

## NORWELL CONSERVATION COMMISSION – 2016 - ANNUAL REPORT



Our 2016 report is dedicated to the memory of Mark Mederos, who passed away in November. He gave boundless energy and enthusiasm to promoting Conservation lands and trails. His vision was to restore and maintain the woodland trails so they would be welcoming, user friendly and accessible for families, pairs of walkers, strollers, dog walkers and allow all visitors to enjoy the woods and scenic waterways safely and comfortably. His love of the outdoors and membership and leadership of the trail program from 2012-2016 can be seen simply by walking any of the many trails on Norwell Conservation Lands. In addition to trail management Mark also led the spring and

fall trail walks from their start in 2012 through 2016. His love of Norwell's history, especially that involving the North River and ship building, was shared and appreciated by the many residents and guests who have joined us over the years. The Commission will miss his contributions, presence and energy greatly. His family plans to dedicate benches along some of Marks favorite Conservation trails as a memorial and testament to his many contributions. We look forward to supporting and facilitating that effort and to knowing the residents will enjoy the views and trails that Mark loved so much.



**The Conservation Commission is responsible for the protection and management of Norwell's Conservation land and for the regulatory administration of the Massachusetts Wetlands Protection Act and Norwell Wetland Bylaw.**

**The Conservation Commission serves these primary purposes:**

1. To administer and enforce the state Wetland Protection Act and the Norwell Wetland Bylaw.

*Protect the water you drink, and the natural resources around you!*

2. To manage:

1969	Acres	Total Land Under Conservation Care		Jacobs Woods-1950 Stetson Meadows -1971	Donovan Farm / Wildcat - 1997 -
15		Boardwalks, Bridges, Docks and View Decks		Fogg Forest – 1972 Valley Swamp – 1973	Betzold and Asinippi parcels - 1999/2001
21+	Miles	Public Trails		Hatch Wood Lots – 1977	Cuffee Lane - 2012
10	Fields	Active Farming		Cuffee Hill - 1982	Simon Hill- 2013
11	Conservation Restrictions	Monitored		Miller Woods - 1983	Masthead – 2013 AND OTHERS!
9831	Feet	Scenic Stone Walls		Jacobs Farm - 1989	<b>FUTURE - TBD – BY YOU!</b>

3. To conduct outreach and education regarding the town's natural resources and environmental issues.

## **2017 Goals and Challenges -**

### ***1. Increase utilization of Norwell's Town properties for its residents.***

The residents of Norwell have continued to invest in open space in order to preserve the beauty and environmental quality of the town. This dedication by the voters comes with a responsibility to protect essential environmental communities while also allowing responsible recreational access to these lands by the taxpayers who have purchased them. The Commission along with volunteers, staff, and the Open Space Implementation Committee, pledges to work cooperatively with all Town departments in order to provide safe community access to green space. This will be in balance with protection of the environment as identified in Goal 1 of the Norwell Open Space Plan #'s 2, 10, 13 and 14. To view the 2012-2019 Norwell Open Space Plan, please see the attached link.

<http://www.townofnorwell.net/sites/norwellma/files/uploads/norwellopen spacerecreationplan2012-2019.pdf>

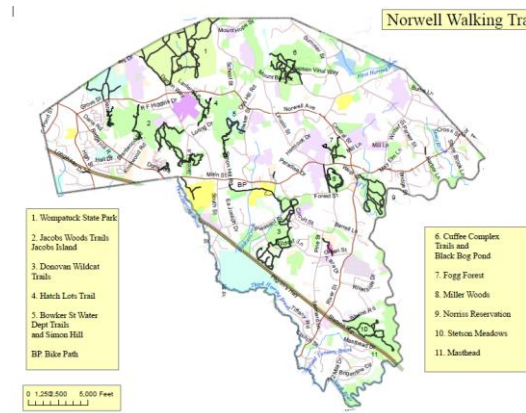
Clean water, clean air and a healthy environment are values we are all charged with protecting and preserving. Residents are provided the opportunity to hike, bike, camp, fish, and enjoy the natural areas they have protected, all minutes from home. Preserving open space also protects watersheds, improves the water quality of rivers, lakes and streams, protects drinking water and air quality, helps control flooding and preserves critical wildlife habitat.

