stone structures) We have walked this land before finding 3 posts, the other being just at the junction of the road and lawn.

Lot F (inside circle at the end of the road. Since this is entirely enclosed by road, there are no stakes.

Lot G. (large southern hillside, entrance at the top of the hill.) We were only interested in the stakes where this lot meets the circular part of the road. The eastern one, near the house being built is marked. The other is not (was removed during septic work.) Sid has promised to replace it. This lot has many other corners. In the past, we have found those abutting the upper lots (4, 11, 12, 13, and 14). On a future walk, we need to check on the corners that make the rectangle going to the North Leverett Road.

Lot H (stream area next to Chestnut Hill Road). In the past we have found the eastern pin (H and 2). Since the rest of the land is just the stream, we have not ever looked for the other H/2 corner.

Laurel Hill Monitoring Report, 2007

Sunday, May 13, 2007; Representing RGT: Glen Ayers, Jean Bergstrom, Joan Godsey, Mary Alice Wilson. Representing Laurel Hill Association: Sandy Southwick.

Our walk began with a discussion of our new understanding of the complex ownership of the Laurel Hill Conservation Areas: As each lot is sold, that property's share of the common land is deeded (Ken's word is "fee") to RGT. The Laurel Hill Association is still responsible for maintaining the land as a Conservation Area. Sandy said that there were 20 lots and three have not been sold: 5 (lot), 15 (has spec house), and 20 (Sid's house and land). We are, therefore, 85% owners of the total amount of common land. What a complex world.

In fact, this does not change our responsibility to monitor or the Association's responsibility to administer, but it is a slightly different way of looking at things.

Our walk took us along the road, into the trails on lot G (the large lot that goes to North Leverett Road), back to the road, up Split Rock Trail (lot D), up to road, into lot E (standing stones), through the new trail in the circle (lot F), back down the road and then Glen and Jean went down Hidden Springs Trail (lot A); Joan and Mary Alice went down the road. We searched for stakes as we walked. The description below is by lot rather than in the order we visited them. Also see accompanying map.

Lot A. (above parking area at the bottom of the hill.) Glen and Jean walked down the Hidden Springs Trail. We found the post marking the corner of A and 1. There is no stake marking the southeast corner of A and 1, but it is directly across from the B and 6 corner. The back line of A is the Leverett/Montague town line and therefore easy to find. We have never found the northeast short line marking the boundary of A with lot 20. One of those corners was marked on a tree which has since fallen down. We need to look again.

Lot B. (inside the northernmost loop of the road). Both southern corners with lots B and 6 have stakes.

Lot C. (inside the southernmost loop of the road) The two northern corners of 1 and C are both marked. The upper/east corner is at the Split Rock Trail sign. That stake had been recently uncovered. (Also see notes under lot G.)

Lot D. The string lines marking the boundary of Lot 4 have, of course, deteriorated. We did not walk the line, but did note that the Association and owners of D still need to deal

with the driveway which is on lot D. (The line was moved at least twice to provide more septic tank/leach field land at the southern/road corner of #4 - in the process, it seems that the land with the driveway was transferred to the common land D. (This change explains the two southwest corner markers for D.)

The northwest corner of D has a flag, we could not find the stake - which needs to be located or replace.

There is also a well-marked jog on the north line where land was transferred so that lot 7 could have a leach field. (All of this is, of course, a case study in what happens when a subdivision is approved before the perk tests were done, but that is ancient history.) At the upper/eastern edge of the property, the D/7 line is marked by a line of stones, the D/11 line by a stake.

The upper part of that lot is an open (leach field) area and we had a discussion of native plants appropriate to this setting. Shrubs, except the low-growing blueberries already coming in, are not appropriate over a leach field. While the grasses look sparse, there are low-growing plants/lichens/mosses coming in. It might be more visually interesting for the residents to add more low-bush blueberries. This field is the only open habitat available to wildlife. The most recent, obvious, wildlife in the area being the bear complaining when residents took down all the bird feeders.

Lot E. (high land with stone structures) We walked on this land. Did not check the west roadside posts, did find the east roadside post and the back E/13/14 post. We did not find E/13 post, but Don Southwick pointed it out later that day. (We had been looking too far toward the house.)

Lot F (inside circle at the end of the road. Since this is entirely enclosed by road, there are no stakes.) However there is now a lovely trail across it - providing access to the interior.

Lot G. (large southern hillside, entrance at the top of the hill.) We walked a number of the trails this time.

The trail goes below/south of the corners with lots 11, 12, 13, and 14. We found those stakes/flags a number of years ago and need to look for those again on the next walk (preferably before the leaves come out.)

We began our walk on the road near C. We were not able to find that stake and, as far as we can remember have never found it. While it is the line between two common land areas (C and G), it also marks the line with private land to the southeast and should be

located/marked. Since we have found the northeast stake of C and have the road frontage measurement for C, it just requires a tape to determine its location. (Next time.)

