

November 18, 2009  
By Larry Mead, Town Manager, Kennebunkport

And the sign said.....Private Beach

Usually October is a month that Kennebunkport residents look forward to with anticipation. Summer visitors have left, the pace slows markedly and there are still warm days to enjoy. For many of us, an October walk on the beach under bright autumn sunshine can't be beat. However, the past two Octobers have not been kind to the interests of community in Goose Rocks Beach. This past October was marked by the filing of a lawsuit against the Town by 23 beachfront property owners asserting the right to completely control who may and who may not use 93% of the beach from Sand Point to Batson's River. A year ago in October, a property owner took the step of posting a sign along Kings Highway across from Bellewood Avenue proclaiming, among other things, "Private Beach".

Signs are not unprecedented at Goose Rocks Beach. The Town has posted signs at beach entrances providing information to people about dogs, swimming advisories and the absence of lifeguards. Some of the pathways to the beach have been posted as reserved access ways not open to the public. Some beachfront owners have posted their property above the seawall as private, or posted people to keep off of the seawalls. Not all signs are objectionable. This sign, however, was.

Words have meaning. The placing of the sign was significant in that it represented a marked departure from past custom and behavior at Goose Rocks. For the first time in the memory of longtime Goose Rocks residents, a property owner had posted a sign with the claim "Private Beach". Such an unprecedented step was un-neighborly at best and provocative at worst. I contacted the property owners who erected the sign and asked them to reconsider their decision to post a private beach sign, contrary to the long standing tradition and practice at Goose Rocks of undesignated stretches of beach being open and available to general public use. They declined. I wrote them a letter stating the Town's reservations and concerns. (See letter dated October 31, 2008)

Neighborhood tradition has incalculable value. The Town seeks to uphold and preserve the tradition of Goose Rocks serving as a haven for families who come back for generations and as a welcoming summer get-a-way for visitors. However, putting up "Private Beach" notices is not a Goose Rocks welcome.