

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, jesshalm78@gmail.com.

Title: No Two Conservation Projects Look Alike

Written By: Campton Conservation Commission

If there is one thing we have learned collectively as a Conservation Commission serving the town of Campton for the past two decades, it's that no two conservation projects look alike. All conservation projects must meet a certain set of criteria based on the mission and goals set forth by the organization that is pursuing the project, but how each project meets the criteria can vary greatly. The size, cost, project partners, land protection measures, and funding opportunities, to name a few, are all variable, moving parts. All conservation projects demand commitment on the part of the pursuing organization, and can take as much as triple the amount of time that is originally estimated. This article seeks to bring this variability to light, using the land conservation projects in our town as an example.

Aside from State and federally owned lands, perhaps the longest-standing conservation land in town encompasses Bald Mountain, offering majestic views of Franconia Notch. This is a large, privately owned parcel, with an easement held by the Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests. The landowners who donated this easement to the Forest Society continue to live seasonally on the property, and the public is welcome to visit the property and enjoy the view year-round. More than thirty years later, an abutting landowner with a comparably smaller parcel of land followed with an easement donation to the Forest Society which abuts the longstanding easement and connects it to a wooded brook.

Blair Woodland Natural Area is 18 acres in size, with Pemigewasset River frontage, upland mixed hardwood forest, a small brook, several vernal pools, and an unbeatable view of the Blair Covered bridge. There is a small parking area that provides seasonal public access for dog walking, hiking, swimming, fishing, and nature programming. About 20 years ago, this land was donated to the town by the landowner, who had grown up walking the land and learning about the woods and wildlife from a renowned naturalist, F.Schuyler Matthews.

When a locally well-known resident and former land agent passed away, his house and surrounding field and forest went on the market. Local residents, who did not want to see the field that the late owner lovingly cared for over a half century-long period get subdivided and developed into house lots, approached the Conservation Commission, to see if the town's conservation fund could be utilized to protect the land. Since 2005, the town of Campton has been setting aside half of the Land Use Change Tax (LUCT) paid to the town when a current-use property is developed. Strong community support and the land's proximity to the Blair State Forest led the town to purchase the land, and Pattee Conservation Park was created. No longer a mowed lawn, the field is maintained as wildlife habitat, and boasts a good crop of lowbush

blueberries. A trail through the woods connects to Blair State Forest trails, and the local garden club partners to care for a Liberty Elm. The property has also hosted fall community events, such as a 5K running race and Campton's 250th Anniversary celebration.

When a very large property formerly managed by a timber company came on the market about 10 years ago, large conservation stakeholders quickly collaborated to conserve the 6,000 acres, which abut the WMNF and span the towns of Campton and Sandwich. A regional conservation organization held the property for 5 years, during which time an easement was placed on it, and private landowners were sought. The local Trout Unlimited chapter was instrumental in helping to make this project a reality. Since being conserved, the land has been a site for trout reproduction research by Plymouth State University faculty and students.

Most recently, the Campton Conservation Commission (CCC) has entered into a purchase and sales agreement on a 152-acre property, after working toward this goal with the landowner for several years. The ownership is comprised of four surviving siblings who spent their childhoods visiting their grandparents and exploring the woods out back. These children have grown to hold this land very near and dear to their hearts, despite their own lives and career choices taking them to different corners of the United States, with the closest living in Northfield, NH and the furthest in California. The land boasts over 1.3 miles along the West Branch Brook, a major tributary of the Pemigewasset River. The property is completely forested in mixed hardwoods, contains many vernal pools, and is an integral part of the snowmobile trail system. All of these qualities of the property make it an ideal parcel for conservation, due to its value for wildlife habitat, drinking water protection, and low-impact public use. The goal is to keep it a dynamic and important resource for wildlife and human residents and visitors of Campton. Once again, the conservation fund will be utilized to purchase the land, with the assistance of grant funding and individual donations. Assuming this purchase agreement comes to fruition, the Pemi-Baker Land Trust will hold and monitor the conservation easement for this parcel.

These examples serve to highlight the various and sundry ways that lands are conserved. Depending on the unique circumstances of each situation, these projects come about as the result of many years of dedicated hard work and collaboration between local and regional conservation groups, partnering organizations such as snowmobile and garden clubs and historical societies, and the general public. Conservation lands are donated outright, funds earmarked for conservation are used for purchasing lands, or easements are placed on lands that remain privately held. Each project takes on its own course for completion, with the true benefit being the natural communities that call these lands home, and the members of public who stand to benefit from the conservation of natural resources.



Photo caption: A flyfisherman enjoys spring on a privately owned parcel of land in the town of Campton that is being considered for a conservation easement, which would mean protecting 1.3 miles of shoreline along the West Branch Brook. This is good news for aquatic and terrestrial wildlife, water drinkers, and fishermen, to name a few.