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Report from the Land Stewardship Coordinator Accomplishments for 2017

The Land Stewardship Coordinator (Ellen Snyder) works in consultation and collaboration with the Durham Land Stewardship Subcommittee to coordinate land stewardship activities, responsibilities and opportunities on town-owned lands, fulfill conservation easement obligations, and provide information through the town website, E-News, kiosks and other forums to inform and engage the public in caring for and enjoying town lands. This is a contract position for about 10 hours per week that began March 1, 2017.

Stewardship of Town-Owned Lands

Oyster River Forest (ORF) (172 acres) and Spruce Hole Bog (42 acres)

Fifty-acre Habitat Project

- Coordinated ongoing young forest/shrubland habitat restoration and invasive plant control project with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), Rockingham County Conservation District, NH Fish and Game, and consulting forester Charlie Moreno.
- Hosted a site walk to the ORF with the Land Stewardship Subcommittee and project partners to discuss the habitat project, which is funded by NRCS.
- Hosted a volunteer training on the invasive wild parsnip; with help of volunteers pulled 3,620 parsnip stems. This was the 4th year of hand control of this plant.

Trails and Public Access and Interpretive Signs

- Helped Conservation Commission plan and host a volunteer work day at the ORF with UNH Fraternity: cleared trails, added bark mulch, removed trash, installed sign posts.
- Helped the Oyster River Trails volunteer group coordinate volunteer trainings and work days with trails consultant Lew Shelley, which resulted in trail improvements and new bridges on the trail from Packers Falls Road to College Woods and added trail markers in ORF and Spruce Hole.

Thompson Forest (54 acres)

Conservation Easement Deed Obligations – Archaeological Surveys

Worked with the Southeast Land Trust of NH (Easement holder) and NH DRED (Land & Water Conservation Fund) to fulfill Town obligations under the conservation easement deed. This involved contacting NH Fish and Game, NH Natural Heritage, and NH Dept of Historic Resources to determine level of sensitivity of the Thompson Forest for these resources as required by the deed, prior to ground disturbance for trails, invasive removal, or other projects. Oversaw drafting of an RFP and hiring of an archaeologist to conduct Phase IA and IB surveys on the property and provided follow-up correspondence with project partners to ensure town could move ahead with projects.

15-acre Habitat Project

- Initiated a partnership with NH Fish and Game to manage 15 acres of overgrown old pasture on Thompson Forest as young forest/shrubland habitat to benefit New England cottontail and other wildlife, funded by NHFG.
- Created outreach materials for the community and abutters to the property including Friday Updates, letters to abutters asking for comment, and hosted a site walk. Also responded to several landowners during the project
- Worked with NHFG and consulting forester Charlie Moreno to scope the project – removing invasive shrubs and mid-successional forest to create desired habitat. Identified two contractors – Forest Savers of Vermont and Morse Logging of Maine -- and helped monitor and coordinate the completion of this first phase of the project in Fall 2017.
- Collaborated with the Conservation Commission and NHFG to design a new trail for the property, which an Eagle Scout will help create in Spring 2018.
- Worked with NH Fish and Game to plan the next phase: planting and mulching of native shrubs in May 2018.

Doe Farm (87 acres)

- Met with the Trustees of the Trust Fund at their request to discuss management priorities and funding needs and opportunities to collaborate with the Land Stewardship Subcommittee.
- Formed a subcommittee with the Trustees and several members of the LSC to discuss the Will of Olinthus Doe, the history of land stewardship at Doe Farm, stewardship needs, and recommendations to the LSC on a path forward to be discussed at the Feb 2018 LSC meeting.
- Led a walk with the LSC to Doe Farm to look at trail needs, invasive plants, and property highlights.

Wagon Hill North (40 acres)

Twenty-acre habitat project

Met with NHFG to review their ongoing habitat management project on 20 acres at Wagon Hill North to benefit New England cottontail. As part of their invasive control last fall they cleared the trail that leads from Watson Road through the clearing.

Milne (1.5 acres)

- Met with the Milne Trustee to evaluate site for invasive species and landscape plan.
- Flagged invasive Norway maple.
- Participated in meeting to discuss expending Trust Funds for stewardship of the property as intended by the Milne Trust.

Other

- Researched boundary signs for fee-owned town lands and town-held conservation easements.
- Helped plan a volunteer work day with Conservation Commission and Durham-Great Bay Rotary to improve trails at the Longmarsh Preserve.
- Worked with NRCS to complete a Compatible Use Authorization for the Oyster River Forest per the easement deed. Included provisions such as trails, forest and habitat management, and seed collecting by approved partners
- Researched all town-owned properties, including the Willey and Ellingwood parcels on Dame Road. Provided property inventory spreadsheet to LSC, Heritage Commission, Agricultural Commission, and Town Planner
- Wrote a grant application for funding the Littlehale Pond Restoration and other land stewardship.

Conservation Easement Monitoring

Easement monitoring protocol and filing

- Researched and developed a new standardized easement monitoring protocol
- Created and organized files in the town hall for each of the town held conservation easements and Executory Interests
- Planned and hosted, with UNH Cooperative Extension, an Easement Monitoring Training for volunteers

Annual Easement Monitoring

- Coordinated the hiring of a contractor to monitor the Capstone easement, funded by an existing Trust specific to this easement.
- Coordinated, with assistance of town volunteers, the annual monitoring of the following conservation easements and wrote and filed monitoring reports:
 - Beaudette
 - Fogg
 - Merrick
 - Oyster River Forest (a town-owned property with NRCS-held easement, that requires the town to monitor)

Landowner Outreach and Assistance

- Coordinated trail stewardship by volunteers with landowner Mary Merrick (town held easement that allows public access)
- Assisted Troy Fogg, his realtor, and potential buyers over several months to clarify and explain the conditions of the conservation easement prior to sale of the 4.46-acre Fogg property

Information and Education

- Attended the monthly Land Stewardship Subcommittee meetings to discuss stewardship issues, projects and priorities.
- Contributed 33 pieces to the Administrator's weekly Friday Updates.
- Reviewed the Town website and developed a set of recommendations for changes and updates to the conservation-related portions. Began implementing some of those changes in collaboration with Craig Stevens (IT).
- Answered numerous emails from residents, students, town staff, committee members about various issues: invasive plants, town-owned lands, agricultural opportunities on town lands, hunting on town land, Eagle Scout projects, among others.
- Hosted an Oyster River High School Student for a day-long job show.
- Assisted ORHS Science Class with invasive plant class exercise.
- Created a list of student land stewardship project ideas.
- Coordinated installation of an information kiosk with contractor and volunteers at the Oyster River Forest and Thompson Forest.
- Helped staff a booth about the Wagon Hill living shoreline project at the annual Durham Day.

These were the Goals for First Year of the Land Stewardship Coordinator as outlined in March 2017:

These goals were met, at least to some degree:

- Cadre of trained and engaged town volunteers to help with ongoing stewardship projects
- Prioritized list of stewardship needs for town-owned properties
- Methodology for tracking stewardship activities on town lands
- Standardized protocol for monitoring all town-held easements and trained easement volunteer monitors
- More informed public about land stewardship issues through town website, weekly E-Bulletin, work days, field trips, presentations
- More people using the trails on town lands and helping to care for town lands

These goals were not met, but are a priority in 2018:

- Easy to navigate information on the town website related to town lands and stewardship information
- All existing town trails on web-based searchable site (i.e., Trailfinder)

Other priorities for 2018 include:

- Inventory of town conservation areas to identify stewardship and maintenance needs
- Continue implementing stewardship projects on properties highlighted above, with Doe Farm as a new focus area in 2018.