

Water Trails Between the Lakes

WATER TRAILS BETWEEN THE LAKES

by Tom Beaver (written in 2002)

In Sections 25 and 36 of Pequot Lakes (formerly Sibley Township) there are county and state lands to be explored. Old logging trails meander through these 500 acres of tax forfeited wetland marshes and hills. I have been hunting in this area for 40 years. Walking these trails (except in recently logged areas) gives you the feeling of complete wilderness while skirting the edges of Upper Cullen Lake, the Preserve Golf Course, and Wilderness Point Resort.

With the area being two-thirds wetland, you are limited to where you can hike, but the wetland vistas of heron rookeries, osprey nests, ducks and geese, and of course the resident beaver lodges perched above each of two massive quarter-mile beaver dams make it well worth your while. You can even traverse the beaver dams if you do so with care.

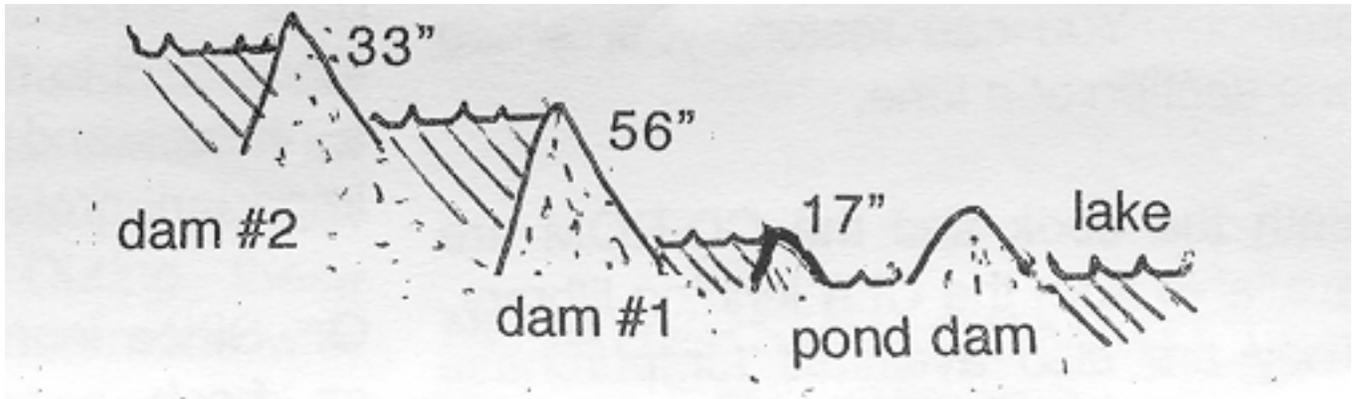
In the spring of 1999, the Cullen Lakes Association discussed establishing trails and signage with the County Land Commissioner, Tom Cowell. He gave us the OK to maintain two trails and develop a third, the highland trail running along a ridge in the south central part of the property. The county commissioners dedicated this property in December, 1999 as the Upper Cullen Memorial Forest, and the Land Department erected a handsome wooden sign at the trail's head.

If you walk the trails, you will see syphons and Clemson

levelers that have been installed in or over the beaver dams and the stream to Upper Cullen Lake to control the level of the backed up water. Upper Cullen's water is largely supplied by ground water and wetland fens. These fens give the beaver an opportunity to block the natural flow of water into the lake; all they need is an upland area nearby. With these conditions met, in kick their instinctive engineering skills and down go the trees, in goes the mud, and voila -- they have expanded their swimmable territory.

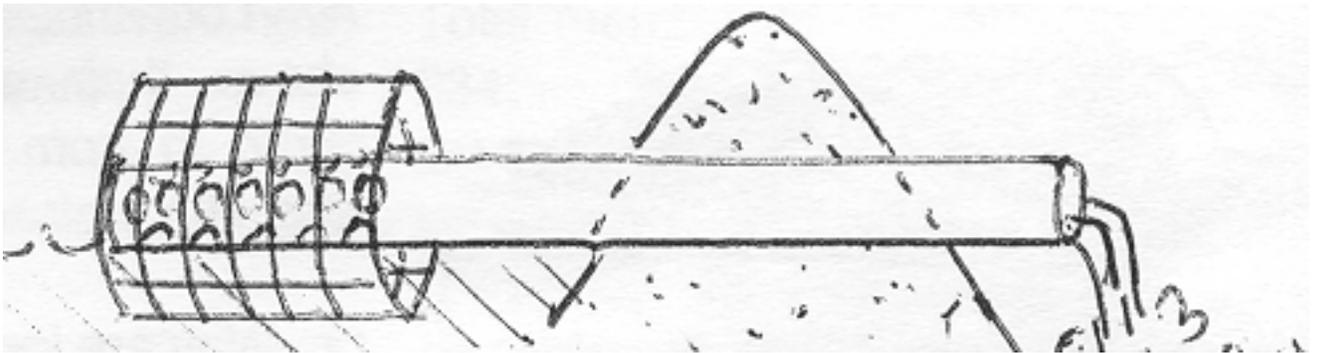
Now, beaver dams can clean water, but if they become too large or they are abandoned they can be devastating to a lake by overflowing or giving way altogether, creating a surge of nutrient-loading into the lake . Enter the county, CLA, the golf course, and the DNR. But guess who gets to do all the work? The county donated the main Clemson leveler; the DNR has given freely of its advice and hopefully will come through with some funds; the Preserve has donated funds; CLA is providing the muscle and time.

