

MIDDLESEX FELLS RESERVATION

*Proposal for
Improvements and Expansion to Mountain Bike
User Resources*

Submitted to:



**Metropolitan District
Commission**

Submitted by:



**New England
Mountain Bike
Association**

16 March 1999

Proposal Summary

Introduction to NEMBA and the Middlesex Fells Reservation

Phase I

Introduction of an Additional Mountain Bike Loop - Due to the tremendous success of the existing mountain bike loop NEMBA believes that the introduction of additional designated loops within the Fells would achieve numerous goals:

- The concentration of riders could be spread out to areas of the park which see less use. This would give riders more choice of terrain for and it would help lessen congestion and conflicts between other user groups.
- Loops could be developed to address different user ability levels, Lawrence Woods ("B" Loop) would be designated for beginners and the ("E" Loop) would target more advanced riders.

Expanded Fells Mountain Bike Day - By expanding the existing Fells Day or creating a separate Fells Mountain Bike Day (loosely based on the Blue Hills Day) we will be able to directly interact with present and future users of the Fells. The benefits of the Mountain Bike Day are:

- Attract families to the Fells for mountain biking
- Provide fun rides
- Promote MDC and NEMBA policies
- Recruit more volunteers for the patrol and maintenance events in the Fells

Phase II

Singletrack Access - NEMBA has a very dedicated following of experienced volunteers and it is our belief that we can do more in the Fells. With the proper design and maintenance most trails in the Fells can be enjoyed by all users. We would be there to help.

- We would identify potential trouble spots.
- We would propose a trail assessment to determine trails unsuitable for use.
- We would expand our maintenance efforts.

The benefits of opening more single track are many.

- More equitable trail access would allow visitors to have a more pleasurable recreational experience and would be based on documented conditions.
- The dispersed trail users would help keep the trails safe and maintainable.

Phase III

Ongoing Programs - NEMBA has been involved at the Fells since 1987 and has donated thousands of dollars and volunteer hours. We are proud to have a role in protecting the beauty and safety of the Fells through the Mountain Bike Patrol, Education, Trail Maintenance and Communication. In the future we hope to be able to contribute more to the Fells.

- We hope that the Patrol will be instrumental in carrying out this proposal through publicizing the loops, through the education of users to the MDC's policies and through riding clinics.
- We hope our trail maintenance efforts will be expanded to include additional trails without burdening the park staff. We would like the opportunity to attract more volunteers where we can communicate the need for sustainable riding practices and stewardship.
- We will continue to expand our ability to communicate with the cycling community. With our web site, listserves, rapore with merchants and skills clinics we convey important messages about conservation, responsible riding and stewardship.

Introduction



Introduction

The Middlesex Fells Reservation is a unique resource and very important outdoor recreational destination for the greater Boston mountain bike community. NEMBA represents this cycling community and its members, who have a strong sense of stewardship to this precious open space and the recreational opportunities it provides all user groups. Reflecting its commitment to the reservation, NEMBA has drafted a proposal for improvements and expansion to mountain bike resources at the park. This proposal is designed to promote sustainable recreational trail use, environmental awareness and the preservation of the Middlesex Fells' open space.

With sustainable recreational trail use as a key mandate, the proposal for improvement and expansion includes a two phase program designed to redistribute and relocate traffic from the West side of the reservation. *The proposal was designed to parallel the present MDC Fells policy.*

- Phase I of the proposal may be implemented immediately since it does not require any alteration to the present MDC Middlesex Fells policy. This phase includes the introduction of a new mountain bike loop which travels through the East side of the park. The additional loop would reduce the concentration of riders on the West side as well as provide new recreational challenges for the mountain bike.
- Phase II proposes the further assessment and consideration of singletrack trails. NEMBA believes that the inclusion of singletrack will both enhance the recreation experience and provide important environmental protection.

Environmental awareness and preservation are also key tenets of the proposal and are especially highlighted in the education and ongoing programs section of this Proposal. NEMBA has been deeply involved at the Fells ever since its inception in 1987. NEMBA's programs of bicycle patrols, education and trail maintenance are key factors in maintaining the beauty, integrity and safety of the Fells for all users. All of these vehicles have enabled NEMBA to convey important messages about conservation, responsible riding and stewardship to Boston area riders. NEMBA's ongoing programs and education efforts reflect the local riding community's commitment to the Fells and our valued relationship with the MDC, AMC and all other user groups.