*“Communities that conserve land make an investment in future economic development. Companies frequently relocate where their top talent wants to live, and that is most often in places of natural beauty. Frederick Law Olmsted first demonstrated this principle in the late 1800's when he documented that Central Park caused \$5.4 million in additional annual tax revenues, quickly repaying the \$14 million cost of the park.*

*(Excerpt from Rand Wentworth, President, Land Trust Alliance, Spring, 2003)*

### ***2. Streamline trail maintenance and improve access to our conserved lands.***

Maintenance and repairs on the Town's many miles of conservation trails continue to be managed through the use of the recently purchased utility access vehicle. We will work to involve all neighborhoods within each open space trail system. Over the past three years, the Commission, staff and volunteers have worked diligently to improve trail conditions so that families, walkers, bikers, and skiers can have access to the many Conservation-managed lands in town. We plan to continue enhancing and maintaining the parking areas, trail width, boardwalks and bridges within each park, while still maintaining the small path charm of the overall trail systems. OS&R Plan, Goal 1, #'s 17, 19-22, Goal 3 #53, 54.



### ***3. Continue coordination with Norwell Highway and Tree and Grounds.***

The Commission appreciates the time and effort that the Norwell Highway and Tree and Grounds crews have made to Jacobs Dam, Jacobs Parking Area, Donovan Parking Area and to many other scenic conservation areas throughout town. The parking areas are designed to be picnic destinations as well as access to the many trail networks. We look forward to continuing this effort.

4. *Apply for more grants. (save the town money by utilizing other fundraising avenues)*

There are significant quantities of grant money available to communities. The Commission Chair and staff will work to maximize efficiency and achievements by initiating a program to find creative project funding and support services through multiple sources. One goal is to create a grant writing committee utilizing the knowledge, resources and skills of staff and volunteers.

The Commission is actively involved in land acquisition with regional partners and is applying for grants to continue to create conservation areas that provide access and use for all abilities.

Additionally, grant funding is being sought to create a parking and trail head access to the 500 acres of Wompatuck trails in Norwell via the newly acquired Bennett parcel on Grove Street. Goal 3 #43-45 and 4 #76.

5. *Continue the Adopt-A-Trail Program.* Please help us keep the trails maintained and open for all residents to enjoy by volunteering to help monitor and report on trail conditions. You may already be walking trails weekly and can participate simply by downloading the link and form. Your feedback is essential to allowing our amazing trail team to streamline the program, making sure we target problems and issues as quickly as possible. We will be hosting an Open House and 2017 Volunteer Monitor Kick-Off in May to continue this volunteer program. You can also come into the Commission office and sign-up today! Contact us for more information.
6. *Improve the permitting process by improving communications and collaboration with other departments.* The Commission staff has increased coordination with other regulatory departments and is in the process of developing housekeeping articles to create consistent regulatory requirements with other Town Boards and Committees
7. *Improve clarity of regulations and documents in an easier to understand format for residents.* The Commission initiated a review of the regulatory process and regulations and will continue that effort to develop concise guidance as to the necessary level of permitting required and proper way to attain such permits. The Norwell Wetland Bylaw regulations are in process of being reviewed for clarity and effectiveness and will be amended as needed to better protect both the environment and the needs of the residents.
8. *Implement community outreach and education programs.* The Commission will continue to develop the education and outreach goals identified in the Norwell Open Space Plan (community and recreation needs sections). We have had great success in prior years with the trail-walking program, which will continue (on Thursdays, during spring and fall) in coordination with the Recreation Department. We will work to expand our outreach and education programs to include seasonal, outdoor, family- oriented nature programs (at Jacobs, Fogg and Stetson trail areas). Our goal is to facilitate family-friendly outings to the many Conservation-managed, passive recreational areas in Norwell. OSR Goal 3#42.
9. *The Commission continues to support the environmental education programs* at all the Norwell Schools. We look forward to continuing to help and promote conservation related School programs.
10. *Continue hunting and promoting year round multi-purpose use of Norwell's Open Spaces.* The Commission manages over 1200 acres of land available to hunters during State authorized seasons. The Commission does not require any permits or impose regulations beyond State Hunting requirements. A map is available in the Conservation and Town Clerk Offices showing where these areas are. The Commission appreciates the willingness of the majority of hunters to help preserve the rights of families with children and dogs to feel safe while enjoying the active conservation trails during hunting season by taking advantage of the significant acreage dedicated to hunters, away from

the trails. The Commission is committed to preserving and encouraging year-round outdoor recreation for all residents in a safe and mutually respectful manner.

