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Halcyon Island in Highland Lake, as seen from the shore. The Board of Selectmen is considering public input about posting signs on the island to encourage more respectful use of the town resource. Photo: Larry Chase

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Public Hearing Considers Signage for Halcyon Island

To encourage safe and respectful use

Vicky Mishcon, Board of Selectmen

The much-beloved Halcyon Island in Highland Lake, enjoyed by generations of families, as well as by newcomers and visitors, was the subject of a Public Hearing on July 6.

The following is a summary of the comments and concerns shared by members of the public who attended the hearing.

Halcyon Island is an approximately two-acre island on the eastern side of Highland Lake. The island was given to the Town of Andover in 1934 by Naham Bachelder for the purpose of recreation for the townspeople of Andover.

Concern about the use of the island has been voiced over the years, as certain problems come up. There have been campfires that have burned out of control, eggs from the loons nesting on the island have been abandoned due to too much disturbance, or eaten by dogs allowed to roam on the island. There have been large numbers of people camping overnight on the island, which brings up concerns of human waste and trash.

Overall, however, most people have been respectful and conscientious when visiting the island.

Discussion about the type of signage needed on the island ensued. Some people thought overnight camping should be allowed, others thought camping should be allowed by permit only, while still others opined that overnight camping is too harmful to the small island environment.

There was similar discussion about the use of open campfires. Several people remember enjoying campfires and family picnics, while others reported

having to help put out fires that had gotten out of control.

A member of the Andover Fire Department noted that the Fire Department has purchased boats and other equipment used in water rescue, which provides a measure of safety to those using the island.

There was consensus that some signage is needed to promote safe and respectful use of the island and that the signage should be short and simple. An example that was suggested was: No open fires; no overnight camping; carry in, carry out.

A more comprehensive sign that was suggested was: Halcyon Island, gifted to the town in 1934; respect wildlife; respect the loons; no fires or fireworks; leave no trace; no camping; no dogs. The "no dogs" was in concern for the safety of the nesting loons and to eliminate dog waste.

There have been previous signs posted on the island by past Boards of Selectmen, but they have disappeared over the years. The current Board of Selectmen will take all of these comments into consideration, as well as signage used by other towns.

Many thanks to all those members of the public who took time to attend the hearing, thereby giving the Board some guidance in their decision making.

We would like to thank the Highland Lake Association for their care of and attention to the island over the past years, and especially Earle Davis, who regularly does a clean-up several times a year. Special thanks to Donna Baker-Hartwell, who has worked to keep the lake's nesting loon pairs as safe as possible from human disturbance so that their presence on the lake can be enjoyed year after year.

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