

NORWELL CONSERVATION COMMISSION – 2014 ANNUAL REPORT

The Conservation Commission is responsible for the protection and management of Norwell's Conservation land and for the 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:

1776	Acres	Open Space Public Land
18	Miles	Public trails
9	Fields	Active Farming
11	CR's	Monitored
9831	Feet	Scenic Stone Walls

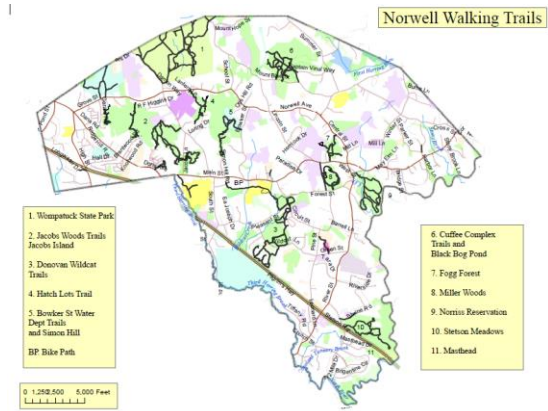
3. To conduct outreach and education regarding the town's natural resources, and environmental issues.

2015 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 (recently Masthead, Simon Hill, Cuffee Lane and Grove Street, among other properties) 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 through 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 in balance with protection of the environment as identified in Goal 1 of the Norwell Open Space Plan #'s 2, 10, 13 and 14.

Clean water, clean air and a healthy environment are values to protect and preserve. Residents are given the opportunity to hike, bike, camp, fish, and enjoy the natural areas they protect, 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. *Stream line trail maintenance and improve access to our conserved lands.*

Maintenance and repairs on the town's 17+ miles of conservation trails continue to be managed through the use of the recently purchased utility access vehicle. This will allow a safer, more efficient work environment for our senior workers. 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, #'s17, 19-22, Goal 3 #53,

Specific targets for 2015 include; completing the signage project, expanding the parking lot for Jacobs Trails, repairing several boardwalks and bridges in disrepair on the Stetson, Miller, and Donovan trail systems, as well as creating access over the brook within the new Cuffee Lane trail.

3. *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.

Additionally the Commission is interested in encouraging a new non-profit Friends of Open Space and Trails group. Anyone with an interest in being part of facilitating such a start-up is encouraged to contact the Commission office.

OSR Goal 1 #23 and Goal 5, #91 and 110

4. *Improve permitting process by improving communications and collaboration with other departments.*

5. *Improve clarity of regulations and documents in an easier to understand format for residents.*

The Commission will strive to streamline the regulatory process by offering concise guidance as to the necessary level of permitting required and proper way to attain such permits. The Norwell Wetland Bylaw regulations will be reviewed for clarity and effectiveness and amended as needed to better protect both the environment and the needs of the residents.

6. *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). As in prior years, the trail-walking program 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.

The Commission supports the environmental education programs at all the Norwell Schools.

7. *Recently acquired Masthead Drive parcel and riverfront area.*
(Stay Tuned!)

Regulatory Responsibilities

A major task of the Commission involves overseeing the conditions under which work that falls within a nearby river, stream or wetland may be affected. 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 four 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 and issued 30 Orders of Conditions in 2014 for Notices of Intent and Resource Delineations.*
- 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 20 Determinations in allowing the work and 1 Determination requiring further permitting review in 2014.*
- A 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 14 letter permits in 2014.*
- 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 68 sign offs in 2014.*

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. In August 2014, David Osborne stepped down as Chairperson of the Commission after seven plus years of service in that capacity. While he continues to serve, the Commission is grateful for Dave's generous donation of his time and service as chairperson. We acknowledge and appreciate his leadership at a time when conservation of natural resources is increasingly vital to a community success. His leadership has enabled Norwell to not only maintain, but also further expand and enhance the Commission's exceptional quality of service. During his tenure well over 100 acres of open space land was added to the roster of protected public spaces in Norwell. The most notable of these is the Masthead property with North River Access. His contribution demonstrates how concerned individuals can make the difference that will last well into the future. Thank you!

