

MILTON CONSERVATION COMMISSION ANNUAL REPORT

www.miltonnh-us.com/conservation-commission
mcc@miltonnh-us.com

The Conservation Commission (CC) has five volunteer members and up to three alternates appointed by the Select Board. Our mission is to protect the Town's natural resources, as mandated by NH RSA 36-A, and to fulfill the conservation goals of the Milton Master Plan. We also try to increase awareness and appreciation of Milton's wonderful outdoor resources through education and outreach and by improving accessibility to town-owned conservation lands.

Trail Volunteers Group:

In summer 2022, the CC established a Trail Volunteers group to maintain and build hiking trails on town-owned conservation properties. CC member Jeff LeClair and volunteer Mike Schneider are our most energetic members, keeping the trails clear of fallen trees, raking out the parking area, removing invasive plants and old trash, and generally keeping an eye on things. They have also added signage, new seating, and created new trails. Thanks so much to Jeff and Mike for all their hard work, and to Mark Pryor and Robin Schumaker, who help out as well. Let us know if you want to help too!



Here is Jeff LeClair's report from the Trail Volunteers:

"The Trail Volunteers' biggest accomplishment in 2023 was the addition of a new loop trail at Casey Road Conservation Land. The new 'Stone Works Trail' shows off features like big rocks deposited by the last glacier, New England stone walls and other stone constructions from Milton's early farming days. Other recent additions include a hand made bench at the trailhead kiosk and a chair partially made from material drifted up on the shore of Lyman Brook where hikers may rest by the gurgling waters. The coming year will see us relocate a section of trail along the Brook slightly inland to raise it out of the flood path of what has recently become an increasing number of heavy rain events. We are happy to have noted more usage of the Casey Road trails as the public has become more aware of them. Likewise for Jones Brook Park, located near the Village of Union. I am told the fishing on the Jones Brook is pretty good. If you make a quiet approach you may be fortunate enough to see a Great Blue Heron fishing in there."



Protecting the Ponds:

An important focus of the CC is to protect the water quality, wildlife habitat, and recreational and scenic values of the Milton Three Ponds. In that effort, we gratefully rely on the hard work and dedication of Three Ponds Protective Association (TPPA), which conducts volunteer water

quality testing, applies for grants and manages control of invasive species, keeps an eye on possible cyano-bacteria outbreaks, and educates its members and the public about risks to the health of the Ponds.

We particularly wish to thank TPPA Vice President Wayne Sylvester, who serves as TPPA representative on the CC, for his grant writing and coordination of the effort to control the invasive aquatic weed European Naiad (EN). This aggressive plant spreads by both seeds and fragments. If left unchecked, EN will eventually take over the Ponds, with devastating impacts on the lake ecology and wildlife, on our recreational opportunities, enjoyment of the Ponds and quality of life for many Milton residents, and on the Town's economy due to losses in waterfront property values and associated tax base as well as tourism-based revenues.

The long-term control of EN uses a combination of volunteer and costly contracted techniques: herbicide treatments, Diver Assisted Suction Harvesting, boat inspections and volunteer monitoring to find new infestations. In 2023, TPPA was awarded over \$45,000 in grants from NH DES and ME DEP, which resulted in TPPA, and the Towns of Milton, NH and Lebanon, ME each contributing approximately \$4,500 towards the fight against European Naiad. The 2023 total outlay was lower than expected because herbicide treatments were not required, possibly due to unusually poor growth conditions (rainy weather and silty water) for the invasive weed. Costs in 2024 are anticipated to reach almost \$95,000. To contact TPPA, for more info, or to sign up for their newsletter, go to <https://threeponds.net/>.

