

## Public Access to Conservation Properties

Larry Spencer, Chair, Holderness Conservation Commission

Many of the local conservation commissions either own or have easements on one or more conservation properties. Owning outright means that the town has a deed to the property. Having an easement on a property means that the owner still has the deed to the property but has sold some of the property rights to another group often the local commission or a land trust such as the Society for the Protection of NH Forests. By property rights, this typically is the development rights. The property owner can still carry out some actions that are permitted under the easement document, such as forest management, etc.

The Holderness Conservation Commission has seven properties, three with easements and the remainder owned outright by the town of Holderness. The three with easements are non-public access properties. This is because two of them consist of wetlands and the third was used as a match to purchase other town properties. Thus, the remainder of this essay will examine the four public access properties.

Riverside Park (43° 45' 29.40" N, 71° 40' 58.80" W)

Riverside Park is a 2.7-acre parcel located at the end of South River Street. There are spaces for at least three cars and a kiosk that has a map showing the trail system that leaves from the parking lot. The Riverside Park is a gateway to an extensive trail system that is used in the summer for walking and mountain bike riding and in the winter for snowshoeing/cross-country skiing and with a central snowmobile trail that goes from the North Ashland Road Bridge that crosses over the Interstate and leads to the bridge crossing the Pemigewasset River. The Riverside Park was purchased with funds from the NH Land Conservation Investment Program. Plans are underway by the Holderness and Plymouth Conservation Commissions to purchase using the Land and Water Conservation Fund program, four properties that lie south of the Plymouth State ice-skating rink. They have been working closely with the local chapter of the NE Mountain Bike Association and the Squam Lakes Snow buster snowmobile group.

Smith Road-Sargent Road Beaver Swamp (43° 45' 26.48" N, 71° 38' 53.47" W)

This property was gained by the town by the non-payment of taxes and given to the HCC to manage. At times in the past, there has been an active beaver pond, but that pond is now a wetland. Recent observations indicate that beavers may have returned to the property. There is parking for two cars and a kiosk that describes the natural history of the property on Sargent Road. There are no trails on the property, but one can walk a short distance from the parking area to the edge of the marsh.

Pilote Forest (43° 46' 26.24" N, 71° 37' 13.71" W)

This property, 101-acres was purchased at the same time as the Riverside Park using LCHIP funds. The match for that grant was one of the non-public easements mentioned in the first paragraph. There are two parking spaces at the trail head and the kiosk has a map of the existing trails on the property. Please do stay on the trails. The Commission has a forest plan for the property and in the recent past harvested the property for forest sustainability management. That cut also resulted in a five-acre clear-cut for enhanced wildlife use. Birds and other wildlife use the space between the woods and the cleared area for their activities. The clear-cut is being mowed on a biannual basis. Upon completion of the forestry cut, the Commission had a NH firm do a Natural Resource Inventory on the property. NRIs are usually done by conservation groups to determine the present status of natural features on a property and to determine future management strategies for a property. A nice hike on this property is to hike the farm road that passes through the middle of the property to the top of the property and then to take the Town Farm Road (a class six road) back down to Seven Pines/Beede Road to the parking area.

Howe Town Forest (43° 45' 26.22" N, 71° 37' 09.24" W)

The Howe Town Forest is an unusual property as it is a 35-acre parcel that from the air looks like a bagel. The whole property was gained by the town because of non-payment of taxes. Many years ago, the town needed a new location for the Department of Public Works, so a five-acre parcel was cut out of the center of the existing property for that facility with the town forest encircling that facility. There is a large parking area on the property and the kiosk has details on the history of the property and a trail map. Like the Pilote Forest, the commission used a forest management plan for a forest cut and then subsequently had a Natural Resource Inventory done on the property. One of the major trails goes around the periphery of the property. The property is named the Howe Town Forest in honor of Sid Howe, a Holderness resident who before his death was involved in international, national, and local conservation issues and encouraged all Americans to get out into the woods to enjoy nature.



