

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: Help Keep It An *All-Seasons* Wonderland

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As we enter into the winter months and celebrate the holiday season, let us not overlook the ties conservation has to the holidays we celebrate. Thanksgiving, a day that we set aside to recognize and give thanks for all those things, which make our lives more enjoyable and productive is behind us. I am sure that the majority of us gave thanks for many things that have affected our lives over the past year; our health, the addition of a loved one to our family, personal good fortune, and I could go on – how many stopped and gave thanks for the natural resources we share that make our lives possible? A variety of religious holidays and New Years are on our doorstep providing us with the opportunity to not only share gifts and good times with our friends and family, but also provides the opportunity to reflect on the importance of giving back and helping those who are unable to help themselves. New Years, the first day of the rest of our lives, allows us to look back on the past year's accomplishments and shortfalls and make resolutions to change our lifestyles moving forward. Winter is a fun season and provides us with the opportunity to reflect on how we have progressed to this point in time, and how we can adapt our lifestyles to meet the challenges we will continue to face in future years.

How does all this tie in with conservation efforts and the work that Conservation Commissions and their counter parts are doing throughout the world? Our natural resources and the environment are (or should be) at the top of the list of things for which we are most thankful, without them we could not survive. Conservation is about giving back, respecting, and taking care of those resources that are unable to take care of themselves given the stress we put on them to satisfy our demands. Even “renewable resources” are at

risk if we use them up at a faster rate than we replace them. Conservation means careful management of our resources to ensure that there are enough to sustain our needs. Management is a combination of actions designed to sustain availability by controlling use and protecting habitats and the environment.

Although not readily recognized as such, recycling is a large part of managing resources. Recycling's three main components are: *Reduce*, *Reuse*, and *Recycle*. The first component, *Reduce*, is really where it all begins. We need to cut back on the amounts we consume. We have become a "single use" society, use it once and throw it away. Styrofoam food containers are probably the best example; not only do they consume non-renewable resources, petroleum, but most end products of this type are not biodegradable. Why not buy a thermo-mug and use it every day, or keep a glass or mug for use at work? That brings us to option 2; *Reuse*. There are many items such as glass jars or tin cans that can be reused/repurposed as storage containers for numerous small items like pencils at your desk, screws and nails in the workshop, leftover foods, or used in craft projects; this eliminates the need to buy something new to fulfill that need.

When options 1 and 2 don't work, move to option 3: *Recycling*. It may seem strange that the last option of the recycling triangle would be to recycle, but while recycling does cut down on the amount of resources used, it does use some resources in the process of converting materials into 'raw' material for new products.

Conservation and resource management also takes into consideration management of land development. This consists of a comprehensive master plan, which includes protecting unfragmented segments of land to protect the ranges and habitats of wildlife; limiting development in certain topographical land configuration such as lands with slopes steeper than 25 percent or with wetlands considerations; and adherence to non-pervious

surface requirements, both of which affect soil erosion and water pollution. Forests and plant vegetation also play an important part, both in holding the soil in place with their root system to prevent erosion, and trees store CO₂ and expel oxygen back into the atmosphere, which makes timber harvesting and reforestation a conservation issue. Conservation commissions are there to help conserve our natural resources, not to eliminate using them, but rather to manage their use to ensure they are used efficiently and to the maximum benefits for all. A resource is only a resource if it is available for use, and everyone's job is to use our resources sparingly and wisely, and do our part to protect the environment; our lands, oceans, streams, rivers, and lakes, and the air we breathe.

So as you're drawn to your holiday traditions this year, please take a moment to appreciate the importance of our natural resources and the part they play in our everyday lives, and remember that the holidays are a time not only for celebration, but also for reflection, planning ahead for the future, embracing the thought that it is more blessed to give than to receive, and recognizing that we all have a responsibility to take care of those who cannot care for themselves – including our natural resources and the environment. Happy Holidays to all.