

**Williston Conservation Commission
Annual Report
July 1, 2022 - June 30, 2023**

The town considered the redevelopment of the Glaser parcel (a 97 acre parcel at Old Stage and Mountain View Road) under the Specific Plan provisions of the Williston Development Bylaws. The land is presently used for haying and grazing by the Windswept Farm horse farm and the owner was seeking to develop the parcel with new homes. Gary Hawley served as the WCC representative on the Specific Plan Committee that developed a recommendation to the Planning Commission to approve the proposals. The WCC also reviewed the proposal on three occasions and made a formal recommendation to the Planning Commission. If the Selectboard approves the development in FY 2024, the project will conserve 15 acres of viewshed, preserving views of Camels Hump and the Green Mountains (see proposed rendering). This viewshed land could be transferred to the town, together with a further 38 acres of pasture, wetland and forest.



1 Proposed Rendering by Digital Media Solutions

The WCC worked on updates to the Significant Wildlife Habitat Area regulations in the town's development bylaws. Working with Jens Hilke from Vermont Fish and Wildlife, the WCC leveraged an earlier analysis of the Town's habitat blocks to categorize them into 3 tiers of importance. Habitat connectors and wildlife road crossings were also identified. The changes require avoiding development on Tier 1 habitat and minimizing development on Tier 2 habitat. The analysis also examined how relief could be given where parcels were highly constrained by identified habitat blocks to ensure that landowners retain some rights to develop their land. The WCC developed draft amendments to Chapter 27 of the Williston Development Bylaws to enact these changes. In FY 2024 they will conduct outreach and consultation on these changes.

The WCC met with Adam Morse from Fellowship of the Wheel to discuss safer access to trails at Mud Pond Country Park, particularly for children and families, and for those who use adaptive bikes. Bikers previously had to travel from the parking lot along the busy and fast South Road to get to the Country Park. Together a schedule of trail improvements was developed for a short section of the Mud Pond Conservation Area which previously did not allow bikes. The WCC consulted with the community of hikers and walkers who use the Conservation Area trails and discussed the ecological impacts of the work. This resulted in an update to the Management Plan for the Conservation Area. WCC collaborated with FOTW to upgrade a short trail, along with appropriate signage, through Mud Pond Conservation area to provide safe access to the adaptive MTB trails Mud Pond Country Park

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2 FotW working on the trail at South Road

The WCC drafted a policy for the Selectboard to regulate trapping on town owned land. The Commission heard comments from local residents and worked closely with the Department of Public Works. The policy prohibits all non-essential trapping on town owned land, so recreational trapping is not permitted. The only trapping allowed is to manage beavers where critical infrastructure, property or public safety is threatened. In those cases where trapping is allowed, best practice and humane methods need to be followed. The policy was adopted by the Selectboard.

The Conservation Commission also worked on the following:

- Secured a Watershed Protection grant from the State of Vermont to install protective fencing around newly planted trees at Abazimenahanik, a new forest park being developed by volunteers and students on the land between the Allen Brook School and Fire Station
- Amending the Williston Development Bylaws to require that Habitat Disturbance Assessments for new development be conducted by a biologist contracted to the town instead of the developer to facilitate a more objective assessment.
- Sought public comment and approved a request to reroute the Schmoker Trail to help the landowner farm his property. This showed support for our working landscapes and recreational use of our primitive trails.
- Promoting No-Mow May at Green Up Day. This encourages home owners to leave their lawns unmowed for a month to benefit wildflowers and insects. The Commission gave out 35 yard signs to promote the initiative.
- Exploring the potential reuse of the town's remote cabin at the Pine Ridge property by organized groups. Ultimately the Commission decided that it was not feasible for the town to take on management of the cabin. This decision may be revisited in the future.
- WCC recommended supporting the 30 by 30 initiative; conserving 30% of land by 2030, and allocating \$100,000 for the ERF. The Town allocated \$50,000 to the ERF in the budget for FY24. The ERF balance was \$419,187 as of June 30, 2023.



3 State of Vermont Conservation License Plate program



4 Photo by Marcy Kass

The Conservation Commission reviewed 2 Discretionary Permits and 3 Pre-Application requests.

Respectfully submitted by the Williston Conservation Commission:

Eric Howe, Chair
David Westman, Vice Chair
Reed Carr
Laura Meyer

Kim Coleman
Gary Hawley
Terry Marron