

Report of the Conservation Commission and Open Space Advisory Group

Report of the Conservation Commission

In 2022 the Fremont Conservation Commission continued focus on public awareness and preservation of natural resources. The Commission meets monthly and has the following responsibilities as one of the Town's Land Use Boards:

- Stewardship of over 630 acres of Town Forests including the implementation of the Town Forest and Wildlife Management Plans, thoughtful educational programs, and trail maintenance support.
- Bring public awareness and appreciation of the Town's natural resources and recreational trail system by participating in community events, regular liaison reporting to the Select Board and other Land Use Boards, advertising hikes and events through the Town Newsletter and on social media, and the distribution of announcements when special projects are complete. We are working hard to update our page on the Town's website with more material including applications for everyone's convenience.
- Communicate openly and assist landowners and conservation organizations to strategically preserve critical properties in Town. This includes coordinating review of properties for potential conservation with Open Space Advisory Group, Land Trusts, and the Select Board.
- Review land use applications and advise Boards on matters related to the Town's natural resources.
- Provide technical review and comment on state wetland permit applications on behalf of the Town.

The following are some of the highlights from 2022:

- 2022 marks a milestone in our efforts to design and implement an interpretive trail system. By combining the visions of science educator and longtime Commission member Bill Knee with the talents of a Professional Designer Connie Porter, we proudly presented the first set



of interpretive trail signs. You will see one at the Library and one along the Depot Trail in the Oak Ridge South Town Forest. This project was made possible by a generous bequest by Ariela "Aja" Mahoney, who was an educator and avid gardener. This is the first of what we hope will be many such projects to bring about public awareness of our natural resources.

Bill Knee and Leanne Miner pose with new interpretive trail panels.

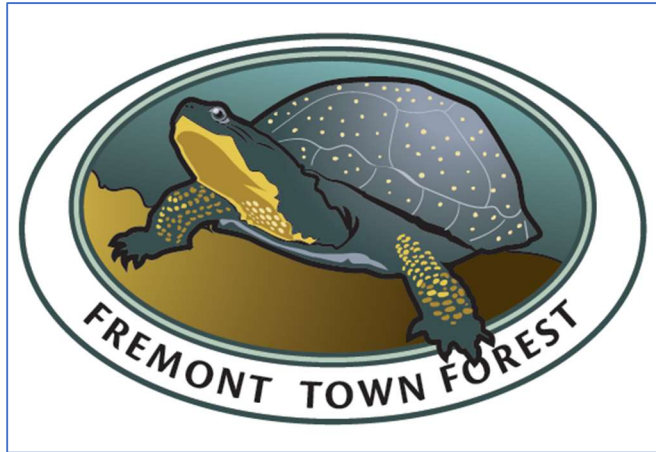
- Thanks to Rich Cooper, we have made significant progress in the planning for the next timber harvest event in Oak Ridge North as prescribed in the Town Forest and Wildlife Management Plan. I am extremely grateful for his skill and persistence in managing professional services to plan and permit this event (i.e. in herding cats). Rich also made time to liaise with New Hampshire Fish and Game and the School District on the topic of turtle habitat preservation on school property behind the Library. We hope to continue productive conversation with the School Board on this topic in 2023.

- Commission members Leanne Miner and Bill Knee engaged with a property owner to successfully conserve another 27 acres to expand the Glen Oakes Town Forest and conserve additional land with high recreational and ecological value. Three grant applications were submitted to fund more than 60% of costs of the land acquisition. While our hopes were dashed on the largest grant, the project was awarded



\$30,000 from the State Conservation Program's Moose Plate grant. We are waiting to hear back on the final grant application. Send good vibes!

- Members of the Commission worked in Subcommittee with the Planning Board to create a Natural Resources Chapter for the Master Plan.
- Reviewed and commented on a major dredge and fill permit application for Shirkin Road.
- Reviewed and commented on several land use applications before the Planning Board and Zoning Board of Adjustment with the potential to impact wetlands, wetland buffers, and other natural resources.
- Continued preparations for forest management in the Oak Ridge North area including meetings and planning with forestry and wetland consultants.
- As part of the interpretive trail designing effort, we are happy to present our new logo (below) which will soon grace our Town Forests.



