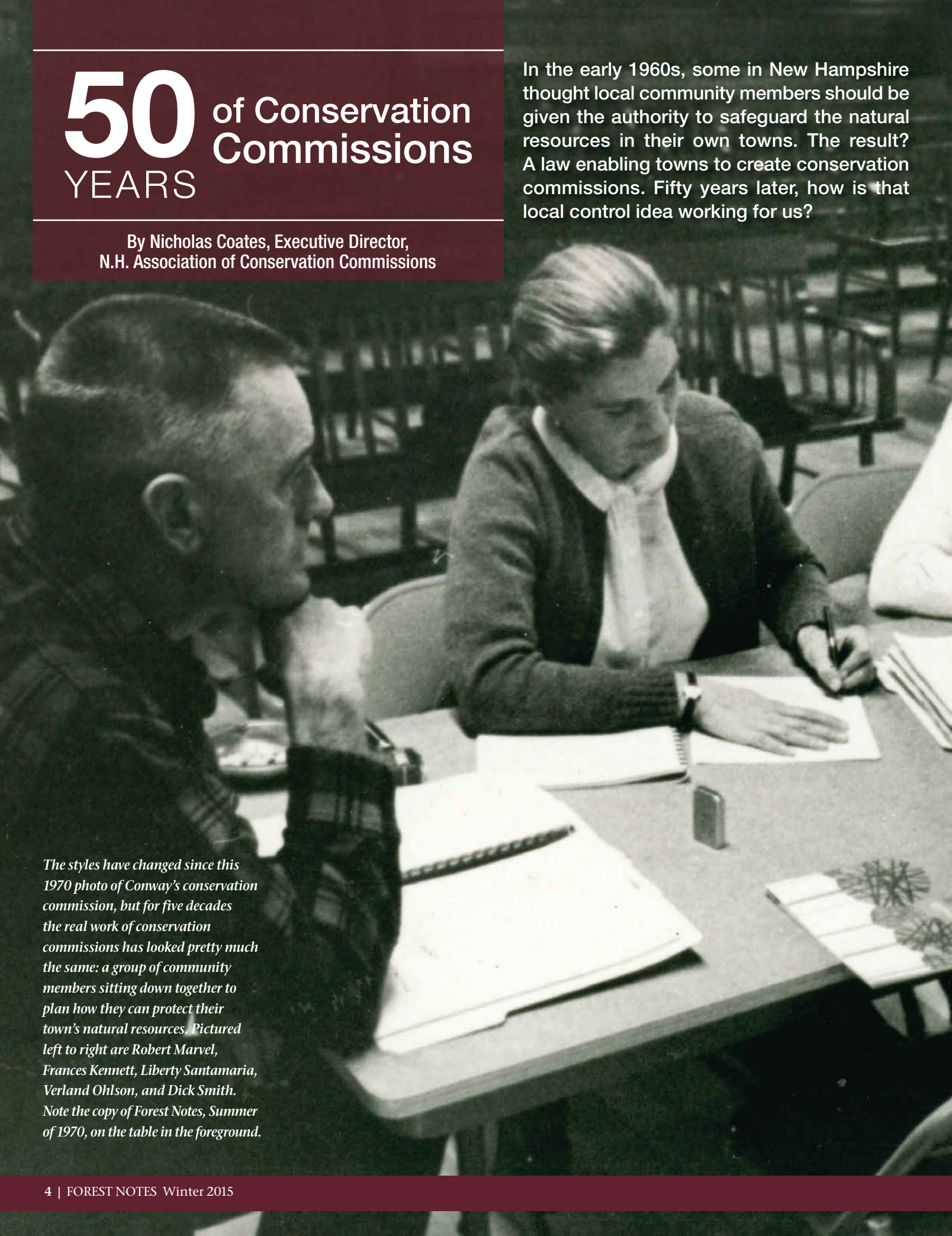


50 of Conservation Commissions YEARS

By Nicholas Coates, Executive Director,
N.H. Association of Conservation Commissions

In the early 1960s, some in New Hampshire thought local community members should be given the authority to safeguard the natural resources in their own towns. The result? A law enabling towns to create conservation commissions. Fifty years later, how is that local control idea working for us?