Forty-eight beaver were trapped professionally last winter to help manage a beaver population that had outgrown the Cullen forest and was traveling the three lakes' shorelines looking for lunch and new homesteads. In the drawing below you will see the layout of the dams and the challenge facing us.



There is a 9 foot drop in elevation from dam #2 to Upper Cullen Lake

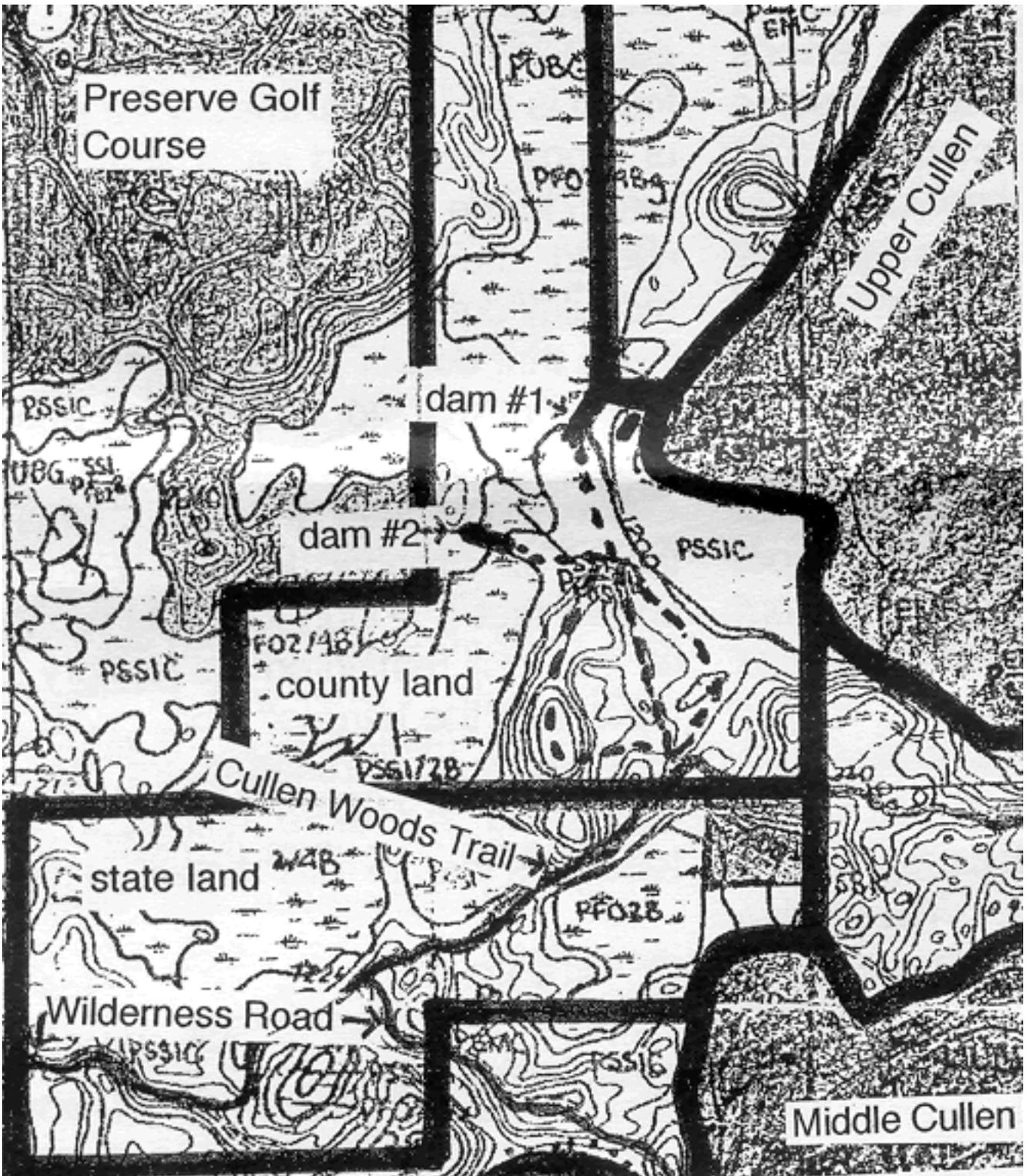
The cages on the intake end of the levelers and syphons were designed to keep the critters from blocking the culverts.



Sketch of a Clemson Leveler

Thanks to a much colder than average October, we are working in frigid waters to finish phase two before "ice up". Duck hunters are common in this area and soon deer hunters will be working these lands in earnest. So, if you decide to walk the Memorial Forest yet this fall, be sure to wear orange. It's also a good idea to have a walking stick to lean on. Another good time to walk the area is in early spring, before the ticks and skeeters set in.

To get there, take Wilderness Road east from 371 to Cullen Woods Trail (don't blink, you'll miss it!) which veers off to the left. For the next 1/2 mile you will be on a very narrow, sandy, rutted trail that will bring you to the yellow lettered Upper Cullen Memorial Forest sign. Park in the area just to the left of the road and hike in on the trail. It's a hike well worth the effort, and there's no need for your Master Card.



Preserve Golf Course

Upper Cullen

dam #1

dam #2

county land

Cullen Woods Trail

state land

Wilderness Road

Middle Cullen