Fremont Town Forest Logo and Boundary Marker

The Conservation Commission expended approximately \$3,462 of the \$3,672 budgeted in 2022. Most of the budget was spent on clerical services required to maintain meeting minutes, grant preparation, and coordination of reporting and legal documents. The remaining budget of \$209 has been deposited into a budget residual fund which will pay for new Town Forest markers in early 2023.

This year we said goodbye to our friend and longtime very active member of the Open Space Advisory Group and Zoning Board of Adjustment, Dennis Howland (1949-2022). Dennis leaves an indelible mark on our trails with his woodworking skills and ideas. I will miss his Yankee thrift. The Commission graciously accepted monies in memory of Dennis Howland totaling over \$2,000 which has been deposited in the Town Forest Management Fund and will go towards more trail and conservation projects in Town.

The Open Space 2021 Report Update was completed in early 2022 and is now available online and at the Fremont Public Library. This document was last revised in 2010. This update is an enormous achievement by the Open Space Task Force that spent many hours discussing conservation initiatives, updating conservation priorities, and the evaluation process for ranking land for conservation. Too many updates to count and new mapping. Longtime member Pat deBeer led this effort which was a big accomplishment and a great way to end her longtime tenure as a Commission member since 2004.

The Town of Fremont also has representation on the Exeter Squamscott Rivers Local Advisory Committee (ESRLAC) and Lamprey River Committee. Big thanks to longtime representatives Ellen Douglas and John Roderick and warm welcome to new member Alexa Brown who all represent the Town on the ESRLAC Committee. The Lamprey River Advisory Committee is actively seeking a Fremont Representative.

This year we welcomed new members Anne Beliveau and Jack Carson. We are always seeking new Commission Members that are interested in conserving and bringing awareness about the natural resources of our Town. You don't have to be a professional in the sciences, you just need to be interested and willing to participate. To learn more, please contact any of our members, visit the Town's website, or attend one of the regular meetings on the first Monday evening every month at the Fremont Town Hall. You can also watch us on FCTV and Vimeo live or recorded. Learn more about your Town Forests by visiting trails or "The Fremont Town Forest" Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/FremontTownForests>). We couldn't be more accessible.

Lastly, here are just a couple of interesting facts you will find in the Open Space Update...

- Consider that in 2010 Fremont had a population of 4,283 and there were about 890 acres conserved.
- In 2021 our population is about 5,000 and we now have 1,595 acres conserved; or 14.3% of the Town's land.
- Southeast Land Trust (SELT) has been very active in Town and is responsible for 568 of those newly conserved acres.
- Consider that since 2010, 144 acres have been added to the Town Forests.
- The total mileage of Town Forest Trails is 8 miles.

Respectfully submitted,

Leanne Miner

Chair of the Conservation Commission

Report of the Open Space Advisory Group

The passing of Dennis Howland, former Chair of the Open Space Advisory Group, in early 2022 left an enormous void in the lives of his many loved ones, friends, and family, but also the Town of Fremont and the many Committees and Boards on which he served as a Fremont concerned citizen. The Fremont Open Space Group has especially been affected by his loss. Dennis Howland was certainly "our avowed leader," "master trailblazer," "prime mover and shaker" and founding member of Fremont Open Space Group. Fremont would not have such an excellent hiking trail system in the town forests and conservation areas were it not for Dennis's vision, adept woodworking skills, and effort in all aspects of hiking trail creation.

The Fremont Open Space Group has proposed and is in the process of approving 2 or 3 fitting tributes to honor Dennis's legacy in 2023. Already approved is a Leopold sitting bench on the Marsh Trail with the inscription "In Memory of Dennis R. Howland, Trailblazer Extraordinaire" Also planned is officially naming a Town Forest trail in his honor.