Phase I

***Expanded Loops and
Rider Education***



Phase One - Expanded Loops and Rider Education

The enormous popularity of the Fells as an urban recreational park has created several key issues that NEMBA believes need to be addressed. Based on the desire to define the Fells as a multi-use family destination, and redistribute and relocate traffic from the heavily used West side (especially the Mountain Bike Loop), NEMBA has found several key solutions that can be quickly implemented. These solutions do not require any alteration to the present MDC Middlesex Fells policy. This initial phase of effort would consist of two main components:

- **Introduction of Additional Mountain Bike Loops**
- **An Expanded Fells Mountain Bike Day**

The successful introduction of these components would further attract the desired core user of the Middlesex Fells, the family.

Introduction of Additional Mountain Bike Loops

The present mountain bike loop at the Fells has been a tremendous success. The combination of the MDC and NEMBA in supplying the Greater Boston mountain bike rider with valuable riding terrain has been first rate. Based on feedback from mountain bike riders and other trail users, NEMBA believes they have identified an easy initial solution to further increase user satisfaction.

As detailed in the enclosed addendum (see map) several additional loops, consisting predominately of fire roads already open to mountain bikes, can be easily designed. Small sections of singletrack have been added to ensure rider safety and avoid high traffic areas on the East Side that would conflict with current construction projects.

The additional loops would serve several purposes. First, the concentration of mountain bikes on the West Side would be spread out among different areas of the reservation. Second, by spreading out riders among different areas, it is possible to develop loops based on user preference. With this in mind, NEMBA has tried to develop a tiered riding system to target different levels of skill and fitness based on the different areas of the reservation.

- 1) The small loop (“B” loop) in Lawrence Woods would constitute a beginner loop for those just starting to ride a mountain bike, are unfamiliar with the Middlesex Fells, or are not of a fitness level to complete a full lap of the mountain bike loop.

- 2) The large loop (“E” loop) targets the advanced rider who has a greater range of technical skills and a greater fitness level. This additional loop will help those riders who have repeatedly ridden the mountain bike loop and are looking for an additional challenge.
- 3) Finally, the existing mountain bike loop would remain intact and maintain its attractiveness to the average Fells mountain biker.

All loops are open to all riders. The goal is to enhance the riding experience by leading riders to appropriate loops. The implementation of these loops would have a minimal impact on the existing trail network. Only the previous outlined singletrack sections would not be part of the existing jeep road network. Additional signage and maps would be required to direct users to the correct loop sections. NEMBA is willing to help coordinate the effort to raise grants for the required signage and help supply the labor required to install the new signs. Also (as outlined in our Ongoing Programs and Fells Day sections) NEMBA realizes the important role education will play in the success of the new loops. We believe that with a coordinated effort with the MDC these new proposed loops will be a tremendous success.

Expanded Fells Mountain Bike Day

By expanding the present MDC-sponsored Fells Day or creating a separate Fells Mountain Bike Day (loosely based on the Blue Hills Day) there is a tremendous opportunity for this day to appeal directly to the existing mountain bike rider and help attract family users of the Fells to mountain biking. This could be the core of a new education campaign at the Middlesex Fells. The benefits of the Mountain Bike Day are:

- Attract families to the Fells and mountain biking.
- Market the new tiered Mountain Bike Loop system and provide fun rides.
- Promote the MDC and the present Fells policies.
- Trail Maintenance and Mountain Bike Patrol information and recruitment.

By expanding the present Fells Day format the MDC and NEMBA will be able to directly interact with the core users of the Fells and open a more direct line of communication. Additionally, by placing an emphasis on families NEMBA and the MDC can properly market the recreational opportunities at the Fells and ensure the long-term health of the property for future generations.

The introduction of new loops requires a learning curve. By adequately promoting, signing, and leading rides on the loops the MDC and NEMBA can introduce the spread of mountain bikers to other less concentrated areas of the Fells. NEMBA would also like to increase the amount of information provided to mountain bike riders on the present kiosks. This will supply an additional source of information concerning loop trails, riding techniques and trail maintenance.

Phase II

Singletrack Access



Phase Two - Singletrack Access

If Phase One is successful, NEMBA feels that more can be done to further the management objectives of the MDC by improving recreational opportunities at the Fells while protecting sensitive trails. Under the current Mountain Bike Policy in the Middlesex Fells the MDC has chosen to open only a few sections of singletrack trails to mountain bikes, those on the current mountain bike loop. This policy decision has stood for nearly 10 years, with future changes being held in check until the current Natural Resource Inventory is completed.

It is NEMBA's belief that properly designed and maintained trails at the Fells are capable of sustaining dispersed uses. The scenery, topography, and overall beauty of the reservation should be accessible to all. And while this need to commune with nature is expected and allowed with the hiking community, mountain bikers are expected to get that same experience from roads and paved rail trails. More equitable trail access would allow all visitors to have a pleasurable recreational experience.

Last Fall NEMBA held an open forum for the mountain biking users of the Fells, to gauge their understanding of the MDC Mountain Bike Policy and get some input on how NEMBA might affect a positive change in the Fells. There was a strong sentiment that there was not enough challenging or diverse legal riding. If there were more trails open, people would be more likely to abide by the MDC policies.