The trail that enters at the southern loop in the road (near C) joins the “emergency access road.” In quotes because it is obviously impossible to use and so badly designed (steep) that it is virtually impossible for the Association to maintain. As we got down to the steepest part headed to North Leverett Road (which we did not take), the number of houses on the road below reminded us again of the value of protecting forested hillside lands. We did not look for the markers on the four corners of the rectangle going to the road. We need to do that on a future walk.

We did find the well-marked southeast stake and we also saw the ATV trails that are networking the area. While most of the trails (and the laurel cutting required to establish them) has been on the neighboring property (accessed from Richardson Road), there is no question that they are using some short parts of the Laurel Hill Trails. That use, and the impossibility of policing it, add another level to the questions about the desirability of keeping the emergency access in good condition.

We also had a discussion of hunting - the Laurel Hill Association has posted no hunting signs to protect hikers. These signs are regularly ripped down; even hunters spoken to return the next year. While we have had some success at the East Leverett Meadow in reducing the hunting by closing the meadow to stocking the field with pheasants (who were killed by coyotes before the hunters had a chance), we have also experienced sign damage and did not have any useful suggestions.

We turned back, coming out at the edge of lot 4. However, since the southwest corner (by the ATV trails) was not only marked by a stake but a corner blaze (3 blazes), we thought we could probably find the line headed east parallel with Richardson Road. Need to do that.

Later in our walk, we checked out the stakes at the upper circle. The stake between G and 15 is well-marked. The stake between G and 14 apparently was lost years ago when a septic system was put in. There is now a flimsy white pole which is apparently marking that corner, but it needs to be replaced by a real corner stake.

Lot H (stream area next to Chestnut Hill Road). While we didn't enter this lot, we did find the stake along the road (H and the private land on Chestnut Hill Road. We have never looked for the two southern corners and need to do that.

Summary of things for others to do:

Lot D. Northwest corner of D is marked with a flag, Sid Poritz needs to either locate and mark or replace stake.

Lot G. North corner of G and 14 (along road) Sid Poritz needs to set.

Summary of places to visit next time:

Lot A. Find two northern corners (if we can).

Lot C. Find location of C/G/private land by measuring distance from C/1 (bring tape)

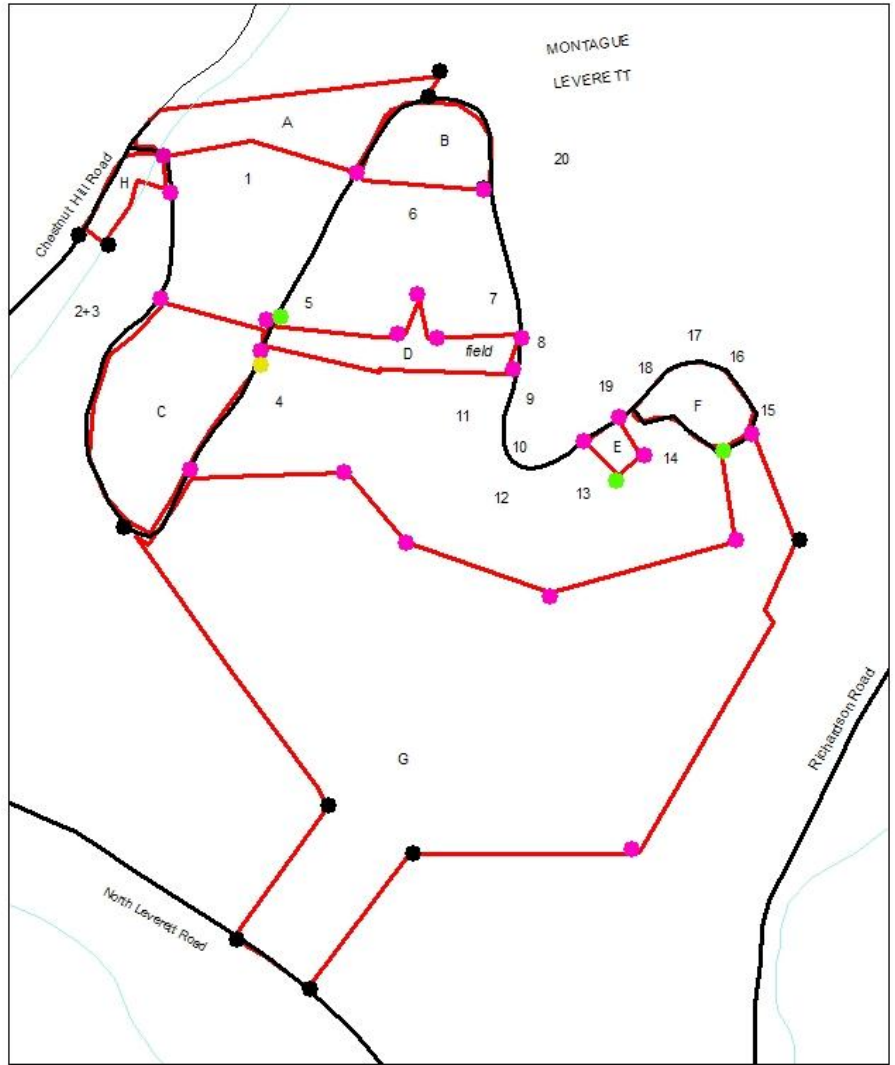
Lot G. Walk the northern line of G: relocated posts with 11, 12, 13, 14. and the entire southern boundary (parallel to North Leverett road, to North Leverett Road, and parallel to Richardson Road. Easier to do without leaves. (This year, the leaves come out just a few days before our walk.)

