

Bolton Conservation Commission FY 2022-23 Annual Report

Rodney Parlee (Chair), Peter Van Dine (Vice-Chair/Treasurer), Brenda Cataldo, Alan Bicknell, Jean Laughman, Matt Rivers (Alternate) and Leslie Brand (Clerk)

The Bolton Conservation Commission (BCC) is mandated to conduct research into the utilization and possible utilization of land areas in Bolton. Conservation and ecological preservation of the natural resources, viability, usefulness, and beauty of our town requires knowledge, observation, outreach, and work. The accomplishments of the BCC during FY 2022-2023 were made possible due to the perseverance, skill and effort of its members who are serving in a volunteer capacity. The Commission members bring their life experience, willingness to learn and teach, and extensive time and effort toward these goals. As our town balances economic growth with conservation of irreplaceable resources it is important that all aspects of any development be carefully reviewed by utilizing all available tools to assist regulatory agencies in making the best and most informed decisions.

The BCC participated, organized, hosted, and commented on events as follows:

Conducted voluntary research associated with Citizen Science by strategically placing temperature monitors in six streams and two vernal pools. This was done in coordination with the CT DEEP Volunteer Stream Temperature Monitoring Network, Bolton Lakes Watershed Alliance (BLWCA) and the Salmon River Watershed Partnership (SRWP). The BCC now has a total of 14 monitors that record water temperature on an hourly basis, some streams are monitored throughout the year. Two monitors went missing due to excessive flooding but were recovered thanks to metal detectors and GPS photos. The constant monitoring of our water resources, from lakes and ponds, streams, vernal pools, to aquifers is of high priority. The BCC has gained regional collaboration now that Commission member Matt Rivers serves as a BCC liaison to the SRWP.

Organized the 19th annual Riffle Bioassessment by Volunteers (RBV), a program run by the Connecticut Department of Energy & Environmental Protection (CT DEEP). After a training refresher, six volunteers went from the Herrick Park Lodge to specified locations to collect small macroinvertebrates, which live in the streambeds. The types of creatures found are identified by the CT DEEP and are a strong indicator of the health of the stream. One of the RBV volunteers submitted a beautiful poem reflecting on her volunteer experience which was printed in the town calendar.

Held the 22nd consecutive Annual Town-wide Photo Contest and as a result, completed the sale of its twelfth-edition 2023 Calendar "A Town for All Seasons". The winning photos may be found on the town website under the BCC webpage. The calendar, published by the BCC and containing winning photo contest entries, clearly illustrates the seasonal beauty of Bolton and highlights the areas of open space in town that are valued by residents and non-residents, young and old. Great prizes were delivered to the doorstep of winners and awarded by the BCC. Proceeds of calendar sales and donations help fund calendar printing, prizes, and citizen science and conservation efforts.

As publicized in the Town-wide calendar, the BCC held many events throughout the fiscal year. In October, a “Peak Foliage hike” was held in Bolton Notch State Park showcasing the heavy-duty water bars installed on the Mohegan Trail. In January, on a wet and windy day “Winter Trails Day” was held in Freja Park. In March, the well-attended “Vernal Pools Day” hike at the Nathan Hale Greenway was highlighted by a hike to a picturesque vernal pool with special guest, Herpetologist, and Andover Conservation Commission member Hank Gruner. The “Earth Day Celebration” in April took place at Freja park with Marty Aligata of CT Notable Trees. The celebration included a fairy house building contest with cool prizes, a big tree walk with an emphasis on proforestation and a spruce tree planting ceremony. Stephanie Crane of the Recreation Department teamed up with the BCC for “Kids to Parks Day” in May. Many special guests contributed to the popular “Trails Day” at the Nathan Hale Greenway. Nationally known arborist Matt “Twig” Largess dazzled everyone with Tree ID including three Love Trees and a Triple Love Tree. Three members of the Stafford Conservation Commission enjoyed themselves immensely as did people who traveled from as far away as MA.

The BCC continued to help manage Freja Park, Bates trail in Herrick Park, Mohegan trail in Bolton Notch State Park and unofficial trails in the Nathan Hale Greenway. The commission provided printed Freja park brochures, managed three kiosks, and maintained trails by holding workparties that reblazed trails, added water bars, cleaned out existing water bars and removed invasives and litter.

A highlight of the year was the formal induction of the 117-acre Box Mountain Forest in Bolton and Vernon into the national Old-Growth Forest Network. Local, private landowners, Mark and Jamie Summers were honored at the ceremony for protecting the forest from future logging. Leaving forests intact has become a crucial step as a climate change countermeasure. Keeping some forests intact as nature preserves is invaluable. This newly designated parcel will allow us to witness changes in a natural forest proforestation - in perpetuity. These old forests are a rare gift to the future.

The BCC participated in monthly CT Association of Conservation and Inland Wetlands Commission’s Inc. virtual board meetings, attended a virtual conference, and attended and tabled at a live annual meeting and environmental conference. Members attended monthly virtual meetings of the Bolton Lakes Watershed Conservation Alliance (BLWCA). The BLWCA tracked the progress of a Bolton Lakes & Watershed Management Plan by Northeast Aquatic Research now in the hands of the CTDEEP. BLWCA is made up of the Bolton lakes four watershed towns’ Conservation Commissions, Inland Wetland Commission members and agents, a member of the Friends of Bolton Lakes, Watershed property owners, Land Trusts, and staff of the North Central Conservation District (NCDD). The Alliance is a working program of the NCCD.