

# Concord Conservation Commission Annual Report

July 1, 2011 – June 30, 2012



*View of Hoit Road Marsh from the Riley Property – Photographed by Bill Luti*

The mission of the Concord Conservation Commission is to promote, protect, manage, and develop for public use, the natural resources of the City of Concord.

In 1971, the City of Concord adopted the provisions of RSA 36-A and established a Conservation Commission. The Commission currently consists of seven regular members, three alternate members, and one Council representative. The regular and alternate members are appointed by the City Manager pursuant to Article 30-3-12 of the Code of Ordinances. Ten positions are currently filled and there are no vacancies. The group meets monthly and has two subcommittees: the Open Space Subcommittee and Trails Subcommittee.

The main responsibilities of the Conservation Commission include:

- Land Protection;
- Land Stewardship;
- Management of the City Forests;
- Management of the City Trails;
- Review of wetlands permits and conditional use permits related to disturbances to wetland buffers, shoreland protection district and buffers to bluffs;
- Conducting inventories and studies related to the City's natural resources;
- Stewardship of the City's Urban Forest; and
- Public outreach and education related to the City's natural resources;

## Land Protection and Stewardship

This past year, the Commission continued to pursue its goals of protecting priority open space through acquisition of fee ownership or conservation easements, and utilizing innovative financing techniques to leverage land acquisitions.

During Fiscal Year 2012, approximately 223.43 acres of conservation land will be protected by the City. The land has been acquired through charitable donations, easements that have been donated to the City through the site plan or subdivision approval process, and the purchase of land with funds from the Conservation Trust Fund.

Below is a summary of properties:

- Swope parcel, located westerly of Long Pond Road, includes 77.25 acres of forested land, adjacent to city-owned land in the Penacook Lake Watershed, donated to the City by the John Swope Trust with a conservation easement to Five Rivers Conservation Trust;
- Emerald Abode Subdivision parcel, located westerly of Graham Road adjacent to the Oak Hill City Forest, includes 40.72 acres of forested land, deeded to the City to satisfy the open space requirement for cluster subdivisions located in the Open Space Residential District;
- Concord Steam Conservation Easement, located southerly of Langdon Avenue, adjacent to the city-owned parcel containing the South End Marsh, includes 13.54 acres of land, donated to the City through the Planning Board review process;
- Triacca parcel, located northerly of Hopkinton Road, includes 23.92 acres of agricultural land adjacent to Dimond Hill Farm, to be deeded to the City with a conservation easement to the Five Rivers Conservation Trust; this purchase will be leveraged with a grant from the NRCS Farm and Ranchland Protection Program (which provides a 50% match) and the total cost to the City will be \$152,000; and
- St. Paul's School Jerry Hill Conservation, Trail and Access Easement, located westerly of Long Pond Road, includes 68 acres of forested land adjacent to the Swope property, to be donated to the City by St. Paul's School.

The Commission is also coordinating a land protection effort with the Five Rivers Conservation Trust to purchase a 76.5 acre conservation easement on the property known as Maplewood Farm off of Stickney Hill Road. The purchase of this property will also be leveraged with a Federal Farm and Ranchland Protection Grant. The FRPP grant will contribute 50% of the value of the conservation easement which was \$680,000. In October 2011, the City Council authorized the issuance of a bond in the amount of \$340,000 as the match for the purchase of this conservation easement. The Five Rivers Conservation Trust raised \$35,250 to be used towards the purchase of the conservation easement. Also as a result of this project, a neighboring property owner will be donating a conservation easement to the Five Rivers Conservation Trust on 18 acres of land. The Commission is also talking with other property owners in the Stickney Hill neighborhood about land conservation.

The Conservation Trust is a City trust fund which receives 50% of the monies generated from the land use change tax penalties. The Trust currently contains approximately \$568,000. The Commission also has the ability to use bonds and notes appropriated to the Conservation Trust by the City Council in 2002 for the purchase of land or easements. Approximately \$3,460,000 of the \$5,000,000 in bonds and notes has not yet been bonded. The bond is typically reserved for large projects that could not be financed alone by the Conservation Trust Fund. In 2005, the bond was used to purchase the agricultural land along the Merrimack River off of exit 16, and was also used in

2006 to contribute funds towards the purchase of a conservation easement on Dimond Hill Farm. The bond will also be used to finance the purchase of the conservation easement at Maplewood Farm.

