

INFORMATION ON WARRANT ARTICLE 8 - Funding for Cranberry Bog Maintenance Project - \$5,000

THE WARRANT ARTICLE

WARRANT ARTICLE 8 - To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate, transfer from available funds, or borrow pursuant to any applicable statute \$5,000 to be expended by the Cranberry Bog Working Group, with the approval of the Town Administrator to conduct studies and apply for necessary permits to perform maintenance at the Town-owned cranberry bog, or to take any other action related thereto. (BOARD OF SELECTMEN)

SUMMARY

The Cranberry Bog Working Group is seeking to hire a professional wetlands scientist to prepare a low cost plan for long term maintenance of the Cranberry Bog for wildlife habitat that will also preserve open vistas. The plan would be submitted as part of a Notice of Intent for approval by the Conservation Commission under the Wetlands Protection Act and the Carlisle Wetlands Bylaw.

What is a Notice of Intent?

A Notice of Intent is the application for approval that must be submitted to the Conservation Commission and MassDEP under the Wetlands Protection Act and the Carlisle Wetlands Bylaw for permission to do work within or near wetlands. A Notice of Intent includes a detailed description of proposed work in and near wetlands, plans showing the locations of the proposed work and the boundaries of the wetlands and the different types of wetlands that may be affected. It also must demonstrate how the proposed work complies with the Wetlands Protection Act and the Bylaw.

Why does the Cranberry Bog Working Group Need the Services of a Professional Wetlands Scientist to Prepare a Plan?

Regulations under the Wetlands Protection Act and Bylaw permit Ecological Restoration Projects within wetlands. An Ecological Restoration Project is a project whose primary purpose is to restore or otherwise improve the natural capacity of wetlands to protect and sustain such interests as water supplies and wildlife habitat when such interests have been degraded or destroyed by human activities.

The regulations governing ecological restoration projects are complex and the Cranberry Bog is a large area that supports diverse wildlife habitat. The services of a professional wetlands scientist are necessary to devise a long term plan that complies with the regulations and will sustain open wildlife habitat.

What would an Ecological Restoration Project Entail?

Open land habitat is increasingly rare in Massachusetts. An Ecological Restoration Project at the Cranberry Bog would be designed to maintain the Cranberry Bog as open land and would likely entail hand and machine removal of invasive plant species on a recurring basis, selective planting of desirable species to increase biodiversity, management of drainage and occasional flooding of the bog and other activities to promote the wildlife habitat value of the cranberry bog.

Why is the Cranberry Bog Working Group Considering an Ecological Restoration project for the Cranberry Bog?

As the result of public information sessions and a survey of cranberry bog users, which received 315 responses, the public has identified open vistas as the primary feature of the cranberry bog that the public would like to preserve.

The Cranberry Bog Working Group and before it The Cranberry Bog Alternatives Committee examined many alternatives for the Cranberry Bog.

Doing nothing will likely result in loss of vistas.



Abandoned bog (above).

Continued cultivation of cranberries is not feasible. To qualify as an exempt agricultural use it must be carried on as a commercial enterprise for profit. To be viable, the existing plants must be replaced, but the market for cranberries, which has collapsed, together with production quotas limiting the amount of cranberries that may be harvested will not support the investment necessary to maintain the bog in cranberry cultivation.

Federal Agencies that provide assistance to farmers require that any alternative crop be perennial. The only alternative that has been identified as a potential perennial commercial crop for the bog is hay. However, the cost of conversion of the bog to hay is estimated to be approximately \$370,000.00 and there is no guarantee that the use will be sustained over the long term.

An engineered restoration involving soils removal and replacement has been estimated to cost in excess of \$600,000 and would likely require long term maintenance at unknown costs to ensure that the restoration was effective. This alternative would also not ensure maintenance of open vistas.

A more detailed description of alternatives is availed on the Town website at <https://www.carlislema.gov/772/Cranberry-Bog-Working-Group> . Scroll down to the bottom of the page where you will see links to their reports.

An ecological restoration project of the type presently contemplated can likely be implemented at cost levels substantially the same as the current annual bog maintenance budget. (\$12,000 per year.).

What Will the Notice of Intent Accomplish?

It will identify a set of specific set of management activities to achieve the goals of ecological restoration so that costs of implementing an ecological restoration project can be determined for future Town Meeting consideration. It will also provide the legal framework for the Commission to manage the property after the agricultural exemption expires.