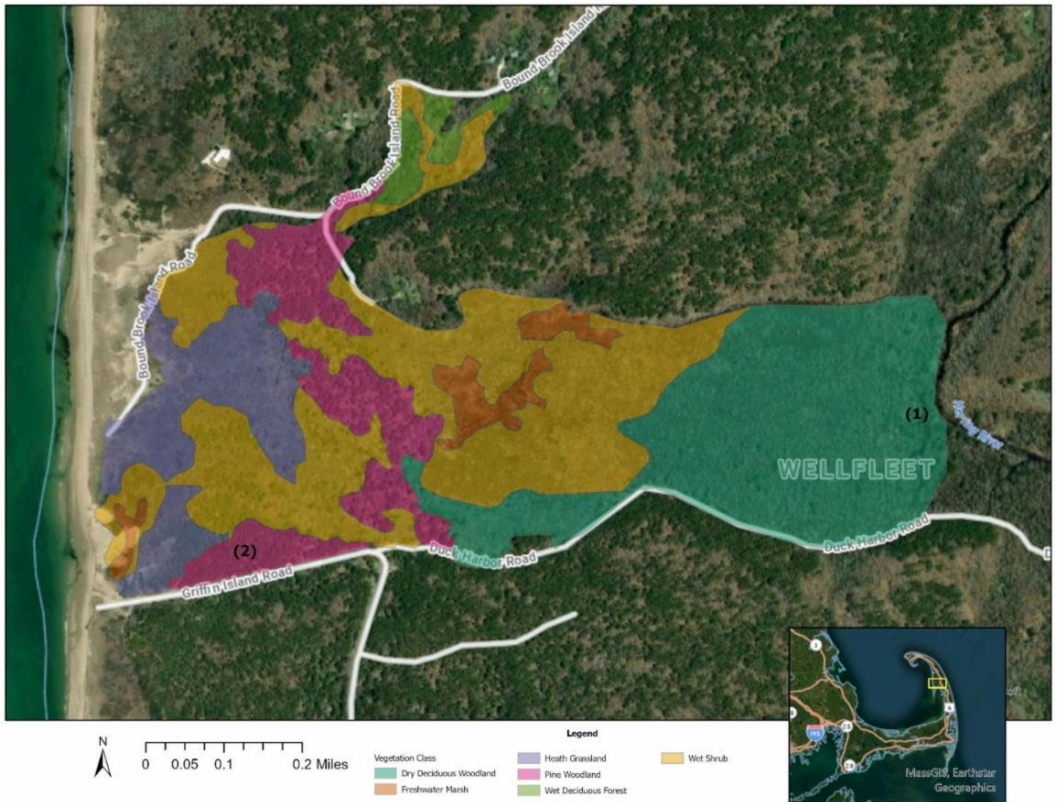


Duck Harbor Vegetation Removal Begins



A constant on Cape Cod is a dynamic landscape that is always changing . Anyone who has been to the Duck Harbor area of Wellfleet over the past few years has probably noticed the sands shifting once again. Starting in January of 2021, Duck Harbor has experienced periodic overwash events during the few days each month when the high tides are higher than normal. An overwash occurs when the flow of water breaches over a coastal dune during storm events. Sediment also gets transported and deposited inland in large layers called overwash fans. This influx of salt water and sediment into an area that has been a freshwater (swamp) forest for years resulted in a massive die-off of the freshwater trees, shrubs and herbaceous plants that colonized the area following the diking

of the Herring River in 1909.

This HAS provided a foreshadowing of what was expected to happen eventually, once tide gates were opened at the new bridge on Chequessett Neck Road. The Herring River Restoration Project was always planning to manage vegetation to avoid having dead plants impede the restoration process. The results of the overwash at Duck Harbor required that the project adjust the timeline.

Vegetation clearing efforts began with help from AmeriCorps Cape Cod, a residential service program, and the Woodchucks, a volunteer group that assists the park and other local entities with vegetation management. These two groups used hand tools to clear shrubs and brush from upland areas along the Herring River on the far eastern edge of Duck Harbor. AmeriCorps Cape Cod crew of 14 members cleared around 20,000 square feet near High Toss Road over a three-day period. The Woodchucks cleared around 43,000 square feet near Bound Brook Island. This effort was accomplished over seven workdays by 37 volunteers who contributed a total of 390 hours to the project. This adds up to over an acre cleared by both groups and will provide access for scientists to collect crucial data needed to develop and evaluate methods for restoring the Herring River floodplain.



Heavy equipment will be required to remove dead trees and other large dead vegetation from the Duck Harbor area,. **The Herring River Restoration Project Team and Ducks Unlimited are using funding received through a North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA) grant to employ a contractor to remove large trees and brush from across the 120-acre Duck Harbor flood plain.** The operation is scheduled to begin shortly and will use specialized equipment with large cutting heads to take down dead trees and brush. The dead vegetation will be mulched and spread across the area to promote growth and vitality for the native species. In addition, park scientists will work with the Center for Coastal Studies to monitor changes in Duck Harbor to see how the system responds to vegetation removal. The team is optimistic that they will begin to see native salt marsh vegetation recolonizing the area.

-- By Geoffrey Sanders, Chief of Natural Resource Management and Science, CCNS