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Kennedy, Kerry and Meehan Weigh In: Middlesex School Should Preserve Estabrook Woods

Concord, Massachusetts, July 16—An impressive list of federal, state, and local government officials and prominent environmental groups weighed in this week on a controversial development project undertaken by Middlesex School, a private high school in Concord, Massachusetts. Members of the Massachusetts Delegation wrote unequivocal letters addressed to the Middlesex Board of Trustees urging them to preserve the Estabrook Woods' as an important state resource.

Senator Edward Kennedy, Senator John Kerry, and Congressman Martin Meehan stated that the Estabrook Woods “are part of the environmental and historical legacy that is of great significance to the Concord community and our state heritage. The Massachusetts Executive Office of Environmental Affairs designated Estabrook Woods as both a Forest Legacy Area and a Core Habitat, deemed necessary for the protection of endangered and rare species.”

State Senator Susan Fargo, State Senator Pam Resor, and State Representative Cory Atkins also argued in a joint letter of support for preservation, “there is educational and ecological value in Estabrook Woods and we believe that value outweighs the benefits of new athletic facilities.”

Leading environmental organizations also urged Middlesex to reconsider its construction plans. The Massachusetts Environmental League called the project “truly shortsighted.” Kathi Anderson, Executive Director of The Walden Woods Project, called on the Board of Trustees “to demonstrate leadership, vision, and stewardship for an area that has an extraordinary history and abounds with recreational and educational opportunities.”

Middlesex's development plans have been the subject of contentious debate since their inception in 1992, as they involve the clearing of significant acreage in the historic Estabrook Woods to make way for tennis courts, soccer fields, and a large bridge. Opponents of the development, including students, alumni, faculty, and Concord residents, argue that the Estabrook Woods are an invaluable educational resource for Middlesex, rich in historical and ecological value.

The complete list of supporters for the preservation of the Estabrook Woods included the following government officials and environmental organizations:

US Senator John Kerry
US Senator Edward Kennedy
US Congressman Martin Meehan
State Senator Susan Fargo
State Senator Pam Resor
State Representative Cory Atkins
Massachusetts Audubon Society

The Sierra Club, Massachusetts Chapter
Massachusetts Environmental League
The Walden Woods Project
The Wilderness Society
Appalachian Mountain Club
Clean Water Action
Sudbury Valley Trustees

Copies of letters from the supporters are available upon request.

The Unique Values of Estabrook Woods

- The Estabrook Woods have been designated a Forest Legacy Area by Congress, rich in rare and endangered species and archaeological and historical resources, and by the Massachusetts Office of Environmental Affairs as a Core Habitat, necessary for the preservation of biodiversity.
- The Estabrook Woods contain early American artifacts, including visible Colonial corn hills, and the path down which local minutemen marched on their way to instigate the American Revolution. Henry David Thoreau wrote over 160 journal entries comprised of more than 50,000 words about the Estabrook Woods.
- Harvard maintains the field station for its Museum of Comparative Zoology and Department of Organismic and Evolutionary Biology in Estabrook, but Middlesex recently refused a Middlesex alumni parent's offer of \$4.5 million to endow a joint chair in Environmental Science with Harvard.
- Monk Terry, the school's second headmaster, presided over Middlesex's acquisition of its Estabrook land in the 1960's. At the time, Middlesex and Harvard University, which owns an adjoining piece of the woods, conceived of an ecological study area that would be protected from development. Concord residents, eager to preserve their Estabrook parcels, ceded their land to the project for little or no compensation. The arrangement was formalized through a "gentleman's agreement." Later, in a May 1963 Alumni Bulletin, he wrote that "the School land abuts the largest piece of uninhabited property within seventy-five miles of Cambridge... Surely the grandsons of boys now in School will rejoice to live beside this quiet, protected area."

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