

## Norwell Conservation Commission – 2018 Annual Report

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

**The primary purposes of the Conservation Commission are to:**

- Plan for Natural Resource Protection
- Acquire important land and water areas
- Manage these areas for conservation and passive public recreation
- Administer and enforce the Massachusetts Wetland Protection Act, the Norwell Wetland Bylaw, and any associated regulations
- Conduct outreach and education relative to Norwell's natural resources and environmental issues

**The Conservation Commission protects and manages:**

2000+ 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 Assinippi parcels 1999/2001
22+ Miles Public Trails	Hatch Wood Lots - 1977	Cuffee Lane - 2012
10 Fields Active Farming	Cuffee Hill - 1982	Simon Hill - 2013
12 Conservation Restrictions Monitored	Miller Woods - 1983	Masthead - 2013
9831 Feet Scenic Stone Walls	Jacobs Farm - 1989	Bennett 2015

### **Accomplishments, Projects and Goals**

#### **1. Increase awareness and 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 on behalf of the voters also comes with a responsibility to protect essential ecological communities while also allowing recreational access to the land that taxpayers have purchased. The Commission, along with its staff and volunteers, work cooperatively with all town departments to provide safe community access to green space.

Clean air, water, and a healthy environment are the key values we are all charged with in protecting and preserving Norwell's landscape. Residents are provided the opportunity to hike, bike, camp, fish as well as enjoy the protected natural areas all just minutes from home. Preserving open space also protects watersheds, improves air and the water quality of rivers, lakes, streams, and drinking water. Local flooding issues can be better managed while not encouraging the disturbance of local wildlife habitats.

#### **2. Open space and recreation plan.**

The Open Space and Recreation Committee, a sub-committee of the Conservation Commission, is in the process of updating the Open Space and Recreation Plan, to be completed by mid-July 2019. If you are interested in participating, please contact the Conservation Office.

#### **3. Open space land improvements and promoting multi-purpose use.**

The Commission continues to work with DCR and the Norwell Pathways Committee to create parking and trailhead access to the 500 acres of Wompatuck State Park trails in Norwell via the newly acquired Bennett land parcel on Grove Street. The design phase is near completion; the construction phase will be presented at the Norwell Town Meeting in May 2019 for voting to request

funding for the project. We encourage support of this initiative that will allow access to the extensive Wompatuck trail system.

The Commission respects and encourages the interest of residents to access Norwell's public land for recreation and enjoyment. It strives to preserve the rights of individuals, families (and their dogs) to do so safely. This also includes the hunters who enjoy the preserved areas in Norwell - however, away from the trails in respect to the safety of the trail users. The Commission manages over 1200 acres of land that is available to hunters during Massachusetts-specific mandated hunting seasons. We do not require any permits or impose regulations beyond those of the state. A map is available in the Conservation and Town Clerk offices, specifically indicating where hunting is allowed. These maps also include the trail system for those looking for areas for people and dogs to walk.

**4. Streamline trail maintenance and connectivity to improve access to conserved land.**

The Commission continues to maintain and manage many miles of trails within Norwell. The severe winter storms of March 2018 resulted in significant tree damage. As a result, cleanup of damaged trees and debris on trails will continue into 2019. The Commission gratefully acknowledges the Senior Trail Crew – Al Svelnis, Dave Hill, Edward Cox, Paul Legere, Mark Aigan, Steve McViney, along with assistance from the Tree and Grounds staff. Their dedication to the conservation lands and trails in Norwell is much appreciated!

The Commission worked with the Norwell High School during Norwell Cares Day to construct a combination woodland foot trail with movable boardwalk sections to link the two trail spurs in Miller Forest.

Proper maintenance and repairs to Norwell's trails results in greater and improved access to the many conservation-managed lands in town. As long as trails are properly cared for, they will continue to provide families, walkers, bikers, and skiers, the capability to enjoy and explore the endless beauty of Norwell. New trail information kiosks have been printed and installed in parking areas, with mid-trail signs to guide walkers planned for 2019. The Commission will work with the Pathway Committee during 2019 to look at all neighborhoods within each open space trail system in order to prioritize future connectivity projects.

**5. Continue coordination with Norwell Highway and Tree/Grounds Department.**

The Commission appreciates the time and effort that this department's crew has made to improve accessibility to the many conservation areas throughout Norwell. The Donovan Field parking area, (accessing the Circuit Street pathway entrance) for example, is currently underway and scheduled to be completed in 2019.

**6. Explore new grant funding opportunities.**

There are significant quantities of grant money available to communities. The Commission and Conservation Department staff work to maximize efficiency and achievements by continuing to seek creative project funding and support services through multiple sources. This important and beneficial process has been difficult to maintain however, as priority must be given to regulatory and active land management. The Commission would welcome a team of volunteer residents to help identify, draft, and monitor grant applications.

**7. Promote Adopt-A-Trail Program.**

Please help us keep the trails maintained and accessible for all Norwell residents to enjoy by volunteering to help monitor and report on trail conditions. You may already be walking the trails and can participate simply by downloading the link and form. Your feedback is essential in assisting our amazing trail team to target problems and issues as quickly as possible. If you are interested, please contact the Commission office today!

