

Russell Preserve

Some Notes Regarding the Past & Present State of the Preserve & Pond

Overview

- Russell Preserve is a roughly 8-acre parcel of woodlands in the north of Wolcott. It is surrounded on three sides by suburban development; to the north, it is bordered by several dozen acres of unbroken forest east of Cedar Lake. Russell Pond, which is perhaps roughly an acre in size, is found at the southern end of the preserve. The western half of the pond lays within the preserve, while the eastern half is privately owned.
- Most of the historical information we possess regarding the pond on the preserve comes from an autobiographical text by Alan Russell, a child of the Russell family that grew up on the property beginning in the mid-1900s.
- Russell Pond was originally a spring-fed wetland. A very small dam of fieldstone and concrete (if I recall correctly) is used to trap the spring waters and fill the wetland to a modest depth fitting of a shallow pond. Alan writes:

“There are three springs that feed the pond - two of them are along the southern edge and one is more out in the middle. Because of them the pond has never run dry even during the worst droughts that Wolcott has experienced. Even when the dam has been torn down (which kids occasionally did), and the pond drained, the springs keep flowing.”

- Aerial photography from 1934 demonstrates that the springs were already impounded at that time. However, USGS maps from the 1890s do not portray a body of water. Thus, it seems probable that the first dam was constructed sometime between the late 1890s and the early 1930s.
- Alan’s description of the pond from his childhood reveals that the pond has indeed undergone quite a transformation over the past 5 or 6 decades. He describes one side of the pond as having bushes and mounds of grasses (probably the eastern side), but he also states that:

“...about half of the pond was exposed water and it held a quantity of frogs, turtles (including snapping turtles), and fish (we caught perch, sunfish, and one pickerel from it over the years).”

As an avid fisherman myself, I can attest that I would be stunned if any of those fish species are still living in the pond these days, so the ecosystem has certainly become less hospitable for certain types of aquatic life which thrived there many decades ago. Alan does mention that the pond was never very deep –“only about two to three feet”– but from what I’ve seen at the preserve during my visits, it is much shallower now. We are unsure if most of this transformation was caused by eutrophication/sedimentation or if a partial breach in the small dam has developed which has necessarily reduced the water level. Although I have been to the dam myself on many occasions, I have neglected to inspect it in any great detail.

Possible Management Scenarios

Currently, the WLCT board is brainstorming on how best to manage Russell Preserve. At this stage, we are interested in determining whether or not it is feasible to restore or stabilize Russell Pond.

Since the pond is probably around a century old and was used for decades as an outdoor playground for neighborhood children beginning in the 1940s, it definitely brings a certain heritage value to this nature preserve. In that regard, it would be fitting if it could realistically be restored or stabilized.

However, it is also clear that a great deal of eutrophication has taken place over the past decades. The water depth *seems* to have decreased, partly due to a build-up of muck and possibly due to a partially breached dam. Based upon historical notes, we can discern that species diversity has already decreased dramatically since the mid-1900s. The pond remains impounded behind a poorly constructed dam of unknown age which has historically failed in the past, leading to drainage of the pond until its reconstruction (it is not clear if dam reconstruction would be legal at this point). In short, we realize that the pond has been in decline for a long time now and we are trying to objectively ascertain whether or not the damage is arguably irreversible at this point.

Stabilization/Restoration (currently being considered)

We are currently evaluating the usefulness of an aeration system to halt the eutrophication process. The on-going discussion regarding this possibility is ultimately what prompted us to seek insight from a particularly knowledgeable person such as yourself. Our cursory research seems to suggest that an aeration system may even reverse the effects of eutrophication to some degree by facilitating the deterioration of accumulated muck.

- Is an aerator likely to significantly halt the eutrophication process?
- Could such an aerator system possibly even deepen the pond by enabling the decay of accumulated detritus?
- Can we expect that the effects of an aerator will be long-lasting even though the initial causes of eutrophication remain unabated?
- In general, does the installation of an aeration system seem to be a practical way to preserve or improve the pond? Or is it unlikely to yield significant benefit in spite of the cost of installation/maintenance?

Hands-off: Allow Succession (essentially what's happened thus far)

If we choose to take no action, allowing eutrophication to continue, what can we expect with regard to the changes that will continue to occur?

