

## **Conservation Commission 2008-09 Annual Report**

The year 2008 resulted in significant progress by the Conservation Commission on behalf of North Hampton's residents. Highlighted below are some of the achievements made by our Commission as well of the challenges ahead of us.

### **North Hampton is an Environmentally Sensitive area**

North Hampton is surrounded by several highly environmentally sensitive areas. Approximately 1,290 acres, or about 12% of the Town's land area is protected conservation land. About one-third of the Town's land area is wetlands and 29% of the land surface sits on ground water aquifers, for which we rely totally for our drinking water. The Town has two environmentally important watersheds surrounding the Winnicut and the Little Rivers. It also has two environmentally critical salt water estuaries, Little River and Bass Beach Salt marshes. Unfortunately, there is continued degradation of these environmental assets. Over 12% of the land area in Town is impermeable surface, exceeding the 10% guideline at which point wetlands begin to degrade from storm water runoff. Nonetheless, the Town continues to increase its total impermeable surface areas. Highlighted in this Report are some of the initiatives we have undertaken to mitigate the threat of continued wetlands and groundwater deterioration.

### **NH Estuaries Grant Project**

With a technical assistance grant from the NH Estuaries Project, we completed both an expert contractor technical assessment of North Hampton's wetlands buffers and drinking water aquifers and also issued a Community-wide public information newsletter describing North Hampton's environmentally sensitive wetlands areas. These are available on the Town's web site along with other information describing wetlands and buffers. The newsletter is a model for the NH Estuaries Project to use for other Towns seeking public information programs on important conservation issues. Since one-third of our town's land area is wetlands and we depend totally on indigenous groundwater aquifers for our drinking water supply, we are increasingly concerned with the escalating encroachment into our wetlands buffers. We strive to encourage the Town to be more cognizant of this, given the continuing unabated encroachment of wetlands buffer setbacks.

### **Little River Salt Marsh Restoration Project, Phase II**

With a DES Coastal Program grant, with Federal Government NOAA funding, we are working with the Rockingham County Conservation District (RCCD) to complete the permitting and engineering for the Little River Salt Marsh restoration project. This project includes excavation and dredging to allow the natural tidal flow into the upper southwestern portion of the marsh. Project activities are underway by RCCD along with DES Coastal program staff and expert contractors to complete permitting and engaging an excavation contractor. Our goal is to complete the excavation in early 2009, while equipment access into the marsh can be made on frozen turf. The outcome of the project will include mitigation of mosquitoes, reduced flooding and the restoration of natural salt water habitat in the marshes.

### **Enforcement Initiative**

Through collaborative efforts with Aquarion Water Co. and The NH Nature Conservancy, we will continue water testing in environmentally sensitive areas in Town to give baseline

information and to identify potential contamination of wetlands. We have already completed testing of Barton Brook, which transects the Dustin Farm conservation parcel. With the Nature Conservancy, we are also developing a water testing program along the Winnicut River, particularly in locations near septic systems along the river watershed. We have evidenced increasing contamination of wetlands in Town and the potential for contamination of drinking water continues to intensify. Our intent is to uncover and report any evidence of contamination to the DES for corrective enforcement actions.

### **Historic Farms Initiative**

We have completed historical research narratives for five Conservation parcels that were former farms in Town. We are continuing to work with the Heritage Commission on this initiative, with the goal of completing a summary document for publication.

### **Dalton Town Forest**

Subsequent to the overwhelming approval of the Town Forest by North Hampton voters in 2008, we have completed the required Forest Management Plan in 2008, and anticipate an initial tree harvest in early 2009. In addition, we are planning to erect the Town Forest sign using a granite signpost remaining from the demolition of the former house on Atlantic Ave owned by the Town.

### **North Hampton Forever**

The North Hampton Forever committee continues to make progress in completing federal grant documentation and in negotiating for a large parcel in Town. The acquisition of this conservation land is likely to exhaust the remaining funds from the 2001 bond issue. Further discussion is given in the North Hampton Forever Annual Report.

### **Deterioration of Wetlands and Wetlands Setbacks**

As mentioned, the wetlands and wetland setbacks continue to deteriorate in North Hampton. Contrary to our continued recommendations against approving all variances in critical wetlands and wetlands setbacks, in 2008 variances were approved by the Town for every submitted wetlands setback application, including several with septic systems within a few feet of critical wetlands. Larger quantities of storm water runoff continue to degrade these wetlands as a result of increased impermeable surfaces in the setbacks. Our goal is to continue to challenge the ongoing Town variances approvals to construct impermeable surfaces in wetlands setbacks causing wetlands deterioration, since we believe it is both in the public interest and in the spirit and intent of the wetlands setbacks ordinances.

### **Environmental Guest Speakers Series Initiative**

We are planning a guest speakers series featuring topics of interest dealing with conservation such as drinking water protection, regulation and enforcement, wetlands and wetlands buffers protection, farmland protection/use and conservation monitoring. We plan to host these lectures at the library and will enlist environmental experts from a variety of local organizations. Further information will be provided to residents from the Town web page, Channel 22 and local press releases on dates, times and subjects.

Our other ongoing activities involve the monitoring of Town conservation land, review of applications regarding wetlands setbacks, along with updating our land inventory and conservation parcels maps.

**Conservation Commission e-mail Address**

We have a new e-mail address: [Northhamptonconservation@comcast.net](mailto:Northhamptonconservation@comcast.net) and, as always, we welcome your continued suggestions and comments.

Finally, on behalf of the Conservation Commission and North Hampton Forever, we would like to thank the property owners who have agreed to place their land into conservation and residents of North Hampton for their continued support and confidence in our efforts to acquire, preserve and protect conservation land, to reduce taxes and to preserve the rural and historic character of our Town.

***Respectfully submitted by the Conservation Commission,***

Chris Ganotis, Chairman

Lee Brooks, Vice Chair

Emily Creighton, Select Board Representative

John Peterson, Treasurer

Shirley Carter

Brian Chevalier

Stan Knowles

Patty O'Connor

Alternates: Peter Simmons, Phil Thayer, Lisa Wilson

January, 2009