The styles have changed since this 1970 photo of Conway's conservation commission, but for five decades the real work of conservation commissions has looked pretty much the same: a group of community members sitting down together to plan how they can protect their town's natural resources. Pictured left to right are Robert Marvel, Frances Kennett, Liberty Santamaria, Verland Ohlson, and Dick Smith. Note the copy of Forest Notes, Summer of 1970, on the table in the foreground.



Photo courtesy NHACC.



Left: Members of the Hooksett Conservation Commission pose on town-owned Pinnacle Park, overlooking their most recent land protection project: the conservation of some 116 acres with frontage along the Merrimack River. Pictured are N.H. state Rep. David Hess, Steve Couture, JoCarol Woodburn and Robert Woodburn.



Photos this page by Emily Lord.

Right: David Wood and Richard Hocker of the Grantham Conservation Commission walk along Skinner Brook, on the town's Brookside Park property.

Evy Nathan was making a presentation at the New Hampshire Association of Conservation Commissions' annual meeting last fall when she clicked on some slides that roused the 230 people in the audience to sit up in their chairs with a collective 'Wow.'

The first photo showed volunteers from the Kingston Conservation Commission and other adults gathered at the entrance of the Old Frye Farm Town Forest. A group of school buses barreled toward them down the road, full of kids ready to pull invasive weeds and clean up the property. The next photo showed kids getting off the buses, and getting off the buses. It wasn't just a troop; it was a whole army of budding conservationists. Nathan counted 190 students and volunteers that day all coming out to experience this land, many for the first time.

Then came the photos of the aftermath—trash bags stacked three and four high, full of weeds, and students with mud on their faces and shovels in their hands smiling ear to ear.

"I just want people to open their eyes and see New Hampshire's beauty," Nathan said in an interview later. "The woods, the rivers.... Get excited about the outdoors and enjoy it. And not deface it. I guess my goal is environmental enlightenment."

Early on, Nathan, who chairs the commission, realized that with its limited budget, its members would have to be creative to get things done. Connecting to the local high school and science teacher Sarah Sallade "has been a wonderful thing" that has really helped the commission's work take off, she said.

The creativity that Nathan tapped into in Kingston is a hallmark of conservation commissions statewide. So is the grassroots activism symbolized by volunteers coming together to protect the

natural resources of their own town. It was this idea—of local guardians and caretakers—that sparked the legislation that enabled towns and cities in New Hampshire to create conservation commissions back in 1963, around the time when Rachel Carson was publishing her seminal call to environmental action, *Silent Spring*.

The work of establishing local commissions started a few years earlier, and the Forest Society was a driving force. Les Clark, the Forest Society's education director, attended the first New England Conservation Commission Conference held at Harvard University in 1960, and the Forest Society sent letters to members and educated groups around the state about the need for local action. The Forest Society later urged individuals in many communities to be the ones to place warrant articles proposing conservation commissions onto their Town Meeting agendas.

This year marks the 50th anniversary of the first seating of a New Hampshire conservation commission—six pioneering people in Hollis in 1965. After 50 years, it's worth asking: What difference have conservation commissions made? How is the idea working for communities today?

One gauge is to look at how many towns and cities have voted at Town Meeting or in city councils to create the optional commissions. In 1966, the number was 38. Today, 216 out of 234 municipalities have taken up the charge. Even more telling is the amount of land permanently protected through conservation commissions' work. Thousands of volunteers over the years have conserved some of the most important and iconic lands in our state, and in total have protected more 180,000 acres of important farmland and forestland for the next generation to experience. Working with private landowners and land trusts, conservation commissions have been



Students from Sanborn Regional High School gather for a celebratory photo after a workday on conservation land in Kingston.

Photo by Evy Nathan.

the public partners on voluntary land conservation, identifying priorities for conservation set forth by residents and helping protect those important places that make our communities great.

As the executive director of the N.H. Association of Conservation Commissions (NHACC) since January of 2014, it's been my privilege over the past year to hear from conservation commission members about what's working in their communities when it comes to natural resource protection. So far, I've visited more than 70 commissions and met many others at regional meetings. (Luckily, I have a fuel-efficient car and very patient wife.)

The challenges that commissions around the state face are similar. Development pressure, the need to engage more people in their work, finding ways to fund projects—the list goes on. But the ways in which they are meeting those challenges are as unique as the communities they live in.