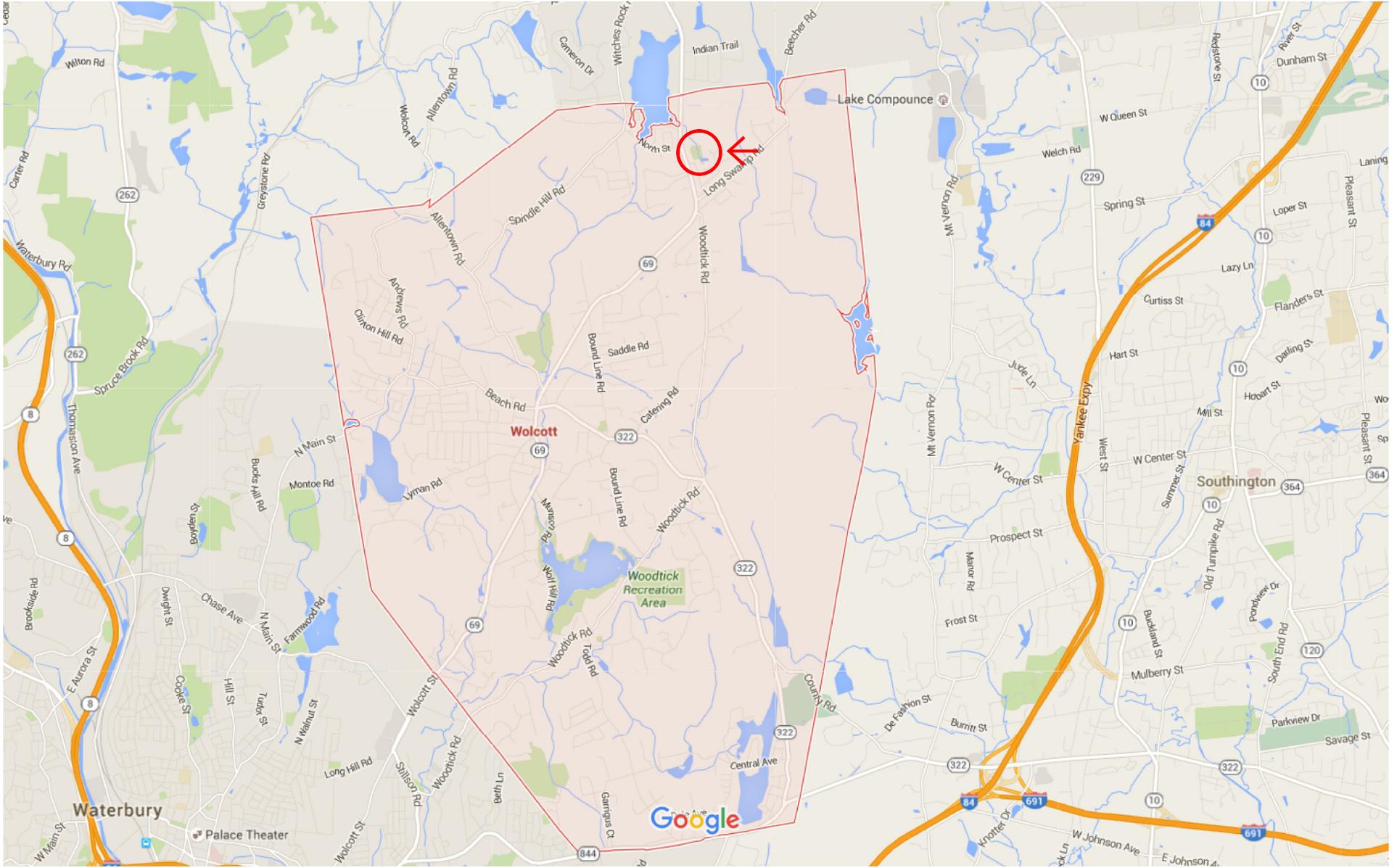
- Given that the pond is spring-fed and will remain fairly wet even if there is no significant water depth, what is the likely course of change? Would it simply become a shallower swamp? Eventually become woodlands?
- Are there any benefits, from an ecological perspective, to taking no action at all and allowing the pond to continue in its current trend?

