

Cliff Walk and Lighthouse View: Preserving Maine's Iconic Legacy

Fort Williams Park in Cape Elizabeth – one of the most majestic coastal open spaces in the Greater Portland region and the state of Maine. Fort Williams Park offers recreation and discovery in nature to over 800,000 annual visitors from near and far.

The Park has a significant naval and military history and is the site of Portland Head Light, the first commissioned lighthouse in George Washington's administration. In 1963 the Fort was decommissioned, purchased by the town of Cape Elizabeth, and turned into a public park. Over time invasive vegetation has taken a toll on the Park's ecology and historical sites, crowding out native plants, choking paths and views, and impacting the natural beauty.

Maintaining this unique open space has rested primarily on the generous citizens of Cape Elizabeth; yet tax dollars have historically covered only the most basic maintenance care. Gus Barber, a local civic leader, businessman and philanthropist, recognized this challenge and the need for private funding. In 1998, he funded and created the dramatic coastal Cliff Walk Trail to the Portland Head Light, the most heavily trafficked area in the Park. Millions of visitors – from joggers to photographers, painters, history buffs and others – have immersed themselves in history and nature on one of the most scenic and recognized paths in Maine. Here one can marvel at views across Casco Bay islands and the entrance to Portland Harbor or snap photos of Portland Head Light – said to be the most photographed lighthouse in the world.

While still beautiful, much of the Cliff Walk area is threatened or overgrown by multiflora rose, bittersweet, Japanese Knot-weed, poison ivy, Asian Bush Honeysuckle and Black Swallow-wort, obscuring views and limiting access through the tangled undergrowth. A three-acre area bordering the Cliff Walk Trail and around Portland Head Light has been identified as a priority restoration project of the Fort Williams Foundation and Arboretum at Fort Williams Park. The goal is to replace invasive species with hardy sustainable plants that will restore a more diverse ecosystem and provide inspiration and education for home gardeners. Native shrubs and trees like birches, pines, and red oak could be interspersed with colorful chokecherry, witchhazels and junipers. Ground covers might include sedges, hayscented fern and wild lowbush blueberry.

With a ready audience of Park users, the Arboretum offers education to visitors about their role as responsible environmental stewards. With expanded opportunities for learning, volunteering and community engagement, we are advancing the understanding of the Park's distinctive coastal landscape and history.

As Fort Williams Park nears its 50th anniversary in 2014, we invite others to join the Barber Family's spirit of stewardship to preserve and protect this important open space for future generations.



Phase II Arboretum Sites: Cliff Walk and Light House View

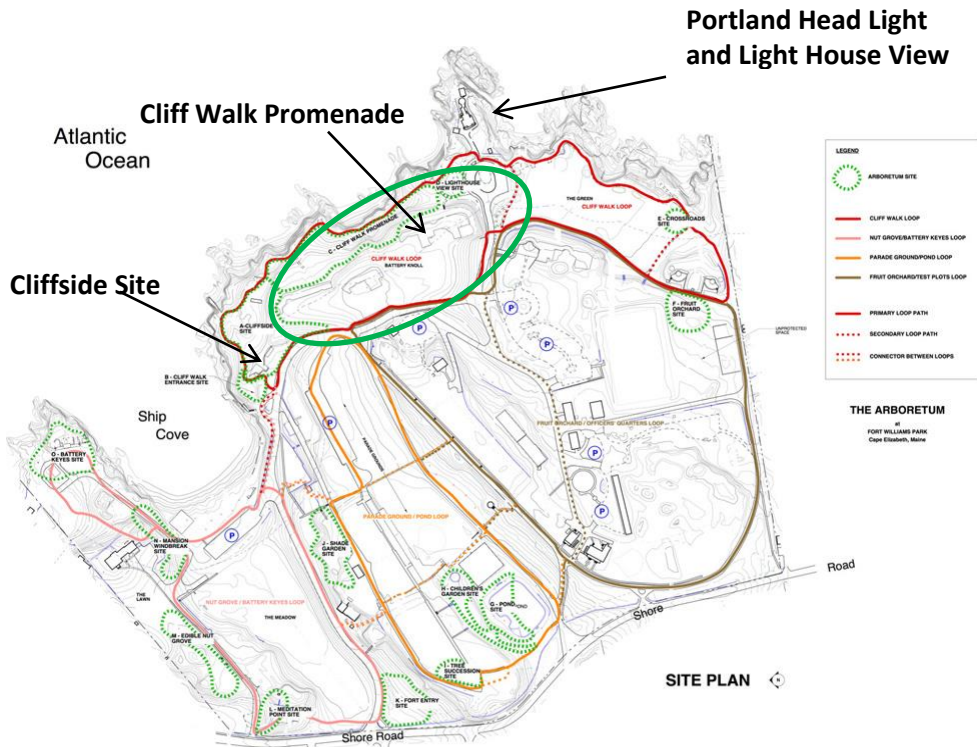


Figure 2. Site Plan for the Fort Williams Arboretum highlighting the proposed Cliff Walk and Light House View at the Portland Head Light. Also shown is the newly completed Cliffside Site.

Join us!

There are many ways that friends can help Fort Williams Park through the Fort Williams Foundation and the Arboretum project as volunteers and donors. The website has extensive information on giving or volunteer opportunities including gardening work days, events, fundraising or administrative support.

Visit www.fortwilliams.org/arboretum.html or contact the Fort Williams Foundation at (207)400-6706 or arboretumatfortwilliams@gmail.com

The Fort Williams Foundation was chartered in 2001 by the Cape Elizabeth Town Council and the Fort Williams Advisory Commission to preserve and enhance the natural and historic resources of Fort Williams Park for future generations by providing funding support and stewardship for selected projects within the Park. The Arboretum is the Foundation's first major restoration effort at the Park.