



Nantucket Field Station

- Walking Paths (Pedestrians only)
- Single-Lane Dirt Road
- Paved Road
- Open Water
- Vegetated Wetlands
- NCF Properties
- Private Property
Please respect the privacy of our neighbors
- P Parking
- ? Information

Property History

The Nantucket Field Station contains a diverse collection of unique natural communities. Totalling 110 acres, this protected parcel provides examples of harbor beach front, sand dune, shrub thicket, freshwater pond, tidal flat, vernal pool, freshwater marsh, and salt marsh habitats. Many native and rare wildlife species utilize these habitats for feeding and breeding.

The Field Station provides students with an exceptional setting to study Nantucket's diverse natural history, social sciences, and the arts and humanities. The University of Massachusetts Boston acquired the property in 1963. It has been used for education, research, and community service programs for students, Nantucket seasonal and year-round residents, and other local and off-island collaborators for the past several decades. Existing facilities include a laboratory, an office, staff housing, a workshop, and a dormitory with classroom space.

The Nantucket Conservation Foundation began working with the University of Massachusetts Boston in 2003 to safeguard the future of this property. The Foundation's interest in protecting this site was sparked when the University received several unsolicited offers from private parties interested in purchasing and developing the property. As the University seriously considered the sale of this asset, it started working closely with the Foundation to focus on ways of continuing its presence on Nantucket while preventing the development of this important parcel.

As a result of a complex sale agreement negotiated with the University, the Foundation was able to obtain the property after raising the \$20 million purchase price. These funds were paid to the University in regular installments between 2004 and 2008. The Foundation now holds title to the entire property, subject to an agreement that enables the University to continue to occupy and use the Field Station's facilities. The University has access to 63 of the 110 acres and the existing structures for its educational, research, and community service programs. Forty-five acres of upland bordering Folger's Marsh and the Polpis Road are managed by the Foundation.

In 2004, the Field Station was designated "The Grace Grossman Environmental Center" in honor of the late Grace Grossman, a member of the Nantucket Conservation Foundation's Board of Trustees. Mrs. Grossman was a lifelong proponent of environmental causes on Nantucket and a key

contributor to the negotiations that resulted in the successful acquisition of the property.

Folger's Marsh

One of the most interesting and ecologically valuable natural habitats found on the property is Folger's Marsh, an extensive salt marsh that lies between Polpis Road and Nantucket Harbor. This site provides important feeding habitat for many species of shorebirds and colonial waterbirds that nest on Nantucket or migrate through the area, stopping to feed on organisms and organic matter found in the damp, spongy peat and mud flats. These include semipalmated plovers, greater and lesser yellowlegs, dowitchers, sanderlings, black-crowned night herons, American oystercatchers, snowy and great egrets, and least terns.

Because of the twice daily ebbing and flooding of the tide, salt marshes represent one of the most productive ecosystems on earth. Each rising tide brings in a flux of new nutrients and tiny marine organisms that fuel the plants and animals in this unique environment. Many varieties of marine animals that spend their adult lives in the open waters of the harbor, sound, and ocean use salt marshes as "nurseries" for their young. Examples include mollusks, saltwater fish, and crustaceans.

Beach Area

The tide ebbs and floods from Folger's Marsh through a tidal creek located on the northwestern side of the property. Otherwise, a narrow ridge of sand dunes and beachfront separates the marsh from Nantucket Harbor. Combined with the shoreline that lies at the base of the bluff overlooking the harbor, the Field Station property contains over 2,000 feet of harbor front.

Beaches are dynamic systems, constantly changing as sand is deposited, moved, and eroded in a never-ending cycle. Plants that grow on the open beach are uniquely adapted to this harsh environment. They obtain fresh water by absorbing rainfall and forming deep, penetrating roots. The root systems of beach vegetation serve the important function of holding windblown sand in place, preventing erosion. Species that are common on the Field Station's beach include American beach grass, dusty miller, and beach pea.



Salt Spray Goldenrod



Sweet Pepper Bush



Dusty Miller



Marsh Mallow

❁ Bluff & Freshwater Pond Area

Along the bluff on the northeastern portion of the property is an osprey pole that is actively used during the nesting season. These rare birds of prey feed primarily on fish, and the Field Station is an ideal site for them due to its close proximity to both fresh and salt water. Nesting poles are erected to mimic dead trees, the preferred nesting habitat of this species. Osprey populations reached dangerously low numbers in the 1960's because of high levels of DDT (a dangerous pesticide that has since been banned) in the food chain. This chemical caused egg shell thinning, which drastically impeded the ability of many birds of prey to successfully reproduce. However, osprey populations have recently made a remarkable comeback, with over 350 pairs now estimated to be nesting in Massachusetts.

The remainder of the Field Station property contains a large freshwater pond, and dense thickets of tall shrubs such as bayberry, arrowwood, beach plum, and shadbush interspersed with pockets of freshwater wetlands.

❁ Property Access

A parking area with an informational kiosk is located on the eastern side of the entrance drive about 250 yards from Polpis Road. Most of the walking trails on the property can be easily accessed from here. Additional parking is provided opposite the laboratory further north along the entrance drive. This is an excellent site for looking out over the salt marsh and observing birds and other wildlife on the property.

A series of trails traverse the grassy uplands and shrublands on the property. On the west side of the entrance drive, several paths meander across the property and provide excellent vantage points to view the salt marsh and adjacent freshwater cattail marsh, which often provides nesting habitat for northern harriers, a rare bird of prey. On the east side of the entrance drive, a longer trail winds through the shrub thickets along the eastern property edge and eventually comes out on the bluff overlooking the osprey nesting platform and Nantucket Harbor. From here, a path along the bluff heading west provides access to the beach front and adjacent salt marsh.



*The University of Massachusetts Boston
Nantucket Field Station, a property of the
Nantucket Conservation Foundation, totals 110 acres.*

*This protected parcel provides examples of
harbor beach front, sand dune, shrub thicket,
freshwater pond, tidal flat, vernal pool, freshwater marsh,
and salt marsh habitats.*

*Many native and rare wildlife species utilize these
habitats for feeding and breeding.*

- ❁ **The UMass Field Station is open to the public during daylight hours** with the understanding that those using the property be considerate of the University's educational and research programs.
- ❁ **Visitors are asked to sign in at the Field Station's laboratory when they visit.**
- ❁ **Group use of 20 or more individuals is allowed**, but must be coordinated at least 24 hours advance. Please contact the Station Managing Director at (508) 228-5268 .
- ❁ **There are no public restrooms on the property.**
- ❁ **Hunting is prohibited.**

Enjoy your visit!

*Please consider recycling this brochure
by returning it to the box at the
beginning of the trail. Thank you!*

The Nantucket Conservation Foundation is a non-profit organization that relies on the generosity of its members for its funding. To make a donation that will help support our mission of protecting, preserving and maintaining the island's open spaces please visit our web-site at

www.nantucketconservation.org



Nantucket Conservation Foundation

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www.nantucketconservation.org

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Printed on recycled paper, using vegetable-based inks.



A TRAIL GUIDE TO THE

Nantucket Field Station



Nantucket Conservation Foundation
Nantucket, Massachusetts