

## **NORWELL CONSERVATION COMMISSION - 2021 - ANNUAL REPORT**

The Conservation Commission is responsible for the stewardship of Norwell's Conservation land through the acquisition of land, maintenance, improvements to the properties, protection and conservation of the land's natural resources, and implementation of passive recreation. The Commission is also responsible for the regulatory administration and enforcement of the Massachusetts Wetlands Protection Act, the Norwell Wetland Bylaw, and the Norwell Stormwater Bylaw.

The Commission protects and manages:

- 1900+ acres of land, including 15 actively farmed fields
- 22+ miles of public trails, including boardwalks, bridges, docks, and view decks
- 12 monitored conservation restrictions
- 9831 feet of scenic stone walls

### **Conservation Lands - Years**

Jacobs Woods -1950	Stetson Meadows - 1971	Fogg Forest - 1972	Valley Swamp - 1973
Hatch Wood Lots - 1977	Cuffee Hill - 1982	Miller Woods - 1983	Jacobs Farm - 1989
Donovan Farm / Wildcat Property - 1997	Betzold Parcel (Jacobs) - 1999	Assinippi Parcel (Jacobs) - 2001	Cuffee Lane - 2012
Simon Hill/Bowker - 2013	Masthead - 2013	Bennett Property (Wompatuck) - 2015	Carleton Property - 2020
Tanczos Property (Donavan/Wildcat) - 2021	Raimondi Properties (Circuit and Pine St) - 2021		

### **2021 Accomplishments and Projects**

Wompatuck State Park - The access to Wompatuck State Park is officially open. The Commission and the Pathways Committee worked together to design and fund an ADA and AAB compliant parking lot and trail to access the Wompatuck trail system via the Bennett Property on Grove Street. The parking lot and trail were opened to the public just after Christmas. Final landscaping is to be completed in spring 2022, followed by an official opening with Friends of Wompatuck and the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR).

Mass Trails Grant for Carleton - The Commission was awarded a grant to start the first phase of creating accessible woodland trails connecting the Trout Brook Property, Carleton Property, Fogg Forest and Miller Woods. The grant award was \$17,500 for the initial creation of trails and wetland crossings. The project's end goal is to create a connection of 15 miles of accessible trails, connecting these remote properties to the Main Street Sidewalk and The Pathway, allowing everyone to enjoy the beauty of the Carleton Property. The Commission is applying again this year to Mass Trails for a more significant grant and CPC funds for phase two of the project.

Stormwater Regulations - The Commission adopted & implemented the Stormwater Rules & Regulations under the Town Stormwater Bylaw that Town Meeting approved in 2020. The Commission started reviewing the project on July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2021 and will continue to work with all Departments this year to ensure any possible stormwater issues related to any project are reviewed.

Wetland Bylaw Fees - The Commission adopted new fees for the regulatory work of reviewing permits under the Town Wetland Bylaw. The fees had not been updated in over a decade and were raised for inflation. Over the first 6 months of the fiscal year, the Commission brought in the same revenue as the last full fiscal year.

*Stony Brook Property* - The Commission demolished the abandoned cottage that was located on the Stony Brook Property, which was a persistent hazard. As part of the project, a bench was placed on the edge of the salt marsh, facing a newly installed osprey nest, located further out in the marsh by the North River.

*Farming* - The Commission continues to manage and sponsor active farming on the six Jacobs Farm Fields, the Donovan Farm, the two Barstow Fields, the Main Street Field, the Stetson Field, and the four Whiting Fields on the Carleton Property. We gratefully acknowledge the dedication of Hornstra Dairy Farm, Cross Street Flower Farm, Beekeeper Luke Lambert, and John Haskins in helping preserve this cultural heritage. The Commission would also like to welcome the new Farmers of Blue Stem Natives, who took over the Barstow Fields last year.

*Trail Management* - The Commission continues to maintain and manage many miles of trails in Norwell by clearing trail debris, repairing boardwalks, removing down trees, and maintaining parking areas. The Conservation Commission gratefully acknowledges the work of the Tree and Grounds staff and our Senior Trail Crew - Ron Mott, Steve McViney, Fred Zarack, and Richard Karacius. Their dedication to the Conservation Lands and trails in Norwell is much appreciated.