Planning pays off in Hooksett

In Hooksett, where the town has conserved nearly 25 percent of its land, members have chosen to focus on building the case for conservation through thorough planning, a focus on communicating the benefits of conservation and establishing places where residents can go out and enjoy the outdoors. Getting to that point, though, was a decades-long process.

They faced a tough challenge in 1999 through 2002 when a proposed development sought a delisting of “prime wetlands” status in the town ordinance. This brought protest petitions, generated some “hard feelings” and jeopardized the status and effectiveness of the commission with other town officials, said Chair Steve Couture. Since then, they have taken steps to rebuild the respect

for the commission by identifying priority open spaces and highlighting those priorities as part of the town's master plan.

Couture said one of the first things commission members did was to work with the Southern N.H. Planning Commissions through a N.H. Department of Environmental Services Regional Environmental Planning Program grant to update the town's Natural and Current Resources Inventory. The same year (2004) they created an Open Space Plan and updated the town's master plan, and in 2008 they underwent a “cost of community services” study.

“That gave us the building blocks, then we started communicating our priorities,” Couture said.

In that busy year of 2004, they also convinced voters to increase their Land Use Change Tax (LUCT) allocation to the town's Conservation Fund from 25 percent to 100 percent. Voters later reversed that decision, but later again changed course in favor of a higher percentage. The Conservation Fund gives towns and cities the ability to set aside money for natural resource inventories, maps of town/city properties, wetlands evaluations, purchases of land or conservation easements and so forth.

Beyond methodical and logical planning, Couture attributes the conservation commission's success on the LUCT issue and overall to a level of credibility they have established with their Town Council and voters.

The commission has two lawyers in vice chair Cindy Robertson and David Hess (who also serves as the town's representative in the Legislature), another state representative in Frank Kotowski and a planner in Couture. Beyond their professional acumen, Couture said that the commission has made a point of keeping open lines with the Town Council and Planning Board, and they have worked

hard to not be adversarial to developers, and to be cordial whenever possible.

“We take the approach, ‘How do we work within the regulations?’” Couture said. “We work on giving them a gentle nudge to try to do better. For example, we might encourage using a more effective stormwater best management practice than what they proposed.”

They have also worked hard to be a good partner with other boards and civic organizations. A Heritage Commission member, for example, has helped them with gathering information about the cultural resources of the town and the properties they are working on. They also worked on a land swap project with the Parks and Recreation Department that built a lot of good will that is now bearing fruit on a commission project.

Other partnerships, like working with the local Kiwanis chapter to help with stewardship and the Boy Scouts on a kiosk for a property, have also helped community members start to make the connection to conservation in their town.

This connection is reinforced in the way the commission talks about conservation. For example, in a community survey the

commission took, they asked questions like, “What’s important to you?” In brochures about their lands, they used language like “our heritage” and “our land,” helping residents understand that conservation is for the whole community, not just a select few.

Their approach is paying off. The Pinnacle granite outcropping that was noted by Henry David Thoreau in his trip down the Merrimack River and the Head & Son Brickyard that provided the bricks for the Amoskeag mills are both symbolized on the town seal; the Conservation Commission has secured easements on both properties.

The case for ‘spend now, save later’

In true New Hampshire fashion, the legislation that enabled conservation commissions some 50 years ago didn’t come with funding attached. In the early years, with support from the Spaulding-Potter Charitable Trusts, matching grants to begin open space land acquisition and natural resource surveys were provided to conservation commissions. Additional technical assistance grants were provided by the Trusts and in 1971 the NHACC was incorporated with Tink Taylor as its first executive secretary. These days, conservation

AFTER STUDY, LEGISLATORS REPORT A NEED FOR STATE LEADERSHIP AND FUNDING OF CONSERVATION

A joint legislative committee created last year to take the pulse of conservation in New Hampshire recommended in its final report that the State step up its leadership and funding of land protection. Created by legislative mandate, the bipartisan committee issued its 117-page final report on Oct. 31. The Forest Society, one of the nonprofit conservation organizations noted for its work in the report, contributed conservation data to the study.

The report noted that nearly 30% of the state’s land is protected from development, but said “much more needs to be done.” Seventy percent of conserved land is held by the federal or state government; nearly 10 percent is held by municipalities, nearly 20 percent is held by nonprofit land trusts, and the remainder belongs to quasi-public entities like school or water districts.

