NEWBURYPORT - For now, it's a water feature worthy of the Addams Family. The pond has become a weed-choked pool of greenish water, leaves, and jagged fallen tree limbs. On this sunny morning, only one small turtle and a single water lily remain as examples of the beauty that once was. Two dogs that drank from the pond last year are said to have sickened and died, although there was not definitive proof of that.

This is the Flowering Pond in Maudslay State Park, the former Moseley family estate. It was once a sand-bottomed gem that reflected the flowering azaleas and dogwoods that thrived on its banks. It marks an informal boundary between the gardens and groves to the west and the wilder, more natural lands in the eastern part of the park.

But now many of the plantings are in bad shape, and the pond has become a dank swamp that dismays many of the hikers, bikers, runners, and horseback riders who cross the arched stone bridge over the middle of the pond.

The Maudslay State Park Association, a volunteer group devoted to restoring and maintaining park facilities in a time of tight state budgets, wants to return it to its former glory.

“This could be just beautiful again someday, and that’s our plan,” said Marlys Edwards of Newburyport, treasurer of the association and chairwoman of its pond committee.

Association leaders go out of their way to say it’s not the fault of park staff, simply that the last six or eight years have not been kind to budgets in any state department. Lack of maintenance for a year or two can snowball into a real mess.

Looking out from the middle of the bridge, Edwards said: “There’s not much you have to say when people see it. It’s loud and clear that there’s a problem that needs to be addressed.”

Phase one, association leaders say, is having dead trees in and around the pond taken down or pulled out of the water. Then the pond must be drained and dredged. The bridge, spillway, and outlet systems need to be repaired. And finally, the original plantings must be restored. And all of this must be done while meeting guidelines for state property, historic sites, and wetlands.

It’s a daunting task, especially in these tough financial times. The association estimates the total cost in the low to mid-six figures. The dredging alone is expected to cost at least $100,000, they said. And it’s not clear what the state can do and what will have to be privately funded.

The pond apparently hasn’t been drained in 40 years, said association president Terry Berns of Newburyport. The mechanism for doing so may no longer work, and the group is thinking of asking for firetrucks to help drain the pond.

Last week, the group toured the pond with Commissioner Edward M. Lambert Jr. of the Mass. Department of Conservation and Recreation and staffers from local legislative offices.

“I can appreciate what that pond once looked like and what it meant in terms of its beauty,” Lambert said in a phone interview afterward. “It certainly has the potential to be a very special place.”

Given the fiscal times we live in, Lambert said, his department has a lot of deferred maintenance projects on its list. That means moving one step at a time as resources become available. Already the department has scheduled crews to remove some of the dead trees in and around the pond, which should be happening in the next few weeks, he said.

The work might have been started already, but the crews were called away for the cleanup after the tornadoes hit Western Massachusetts earlier this summer, both sides said.

The department also hopes to get permits for some partial dredging to get
a better idea of how much of the pond’s problems are caused by sedimentation, to help “get a better handle on what the final project cost will be,” Lambert said.

“It’s certainly helpful to have a friends group ... that participates themselves, both directly and indirectly, in terms of financial support and fund-raising as well as advocacy,” Lambert said.

Lambert “seemed very positive to us about getting the situation at the pond taken care of,” said Berns.

“It’s just finding the money,” said Edwards.

The association’s previous projects in the park include the 2005-2007 restoration of a large shed that had fallen into disrepair. The group raised half the cost of the $55,000 project, with the rest matched by the state. The building, one of few survivors among 30 that once dotted the nearly 500-acre park, is now used as a gathering place for various park programs, and has a wood-burning stove that warms cross-country skiers in the winter.

The association raises money through dues, donations, and an adopt-an-acre program. Other projects have included restoration of iron gates at the main drive, and a fountain and irrigation system in the formal gardens.

Donations can be sent to the Maudslay State Park Association at 74 Curzon Mill Road, Newburyport, MA 01950. For more information, e-mail marlysedwards1@gmail.com. Joel Brown can be reached at jbnbpt@gmail.com.