The Commission manages approximately 216 acres of agricultural land, which includes five properties that are leased to local farming entities. The Commission also collects revenue from a wireless telecommunications tower on the Gold Star property off of Locke Road. The tower existed on the property at the time the City acquired the land and is located outside of the conservation easement. This type of development would not typically be permitted on conservation land. During fiscal year 2012 these leases generated revenue of approximately \$64,000. These funds are used to off-set the Conservation Trust Fund Property Management Budget, which is used to pay for the expenses related to the purchase of land and the management of conservation properties, and to reimburse the General Fund for debt service. This year the Commission issued an RFP to solicit a new tenant for the 80 acres of city-owned agricultural land off of West Locke Road. In April, the City signed a long-term lease agreement with the Morrill Farm Dairy of Penacook.

### **Land Stewardship**

The City currently holds 41 conservation easements on approximately 580 acres. The City is responsible for the monitoring of the conservation easements to ensure the long term protection of the land. During the summer of 2011 the Commission hosted an intern from Antioch University's Graduate School to help establish a monitoring program for the City. The internship involved organizing the conservation easement files, contacting the land owners and conducting monitoring field visits to 20 of the 41 easements, GIS mapping, creating field files and standard forms for monitoring reports and reviewing aerial photography to monitor all of the city-owned easements. The Commission is in the process of following up with the landowners to correct easement violations and plans to establish an annual stewardship and easement monitoring program.

### **Forest Management**

The Commission actively manages the City Forests and conducts yearly timber sales based on the recommendations of the City of Concord Forestry Management Plan. Good forest management promotes the development of quality forest products, effective wildlife management and recreational use of the City forestlands. The proceeds from the timber sales are used to hire a consultant City Forester who oversees the logging operations and makes recommendations for future timber sales to assure that the management of the City forests is financially self-sustaining; these funds are also used to support the City's trail system. The City Forester works closely with the Trails Committee and Planning Division staff to assist with the maintenance and construction of hiking trails in Concord.

During 2012, the Commission conducted a timber sale on the Penacook Lake watershed property off of Long Pond Road. The timber sale grossed approximately \$28,000. The Forestry Trust Fund contains approximately \$461,000.

### **City Trails**

During the past year the Commission continued its efforts to improve the network of trails in Concord. The Trails Committee met monthly to coordinate the trail maintenance and construction activities.

The Trails Committee is working to establish a new trail system at Rossvie Farm off of District #5 Road. The Committee has also worked to secure trail access, in the form of land owner agreements, to construct a trail from Silk Farm Road to Carter Hill Orchard. The trail crosses through Dimond Hill Farm and Rossvie Farm, connecting the "West End" farms. The West End Farm trail has been constructed and blazed with trail markers, with the exception of a short section of trail that will be constructed once an access agreement is secured with the

landowner. The Committee is also coordinating the construction of a trail to connect Rolinda Avenue to Russell Martin Park in the South End.

The Conservation Commission and Trails Committee are in the process of constructing new trails and a parking area/trailhead at Marjory Swope Park off of Long Pond Road. The park includes approximately three miles of trails that will lead hikers to the top of Jerry Hill over land owned by St. Paul's School, and will connect with nearby conservation lands to the west of Long Pond Road. The project should be completed by the end of June.

The Commission also continues to be an active partner with the Friends of the Merrimack River Greenway Trail to facilitate the implementation of the proposed shared use path in Concord. Two volunteer work days were held to remove trash and debris from the banks of the river and construct a walking path along the river in the approximate location of the proposed shared-use path. A representative of the Conservation Commission participated in the Merrimack River Greenway Trail Feasibility Study and continues to serve on the steering committee.

The Commission contributed funds to sponsor the Boys and Girls Club Youth Environmental Services Team (Y.E.S. Team). In exchange the group dedicated service hours towards the maintenance of City trails. The Team completed routine trail maintenance throughout the city and also constructed bridges at the Rossvie Farm property and Morono Park.

#### **Wetlands Permitting/Regulatory Review**

This past year, the Commission continued to conduct site walks and provide reports to the Planning Board, the NH Department of Environmental Services Wetland Bureau and developers on projects with proposed wetlands or other environmental impacts.

#### **Urban Trees**

The Commission contracted with Bartlett Tree Services for the pruning of the street downtown trees and the application of soil amendments to tree care for the street trees. In April, two trees were planted on Storrs Street in recognition of Arbor Day and with the assistance of the General Services Department eight additional trees have been planted.

#### **Public Education/Outreach**

The Commission now has a webpage on which it publishes documents, meeting minutes, agendas, and trail information as well as member listings. This is updated monthly.

#### **Acknowledgments**

The Commission would like to thank the City Council and Concord residents for the continued support of the Conservation Commission's efforts. The Commission also appreciates the professional support it receives from the Planning Division staff and the volunteer efforts of the Trails Committee and others who have worked to protect and improve the City's open space and natural resources.