For the past few years, Dennis worked to establish a mutually beneficial working relationship with Southeast Land Trust (SELT). Dennis worked with SELT's land manager in joining the Fremont Glen Oakes Town Forest's BARRED OWL TRAIL into SELT's new Spruce Swamp Conservation trail system. A number of Dennis' priority initiatives and ideals remain instilled in the minds and values of the Fremont Open Space Group's current regular and part-time members and volunteers. We will endeavor to carry on his efforts!

Although 2022 was not a high-water mark for trail projects in the Town Forests, we accomplished a variety of tasks, big and small. In addition to the usual Springtime trail maintenance and brush clearing in October 2022, Open Space members and volunteers spent upwards of 40 hours spreading wood chips to improve the trail surface for hikers and walkers leading to and along a new "interpretive nature trail" along Depot Trail (near the Fremont Public Library off Rockingham Rail Trail). Inspired by a bequest from a Fremont resident Ariela

Mahoney, longtime Conservation Commission Member/Co-Chair, biologist, and educator Bill Knee designed and planned the interpretive educational nature trail.

The initial signage showing a map of the interpretive trail along with artwork depicting local flora /fauna and related information was recently installed near the parking area of the Fremont Public Library. Open Space members encourage the public to check it out! Conservation Commission Vice Chair Bill Knee, Open Space Group Chair Rich Cooper, and member Sam Harris installed new interpretive trail signage at the Library. Be sure to check it out in the Library parking lot.



In the Spring of 2022, at the request of the Fremont Conservation Commission, the Fremont Open Space Group was chartered to evaluate a property considered for acquisition and earmarked for permanent conservation by the Town of Fremont. Funds for the land purchase were provided from the Fremont Conservation Commission's Land Use Change Tax Conservation Fund and the NH Conservation Commission's Moose Plate Grant program. (Kudos to Leanne Miner, Fremont's Land Use Administrator, for completing and submitting the long and detail-tedious grant application!)



The 25 acre "Lawrence" parcel abuts the southern end of The Glen Oakes Town Forest, a section of Spruce Swamp, and has access frontage on Copp Drive. The property will be a high-value addition to the Glen Oakes Town Forest! The sale and acquisition proceedings are currently underway.

Photos courtesy of Sam Harris, Bill Knee & Heidi Carlson



Members of the Open Space Advisory Group conduct a site visit as part of their efforts to evaluate land for conservation.

On Sunday, November 27, the Fremont Open Space Group, led by Sam Harris, sponsored a historically interesting hike featuring some old cellar holes and stories of the families who settled in Fremont in the late 1700's and early 1800's. All nine hearty, hiking adventurers enjoyed hiking, seeing trails through Phillips Exeter Academy Forest, then along several of the trails in Fremont's Oak Ridge North system. The hike lasted just over 2 hours during a very chilly and blustery day.

On December 13, 2022, at an Open Space Group meeting, the following items were discussed for prioritizing effort and action by the Group in 2023.

1. High effort assistance was pledged by Open Space Group membership to complete installation of the Interpretive Nature Trail begun in late 2022. This will include light landscaping, planting, hole-digging, stone work, mulching, etc. Our goal is for completion of the project during the first half of 2023.
2. Finishing, installing and dedication of the Dennis Howland Memorial Leopold sitting bench on the Marsh Trail.
3. Repair of the kiosk at the head of the Oak Ridge South trailhead off Meetinghouse Road. The kiosk was damaged by over 20 9mm bullet holes.
4. Installation of several "hiker" signs pointing to hiking trails off Route 107 and North Road.
5. Possible construction and installation of one or two Leopold sitting benches along scenic overlooks in Fremont's hiking trail network.
6. Installation of Fremont Town Forest and Conservation Easement signage using metal posts along areas where needed.

Respectfully submitted,

Rich Cooper
Acting Chair, Fremont Open Space Group