



## Vision for the Future

The Desert of Maine has been an iconic Freeport landmark for over 100 years. While in recent years it has fallen into disrepair, the potential for this place is far beyond what it has been. As we have learned more about the unique history of the Desert of Maine, its geological past, and the fragile native ecosystems that abound on the land, we see a vibrant gathering place for educators, students, nature lovers, outdoor enthusiasts--including tourists and locals alike. At the center of our vision is the restoration of the historic 18th century Tuttle Barn, which has acoustics to match the grandeur of its ancient beams, and which will serve as an intimate venue for music and events.

Inspired by the Coastal Maine Botanical Gardens and arts venues such as Yellow Barn and Stone Mountain Arts Center, we envision creating world class infrastructure, education, and arts programming that will draw visitors from far and wide.

Specifically, our plans for future investments include:

- A fully restored, winterized barn to serve as an event and performance venue
- Self-guided and guided tours with museum-quality signage and expert docents
- Ecology and history events for both the novice and expert
- Collaborative programs with local arts and nature organizations
- A one-of-a-kind outdoor recreation area for children
- A fully modernized campground with simple, elegant turnkey shelters for campers

With this enhanced infrastructure and programming, the Desert of Maine will add to Freeport's rich cultural fabric as a vibrant destination and an enticing place to call home.

## Arts Programming and Education

Maine is rich in talented musicians, and we hope to connect them with broader audiences through a year-round classical and folk concert series. Working

collaboratively with other local arts organizations, we will embrace a spirit of community-centeredness, accessibility, and artistic rigor. To complement the performance series, we also hope to host visiting musicians-in-residence who would benefit creatively from the experience of setting aside time for their art and who would teach local youth and adults as part of their residency.

In addition to music at the Desert of Maine, we have converted our gift shop into a gallery for local visual artists. We believe that our local artists would benefit from a high profile location to show and sell their work. Eventually, we would like to invite visual artists to participate in our teaching artist-in-residency programs as well.

Our end goal is to create an arts center that will simultaneously serve visitors, artists, and residents of Freeport and that will work collaboratively with other local arts organizations.

## Barn Restoration

New England barns have long been places for the flourishing of local culture, and we hope to continue the tradition by restoring the Tuttle barn. This historic structure from the 1700s is framed using old English craft methods and constructed from the trees of Maine's ancient forests.

The barn will be restored by Preservation Timber Framing under the expert direction of Arron Sturgis, president of Maine Preservation. Last fall, his team performed a detailed assessment of the Tuttle barn that was backed up by years of experience and in-depth knowledge of historic New England architecture techniques. This assessment will form the basis for a historically authentic and beautiful restoration of the structure. Arron Sturgis's resume also includes interfacing with planning boards to make sure that his historic restorations meet the highest standards of safety and architectural integrity. The Tuttle barn will be no exception. The end result will be a safe, functional and magnificent structure.

## Ecology and Native Plant Preservation and Education

The landscape that encompasses the dunes, the surrounding forest, and boggy areas adjacent to the dunes may be an area of ecological devastation, but it is also one of remarkable resilience. Ecologist Tom Wessels noted that the Desert of Maine is an ideal place to study reforestation, because it allows us to view the commonalities with other landscapes that are rebounding while also observing the resilient and co-evolving native ecosystems that are unique to the Desert of Maine. Far from being a wasteland, the

Desert of Maine is a living testament to the ability of nature to heal and thrive once again.

On drier sections of the dunes, colonies of microscopic organisms have formed a crust called cryptogamic soil, one example of a unique and resilient ecosystem supported by the landscape. Countless symbiotic relationships between fungi and plant roots, called mycorrhizae abound in and around the desert and facilitate the regrowth of trees on the edges of the dunes. In boggy areas, sundew, pitcher plants and rose pogonia form an ecosystem worthy of protection. A variety of medicinal plants, numerous species of mushrooms and rare bird species also grace the Desert of Maine

What we know about the Desert of Maine is greatly overshadowed by what we have yet to learn. We are working with two geologists, Josh Smith, who specializes in the glacial era when the dunes were first formed and Professor Emeritus, Roger Hooke whose area of expertise will help us explain later changes to the desert landscape.