Protecting Milton's Wetlands

As part of our mission to protect Milton's natural resources, for the last couple of years the CC has focused on preserving the town's many important wetlands. We reviewed scientific data from a 2005 Blue Moon Significant Wetlands Study and prioritized four Milton wetlands as deserving of extra protection due to their particularly valuable functions and higher risk of degradation. We suggested to the Planning Board (PB) that these four wetlands merit an expanded wetland buffer, restricting new development. We also contracted soil scientist Marc Jacobs to review the existing town Wetlands Conservation Ordinance and we participated in the PB's yearlong work to update that ordinance. The outcome of these two projects is two proposed Zoning Amendments on the 2024 Town Warrant. For more information on the Priority Wetlands Zoning Amendment, you can view the CC's Power Point (presented at the PB Public Hearing and at the Deliberative Session) at <https://www.miltonnh-us.com/home/news/priority-wetlands-ordinance-change-explanation>.

Milton's Conservation Properties:

The CC oversees seven town-owned conservation parcels, two with popular walking trails and others with limited recreational opportunities but many benefits for wildlife and for preserving water quality. We walk the boundaries of these latter properties on a yearly basis (called annual monitoring) to make sure there are no encroachments or other issues. The public is invited – let us know if you'd like to join us! We also oversee all town-held conservation easements on private properties. We save the town money by annually monitoring a few of these ourselves but contract with an outside agency to monitor the more complicated easements.

Land Conservation Projects:

Several new land conservation projects have been completed recently or are underway in Milton, with pledged financial support from the CC's Conservation Fund. The CC also facilitated

an agreement between the Town and local land trust Moose Mountains Regional Greenways (MMRG), signed at the 10/16/24 BOS Meeting, to complete a conservation easement on Jones Brook Park and the Payne Parcel. This easement will fulfill the mandates of Town warrant articles passed in 2003 and 2004, and is expected to close in 2025.

Outreach and Education

The CC seeks to provide opportunities for people to learn about and access Milton's great outdoors. Unfortunately, the notoriously poor weather of 2023 forced us to cancel three of our planned outreach events. The fourth, a Guided Turtle Walk with wildlife biologist Josh Megyesy, was a great success, however. Ten attendees got to see a pair of painted turtles up close and learned fascinating facts about turtle habits and habitat and the value of wetlands. We also sent informational letters to 130 landowners whose property abuts a wetland, with suggestions for maintaining the health of the wetland.

To help people find places to recreate outside, we offer a map of Town of Milton Walking Trails, showing trailhead locations and trail descriptions. Download it from the CC webpage (url in header) or find a paper copy in Town Hall or at the library. All our events are publicized on the CC's Facebook page; be sure to follow us!



2021 Financial Report (supplied by Steve Panish, Treasurer)

The CC's 2023 Budget allocation from the General Fund was \$6,125, of which \$1,915 remained at the end of the fiscal year, taking into account \$192 in outstanding invoices. The apparent budget surplus had been earmarked to pay for contract survey work that had to be postponed due to weather and other contingencies. Most of the budget spending was for Professional Services, including survey, technical review, easement monitoring, and water testing, totaling \$2960. Since the 2023 budget has not closed at the time of this report submission, these figures are preliminary but close to the final amounts.

The CC has a dedicated Conservation Fund (CF) funded by 50% of the Land Use Change Tax (LUCT), which is assessed when land is taken out of Current Use for development. The LUCT fluctuates significantly from year to year; in 2023 the CF received \$33,850, whereas it received zero in most years of the past decade. The current balance of the CF is \$119,053, with an uncertain amount owed it from the 2021 LUCT due to the unfinished 2021 financial audit. The CF has \$17,000 in outstanding pledges to conservation projects that are expected to close in 2024 and 2025. The CF receives interest, which at present averages about \$300/month. In 2023, CF outlays totaled \$10,000, consisting of \$5000 each for the Steer Easement and Keating Easement. These were both easement donations by the landowners, who were not compensated for the donations of the development rights to their properties. For such generosity, the CF helps defray expenses needed to create the easement.

Each year, the CC requests the Town to raise and appropriate \$1,000 for the CC Legal Defense Capital Reserve Fund, which accrues for use if a lawsuit is required to defend an easement.