

The following excerpt from the Conservation Commission's 2019 Annual Report summarizes some of the work of the Land Stewardship Subcommittee.

Conservation Land Acquisition and Management

The Smith land overlooking Black Pond that was acquired by the Town at the close of 2018 was integrated into Sudbury Valley Trustees' (SVT) new Smith Reservation in 2019. The Commission worked with SVT, which will manage the land, and drew up A Memorandum of Understanding to guide the collaboration. The Smith Reservation, with land in Littleton and Harvard, abuts 64 acres of existing Harvard conservation land. SVT worked diligently to assess and prepare the reservation for public visitation and it was ready to open at the end of 2019.

In a major development, Community Harvest, the non-profit that does volunteer farming for hunger relief, and owns the Prospect Hill Orchard, is securing an Agricultural Protection Restriction (APR) from the State that will protect this orchard from development in perpetuity. This is an especially scenic site abutting Dean's Hill conservation land – a beautiful hilly 78-acre orchard iconic to Harvard with expansive views west across the Nashua basin. Originally part of Westward Orchards, the Town was keen, but unable, to purchase this important scenic landscape when it was sold. Most fortunately the purchaser, Earle McEvoy took care of the orchard for 4 years and then gave it as an unrestricted gift to Community Harvest. Now the valuable land will be protected with an APR with development rights sold and reimbursed by the State, the Harvard Conservation Trust and the Town of Harvard. The Conservation Commission committed to raising \$500,000 over two years to preserve this scenic historic agricultural site that is also a nexus for community engagement for local hunger relief.

Thanks to additional philanthropy, 4.7 acres of pastoral landscape on the Ayer line was protected in 2019. Theodore Maxant has placed a Conservation Restriction, held by the Town, on his hayfield to keep it in agricultural use.

In order to develop more proactive land protection in Town the Commission and the Harvard Conservation Trust proposed that the Town establish a standing Open Space Committee (OSC). In the end, the Select Board agreed to appoint a 9 person OSC with a 2-year charter to identify land for potential conservation protection, municipal and recreational use. The new OSC will begin work in January 2020.

In regulatory response to a request by Carlson's Orchards to place a public well on its land, the Commission voted to place a Zone 1 Restriction for Public Drinking Water Supply Protection on a portion of the adjacent Dunlap conservation land, giving assurance that land uses that could contaminate drinking water would not be allowed. The action was approved at town meeting and now will go to the State legislature.

At the invitation of the Department of Conservation and Recreation, the Commission voted to include Harvard in the expanded area of the Forest Legacy program that protects large parcels of privately owned forests with the aid of Federal funds. The Commission collaborated with the Harvard Conservation Trust on specific projects in 2019 and thanks the Trust for its ongoing work protecting land in Harvard.

Concerned about the effects of deer browsing on the health of Harvard's forests, the Commission established a Deer Management Subcommittee to monitor deer densities and their effect on the

landscape and to propose ways to manage deer populations in keeping with MA Division of Fish and Wildlife's goals of 12-18 deer per square mile in this region. In 2019 the new subcommittee with Paul Willard from the Conservation Commission, Tom Cotton from the Harvard Conservation Trust, Ben Urquhart, Jason Cole and chair, Bob Douglass was very active. They organized seven public forums inviting the State Moose and Deer Biologist from MA Fish and Wildlife, the State botanist, a Tufts researcher on ticks and tick-borne diseases, a veterinarian expert in deer contraception, land managers from area towns, Mass Audubon and The Trustees, plus hunters and others involved in deer management programs. The subcommittee presented results of surveys to assess the density of deer and impacts on conservation land in Town, researched the conditions and programs in nearby MA towns and the northeast region, posted resources on the Town website, fielded questions and input from the public and developed a plan that was presented to and accepted by the Conservation Commission in the Fall. The proposal to organize a controlled hunt, assigning bow hunters to designated conservation areas was controversial and elicited a warrant article to ban all hunting on Town conservation land at the Fall Special Town Meeting. This article did not pass, however the Commission's decision to allow a controlled hunt in the Fall of 2020 remains a hotly debated issue in Town. A number of tree stands used illegally by hunters were removed from conservation land in December. The program will continue to develop, with public forums and an expanded deer-impact monitoring program, in 2020.

The Land Stewardship Subcommittee (LSS) and a network of volunteers monitor conservation areas and maintain trails. Work this year centered on removing graffiti at Hoskings Point, completing a new trail on Willard/Poitras, rebuilding a bridge on Hoch, posting CDC tick signage and clearing invasives on Coke and along Bridal Way leading to Hermann Orchard. Jim Burns is the head of the chainsaw crew and Brian McClain helps coordinate engagement. Additional monitors and trail keepers are always needed and welcome to join the group!

LSS organizes two hikes each year to feature the Town's conservation areas. The Spring walk in early April explored the Willard and Poitras lands, introducing the new trail through this impressive wildlife area west of Bare Hill Pond. The Fall walk featured another wildlife mecca, Hermann Orchard, with its hilltop vistas and access to protected sections of Bowers Brook. Both walks were well attended and much enjoyed.

An effort to protect frogs and salamanders crossing our roads when the first "warm" rains arrive in early spring is a tradition now thanks to the leadership of Brian McClain. Signs were posted at critical crossing points where migrating amphibians are run over by cars each year. This along with human "crossing guards" and education is aimed at lessening the mortality of these seldom seen, but important members of the local ecosystem.

The Commission supported the town-wide roadside clean up in April making continued progress pulling invasive Garlic Mustard as part of that well-organized effort. Many thanks to all!

Thanks to DPW, the parking areas of Bare Hill Wildlife Sanctuary, Clapp-Scorgie and the Mass Avenue land have been improved with grading and gravel to improve access. The playing field on Ann Lees Rd, which is on conservation land but under management of Park and Recreation since its inception, was upgraded to a regulation softball field.

Mowing of the fields on Town conservation land was accomplished with all fields hayed or mowed by early October. The revenues from Agricultural leases on conservation land in 2019 totaled \$3,523.

Harvard Community Gardens flourished on the Coke land off Littleton Road; to request a plot for next year, contact: hcgmembership@gmail.org.

We would like to thank the members of the Land Stewardship Subcommittee: Jim Adelson, Pam Durrant, Jim Burns, Brian McClain, Peter von Conta, Sydney Blackwell and Wendy Sisson, plus unofficial member, John Lee.