Dredging or Dam Removal

The most heavy-handed possibilities for the future of Russell Pond lay at opposite ends of the management spectrum: either a dredging of the pond to forcefully restore depth and open water, or 2) dam removal that would drain the impounded water altogether and restore the pond to an arguably more natural, spring-fed wetland.

Both of these plans come with various challenges, but the greatest difficulty lies in the fact that WLCT owns only half of the pond. Such extreme management decisions would likely require lengthy negotiation with the private landowner who possesses the eastern end of the pond; an agreeable outcome is not guaranteed and it is unclear if a management plan could be worked out between WLCT and a private landowner.

For that reason, among others, these options are not currently being considered.





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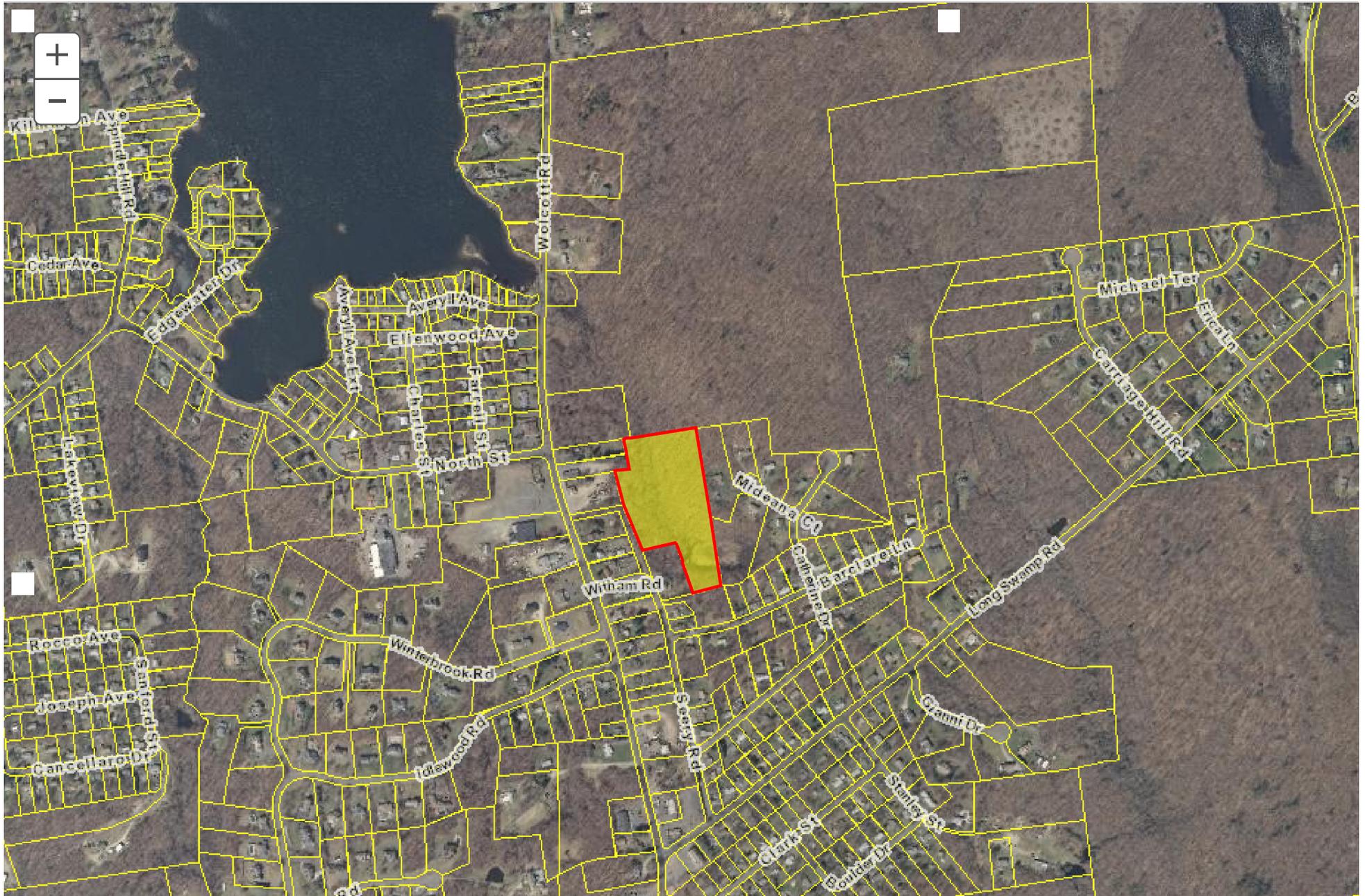
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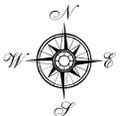
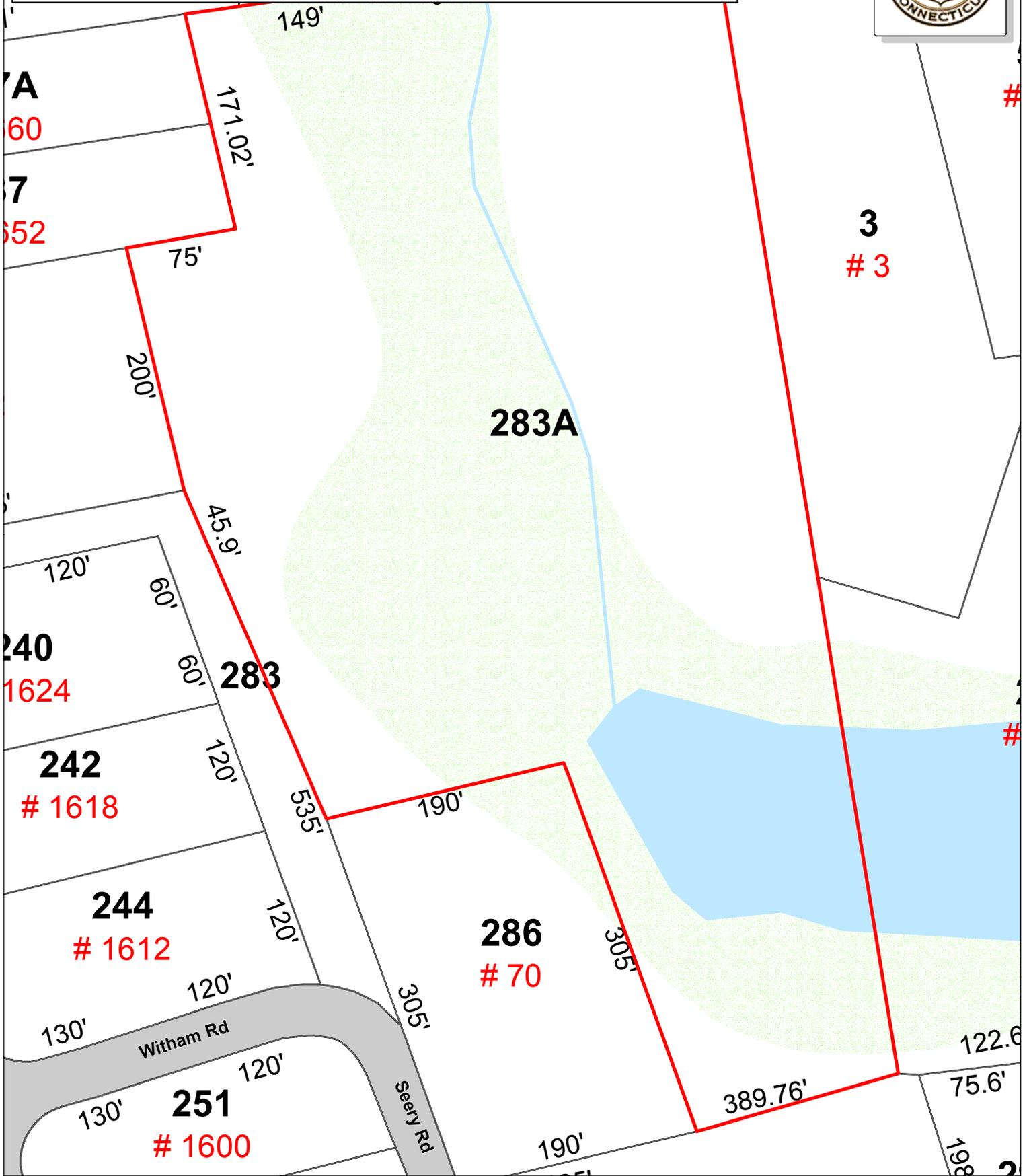
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Town of Wolcott, Connecticut - Assessment Parcel Map