Marynel Wahl was elected as the Commission's Chairperson. As the Commission's new leader, she brings distinctive energy and expresses motivation to expand on multi-departmental goal oriented projects. In addition to the many varied responsibilities of the chair Marynel will focus on achieving many of the goals outlined of the Open Space and Master Plans. The Commission looks forward to continuing and expanding on the work started by previous Chairpersons.

The Commission appreciates the dedication of Agent Nancy Hemingway and Administrative Assistants Meredith Schmid and Jeanne Cianciola (who provide exceptional office support, service and assistance to the public), as well as the services of recording clerk Deb Kruk. Their energy and enthusiasm are limitless - they step up and take on projects as needed, despite steep workloads. They are always there to greet and assist residents, contractors and call-ins in a cheerful and efficient way. Their continual effort and commitment give our program a successful foundation. Gratitude and appreciation for all you do!

2014 Accomplishments and Projects-

Major projects with conservation oversight completed in 2014 include:

Jacobs Pond Treatment – The Commission was granted funds (thanks to Community Preservation Committee) to treat and control noxious weeds in Jacobs Pond during 2014. The program was a success and recreational kayaking and fishing on the pond has been greatly improved. The Commission will work in 2015 to ensure that the recreational quality of the pond is monitored and follow-up treatments scheduled, if necessary.

The Purchase of Masthead property – This parcel provides a unique opportunity for Norwell to preserve public recreational access to the North River. A land use study will be worked on in 2015. This unique property is anticipated to be a signature parcel for the town. The land contains a rough walking path that leads to an existing deck overlooking the scenic North River. Residents are encouraged to visit.



Jacobs Island – As part of the continuing expansion of the public recreational facilities at Jacobs Trails, the Commission sponsored opening of a camping area on Jacobs Island (with assistance from Eagle Scout Alex Shepherd). There is no fee for use - visitors are only asked to leave the island in a clean and natural state when they leave. Those interested should contact the Commission office for a reservation form. In addition, a new boardwalk leading to the first island, as well as a universal access ramp leading to Jacobs dock, have been constructed.



Farming - The Main Street Farm Field (opposite the Osborne sport fields) was added to the list of permanently protected open space lands under the care of the Conservation Commission, thanks to the work of resident Marie Molla. The field is being farmed by Hornstra Farms and is one of several farm fields under the care of the Commission. Other farm fields include the 6 Jacobs Fields (farmed by Norwell Farms CSA and Hornstra Farms), The Donovan Fields (farmed by Hornstra Farms and Whitaker Farm), and the Barstow Field (farmed by Norwell Farms CSA). Luke Lambert also manages bee hives on Jacobs, Donovan and Barstow fields.

Chittenden Landing – The Commission was granted funding to rehabilitate the Chittenden Landing dock, thanks to the Community Preservation Committee. We anticipate completion of this landing upgrade sometime late in 2015.

Trail Maps updated - The Commission staff completed the creation of new, accurate trail maps of the Towns Conservation trails using GPS tracking equipment. These maps will be available at the trail boards of the many kiosks that have been installed around town, as well as in an updated trail map brochure. The maps are also available online on the town website (Conservation page).

The High School Ball fields project was reviewed and permitted to ensure environmental protection remained a key part of the creation of a competitive sports field complex. The construction phase was a model of efficiency and site control. The Commission appreciates the outstanding efforts of the construction company.

Dam construction updates – During 2014 the Commission reviewed and permitted the final removal of the Mill Pond Dam near the YMCA. Additionally, the Commission reviewed and permitted a project to remove the Tack Factory Dam which will further the goals of Ecological Restoration along Third Herring Brook (an established fish run and tributary to Outstanding Resource Waters).

Regulatory projects included: Completion of the South Shore Medical Center and environmental regulatory review of the Pond Street Audi and Porsche car dealerships - NCC worked with applicants to incorporate site designs which will result in groundwater quality improvement associated with tributary to drinking water supply and drinking water supply zone II areas.

Wildlands Trust – The Community Preservation Committee and Conservation Commission initiated a program with Wildlands Trust and the Community Preservation Committee to place Conservation Restrictions on several parcels of land obtained using Community Preservation Act funding, per state requirements. Work on these restrictions will continue into 2015. The Commission appreciates the work of both Scott McFadden and Attorney Bob Galvin in these endeavors.

