# Jim Darling Natural Area, a Local Natural Resource Gem!
# by Janice Mulherin

In 2007, the town of Rumney purchased a 22-acre parcel that is located between the Baker River and Route 25. It was named the Jim Darling Natural Area and deed restrictions were placed for “conservation and public recreation use”. Shortly after purchase, a committee was set up to determine the best uses, how to protect and preserve the land, and determine costs and a timeline to achieve the goals. With assistance of UNH Cooperative Extension and a group of volunteers, a plan was made. Soon, a parking lot was built, trails to the river were laid out and a report of the natural resources was complete. The Rumney Conservation Commission played a crucial role in the purchase and planning of this Area, and continues to maintain it, as well.

This lovely property has benefitted the Rumney community in multiple ways. Over the years, it has been used by the elementary school as part of its after-school and summer programs, and the local 4H group planted a garden there. Visitors to the area often stop, and it is a favorite location for dog walkers and bird watchers. Local residents swim and launch kayaks from the beach. Rare and threatened native bees (pollinators) have been found there. It is part of several ongoing local and state-wide butterfly surveys. Bird hunters still come and locals forage in the spring and fall for edibles. The old apple trees along the edges of the field continue to bear fruit providing food for birds and other wildlife.

So, here we are, all these years later, and it is time to evaluate what has worked and what hasn’t. We have discussed management of the fields with wildlife biologists and are trying out different strategies to provide high quality wildlife habitat while continuing to maximize recreational opportunities for us humans.

The primary conservation issue is the battle with non-native invasive plants. Each spring we put down landscape fabric along the path to the river to allow people to pass through the dense thicket of Japanese knotweed. Unfortunately, while this practice makes river access possible, it does nothing to impede the spread of this aggressive non-native plant to allow desirable local willow shrubs to survive and thrive. Sadly, there is no easy

answer for dealing with this harmful invasive that is taking over whole sections of the Baker River corridor.

Through monitoring and management, we've had a little more success with keeping invasive plants out of the large five-acre field which makes up a major portion of the Area. Multiflora rose and Oriental bittersweet that have started encroaching into the interior of that field have been effectively removed by hand digging. We are on schedule to mow the entire field this fall after only mowing a wide swath around the edge for the past few years.

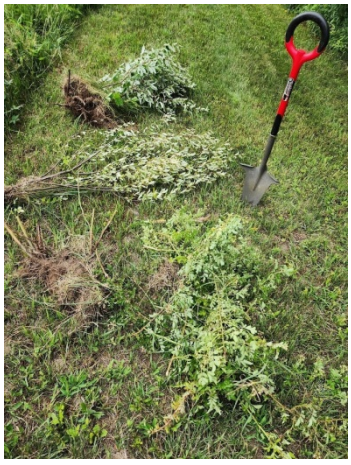
Going forward, we will continue to lay down fabric along the path to the river to keep the knotweed at bay. We will proceed to mow only the edges of the field throughout the summer to maximize food resources for native pollinators including milkweed for monarch butterflies. The entire field will be mowed every 3-5 years at the end of the season after flowers are done blooming to keep shrubs and trees from moving in. We will continue to monitor and revise this plan, if needed.

The Jim Darling Natural Area is a special place, and every time I go there, I am grateful to those who had the foresight to see what an asset it would be to the town. The list of native plant and wildlife species that are present there is impressive. The access to the river is truly welcome on a hot summer day. And local residents and visitors alike will continue to enjoy the beauty of this area though all seasons. By preserving areas like Jim Darling, communities can provide a fulfilling recreational experience for people while also sustaining wildlife and meeting conservation goals. (Added note: the newly-acquired nearby Rumney Rest Area is part of this vision, so stay tuned!)

Butterfly Survey – Judith Saum

Laying fabric to keep the Japanese Knotweed at bay.

Yellow-banded bumblebee, one of the at-risk found - Judith Saum



Invasives removed – Judith Saum