We have a special interest in connecting children to their innate connection with nature. In the words of Richard Louv, “passion is lifted from the earth itself by the muddy hands of the young; it travels along grass-stained sleeves to the heart. If we are going to save environmentalism and the environment, we must also save an endangered indicator species: the child in nature.”

## Outdoor Recreation Area for Children

While the Desert of Maine has been drawing hundreds of thousands of visitors from all over the world for decades, few people from Freeport have had a good reason to go in recent years. We intend to change that. Starting in 2019, we commissioned local artist Steven Smith of Renaissance Timber to design and construct a natural materials playground with a slide, climbing wall, log jumble, see saw, balance beams, cargo net, and a wooden “Milly the Moose” climbing sculpture at the center. In 2020, we plan to add a mini-zipline, a lookout platform with mounted binoculars accessible by a rope bridge, a natural wooden swing set, and a fairy house carved from the trunk of a 200-year-old oak tree. The playground area is situated next to a shaded stone patio with ample seating where adults can relax as their children play. Best of all, admission to the Desert of Maine (the world’s largest sandbox!) and the playground area is free for residents of Freeport. We hope to make the Desert of Maine a gathering place for young Freeport families.

## The Desert of Maine Campground

Freeport residents are often unaware that the Desert of Maine also has a campground. In recent years the campground has fallen into disrepair, but in 2019 we began a multi-year renovation effort. The bath house was gutted and re-clad in cedar with modern fixtures. The campsites were rearranged to give campers more space and we undertook the daunting task cleaning up years of trash and rotting logs. We have installed new fire rings at every site and modernized the booking procedures. This summer we plan to build tent platforms, bury electric wires that are attached to trees, and continue the clean-up and beautification of the grounds. In order to stay in step with industry trends, we are seeking approval to place attractive, turn-key shelters on some of the campsites. Other campgrounds in Freeport already have cabins, but we are seeking to build our shelters in coordination with the town, in observance of all applicable building and safety codes.

## The Next Chapter

Our vision of the Desert of Maine's next chapter is guided by the principles of historic restoration and ecological conservation. Visitors who come to the Desert of Maine will also eat at Freeport restaurants, shop in Freeport stores and patronize Freeport breweries, lifting businesses that will be suffering in the wake of COVID-19. Our renovations and on-going programs and activities have provided and will continue to provide work to local contractors, educators and young people looking for summer jobs.

For local visitors, we envision the Desert of Maine as a community gathering place where people will return again and again to experience artistic performances, workshops and educational talks, or perhaps simply to spend a relaxing day with the family. We will continue to grow community bonds with local organizations and make this beautiful local treasure as accessible as possible to residents of Freeport.

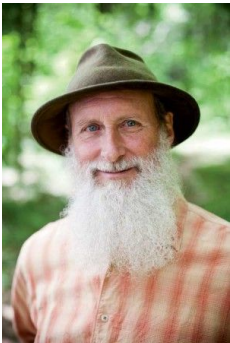
But while we focus on preserving and restoring what makes the Desert of Maine truly special, we must also modernize our business so that it will once again be the vibrant place that it was in its glory days. The last few owners of the Desert of Maine struggled financially. If we are only allowed to do what has been done here in the past, the economics of the current business model will not support the level of investment we think is essential to transforming the Desert of Maine into the kind of place Freeport needs it to be. Without significant investment, the historic barn will be lost and the future of this iconic landmark will be in doubt.

# Addendum

## Our team of Historians, Scientists, and Craftsman



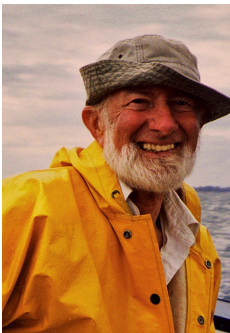
With the help of Holly Hurd who has been a local historical researcher for over a decade, we have discovered much about the lives of the Tuttle family that farmed on the Desert of Maine land, beginning in 1821. We are still in the process of understanding how they farmed and what led to the erosion of their lands. We are also investigating the fascinating details of the lived experiences of the Tuttle family.