“Many important natural assets continue to be at risk, including prime agricultural lands so necessary to sustain our farming and horticultural industries, critical lands essential to maintaining our drinking water supplies and habitats that are needed to support the state’s thriving and diverse wildlife population and important recreational activities,” the report states.

The committee also recommends “that the State take a greater leadership role in both supporting and facilitating land protection

throughout the state” in order to protect and expand the New Hampshire economy.

The committee also recommends that the State:

- ▶ Fully fund the state’s Land and Community Heritage Investment Program (LCHIP) in the next legislative session.
- ▶ Constitutionally protect LCHIP from being raided to fund state government in the future
- ▶ Introduce legislation in 2015 to create a commission to identify priority areas for conservation and to plan how to conserve them, including realistic budgets and potential sources of funding before it is too late. The committee recommends that this commission complete its work by Dec. 31, 2016.
- ▶ Restore funding in 2016 and 2017 for several conservation programs created in the past but not funded, including up to 1.5 million for Source Water Protection Program and up to 3 million for N.H. Agricultural Lands Program (ALP), which would enable the State to leverage federal matching funds.
- ▶ Seek immediate funding for a study of what lands in New Hampshire are most in need of protection.

The Freese Town Forest—and its beaver-designed wetland shown here—is protected from being developed or sold off in the future, thanks to the conservation commission’s success in educating Town Meeting voters, who agreed to put a conservation easement on the property.

commissions fund projects through the LUCT and through town warrant articles, the state’s Land and Community Heritage Investment Program (LCHIP), fundraising campaigns and partnering with land trusts.

Looking at the big picture, conservation plays a key role in protecting drinking water, working farms, working forests, plant and animal habitat and tourism and visitor spending. In 2012, the Trust for Public Land completed an economic analysis on the return on investment in New Hampshire through a variety of state sources that fund land acquisition. It found that for every \$1 invested in land conservation there was an \$11 return on investment on natural goods and services to the state’s economy. What it shows is that while there are limited dollars available for conservation in New Hampshire, the state dollars that are being invested are effective.

The economic case is one that conservation commissions are becoming savvier at making, but there’s still work to do. Eleven N.H. communities have completed “cost of community services” studies. The results show that land conservation saves cities and towns money through avoided costs on infrastructure and municipal services like roads, water supply, wastewater and stormwater facilities, schools, police and fire services.

The American Farmland Trust compiled the results. Their analysis shows that open spaces and working farms and forests require on average 56 cents in services for every \$1 paid in taxes, while residential lands require an average of \$1.12 in services. Local land protection also increases land values, which contributes an untold amount of dollars in property taxes that are essential to municipalities.

Being able to add economic benefits to all of the other reasons to conserve land helps when raising money for projects. In Center Harbor, the conservation commission successfully worked with voters at the 2014 Town Meeting to increase the percentage of the Land Use Change Tax (LUCT) that is deposited into the conservation fund from 25 to 50 percent.

Maureen Criasia, vice chair of Center Harbor’s commission, started building support for the increase well in advance of Town Meeting. After contacting NHACC for reference materials, she created a summary document explaining why the commission was looking for an increase. She used the document when talking to elected officials and residents and also for discussion points during Town Meeting.

The document explained how the LUCT works and what state law allows funds to be used for. It also outlined the rationale for retaining important open space and the town’s rural character. The document highlighted what surrounding towns had for LUCT percentages, examined other NH municipalities in comparable size population, and provided examples of important conservation projects that have been supported by the conservation fund.



Photo by Serita Frey.

Case Study: Grantham

The Grantham Conservation Commission has been working on finding the balance between growth and conservation, and how to articulate the benefits of conservation to convince voters to invest more tax dollars in the acquisition of open space.

Grantham has been one of the fastest growing towns in the state. There were 700 people counted in the 1970 Census but 3,000 people in the 2010 Census. The Eastman residential development, which was initially billed as a retirement/second home housing community, has instead brought an influx of young families who commute to the Lebanon/Hanover area.

With those families have come children and with those children has come the need to expand the schools and to maintain other municipal buildings and roads, said Conservation Commission member David Wood. He added that the town’s 2005 master plan spells out the desire by residents to maintain Grantham’s rural character. In 2009, there was a critical conservation lands index completed that laid out the areas of Grantham that could be conserved. The challenge, Wood said, is that the view of conservation in town is mixed.