**8. Improve the permitting process with other departments.**

Interdepartmental communication and collaboration have seen significant improvement in terms of effectiveness and efficiency. The focus on coordinating reviews that reduce the burden on the applicant and keep the final phases of all projects consistent among all departments has taken significant steps forward, while also ensuring that the processes of the individual Boards' and Commissions' stay in tact.

**9. Implement community outreach and education programs.**

In 2019, we plan to collaborate with regional non-profit educators such as the North South Rivers Watersheds, the South Shore Natural Science Center, the Norwell Public Library, and others to create new outreach and educational programs. They will include additional outdoor seasonal, family-oriented nature programs. A primary goal is to facilitate family-friendly outings to the many Conservation Commission-managed passive recreational areas in Norwell.

**10. Participate in The Second Climate Change Symposium.**

The Symposium with regional partners is planned for May 2019. Coastal Zone Management is the lead on this project. The effects of climate change are widespread and will continue to influence rainfall levels, storm water impact, and wetland resources. The Norwell Conservation Commission looks forward to continuing as a sponsoring member.

**11. Support school-based environmental education programs.**

We promote conservation-related programs at all Norwell schools and look forward to the 2019 Norwell High School Cares program.

**12. Farming.**

The Commission continues to manage and sponsor active farming on the six Jacobs Farm Fields, two Donovan Farm Fields, Barstow Field, and the Main Street Field. We gratefully acknowledge the dedication of the farmers in helping preserve this cultural heritage. Hornstra Dairy Farm and Norwell Farms Community have been with us for many years as well as Beekeeper Luke Lambert. We welcome the additional support from farmer Jon Haskins.

**For Regulatory matters, the Commission utilizes the following permit system.**

- 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 **thirty** new applications and issued **twenty eight** Orders of Conditions for these projects.
- Resource Delineation reviews are conducted either under the Notice of Intent process or with an Application for Resource Area Delineation. These are reviewed in terms of location and type of resource only, with no specific project attached. The benefit of this process is that the natural resource areas can be identified and defined before significant monies are spent on design and engineering. The Commission reviewed and issued **two** Resource Delineation applications in 2018.
- The Commission monitors and works to ensure site stormwater and soils are controlled on all projects, with subdivisions and commercial development being more closely monitored. **Four** major projects were reviewed or monitored for stormwater control in 2018.
- 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 the filing of a Notice of Intent if the project is more involved (ex: simple septic repair). The Commission reviewed and issued **twelve** Determinations of Applicability in 2018.
- An Administrative Letter Permit is used for projects within the outer reaches of the buffer zone, 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 are required for this permit level (ex: projects with all construction activities 100 feet or more from the closest resource). The Conservation office issued **eleven** letter permits.

- Inter-departmental 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 100 feet from the wetland, or hazardous tree removal in buffer areas). The Commission office issued **thirty six** sign-offs.
- Certificates of Compliance are issued when a project is shown to be completed in a manner that protects nearby resource areas and is consistent with the permit issued. The Conservation office issued **fourteen** Certificates of Compliance for completion of projects in 2018.

**Regulatory Projects** – The Commission is re-prioritizing an update of the Towns Wetland Bylaw Regulations with the intent of clarifying resource areas, performance standards and the public understanding of the regulations and how they affect properties near and in wetlands.

**Check before you work– Be Conservation Safe!**

To better understand the resources on or near your property, please feel free to contact the Conservation Department. Norwell offers assistance with permitting issues, environmental concerns, or just creating a unique GIS map for your property. Assistance is also available regarding information on public lands or trails. Please be safe and ask the Conservation Office if you have any questions or just want information regarding your property, nearby resources or Conservation Lands - We are happy to help!.

([nhemingway@townofnorwell.net](mailto:nhemingway@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 would like to help.

**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. Members Stacy Minihane and David Osborne, both resigned in 2018. Stacy provided wetland science expertise and her many contributions will be missed. David served on the Commission since 2006 and contributed a life-long love of the woods and Norwell. The Commissioners will miss his many trail projects and contributions.

The Commission very much appreciates the dedication of Administrative Assistants Meredith Schmid and Nicole Pelletier who make certain that both the Conservation and Planning Offices run smoothly and efficiently. Nicole moved from Planning to Building at the end of 2018 and will be missed. 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 cared for. Marynel Wahl continues as the Commission's Chairperson and Bob Woodill as the Vice-Chairperson.

**2018 Conservation Commission Members - Appointed by the Board of Selectmen**

Marynel Wahl – Chair, 2011

Robert Woodill – Vice Chair, 2011

Bob McMackin, 2016

Justin Ivas, 2016

Ellen Markham, 2018

Roy Bjorlin, 2018

Ron Mott, 2013

Stacy Minihane, 2016 –resigned

David Osborne, 2006 – resigned

Respectfully submitted by Nancy Hemingway, Conservation Agent, Meredith Schmid, Administrative Assistant, and Marynel Wahl, Commission Chair.