

Conservation Matters

A monthly column focused on conservation education, as the result of collaboration among several area conservation commissions and organizations. If your town's commission or conservation organization would like to contribute articles, please contact Jessica Tabolt Halm jess_tabolt@hotmail.com

Title: What are conservation properties?

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As a retired college professor, folks often ask me what I do with all the free time I now have? When I answer that I chair the Holderness Conservation Commission, they ask "What does a conservation commission do?" I usually answer, "One of the duties is to monitor and manage the town's conservation properties." This brings up a new question "What is a conservation property?"

The Town of Holderness has eight properties that would fall under this title; three easements, two LCHIP properties and three non-easement/non-LCHIP properties. I will describe each of these categories in the remainder of this essay, but first a little bit about monitoring. The commission monitors each of the properties once a year. This involves having a member of the commission picking up the field monitoring packet from the town office and visiting the property. The field packet normally contains a map of the property, historic information about the property (either deed or easement document) and typically last year's monitoring report). During the visit to the property, the monitor checks to see if boundary markers are still visible, checks to see whether there have been any major changes to the property since the last monitoring visit, and checks the status of the trails that provide access to the property if the easement is a public access easement.

Conservation Easements—As mentioned above, the town has three conservation easement properties. All are non-public access easements. Two of the easements were donated by developers and one was for a property purchase match. Conservation easements are underlain by a legal document that delineates what can or cannot be done with a property. An easement goes with a property even if there is a change of ownership on a property. For one of our properties, the easement is owned by the Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests. Often when monitoring that property, the Holderness person is accompanied by a monitor from SPNHF. In all cases the yearly monitoring report is not only retained by the town, but also provided to the property owner.

LCHIP Properties—The town has two LCHIP properties. The acronym stands for the Land Conservation Heritage Investment Program. This is a program run by the state of NH and allows towns and other entities funds to either purchase properties or to maintain/upgrade existing historical buildings. The two properties were purchased under a previous version of the program called LCIP (Land Conservation Investment Program). A town committee was organized to write a grant to the LCIP group. Two Holderness property owners offered their properties for purchase. The committee found a property owner willing to provide a conservation easement on his property as a match (this was required by the LCIP program). The two properties purchased are public access properties. One is the 2+ acre Pemigewasset Riverside Park at the south end of River Street and the other is the Pilote Forest on Beede Road. A forest cut has recently been completed on the latter property and the commission is in the process of upgrading existing trails and developing new trails on the property. A map showing the property and the trail system is posted on Beede Road.

Other Properties—The other properties came into the town's possession because the owners no longer wanted to own them. The oldest of these had been partially disturbed by the extraction of topsoil and other materials. When the owner gave that property to the town, the commission decided to transform it into a Town Forest. In NH, towns may designate certain town owned properties as Town Forests. For this to happen there must be a town vote to do so. These properties are regulated by state RSAs. They may be managed by a Town Forest Committee or the town's conservation commission, the latter of which is the case in Holderness. The Holderness Town Forest is on the opposite side of Beede Road, adjacent to the entrance of the Holderness Dept. of Public Works. The DPW yard is a five-acre parcel that was subdivided from the existing property and was the area that had been mined for topsoil and gravel before it was turned over to the town. The commission recently concluded a forest cut and the trail system has been improved and added to over the past year. There is a small parking lot just off Beede Road and a kiosk shows the trail system. The other two properties were undevelopable properties because they were wetlands. One of these

is on the far side of White Oak pond and therefore non-accessible. The other is adjacent to the junction of Sargent and Smith Road. The commission has recently had a biological inventory of that property done and will be using that report to develop more public access to the property; perhaps a viewing stand of the central part of the wetland.

In conclusion, monitoring these eight properties is one of the duties of commission members and making sure that these are done occupy my time as chair of the commission. Monitoring is usually done in the summer months. Reports are discussed during our fall commission meetings, then passed on to the Holderness Selectboard, to the property owners and to the LCHIP state commission for our LCHIP properties. Although it is a task, it is a pleasant task and one of the fun duties of being a conservation commissioner.



Photo caption: View of the newly created open space on the Pilote Forest. The edge effect of the opening will enhance wildlife on the property.