*Trail Information Kiosks* - 911 Markers were installed along all conservation trails in Town. In addition, a color-coded map is provided to Police and Fire in case of emergencies. When you see these signs, note that the color and letter indicate the property, while the number indicates the trail you are on. If in an emergency, tell emergency personnel the color, letter, and the number of the trail you are on to help them find your location on the property.

*Check before you work– (Conservation Safe)*

To better understand the resources on or near your property, do not hesitate to contact the Conservation Department. Norwell offers assistance with permitting, environmental concerns, creating a unique GIS map for your property, and information on public lands or trails. Please be safe and ask the Conservation Office if you have any questions or want information regarding your property, nearby resources, or Conservation Lands. We are happy to answer any questions. [wsaunders@townofnorwell.net](mailto:wsaunders@townofnorwell.net) or [mschmid@townofnorwell.net](mailto:mschmid@townofnorwell.net).

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

**2022 Goals and Challenges**

1. *Open Space Land Improvements* - The Commission promotes year-round multi-purpose use of Norwell's Open Spaces. We encourage residents to use the Adopt-A-Trail Program to help us keep the trails maintained and open for all residents to enjoy by volunteering to help monitor and report on trail conditions (<https://www.townofnorwell.net/conservation-commission/adopt-trail-program>). The Commission also continues to coordinate with and appreciates the time and effort of the Norwell Highway and Tree and Grounds crews in helping us maintain our lands.
2. *Jacobs Pond Dam* - The Commission updated the Emergency Action Plan for the dam in 2020 and had a state inspection done in 2021. The Commission is working closely with Norwell Highway Department and The North-South River Watershed Association to pay for and fund studies and engineered design plans for repairs to the dam and installation of a fish ladder. With these plans, we will apply for state funding and grants to complete the work. The work will keep the dam in compliance with the state requirements, and the addition of the fish ladder will allow Brook Trout and other native fish access to Jacobs Pond for the first time in centuries.

3. Whiting Fields at Carleton - The Commission is working to find new farmers to use the Whiting Fields at Carleton for 2023, once the current license expires. The Carleton Property was brought by Town to preserve the historical fields and maintain them as active agriculture. The Commission is reviewing Farm Use Plans from interested parties this year to receive a license to use the fields. The Commission is currently working with Tree and Ground to open up and reclaim the historic cow path and stone walls around the fields. The Commission plans to apply for CPC funding or grants to fund the rehabilitation of the fields.
4. Hazardous and Damaged Trees on Conservation Lands - The Commission always works closely with Norwell Highway Department and Trees and Grounds to remove and take care of hazardous trees on Conservation Lands. After Significant storms in 2018 and 2021, we continue to find and remove these hazards as we try to keep up with the increase in severe weather. If you notice a dangerous tree on Conservation Land, please call Conservation or Tree and Ground immediately.
5. Dedication of Memorial Garden to Nancy Hemingway - The Commission plans to dedicate a Memorial Garden in the name of our late Conservation Agent Nancy Hemingway in September for the second anniversary of her passing. The Commission has been working to turn the smaller Donovan Field into a native wildflower field in her honor and design a Breast Cancer Memorial Garden along the path. Donations are being accepted for this project by the Friends of Norwell Community Gardens.
6. Apply for More Grants - The Commission and staff work to maximize efficiency and achievements by seeking creative project funding and support services through multiple sources. The Commission will specifically be applying for another MassTrails grant this year for the Carleton trail system and working with the Norwell Highway department for state grants for repairs to the Jacobs Pond Dam. The Commission would welcome a team of volunteer residents to help monitor, identify, and draft grant applications.
7. Improve the Permitting Process by Improving Communications and Collaboration with Other Departments. We continue the focus on coordinating (inter-departmental) reviews, when possible, to reduce the burden on the applicant while still keeping the final projects consistent with all departments, individual boards, and commissions.
8. Implement Community Outreach and Education Programs - In 2022, we plan to collaborate with Regional non-profit educators such as North-South Rivers Watershed Association, the South Shore Natural Science Center, the Norwell Public Library, and the Norwell Public Schools (among others) in expanding our outreach and education programs to include additional seasonal, outdoor, family-oriented nature programs.

