

# Districts will tend vet graves

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Mike Rogers, Superintendent of the Kittery Water District, left, and Don Neumann, Superintendent of the York Water District are working together to maintain small family burial plots and veterans gravesites in the heavily wooded area off Kingsbury Lane. (Rich Beauchesne photo)

YORK — After learning the disrepair of outlying veterans' graves was a concern in town, a decision by the York and Kittery water districts to take care of the cemeteries on their land was a "no brainer," according to York Water District Superintendent Don Neumann.

"As land owners, we feel responsible," Neumann said on a drive to one such gravesite Monday, June 18.

The York and Kittery water districts own and conserve more than 3,000 acres of land in York, while allowing people access to miles of dirt trails. On the water districts' land exists an estimated dozen veterans graves, along with other family burial grounds.

An estimated eight veterans' graves are on Kittery Water District land in York, and another three or four fall on York

Water District property off Chases Pond Road and on Mount Agamenticus, according to Neumann.

On Monday, Resource Protection Manager Gary Stevens, who knows the water district trails as well as anyone, took a drive through the woods on a path off Fall Mill Road Extension. The dirt road goes past Boulter Pond, the Johnson and Adams family cemeteries, which are not known to hold the graves of veterans, and a couple of cellar holes for homes that were once likely in an area cleared for farming.

Stevens stopped at a third cemetery marked for the Leavitt family. It holds the remains of at least one veteran, Neumann said, though that veteran's name was not immediately known. Several stones mark graves, including that of a James Leavitt who was born in 1800 and died in 1879.

Large granite blocks border the cemetery. Trees and brush grow inside, though most of the stones are clearly visible.

Employees will clear brush and trees and maintain the grounds in their respective water districts, Neumann said, calling it the responsible thing to do. They will not attempt to repair broken stones as that would be cost prohibitive, he said.

"The hard work will be the first year," Neumann said. "The first year we'll set up the protocol, looking for guidance from the American Legion and VFW."

Said Kittery Water District Superintendent Mike Rogers, "We'll clear out the brush and dead trees."

Until the issue of veterans' graves was raised at a Board of Selectmen meeting May 21, cemetery maintenance was not part of water districts' work, as it wasn't directly related to water quality, according to Neumann.

At the May meeting, newly-elected selectman Ron Nowell said that under state law, York and other towns in Maine should maintain veterans' graves. York wasn't maintaining outlying burial sites, he said.

After the selectmen's meeting, the two water district superintendents met with their respective boards of trustees, which were both very supportive of maintenance measures, Neumann said.

York has an estimated 65 veterans' gravesites among the more than 200 outlying cemeteries in town.

On Monday, June 18, selectmen Chairman Mary Andrews volunteered Nowell to serve on a committee she is forming to have the town tackle the responsibility of maintaining the graves of its veterans, she said

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