### **Regulatory Responsibilities**

The major task of the Commission is to regulate conditions for any work falling within rivers, streams, wetlands, or buffers to these areas. Anyone seeking to work within 100 feet of a wetland, vernal pool or pond (the buffer zone), within 200 feet of a river or stream (the Riverfront Resource Area), or in any area that may cause additional runoff into a wetland, river, or stream must obtain prior approval of the Commission. The Commission has varying levels of permitting to accomplish this.

- The Notice of Intent is for larger projects that occur close to or near wetland resources or have a high probability of having a direct or long term impact on those resources. – Orders of Conditions are issued that either permit with conditions, or deny the project. (ex: dam removal, new home construction, subdivisions, work within the highly sensitive 50-foot buffer). *The Commission reviewed 23 projects in 2016 and issued 18 new Orders of Conditions for Notices of Intent and Resource Delineations.* The other 5 were for major modifications to previously permitted projects.
- The Commission monitors and works to ensure site stormwater and soils are controlled on 5 major subdivision projects. In 2016 we completed 2 delineations and started reviewing 3 new resource area delineations. We anticipate 5 new subdivision filings within the next year or two.
- A Request for Determination is used for smaller projects, projects in the outer buffer zone, or projects with minimal likelihood of adversely impacting wetland resource areas. A Determination of Applicability is issued either allowing the project or requiring a filing of a Notice of Intent if the project is more involved. (ex: Simple septic repair or pool installation within a yard, and outside the 50-foot buffer). *The Commission reviewed and issued 37 Determinations in 2016.*
- An Administrative Letter Permit is used for projects within the buffer, which are either so minor that there is no chance of adverse impact or for which the physical layout of the project makes it nearly impossible to have an adverse impact on resources. No public hearing or filing fee is required for this permit level (ex: Projects with all construction activities 90 feet or more from the closest resource, minor deck repairs or replacement without a foundation, conversion of deck to enclosed area without foundation, work physically separated from the resource by a berm, or other existing feature, or hazardous tree removal near wetlands). *The Commission office issued 17 letter permits in 2016.*
- Interdepartmental Sign-offs for projects close to or just touching the buffer zone or for which there is no chance of adverse impact to wetland resources (ex: decks on the opposite side of the home from wetlands and more than 90 feet from the wetland, or hazardous tree removal in buffer areas). *The Commission office issued 147 sign offs in 2016.*
- Certificates of Compliance are issued when a project is shown to have been completed in a manner that protects nearby resource areas and is consistent with the permit issued. *The Commission office issued xx Certificates of Compliance for completion of projects.*

Please be safe and ask Conservation Staff if you have any questions or just want information regarding your property and nearby resources or Conservation Lands. We are here to answer any questions.

### **Conservation Commission Members and Staff**

The Conservation Commission is comprised of seven residents who serve three-year terms and are appointed by the Board of Selectmen. Bob McMackin and Justin Ivas joined the Commission in 2016. Bob brings project management, grant writing and Justin brings wetland science and GIS experience to the Commission. We are grateful to have them join us. Lori Hillstrand resigned in 2016, she had facilitated and acted as the liaison for the farming programs and vernal pool program and will be greatly missed. Marynel Wahl continues as the Commission's Chairperson and Bob Woodill as the Vice-Chairperson.

The Commission appreciates the dedication of Administrative Assistant Meredith Schmid who makes certain that both Conservation and Planning run smoothly and effectively. In spite of short staffing the last quarter of 2016 and steep workloads she is always there to greet and assist residents, contractors and call-ins and make sure they find the information they are looking for. This continual effort and commitment gives our program a successful foundation. We also thank CoA volunteer Margaret Dixon and AmeriCorps Volunteer Anthony Serra for coordinating the 2016 Conservation Day program. Thank you to recording clerks Ellen McKenna and Chris Sullivan and Jeanne Cianciola, part-time clerk who resigned in 2016.

### **2017 Accomplishments and Projects**

Major projects with conservation oversight completed in 2016 include:

*Farming* - The Commission continues to manage and sponsor active farming on the six Jacobs Farm Fields, the 2 Donovan Farm Fields, Barstow Field and the Main Street Field. We gratefully acknowledge the dedication of the farmers in helping preserve this cultural heritage, Whitaker Horse Farm, Hornstra Dairy Farm, and Norwell Farms Community Sponsored Agriculture Farm as well as Beekeeper Luke Lambert.

