

The Dummerston Conservation Commission Annual Report, 2006

The mission of the Conservation Commission is to promote community responsibility and awareness of our conservation needs and to encourage stewardship of the natural habitat.

The Commission has had a busy year. This report is an overview of some of the projects we have worked on in 2006, and will continue to work on in the coming year.

Biodiversity Project

The Commission continues to gather information about Dummerston's natural environment and natural resources following the guidelines in the state has outlined in *Conserving Vermont's Natural Heritage*. In 2006, we explored the following topics through presentations and field trips: geology, contiguous land, connecting lands, enduring features, natural communities, wetlands, riparian areas, aquatic features, vernal pools, rare, threatened, and endangered species, deer wintering habitat and mast stands. Working with Patti Smith, a commission member and naturalist at the Bonnyvale Environmental Education Center, we are using the study findings to 1. develop a town conservation plan, 2. provide information on natural resources to the select board, the planning board and the development review board, and 3. pinpoint and address areas of environmental concern. As Dummerston is one of the first communities to undertake such a project, we are coordinating our work with officials at the State Department of Natural Resources. Names of volunteers are being gathered to assist in gathering more in-depth information about natural Dummerston over time.

Through this project, the Commission has identified four areas of concern:

1. Identification and protection of wildlife corridors
2. Invasive species control and elimination
3. Stream degradation
4. Vernal pool protection.

The Commission has brought these concerns to the attention of the Select Board. They will be discussed with other town boards and action will be taken as needed.

Website Development

The Commission has developed a community website at www.dummerstonconservation.com that includes the findings of the

Biodiversity Project, information on all other Commission Projects, reports, minutes of Commission Meetings, a large selection of town maps, and programs from the Place project that was sponsored by the Planning Commission and the Conservation Commission. This website is designed and maintained for easy access by town board members, the people of Dummerston and others who are interested in our town or want to implement our model for studying the biodiversity of our community.

Prospect Hill Stewardship

Charlie Richardson has supervised extensive cutting and pruning on Prospect Hill to preserve the view and remove invasive species. He has prepared a report on Prospect Hill that will guide the future of the Commission's stewardship of this town property.

Rain Garden

Jack Lily has worked with the Soil Conservation Commission to develop a Rain Garden next to the parking lot at the Covered Bridge. This landscaped and intensively planted area will filter run off water from the road before it goes into the West River. This is a model project. The Soil Conservation Commission will be monitoring it and sharing it as an option to be used at similar sites.

Salamander Crossing

In the spring, commission members helped to find volunteers and assisted with the annual early spring salamander migration at the site of the East West Road vernal pool. This project saves the lives of my salamanders as they migrate across the road from the forest to the vernal pool to lay their eggs. Documentation of these migrations is helping biologists to understand the habits of these reclusive creatures and to learn why the numbers of a specific salamander, the Jefferson, have been radically reduced.

Wildlife Observations

Commission members keep a close watch for wildlife and one of the most enjoyable parts of each meeting is reports of wildlife sightings. Sightings this year have included moose, bear, bobcat, coyotes, mink, barred owls, bats, turtles, turkeys, woodcocks, a blue heron and pygmy grasshoppers. Townspeople are asked to report wildlife sightings to the commission through the website.

Of special interest is the Black Racer Snake. Once common in this area and in Southern Vermont, it is now extremely rare. State herpetologists are looking for den sites so they can monitor and protect this species. The snakes are long, slim, black and harmless. Until recently it was thought that these snakes, once common in Dummerston, were no longer here. However, road kill of a Black Racer in a nearby town, close to the Dummerston border, give us hope that some of these snakes might still be here. If you see a black racer, try not to disturb or hurt it and report your sighting to the Commission through the website www.dummerstonconservation.com or call 257-0012.

The Conservation Commission meets the second Thursday of every month at 7:30 in the town office. For more information, or to volunteer for a Commission Project, visit the website at www.dummerstonconservation.com or call 257-0012.

Mary Ellen Copeland Chair

John Warren, Clerk

Charlie Richardson

Jack Lilly

Cami Elliot-Knaggs

John Warren

Hector Galbraith

Bill Schmidt

Patti Smith

Ed Anthes

Bill McKim