In the summer of 2019, we invited esteemed ecologist, Tom Wessels, to do a study of the ecology of the Desert of Maine. Mr. Wessels located several areas that he described as utterly unique and critical to protect. He was especially interested in the spots around the dunes in which co-evolving native species created resilient ecosystems. Tom's findings will be at the center of our educational programs for children, as they reinforce the importance of working with nature and caring for the environment.



Over the past year, we have worked with geologist Josh Smith to refine our understanding of when and how the dunes were formed. The various parts of the dunes tell a story how Maine was transformed by the last ice age.



Roger Hooke, Professor Emeritus at University of Maine, is helping us understand the more recent changes to the dunes.



Arron Sturgis, owner of Preservation Timberframing and President of Maine Preservation, has been instrumental in reconstructing the history of the Tuttle Barn, parts of which date from the late 1700s. Arron's team is planning a full restoration of the barn so it can be preserved for future generations.

## Renovations Completed in 2019

During 2019, we completed over \$250,000 in capital improvements to the Desert of Maine. Here is a partial list of the renovations:

### Safety Improvements

- Demolished maintenance building which had partially collapsed
- Demolished arts & crafts building which was rotting
- Removed over two dozen dead trees
- Pruned dead limbs from trees in the campground and playground area
- Removed damaged pool
- Fixed numerous electrical safety issues
- Removed bathrooms with failed plumbing
- Removed store annex which was partially collapsed
- Shored up parts of the barn where water damage threaten the structural integrity of the roof
- Cleaned well for the first time in over a decade

### Grounds

- Removed fences
- Removed 10 large dumpsters of trash
- Installed new natural playground

### Campground

- Completely renovated bath house
- Reduced number of site from 46 to 23 to give each campsite more space
- Demolished pump house building and replaced with a new one
- Increased water available to campsites by a factor of 10

### Store

- Converted upstairs storage area to a beautiful art gallery
- Replaced lighting, doors, flooring, cladding, and more
- Built cafe area
- Installed two modern, handicap accessible bathrooms
- Installed new metal roof

- Painted exterior and interior

## Planned Renovations for 2020

Pending zoning changes, we are planning to invest over \$1,000,000 in capital improvements for 2020

### Grounds

- Complete renovation of the parking lot to improve lighting, drainage, traffic flow, and handicap accessibility
- Trail work to improve the accessibility of trails
- Dozens of museum-quality interpretive signs
- Landscaping throughout
- Stone patio outside the store
- Add swing set, lookout platform, rope bridge, and zip line to natural playground

### Barn

- Complete restoration by master timber framer

### Campground

- Bury and upgrade electrical lines to improve safety
- Build A-Frame shelters to give visitors a turnkey camping option
- Add water and electrical service to several sites
- Remove hundreds of rotten logs

### Store

- Install new septic system for store bathrooms
- Install new handicap accessible ramps



