
Happy News for Deerfield Town Forests

For many years, the Deerfield Conservation Commission (DCC) has seen the need to permanently protect Town Forests and Conservation Areas. Deerfield voters agreed, as documented in the 2006 citizen survey, and the overwhelming town meeting votes in 2010 and 2011 were in favor of conserving our Town Forests. In 2009, DCC had begun working on the *Town Forest Protection Project* to put conservation easements on these properties. Five years later – this summer, 2014 – the work is done! All eight Town-owned Forest and Conservation Area properties, almost 700 acres, are now permanently conserved under easements:

• Arthur Chase	Town Forest	40 acres
• Dowst-Cate	Town Forest	100 acres
• Hart	Town Forest	71 acres
• Lindsay	Conservation Area	58 acres
• McNeil	Cons Area/ Town Forest	63 acres
• Weiss	Town Forest	93 acres
• Wells	Town Forest	80 acres
• Freese	Town Forest	175 acres

Why did DCC put easements on these properties? DCC believes that it is good stewardship to do so. Conservation easements assure that these public properties will remain a permanent living legacy, to be used only for such open space purposes as wildlife habitat, productive forests, clean water and air, and places people can visit for recreation, education or just peace, quiet and natural beauty. Also, a number of these parcels were donated to the Town by people who believed the Town would manage them for conservation and public use. Without such easement protection, the parcels could be sold or developed, in contrast to donors' wishes.

The lands will continue to be owned by the Town, and managed and used as they are today. All that changes is their level of protection—from temporary to permanent.

What are the benefits of permanently conserving Deerfield's Town Forests and Conservation Areas? DCC has identified a number of benefits:

- **Ensures Healthy Open Space:** The fundamental purpose of establishing conservation easements for our Town Forests and Conservation Areas is to assure that these town forests and town conservation areas remain a permanent living legacy, so that they continue to provide open space, productive forests, wildlife habitat, and clean water and air.
- **Takes The Long View:** Permanent conservation of Deerfield's Town Forests and Conservation Areas is consistent with the long-term view for sustainable management, and will allow the Town to protect their integrity into the future.
- **Maintains Town Ownership And Management:** Currently, the Town owns these properties. Placing easements on these public lands ensures that these parcels will remain forever as undeveloped open space, managed for conservation by the Town.
- **Protects Against Future Development:** Deerfield's Town Forest properties were designated as such by Town meeting votes with strong public support. But without easements, the properties could be sold for development, or developed by the Town, against the wishes of either the donors of some of the parcels, or those many voters who have supported permanent protection.

- **Delivers On Donors Wishes:** Several of the parcels were donated to the Town as conservation lands. Putting the lands under conservation easement ensures donors' wishes will be met in years to come.
- **Fits With The *Deerfield Open Space Plan*:** Our Town Forests and Conservation Areas are key parts of the town's green infrastructure network of conserved and publicly owned open space lands identified in the 2010 *Deerfield Open Space Plan of the Town Master Plan*.
- **Provides Ecological Services; Doesn't Cost Taxes For Town Services:** Open space lands provide many ecological services, such as clean water and air, flood storage, groundwater recharge, pollination and seed dispersal, carbon sequestration, wildlife habitat, etc. At the same time, over the past 30 years, many "cost community services" studies have consistently found that open space provides those benefits while also being tax positive, providing more than they cost. That's because trees and water and wetlands don't use tax-financed services such as schools, road maintenance and plowing, trash disposal and recycling, etc.
- **Provides Revenues from Timber Management:** DCC worked with the Select Board and Forestry Committee to plan a multi-year selective harvest of Town lands, under the guidance of a professional forester who first prepared a management plan for each parcel. Revenues from the timber harvest offset the cost of preparing the management plans. The remaining timber harvest revenue returns to the Town, deposited in the Town Forest Maintenance Fund, as per NH statute. Those revenues then can be used for future improvements such as trails, foot bridges, etc.
- **Creates Additional Amenities In Town Without Tax Impact:** This project had no impact on the tax rate. The Conservation Commission used the Conservation Fund to cover the cost of surveys, title review, recording fees, etc., all of which was needed to complete the legally required steps of this real estate transaction.
- **Provides Recreation and Volunteer Opportunities For Deerfield Residents:** The Deerfield Planning Board worked with Anne Deely of Neatline Associates to prepare a *Deerfield Trails Plan* in 2012. The Deerfield Trails Club, forming this year of 2014, is gathering volunteers to lay out new trails or maintain existing ones on Town Forests and Conservation Areas.

Have other towns conserved their lands? Other nearby towns that have public land protected by conservation easements include Candia, Epsom, Raymond and Strafford.

Who will be responsible for administering and monitoring of the conservation easements? The DCC selected Bear Paw as our conservation partner, after considering the interest, experience and suitability of several potential partner organizations. Bear Paw, as the easement holder, has two major responsibilities: (1) to monitor the easement annually; and (2) to document that the terms of the easement are met. DCC members and volunteers are in the process of placing permanent medallions on the boundaries that identify the parcels as permanently protected conservation land.

So, what if we want the land for something else later? (Will the conservation easements limit the Town's future use of the properties?) Limiting future uses to "open space" activities is the purpose of a conservation easement. The current uses of the Town Forest and Conservation Areas already are within that range. The lands will continue to be managed and used just as they are today, with additional conservation-based activities such as Trails Club events.

For more information, please contact DCC chair, Serita Frey, or any other DCC member.

Thank you, from a very happy Deerfield Conservation Commission.