NEMBA supports the adherence to park policies. In addition we feel that the regulations could be more conducive to recreation while still protection natural resources. To that end we propose to open all singletrack trails to all users, except those trails that are shown to be sensitive, which we would recommend closing down completely to all users. We understand that there may be a desire for a single-use trail, possibly for quiet nature study, but that should be the exception. All of this is allowed for under the current Mountain Bike Policy.

- NEMBA would help identify potential trouble spot.
- NEMBA would recommend a quick survey of the trails in the Middlesex Fells. This could be done in conjunction with, or in addition to, the AMC Trail Assessment. If some trails are found to be inappropriate for use they should be closed to all users, and this could be accomplished during the scheduled NEMBA trail maintenance days or at most anytime throughout the season that volunteers could be raised to do the work.
- NEMBA would back the opening of the trails by expanding our maintenance efforts to include the trails. (See the next section for more information on NEMBA's trail maintenance efforts.)

When the Natural Resource Inventory is completed, or as it addresses sensitive areas that have trail access, the determination could be made quickly whether or not to allow continued trail access.

The benefits of this are threefold,

- First and foremost the dispersed use of the trails helps to keep them safe and maintainable.
- Second, by accommodating as many park users as possible, it makes it easier for the MDC to enforce the policies you really care about.
- And finally trail access would be more equitable and based on measurable, documented conditions, which would significantly aid in the education of park users.

Phase III

Ongoing Programs



Part Three - Ongoing Programs

NEMBA has been deeply involved at the Fells ever since it's inception in 1987, and we are proud to have a role in protecting the beauty of this special reservation. NEMBA's programs are key factors in maintaining the beauty, integrity and safety of the Fells for all users and include:

- Bicycle patrols
- Education
- Trail maintenance

All told, NEMBA's contribution of volunteer labor, cash, and supplies to the area have totalled over \$82,000 since 1995. NEMBA is committed to continue to work hand in hand with the MDC and the mountain bike community to continue providing an enjoyable place for people to recreate.

Patrol

Patrollers will be instrumental in carrying out this proposal successfully, since they will be able to publicize loops, offer aid at the mountain bike day and riding clinics, and continue to educate riders about policies.

The patrol was founded in 1996 to help extend the resources of the MDC on the trail. Volunteer patrollers on bicycles are prepared for emergencies with maps, cellular phones, tools, and first aid kits. They assist all park visitors and educate them about the regulations in the park.

Because of the patrol's success at the Fells, NEMBA was invited to expand to three other New England parks in the following year. Since inception, the NEMBA patrol has reported fires, helped injured and lost visitors, reported potential trail maintenance projects, and have generally served as the "eyes and ears" of park staff to the tune of 1,673 hours since the first year. We are looking forward to continuing our successful patrol program into the future.

Other On-Trail Education

For the last 3 years, NEMBA has maintained the signage on the mountain bike loop and at the kiosks. We will continue to maintain the signs, and we feel that we could do even better at communicating with the public through improved educational materials at the kiosks. Some ideas we would like to implement include:

- More inviting graphics to attract more cyclists' attention
- A clearer policy description
- A list of alternate riding locations besides the Fells

NEMBA also utilizes an Education Booth to talk with visitors. We maintain this booth on popular weekend days, during trail maintenance events, and at other big events such as the Fells Family Day. It provides an opportunity to reach a large number of people before they even enter the park, and is a nice complement to the patrollers who are on the trails.

Trail Maintenance

Trail maintenance is a crucial ingredient for keeping trails sustainable, especially those in heavily used urban parks like the Fells. NEMBA is looking forward to continuing and expanding our trail maintenance efforts in the Fells.

NEMBA's trail maintenance series was founded at the Fells in 1995, and it has been expanding ever since, thanks to NEMBA volunteers.

- NEMBA volunteers have donated over 5,800 hours worth of trail maintenance in the Greater Boston area.
- NEMBA volunteers have donated over 2,000 hours of trail maintenance to the Fells reservation alone.
- Next year the series will have 85 events in 35 parks in Massachusetts — and it all began here, at the Middlesex Fells.

Until recently, NEMBA was the only organization performing trail maintenance in the reservation. Trail maintenance clearly benefits the trails and the rangers directly. In addition, it has been a great communications tool for NEMBA, with over a hundred fifty individual volunteers turning out every year to participate. What better forum to interact with cyclists? Trail maintenance gives volunteers a feeling of stewardship of the trails.

