

## NORWELL CONSERVATION COMMISSION – 2015 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:

1969	Acres	Open Space Public Land
21	Miles	Public trails
10	Fields	Active Farming
11	CR's	Monitored
9831	Feet	Scenic Stone Walls

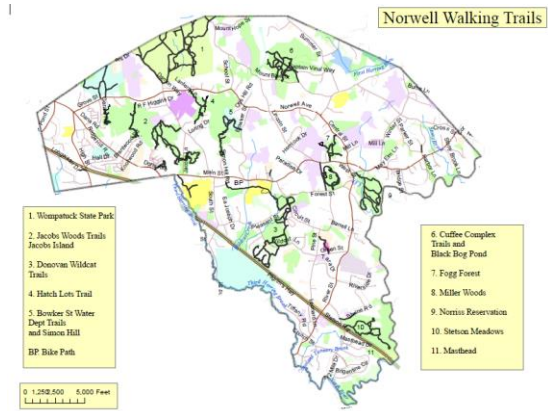
3. To conduct outreach and education regarding the town's natural resources and environmental issues.

### 2016 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 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. *Streamline 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. 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,

Specific targets for 2016 include;

- Development of a "Friends of Norwell Trails" program
- Completion of a town wide trails cost and expense spreadsheet for financial transparency and planning purposes
- Coordination with the recently appointed Open Space and Recreation Implementation Committee to actively work towards achieving the goals outlined in the current Open Space Plan.
- Cooperative planning is on-going with the Water, Recreation, Pathway's Departments and Committees to ensure resident friendly access is maintained.

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.

In 2015, the Commission wrote and was awarded a service grant through AmeriCorps and is working to develop the Friends of Norwell Trails and Pathway group. Open House and Training sessions are planned for March 28<sup>th</sup>, April 25<sup>th</sup> and June 5<sup>th</sup> 2016. OSR Goal 1 #23 and Goal 5, #91 and 110.

4. *Improve 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

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. A new dog-walk-friendly trail walk series is in the works; watch for it in the summer/fall of 2016

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

7. *Recently acquired Masthead Drive parcel and riverfront area.*

The Commission will hold public sessions in 2016 to solicit public input on potential conservation based recreation and education goals for the Masthead parcel.

### **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 23 and issued 15 new Orders of Conditions for Notices of Intent and Resource Delineations.* The other 8 were for major modifications, and/or project extensions.
- The Commission monitors and works to ensure site stormwater and soils are controlled on 5 major subdivision projects.
- 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 16 Determinations in allowing the work and 1 Determination requiring further permitting review.*
- 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 10 letter permits.*
- 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 78 sign offs.*
- 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 15 Certificates of Compliance for completion of projects.*

### **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 May 2015, Bill Grafton resigned from the Commission after four years of service as a Commissioner. The Commission is grateful for Bill's generous donation of his time and service to Norwell.

Stacy Minihane joined the Commission in August of 2015. As a wetland scientist she brings an invaluable level of technical experience and expertise to the Commission.

Marynel Wahl continues as the Commission's Chairperson. As the Commission's leader, she

The Commission appreciates the dedication of staff, Administrative Assistants Meredith Schmid and Jeanne Cianciola, CoA volunteer Margaret Dixon as well as the services of recording clerk Debra Kruk and Ellen McKenna. 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!

### **2015 Accomplishments and Projects**

Major projects with conservation oversight completed in 2014 include:

Jacobs Pond – Boardwalk replacement –The boardwalk along the upper Jacobs Trail was widened and raised to provide emergency vehicle access to the back trails at Jacobs and to reduce impacts to stream and BVW.



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 - Pathway Phase II boardwalk was completed through Donovan Woods between the Middle School and Donovan farm field. The first half of the Forest Street Pathway extension was completed and the second half is well underway.

Open Space and Recreation Plan Implementation -

Trail Creation and Improvements - The Commission continues to maintain and manage many miles of trails within Norwell. 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 introducing residents and guests to the many miles of conservation trails available in Norwell.

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 Stetson and Jacobs in 2015. We will work to continue repairing and replacing boardwalks and bridges throughout 2016. The Commission is also working to upgrade several of the parking areas including both Donovan and Jacobs.



Trail Information Kiosks - 8 informational kiosks were installed in late 2014. Trail maps and information signage are being finalized and out to bid. Hopefully these will be online and physically installed during 2016. Individual trail walk brochures for each of the 8 trail systems were created in 2015 to accompany the Town Wide Trail foldout. These are available on-line and at the Conservation Office.

Acceptance of Donation of Land - The Commission accepted a donation of land on Grove Street adjacent to Wompatuck State Forest and in close proximity to Hatch Lots. This generous donation will allow a potential connection between Hatch and Wompatuck. The Commission also accepted a donation of land on Pleasant St, extending the Donovan Wildcat combined lands and creating a possible pedestrian access to that well established trail system.

Education and Outreach - The Conservation Commission provided a number of education and outreach opportunities in 2015

- 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 2016 and encourage public participation.

Chittenden Landing - The Chittenden Landing dock upgrade engineering and planning was completed and permitted. All state, federal and local permits were obtained. Construction is expected to occur during March 2016.

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, Dave Hill, Dave Merrifield, Edward Cox, John Suurhans, and Mark Mederos. Their dedication to the open spaces in Norwell is much appreciated.

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.



#### 2015 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 Jan-May

Stacy Minihane Aug-Dec