

The following excerpt from the Conservation Commission's 2020 Annual Report summarizes some of the work of the Land Stewardship Subcommittee.

Conservation Land Acquisition and Management

With the Town's new Open Space Committee beginning work in January 2020, the Conservation Commission has been less involved with land acquisition this year. Ongoing projects include the protection of the 78-acre Prospect Hill Orchard owned and managed by the Community Harvest Project. With State funding in place towards the APR valued at \$2.5 million and commitments from the Town of Harvard through CPA funding, the Harvard Conservation Trust and Sudbury Valley Trustees, the project is nearing completion. Fundraising continues to meet those commitments. The Conservation Commission applied for the full amount requested by CHP, \$500,000, in a two-year application to the Community Preservation Committee in 2019. \$150,000 was granted in 2020 and an equal amount is anticipated in 2021. Protection of a 23-acre parcel of land on the market connecting the Clapp-Scorgie and Willard lands to the Luongo and Sprague lands on the western flank of Bare Hill Pond remains the highest priority for the Commission, but no progress was made toward this goal in 2020.

The Commission continues to work with the Park and Recreation Commission to protect the waters of Bare Hill Pond from run-off associated with recreational infrastructure and activities at the Town beach and to develop best practices to protect wetlands abutting Town athletic fields. The Anne Lees neighborhood ball field on the Holy Hill conservation complex was upgraded to a regulation softball field this year and in response the Commission developed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Park and Recreation Commission so that Park & Recreation Commission could manage the new field independently in accordance with measures to protect conservation values on the site.

2020 marked the first year of a controlled hunt, permitting bow hunters on selected conservation parcels as part of the deer management program. This first hunting season (October 5 & 19 – December 31) has yet to be reviewed in detail, but 30 hunters were admitted into the program to hunt on five parcels and one deer was harvested. The Commission will continue to work with the Deer Management Subcommittee (DMS) to evaluate the program and plan for the future. Jason Cole, who worked tirelessly to develop the program, has stepped down and Joe Pulido has been selected to take a seat on the Subcommittee. The Commission wishes to thank Bob Douglas, chair, and all the DMS members for their hard work and also Don Osmer who generously lent his expertise and innumerable hours to the program.

The Land Stewardship Subcommittee (LSS) and a network of volunteers monitor conservation areas and maintain trails. The traditional spring and fall public walks had to be cancelled this year due to the pandemic, but the trails were especially appreciated and saw increased use throughout the year. Storms with high winds in August, October and December left many blowdowns in concentrated areas that were cleared with the help of dedicated volunteers. Aiding in the effort to develop blight-resistant American Chestnut trees, LSS member Brian McClain completed the installation of an orchard of Chestnut saplings on the Powell land. The 107 well-tended young trees grew successfully, with all but one nut germinating and several saplings topping out of their five-foot deer-protection tubes by the end of the growing season.

Invasive plants were battled on conservation land with the help of WPI intern Cat Sherman who focused on manual removal of common invasives on the Williams, Clapp-Scorgie and Holy Hill lands. Later in the

summer, more intractable stands on the Williams land and Bare Hill Wildlife Sanctuary were treated with herbicide by a contractor from Oxbow Associates.

The Town welcomed two orphaned Hereford calves this summer to conservation land in Still River. Four calves are now under the care of neighbor Rob Duzan on the Haskell land as a 4-H project and educational program. LSS member Rob Traver is helping with the project to improve and extend pasture. The young beef cows are drawing appreciative attention and even slowing traffic on Still River Road!

Under the direction of Gina Ashe, teams of Bromfield students completed their community service hours this fall by creating two new trails for the Harvard Conservation Trust, clearing an old trail on the Clapp-Scorgie land, pulling invasive Japanese barberry, and refreshing trails on the Shaker Spring House conservation land. Many thanks are extended to all involved.

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 2020 totaled \$3,512. 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, Rob Traver and Wendy Sisson, plus unofficial members, John Lee and Adam Meier