NEMBA/Merlin Series

In 1996, NEMBA's maintenance program became the NEMBA/Merlin Trail Maintenance Series. This unique program gives every volunteer who helps at a maintenance day the chance to win a "Tiaga" titanium mountain bike frame. As a result, a wide range of people have been enticed to participate. This unique idea has also helped give the whole concept of trail maintenance greater publicity in the cycling media. This program has been so successful that Merlin has donated two frames for 1999 — one of them a top of the line full-suspension frame.

Trail Boss Training

The success of the trail maintenance series depends on our trained trail bosses, who receive a minimum of one full day of instruction on basic trail maintenance techniques, safety, and team leadership. In 1998, the series trained 61 people, including members of the Appalachian Mountain Club (AMC). Most of the leaders at the Fells are Advanced Trail Bosses, with more rigorous training and 3-5 years of leadership experience.

This year, to further train our volunteers, NEMBA will be offering our first intensive Trail Building School in Hawley, MA. Trail experts from all over the country (California, Georgia, and New England) will teach advanced trail design and construction techniques above and beyond our basic and advanced training courses. Although the program is highly selective, we will reserve a few spaces for land managers, and we hope that the MDC will be able to take advantage of the opportunity.

Future of Trail Maintenance at the Fells

We are looking forward to a fruitful year of trail maintenance in 1999. This is the first year that the MDC has participated in NEMBA's NRTA grant proposal, and we have planned 4 trail days for this year.

At the urging of the park staff, NEMBA has limited its maintenance efforts to the mountain bike loop since the very first year of the series. However, in 1999 we are looking forward to planning and executing a few new projects on the Reservoir Trail.

In the fall of 1998, NEMBA participated in the first joint assessment day with the AMC. The assessment successfully brought together various user groups and recorded the trail maintenance needs of many trails on the West Side. We hope that the involvement of the AMC means that the Sky Line Trail will be maintained as well in the near future.

We have been given fewer opportunities for trail maintenance days in recent years at the Fells because of resource constraints (last year's 3 days vs. 8 in the first year). We believe that at least 6 days a year are required to properly maintain the trails, and more days are needed to make improvements. We seek to develop a way in which the trails can get the maintenance they need without overburdening the park staff. This may require coming to an understanding on a maintenance "standard," and if so, we look forward to working with the MDC and AMC to develop that standard.

Other Communication

NEMBA has developed a host of other programs to communicate with the cycling community, and we will be expanding these as well.

- Our ride series introduces cyclists to less known popular riding locations and enables us to educate newer riders about riding responsibly. The 600+ rides all over New England offer a fun, positive activity for all types of riders.
- This year NEMBA is introducing a new set of rider skills clinics, a series of 6 classes in different parks around Boston, to introduce newer riders to basic riding skills and responsible riding ethics. We are doing this in conjunction with the Cycle Loft in Burlington and a few racing clubs in the area, all of whom visit the Fells often.
- SingleTracks, our magazine for members, reaches up to 3000 riders every 2 months. This is how our members hear about upcoming events, trail closures, trail maintenance days, and more entertaining information as well. We urge the MDC to send in an occasional letter, write a column, or submit news to the editor (singletracks@nemba.org) for inclusion into the newsletter.
- Our website, www.nemba.org, gets thousands of hits a week and is the place where people look

for timely local cycling information. We believe we also captured many people simply searching for information about the Fells and Boston riding. NEMBA would like to coordinate our site with the Fells home page so that they integrate better together and link to each other.

- NEMBA listserves enable people to communicate with each other easily via email. We have a listserve specifically for the Boston area. If the MDC has an urgent announcement about the reservation, they are welcome to contact us so that we can post the information.
- NEMBA works with bicycle dealers and manufacturers in the area. We want to make sure these important role models are aware of trail issues. In 1999, we hope to further expand our efforts in these area.

NEMBA will continue its large presence at popular local and regional mountain biking events that attract Boston area mountain bikers, such as:

New England Mountain Bike Festival in VT

Blue Hills Mountain Bike Day in Milton, MA

National Championship race series at Mount Snow, VT.

All of these vehicles have enabled NEMBA to convey important messages about conservation, responsible riding, and stewardship to Boston area riders. Through NEMBA's efforts, more people are volunteering at the park than ever before, and more mountain bicyclists are invested in the future of the park. As NEMBA continues to grow, we look forward to continuing our commitment to the Fells and our gratifying relationship with the MDC.

Trail Map



PROPOSED LOOP CONFIGURATION MAP



LEGEND

- Existing Trails
- (P) Parking
- Existing NEMBA Loop
- Proposed Beginners Loop (B' Loop)
- Proposed Experienced Riders Loop (E' Loop)

- ROAD CLASSIFICATION
- Primary highway, hard surface
 - Secondary highway, hard surface
 - Unimproved road, hard surface
 - Interstate Route
 - U. S. Route
 - State Route

BOSTON NORTH, MASS.
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