“People love the rural character; however, New Hampshire folk don’t want to be told what to do with their property,” Wood said. “So when rules and regulations are put in, there’s resentment. There’s still a general lack of appreciation of the economic benefit (in terms of reduced taxes) of open space as opposed to residential development. So voters reject recommendations to increase taxes to purchase open space, even though in the long term the purchase would reduce taxes.”

But Wood said there are positives that the commission can build on.

Many of the families that have moved to town are committed to conservation and the members of the newly appointed Open Space Committee, including its acting chair and conservation commission member Susan Buchanan, are laying the information base that will allow purchasing opportunities to be prioritized.

At the urging of its new chair, Sheridan Brown, the commission has become more active in seeking out partnerships and has begun



Photo by Emily Lord.

The creation of walking trails was identified as a priority by Hooksett citizens surveyed by the town's conservation commission. Seeking community input and successfully communicating priorities have been hallmarks of the commission's successful projects over the past 10 years.

WHAT DO CONSERVATION COMMISSIONS DO?

Conservation commission members are volunteers—appointed by boards of selectmen, alderman or mayors—who work to study and protect natural resources. They also:

- ▶ develop long-term plans and strategies for the protection of important places
- ▶ work to permanently protect land
- ▶ provide educational programs and hikes, educate the public about renewable energy
- ▶ manage city and town lands for timber production, recreation and wildlife
- ▶ advise other boards on the importance of the town's natural resources
- ▶ work with the state's Department of Environmental Services to provide local comment on wetland permits

working with the Parks and Recreation director on organizing activities. They are also trying to build trails in Brookside Park and to find ways to involve the community, especially children. They are working on planning a snowshoe hike this winter, and they are looking into programs they think would interest the community, like talks about invasive insects.

And, despite their challenges, the commission has still made recent progress on a land protection project. They just purchased a six-acre parcel, which they hope to improve with hiking trails and which is now joined with Brookside Park to create a contiguous, 20-acre tract for people to experience.

Now the real work will begin, Wood said. The commission has been working with landowners over the past eight years to conserve a couple of significant parcels. In the next year they are planning to build the case with taxpayers for an open-space bond at Town Meeting so that they can take the next steps with the owners.

“The opposition will clearly be from people who do not want to see an increase in their taxes,” Wood said. “There are a lot of people in town with fixed incomes, and even for those who are working, taxes are rising faster than salaries. No one wants to increase taxes even more to buy land. But on the other hand, the community is under pressure to grow, and if it grows residentially then it means a greater increase in the long term.”

Along with the planning they've done, the partnerships they are building and the events on existing conservation properties, the commission has been talking with members of other conservation commissions in towns that passed open-space bond articles to understand what worked and what didn't. They are also working to educate themselves on what the impacts on taxpayers could be

From the Spring, 1965 issue of *Forest Notes*: “The development of the town’s natural resources and the protection of watersheds and open spaces should not be left entirely to state and federal governments. This act gives an opportunity at the grass root level to evaluate and plan for resource management within the town and according to its needs and desires.”

and how they will answer the tough questions that will come up. They realize they are going to have to do a lot of listening and a lot of communicating one on one with voters.

Only two more classrooms can be added to their local school before there will be a need for a new school. Long-time commission member Dick Hocker said enough housing lots are already available for development to increase the school age population above the school’s capacity.

“It’s not if, but when it’s going to happen, and we’re not prepared for it,” Wood said.

Real Protection for Town Forests in Deerfield

A paraphrase of a refrain that I’ve heard in my visits to conservation commissions is, “trees don’t need schools.”

But one of the misconceptions about town/city forests is that they are permanently protected properties. In fact, the legislative body of municipalities (town meeting or city council) can vote to establish town/city forests and can just as easily vote to remove a town/city forest designation. In New Hampshire, the statute enabling local designation and management of town/city forests provides two options for municipal forest managers: a forestry committee created for that purpose, or, by vote of the legislative body, a conservation commission may manage the town or city forest.

In Deerfield, conservation commission members, along with former member and current volunteer Frank Mitchell, have been working for the past four years to ensure their town forests were permanently protected with conservation easements. Their approach was to focus on publishing articles in the local newspaper in support of the easements and accompanying the articles with photos of the properties.