*Regulatory Projects included* - Forest Street Pathway extension was completed and the River St. Pathway Phase III permitting is underway. Norwell added three new certified Vernal Pools through the permitting process to the protection list. Thanks to environmentally proactive landowners and Notre Dame Academy Science Students for making this successful.

*Open Space and Recreation Plan Implementation* continues to seek volunteers to support Town Wide Open Space goals. Please stop into the office or call if you have time to help.

*Trail Management* - The Commission continues to maintain and manage many miles of trails within Norwell. The Commission has a highly efficient cost effective trail maintenance program thanks to our Senior Trail Crew and Volunteer Programs.

*Organized Trail Walks* are sponsored jointly with the Recreation Department each spring and fall and have been a successful way of introducing residents and guests to the many miles of conservation trails available in Norwell.

*Installation of Bridges, Boardwalks, and Benches and Parking Improvements* - The Commission started a program to replace and repair many boardwalks throughout the town trail system. The Commission focused on Parking Lot improvements and access in 2016. We will work to continue repairing and replacing parking areas, boardwalks and bridges throughout 2017.

*Trail Information Kiosks* - Trail maps and information signage are being finalized and installed in the kiosks and trail boards.

*Education and Outreach* - An educational program continues on the 4<sup>th</sup> Thursday of each month (spring and fall) focused on environmental educational topics. We will continue this project through 2017 and encourage public participation.

*Jacobs Pond Family Conservation Day* was held in June for the first time. Many activities including free kayak trips through Jacobs Pond, trail walks, hands on pond ecology, painting by the pond, geocaching and others were enjoyed by our visitors. We look forward to hosting this program again in 2017.

*The first Annual Climate Change Symposium* was held in Norwell in early December. The effects and impacts of climate change are widespread and will continue influence rainfall levels, stormwater impacts, and wetland resources. This program is expected to continue and Norwell Conservation looks forward to continuing as a sponsoring member.

Chittenden Landing - The Chittenden Landing deck was completed and is used extensively. Please stop by and take a look, sit down and enjoy the expansive beautiful view of the river. OSR Plan Goal1#26.

The Senior Trails Crew worked throughout the year clearing debris from and widening trails, developing dock plans, investigating and implementing stream crossing plans, repairing boardwalks, removing down trees, maintaining parking areas, helping lead trail walks, and welcoming visitors to the town trails. All of these important tasks are instrumental in keeping the town's open space lands accessible and open to the public. The Conservation Commission gratefully acknowledges the work of our Senior Trail Crew – Al Svelnis, Dave Hill, Dave Merrifield, Edward Cox, John Suurhans, Mark Mederos, Ralph Knowles and Steve Young. Their dedication to the Conservation Lands and Trails in Norwell is much appreciated.

Adopt-A-Trail Volunteers are new in 2016. We appreciate the many trail monitoring trips and reports they have contributed which allow our Trail Crew to more effectively resolve problems and manage the extensive trail system. Thank you to – Jill O'Laughlin, Keren and Bob Fortier, Tom Graefe, George Atkinson, Stephen Peden, Connie Stone, the Church Hillers, Terry Haskins, Brendan Sullivan, Jeff Volpe, Todd MacNeil, Monica Slaak, Stephen Fitzpatrick, Ray and Dianne Crook, Shana Hallman and family, Michael Hines, Laura and Jim Campbell, Dan McBride, Sue and Andy Jonasson, and Marynel, Madison, Miranda, and Missy Halatsis.

The Commission thanks George Grey, Judy Volpe and the Norwell Trail Walkers Club for their dedication to promoting active enjoyment of the Town's trail system and open spaces.

To better understand the resources on or near your property, please feel free to contact the Conservation Agent, Nancy Hemingway. She offers personalized assistance with permitting issues, environmental concerns, or simply creating a unique GIS map for your property. Assistance is also available regarding information on public lands or trails. Anyone contemplating work in or within 100 feet of a wetland, or within 200 feet of a stream, which flows continuously throughout the year, is encouraged to contact the agent for information about the Wetlands Protection Act and local wetland bylaw at the Commission's office in the Town Hall during normal business hours.

A reminder that we are always looking for volunteers. Please stop by the Conservation Office or call (781-659-8022) if you are able to help.

2016 Conservation Commission Members - Appointed by the Board of Selectmen

Marynel Wahl – Chair,  
Robert Woodill – Vice Chair,  
Bob McMackin,  
David Osborne,  
Justin Ivas,  
Ron Mott,  
Stacy Minihane,

Respectfully submitted by Nancy Hemingway – Conservation Agent