Parcel: R0485800

Address: SEERY RD



Approximate Scale: 1 inch = 100 feet

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Map Produced August 2015



50 feet

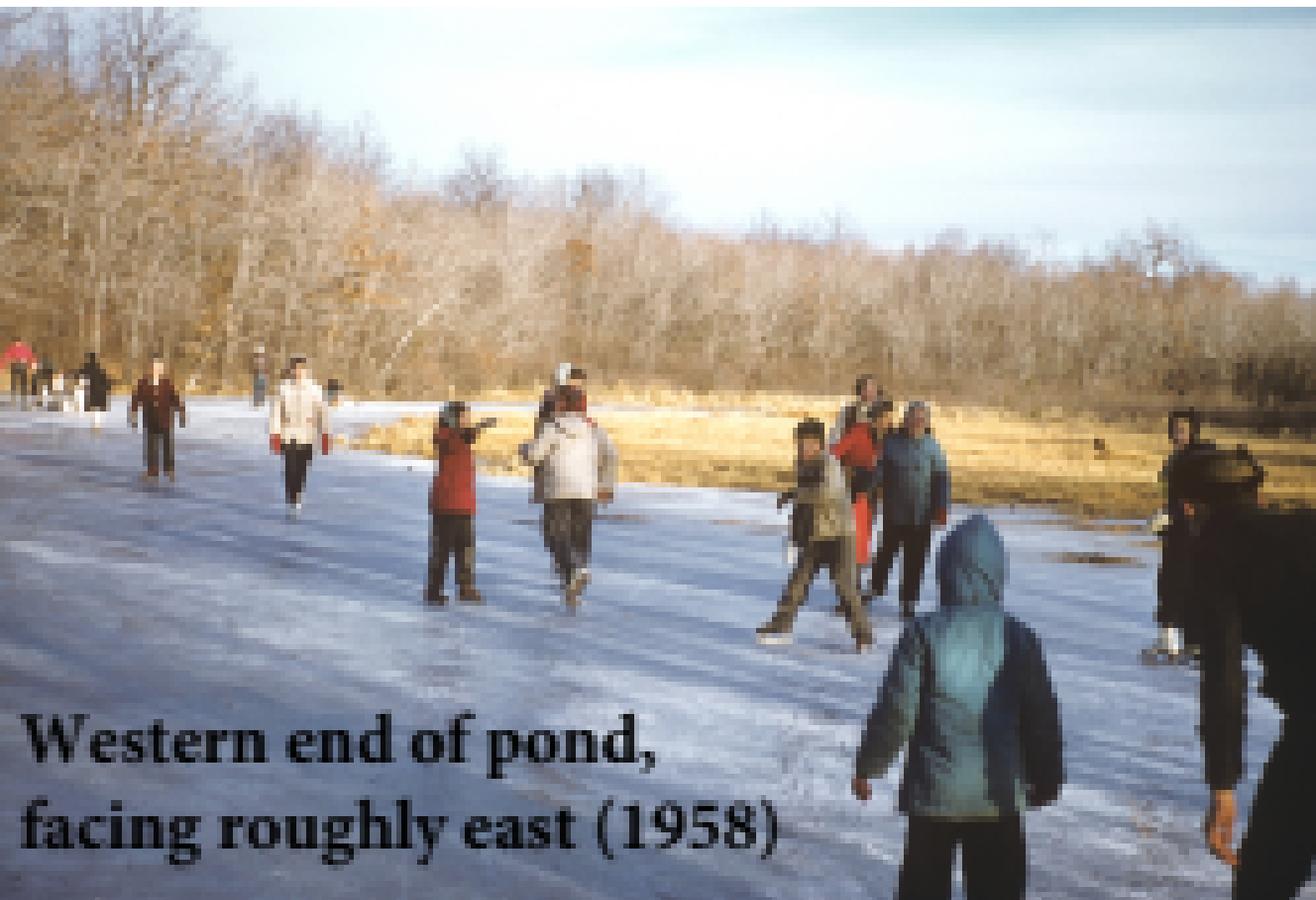
20 m



From western end of pond, facing east (July 2015)



From southwestern corner of pond, facing roughly north-northeast (1995)



**Western end of pond,
facing roughly east (1958)**