Their first article focused on laying the groundwork for the values of public conservation lands such as the importance of wildlife habitats, how they provide places for people to enjoy and how they contribute to the town’s character. The article also explained how the conservation commission wanted to make sure the forests remain a permanent living legacy for the town and was taking two steps: first, working with the town’s forestry committee to create management plans; and second, to permanently protect the land. They also highlighted that easements deliver on the wishes of the people who donated the land.

The article was brief and promised more details to follow in the coming weeks. The second article provided a brief profile and map of each of the properties and highlighted that as owners of these

public properties, residents had the right to enjoy them and to share the responsibility for managing them. The commission got its message across while also educating residents about the opportunities they have to enjoy nature.

The final article highlighted the fact that the conservation commission and the select board had introduced a warrant article for voters to consider. It took a question and answer format with questions like:

- Why would the town permanently conserve our Town Forests and Conservation Areas?
- Have other towns done this?
- What are conservation easements and how do they work?
- Who would be responsible for administering and monitoring of the conservation easement?
- Will this cost the taxpayers?
- What’s the next step?

Success didn’t happen overnight, but commission members’ work finally came to fruition when voters at Town Meeting in 2010 and 2011 voted in favor of putting conservation easements on the properties. The last easement project was completed last summer.

The result is that eight properties totaling almost 700 acres are permanently conserved under easements. The commission shared one final article in the local paper in September that thanked voters for their support and again went through the benefits of the easements.

Water quality watchdogs

When conservation commissions began in New Hampshire, some of our rivers were so polluted that signs warned people away from swimming or fishing in them. Conservation commissions were the driving force, with the Forest Society’s support, for legislation in 1973 to extend conservation commissions’ authority to wetlands protection. Commissioners got to work on the local level to convince their selectmen of the need for sewers and sewage treatment plants and over the last 50 years have been a critical part of cleaning up and protecting water quality across the state.

Today the state statute allows a conservation commission to request time to investigate an application for a dredge-and-fill permit filed with the N.H. DES Wetlands Bureau. The conservation commission is the one municipal body with authority to “intervene” (request this delay). The conservation commission may also



Photo courtesy NHACC.



Photo by Evy Nathan.



Photo by Emily Lord.

Left: The Rye Conservation Commission made its first land purchase in 1972: five acres at the edge of a pond off Brackett Road. In their report to the town, commissioners noted that their focus for land acquisition was solely on preserving wetlands, not on land suitable for housing. Statewide, attitudes about protecting developable land have changed a lot since then.

Middle: Students from Sanborn Regional School use “weed wrenches” to pull invasive weeds at the Frye Town Forest in Kingston.

Right: Evy Nathan, chair of the Kingston Conservation Commission Chair, and Sarah Sallade, science teacher at Sanborn Regional High School, have forged a partnership that has gotten students outside and involved in conservation projects.

prepare the report and maps for the local designation of “prime wetlands.”

There are 33 towns and cities that have elected to designate “prime-wetlands” and had them approved by the state. Municipalities take this step to add a higher level of protection to these wetlands of exceptional value and their surrounding upland buffer.

Gilford was the first town in the state to have a prime wetlands designation, which is something conservation commission members proudly talk about. As a Lakes Region community, the commission feels that protecting their wetlands is a critical piece of protecting their community’s resources and economy.

Engaging Youth and the Community in Kingston

The conservation commission in Kingston that Evy Nathan leads discovered the ingredients for a successful secret sauce for community engagement: a strong partnership with the local high school and an embrace of social media.

The youth-infused invasive weeds workday Nathan spoke about at the 2014 NHACC annual meeting is just one of several fueled by the support of Sanborn Regional High School, where teacher Sarah Sallade has integrated the commission’s work into her curriculum. Students have participated in clean-up and replanting projects on town properties through their classes and their Senior Day of Caring. Perhaps most impressively, students planned and implemented the installation of water quality improvement projects with landowners around the local Pow Wow Pond. They produced vegetative buffers, infiltration projects and rain gardens.

“The connection to the high school has blossomed into this wonderful thing,” Nathan said. “Their cooperation and understanding of the work, and the excitement of the science staff—it’s been great.”

Nathan and Sallade point to the example of a student who participated in one of their workdays to show how their partnership is making a difference. The girl asked if the forest they were working in belonged to Nathan. “I told her, ‘No, this is your forest. It’s the town forest; it belongs to everyone, the taxpayers.’”