The Commission also initiated an internship program with AmeriCorps Volunteers working for Wildlands Trust. This program is a tremendous help in working toward land management goals, thanks to interns Allegra Wrockledge (in 2013-2014) and Liz Maguire and Andrew Bagnara (in 2014 – 2015). Liz and Andrew have been active in coordinating South Shore Open Space Committees and developing a regional Open Space Program. Their efforts and contributions are much appreciated by the Commission.

Pathway phase II boardwalk was permitted and constructed through Donovan Woods between the Middle School and Donovan farm field. The Commission's appreciation goes to G. Lopes (Construction) for an environmentally sensitive construction phase.

Fogg Forest – Thanks to the generous donations of Fire Chief Andy Reardon and the Commission on Disabilities, two new picnic tables are now located in the Fogg Forest Field, off Main Street. These are open and available to the public on a first come, first serve basis.



Open Space and Recreation Plan Implementation - The Commission has made tremendous progress creating a land database, as well as ensuring permanent protection to an additional 176 acres of open space land - voted to be kept in the care, custody and

management of the NCC. These lands were granted to the Commission over the past several decades.

Trail Creation and Improvements - The Commission continues to maintain and manage many miles of trails within Norwell. In addition, a link from Green Street to the Pine Street fields was created. Neighborhood access was added from Simon Hill to the Bowker St./ Water Department trail system.

The Commission has a highly efficient trail maintenance program that worked to maintain many miles of town trails, for a fraction of the cost of similar maintenance programs found around the State. We hope to keep this trend!

Organized Trail walks are sponsored jointly with the Recreation Department each spring and fall and have been a successful way of guests to the many miles of in Norwell. The program was the fall of 2012, and although Dale enthusiastic energy and the continuation of this highly



introducing residents and conservation trails available started with Dale Connor in retired in 2014, her commitment have resulted in successfully program.

Installation of Bridges, Boardwalks, and Benches – The Commission started a program to replace and repair many boardwalks throughout the town trail system. Boardwalks



were replaced in Miller Woods and Jacobs during 2014. We will work to continue repairing and replacing these throughout 2015. Benches for recreational viewing were added to trail systems in Donovan, Jacobs and Stetson Trail systems, thanks to Eagle Scout Ryan Markham and Norwell High Shop Class led by Teacher Mark Hermann.



Stetson Cemetery and Stetson Trails – Phase I of the Stetson Cemetery has been completed. The Commission's trails that lead into the new area will be closed until completion of the cemetery, at which time they will be reconnected. The myriad of paths created for soils and perc testing crossed the previously existing pathways. Until then, visitors are encouraged to enjoy the scenic beauty of the River Loop and Rivers Edge trails.

Trail Information Kiosks – 8 informational kiosks were installed in late 2014. Trail maps and information signage are being finalized and will be online and physically installed during 2015.



Acceptance of Donation of Land – The Commission accepted a donation of land near Jacobs Pond on Doris Ave. This generous donation will allow parking for a few cars for access to fishing on the west side of Jacobs Pond.

Education and Outreach – The Conservation Commission provided a number of education and outreach opportunities in 2014

- An educational program on the 4th Thursday of each month (spring and fall) focused on environmental educational topics such as:
 - climate changes,

- the new FEMA floodplain maps and resources,
- storm smart planning,
- training on shading impacts from docks and piers,
- techniques and issues surrounding delineation submittals,
- how to access and use the many (free) GIS tools available on-line through state and federal agencies,

as well as many other valuable training programs. Access is free and open to the public. We will continue this project through 2015 and encourage public participation. The Commission looks forward to starting an innovative outreach and education program on the open space and trail lands in 2015.

Many people have donated time and effort to the Commission to further the conservation goals in Norwell. 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, Charlie Dirk, Dave Hill, Dave Merrifield, Edward Cox, John Suurhans, Mark Mederos, Ralph Knowles, Steve Gilmartin, Steve Young and Wes Osborne. Their dedication to the open spaces in Norwell is much appreciated.



The Commission also thanks Dale Connor, 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.

2014 Conservation Commission Members

Appointed by the Board of Selectmen

Marynel Wahl – Chair

Robert Woodill – Vice Chair

Bruce Humphrey

David Osborne

Lori Hillstrand

Ron Mott

William Grafton