### **Conservation Responsibilities**

As one of the many required responsibilities of the Commission, we continue to improve and maintain the many Conservation properties, oversee the agricultural use of the historic farm fields, protect the Town's open space and natural resources, and promote passive recreation. The Conservation Agent and the Commission as a team diligently oversee your town resources.

Conservation land and other open space enhance the quality of life for residents and visitors in various ways. For example, it protects the flood control capabilities of wetlands, preserves water quality in streams and ponds, protects wildlife and plant habitat, forestalls problems of overly dense land development, and helps preserve the Town's historic character. Natural open space also provides opportunities for recreational and educational experiences. However, open space protection does not end at simply safeguarding the property from development. Protection is a continuing need involving maintenance, monitoring, and care.

Last year the Commission created new wetland and stream crossings in Fogg Forest and Miller Woods through Norwell Cares, made emergency repairs to the Cliff Prentiss Bridge at Jacobs Pond, cleared and maintained all trails both under normal maintenance, and after the October 2021 Nor'easter, conducted a state inspection of the Jacobs Pond Dam, welcomed new stewards of the Barstow fields in Blue Stem Natives, opened access to Wompatuck State Park, worked towards renewing a Memorandum of Understanding with the Nature Conservancy for the 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Black Pond Bog, took over management of the Carleton Property and Whiting Fields, worked with the Eagle Scouts on projects through Town, including QR codes on heavily used trails for easy access to trail maps, improved the ecology, habitat and use of the Stoney Brook Property, and are began working with hunters and residents to educate all on the allowed uses of the Conservation properties.

The Commission thanks all residents for their support of Open Space.

### **Regulatory Responsibilities**

Submittal of several major regulatory projects occurred during 2021, including those on Accord Park Drive and the new Highway Barn. We review projects as they come in with peer review expertise to protect downgradient and related habitat, wetland resources, riverfront, and other public interests. In addition, the development push to place larger projects into smaller, less suitable areas increases yearly.

In 2021 the Commission also reviewed and issued:

- 36 Orders of Conditions
- 17 Minor/Major Amendments
- 1 Resource Area Delineation
- 29 Determinations
- 18 Administrative Letter Permits
- 3 Stormwater Administrative Land Disturbance Reviews
- 19 Certificates of Compliance for completion of projects
- 7 Enforcement Orders

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

January 2022 marked one full year on the job for Conservation Agent Will Saunders. Will faced a year of new challenges and obstacles as he learned the position, working with town residents to help them through the permit process for their projects while at the same time working to protect the Town's wetlands and natural resources. Will works closely with all town departments to learn the job. He promotes departments' collaboration and finds the best way to efficiently and effectively balance the protection of Norwell's resources for the town residents' projects.

Meredith Schmid continues to work as the Conservation Administrative Assistant, and Jack-of-All trades for the department. Meredith ran the office in the absence of the agent at the end of 2020 and helped Will learn the position in 2021 with all her extensive knowledge of the department. Meredith has been working for Town Hall for 18 years, most of it with the Conservation Department. The Commission cannot thank Meredith enough for her hard work.

The Conservation Commission is comprised of seven residents who serve three-year terms and are appointed by the Board of Selectmen. Patricia DeGiulio joined the Commission in January of 2021, filling a vacancy. In addition, Tricia has been a welcome voice to the Commission and its subcommittees, bringing knowledge from her time with the South Shore Science Center and Norwell Farms. We look forward to her work and input as part of the Commission.

Thank you to recording clerk Chris Sullivan for his continued support.

The Commissioners spend significant amounts of volunteer time to ensure that the natural resources and conservation areas in Norwell are protected and well cared for. Marynel Wahl continues as the Commission's Chairperson and Bob Woodill as the Vice-Chairperson.

**2021 Conservation Commission Members - Appointed by the Select Board**

Marynel Wahl - Chair	(through 2022)
Robert Woodill -Vice-Chair	(through 2023)
Ron Mott	(through 2024)
Bob McMackin	(through 2024)
Roy Bjorlin	(through 2024)
Justin Ivas	(through 2023)
Patricia DeGiulio	(through 2022)

Respectfully submitted by Will Saunders – Conservation Agent, The Norwell Conservation Department,  
Meredith Schmid, Administrative Assistant, and Marynel Wahl, Commission Chair