Lot H. Walk this lovely piece, looking for 2 southern corner (one along Chestnut Hill Road.)

Report for 2007 Reviewed and Corrected by all participants. Sent to Sandy Southwick and the Rattlesnake Gutter Trust Board on June 15, 2007.

Mary Alice Wilson

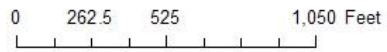
Member of the RGT Property Committee

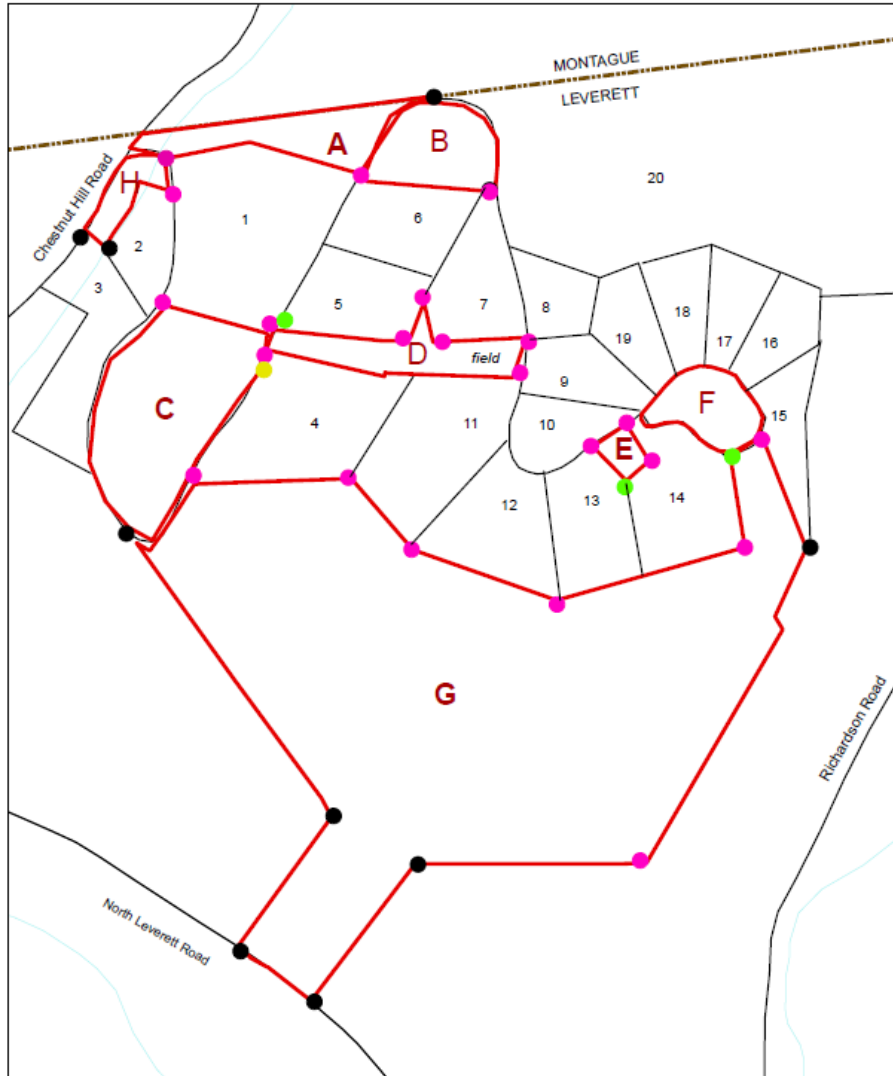


draft 5/15//2007

Laurel Hill CR Monitoring

- found
- never found
- to be located/set
- old stake





Laurel Hill Monitoring

Status of Stakes 5/15/07

- found
- never found
- to be located/set
- old stake

Protected lands = parcels A-H
Residential lots 1-20 (boundaries estimated)

0 0.1 0.2 Miles