## Gallery

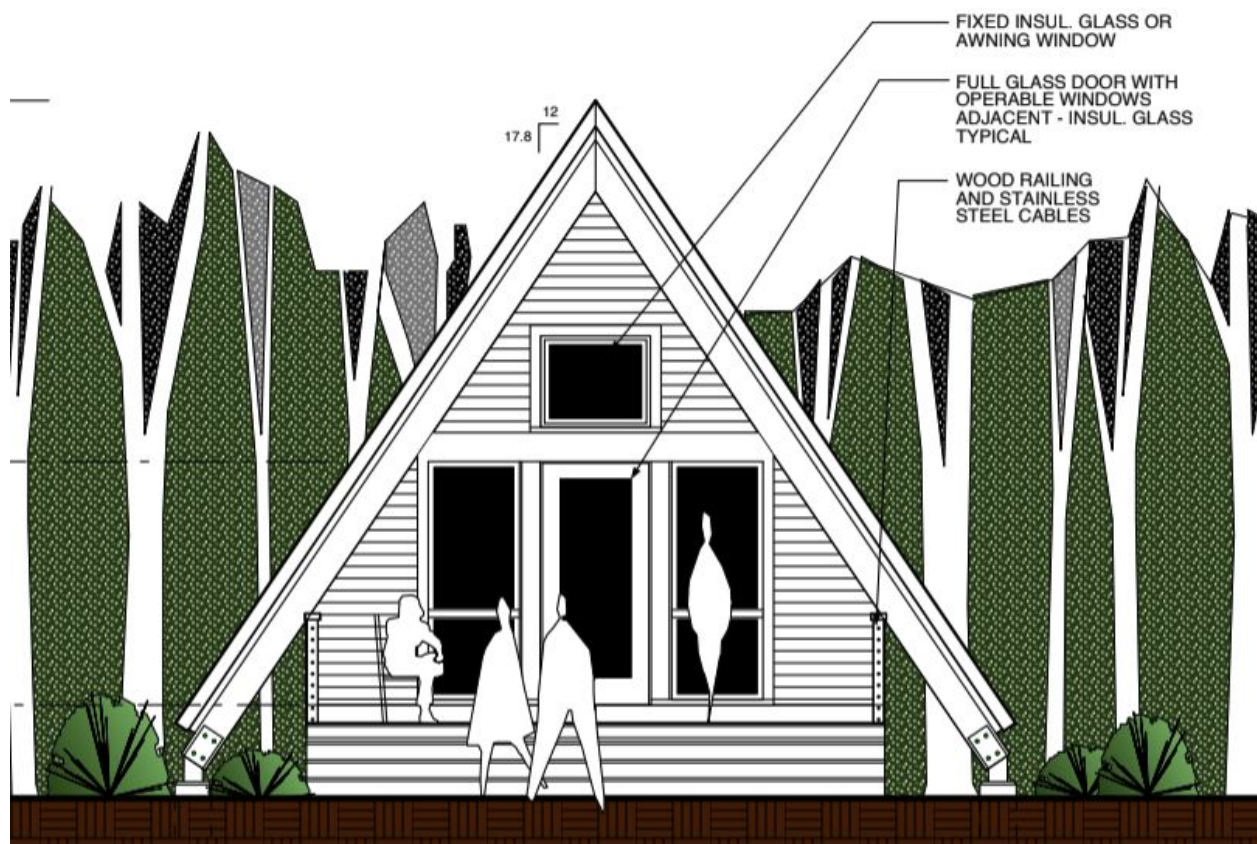


Proposed parking lot redesign

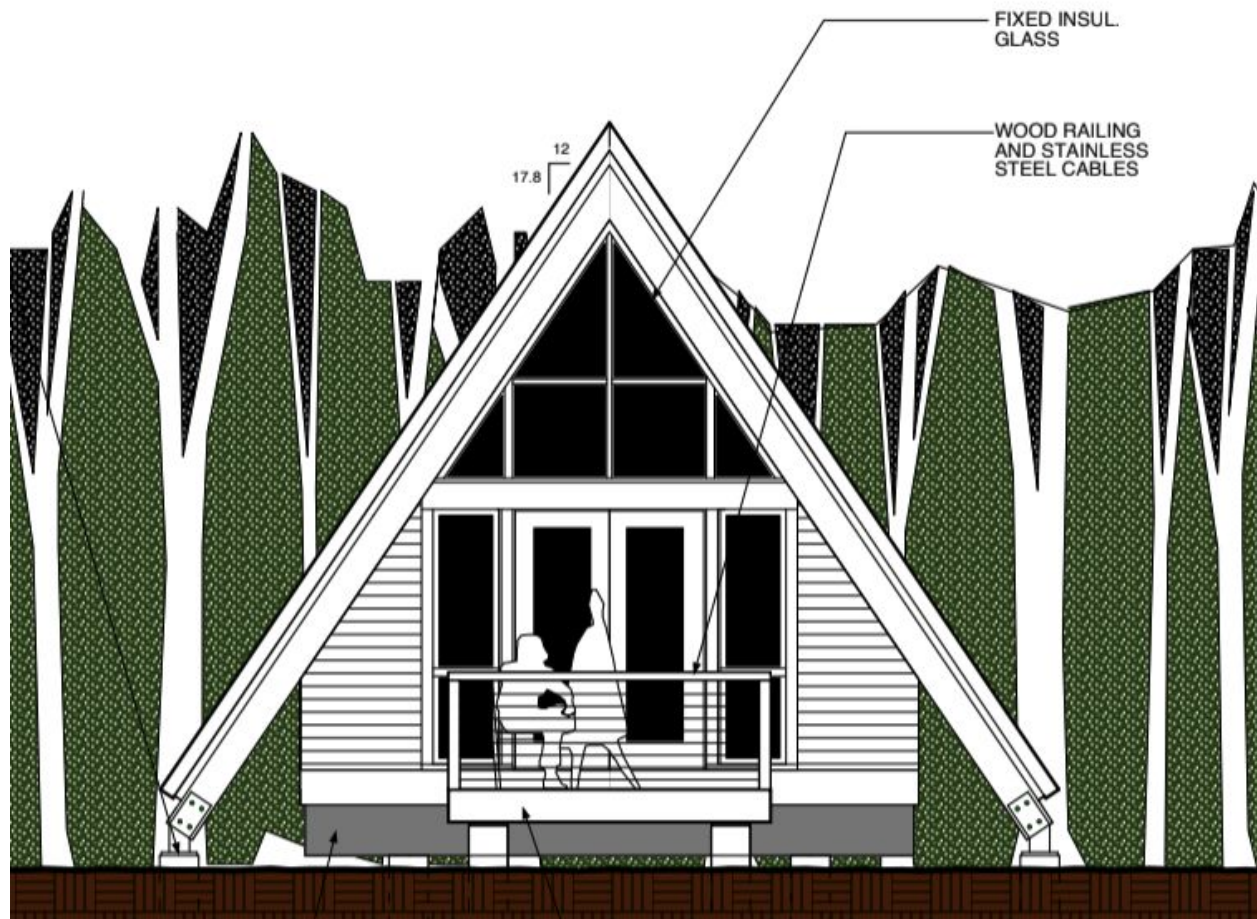


Proposed landscaping in front of store





Proposed shelters - front view



Proposed shelters - back view



Barn dance





Concert in the barn



Final concert in the barn





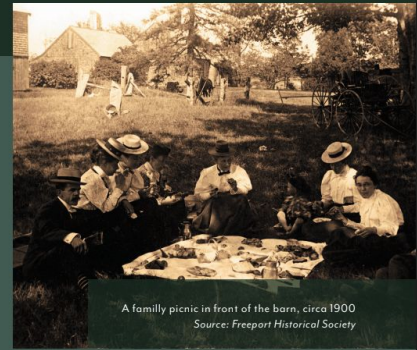
Renovated bath house



## Once a Fertile Farm

The land that comprises the Desert of Maine was farmed by John and Abigail Tuttle and their children starting in 1827. The Tuttle family worked hard to create a successful 150-acre farm with chickens, cows, horses, and sheep. They sold oats, potatoes, wool, and vegetables, and from time to time, focused much of their efforts on producing hay, a lucrative cash crop. They must have sold either beef or dairy products, because

records show that they owned a number of cattle. They must have sold either beef or dairy products, because records show that they owned a number of cattle. The Tuttle family also had a logging operation and bought an additional wood lot to increase production. In 1848 the Maine Central Railroad built a stop in Freeport and the Tuttle family sold logs to the railroad which were used to fuel the locomotives.



### Moving the Barn

"John Tuttle must have been of inflexible character, for it is told in the family that becoming angered by something at a Pownal Town meeting, he vowed never to attend another and forthwith moved his house over the town-line into Freeport. It took twenty-four yoke of oxen to move the house to the site where the barn still stands."

- Sara Fitts Hayes  
descendent of John Tuttle

Sample of new interpretive signs



Natural playground





Morty the Moose