Sallade added, “Once you get kids out into the woods, that’s where kids ask those kinds of questions. That’s why it’s so important.” She went on to say that there is a lot of value in getting kids out to local conserved properties. Many don’t spend much time outside, but once they get a structured opportunity and have a good time, they realize they don’t have to go far to do it.

Nathan said the commission’s successful community outreach is also a product of their partnership with a citizens group called Friends of Kingston Open Space (FOKOS) that concentrates on easement and acquisition projects, and the Southeast Land Trust.

“Our goals at first were small and short sighted,” Nathan says. “Even those took time. But as we got them done, things started to pick up steam.”

The commission has also been meeting people where they gather, not just in person. The biggest growth in Facebook’s users is adults over the age of 55. Nathan said the commission’s Facebook page has been a tremendous networking tool for getting people

“What we’re talking about is the right of a town to control its own destiny.”

— Malcolm Taylor, first executive director of the N.H. Association of Conservation Commissions, as quoted in the *Keene Sentinel* on Dec. 8, 1972

interested in their work. A quick scan of their Facebook page and you’ll see two to three short posts a week. It’s mostly pictures of conservation properties in town or reposts of photos from partners. There are pictures of sunsets with a kayak, video of a blue heron and beavers in action, a cardinal in a marshland and so on. Pictures are worth a thousand words, as the saying goes.

Many commissions around the state have struggled to get more people interested and supportive of their work. In the last year, NHACC has heard from at least a dozen commissions who are having a hard time attracting new members as older members leave. Not so in Kingston. Nathan recently placed an ad in the local newspaper for an opening on the commission, and 10 people responded. They are now looking for ways to get these new volunteers involved in their work.

“All of the little efforts are becoming cumulative,” Nathan said. “There’s a general shift in attitude about open space in the community. If we do enough self-promotion and if we acquaint people with it, they will come along with us.”

The Kingston Conservation Commission’s work with its local high school is innovative, though it isn’t unprecedented. Around the state, conservation commissions have been engaging schools as a way to build the next generation of conservationists and to get others involved. Farmington has two students (non-voting) on their commission. Washington has led vernal pool walks for the younger set. Merrimack has taken students out to a timber harvest operation.

CONSERVATION COMMISSIONS BY THE NUMBERS

216

Towns/cities that have seated conservation commissions

11

Commissions that have conducted “cost of community services” studies

33

Commissions that have designated “prime wetlands” in their town/city

180,000

Acres conservation commissions have helped to conserve statewide

97

Percent of N.H. citizens who say they support land conservation

The Next 50 Years?

Whether in good or difficult economic times, residents of New Hampshire have supported conservation for all that it does for their communities. A 2012 public opinion survey conducted by UNH found that 97 percent of voters support land conservation efforts in the state and that they also see a connection between conservation and the state’s economy.

Looking ahead to the next 50 years, conservation commissions will continue to be the local stewards of natural resources, but they will need to solve some tough emerging challenges.

Last summer, a legislative study committee was tasked with determining the status of conservation in New Hampshire (see results summary on page 8). One of the key findings was that more than two-thirds of our lands that are critical to maintaining clean sources of public drinking water are unprotected. The availability of clean drinking water is the foundation for making our state attractive for residents, commerce, and tourist-dependent businesses. While communities, the state and conservation organizations have shown a wise use of dollars in conservation, the challenge of protecting drinking water supplies is going to require conservation commissions being particularly resourceful with limited tax dollars.

The proverbial greying of the Granite State is another challenge. As conservation commission members grow older across the state, they will need to figure out how to engage the next generation so that the legacy of last 50 years is carried forward.

There are no easy solutions to these challenges, and there will be no one solution that works. To help, the NHACC has launched new field-based training sessions with partners like UNH Cooperative Extension to educate commission members on how to work with youth and schools, how to coexist with beavers and other wildlife, how to build trails, and how to use mobile technology for mapping. We also have programs coming on how to use social media and how to lead wildlife tracking expeditions.

Perhaps the best way to inspire the next generation, as Rachel Carson inspired the last generation, is to make conservation real and tangible by connecting people to the land. Conservation commissions are uniquely positioned to foster those connections. They will continue to innovatively meet the challenges of the next half century and in so doing, they will continue to protect the quality of life we enjoy in the Granite State. ♣

Nicholas Coates is the Executive Director, N.H. Association of Conservation Commissions.