

## **President's Remarks**

Newton Conservators 2015 Annual Meeting

Beth Wilkinson

Welcome! It's nice to see so many of you.

I'd like to begin with a thank-you to the Board of Directors, who have worked hard this year, and to our Board of Advisors, whom we've called on more than ever this year. You're all terrific!

There is a lot to think about as we come together to celebrate the 54<sup>th</sup> year that the Newton Conservators have been helping to preserve open space and the natural environment in Newton.

Much is happening in the natural world to cause us to worry.

Worldwide, the oceans are rising from climate change, causing whole countries to vanish into the sea.

In our nation, there is the drought in California, commercial development and mining that threaten the Grand Canyon, and the depletion of the aquifers.

Even right here in Newton: there is the question of whether our conservation areas are resilient enough to sustain wildlife as climate change continues to make itself felt.

All of this could cause us to be paralyzed, so paralyzed and so distressed that we might just sit, contemplating the terrible state of the environment and all the sometimes-conflicting steps that could be taken to improve the situation. It is critical that we use

our concern, our distress about the state of the environment to motivate us to do our little part to make things better—and to experience the joy that being out in nature can bring.

Many Conservators have been doing their part to make our part of the natural world a better place.

Some of us have pulled invasive plants in Nahanton Park, at Dolan Pond, in Cold Spring Park, near Blue Heron Bridge. Our members have surveyed our own lands and those City lands for which we hold the conservation restrictions. We have had tree work done at Ordway Park and at Dexter Woods, pruning back the oaks hanging over the neighbors across the street.

At the City's request, the board of directors agreed to hold the Conservation Restriction for the Waban Hill Reservoir, and worked with our pro bono lawyer, Leigh Gilligan, and city attorney Bob Waddick to craft a document that will protect that 5-acre property for the enjoyment of generations to come.

Our members have led walks through Newton's conservation areas, helping others to learn to appreciate them—and to protect them—even more. When I first became president last year, I asked everyone I ran into what they thought about the Conservators and what about us they liked the most. Almost unanimously, the walks came up at the top of the list.

We also co-sponsored educational talks about edible wild plants and co-existing peacefully with coyotes.

We've worked with the Conservation Office to help update the signs in those conservation areas, and we've started the long

process of updating our much-loved and much-used Trail Guide. Some of board members joined elected officials and Rep. Ruth Balser to meet with DCR to discuss plans for Hammond Pond, Quinobequin Road, and DCR land along the Charles River.

Our members reviewed applications for the grants we give every year and awarded scholarships to students in the Environmental Science summer program, stipends to the interns at the Newton Community Farm, and money for special-needs high-school students to attend the Appalachian Mountain Club's "Mountain Classroom" at Crawford Notch.

All in all, it's been a busy year. What I've enjoyed most about the year is getting to know many of you better and learning more about all the good that you do in our city. For those of you whom I haven't had a chance to get to know better, well, we have a whole year stretching out ahead of us, and I hope we will have a chance to talk—and, even better, to work together.

This year, the board has talked a great deal about our communication with members and how we can let members know more about what everyone has been doing.

Our website, maintained by Dan Brody, always contains updated listings of all our events as well as information about all conservation areas in Newton. I'm continually surprised by what is on the website.

The other day, I was looking up Nahanton Park (more about that later.) At the end of the main page for the park, I was delighted to see Alison Leary's article about birding in the park and Michael Clarke's article about the history of Newton's

almshouses from 1731 to 1964. Our website truly is a treasure trove of information. When you have a few minutes of down time, just browse to see what's there. (You may have noticed that we're featuring a different section of the website in each edition of our newsletter.)

The newsletter is another way that we communicate with the rest of the organization. As the editor, I'm always delighted by the terrific and busy people that are willing to take time to write for us.

In addition, we have an online bulletin, our E-Bulletin. Ted Kuklinski regularly sends out E-Bulletins with information about events that come up in between issues of the newsletter and, sometimes, events sponsored by other organizations, for which we don't have space in the newsletter.

In the past two months, newcomer Mat Calabro has revived our Facebook page, and it contains reminders of events and is a good source for last-minute changes and other information. On Eric Olson's second vernal pond walk last month, three of the folks on the walk learned about it on Facebook. Follow us on Facebook!

That's a lot of information going out to you. We're just as interested in communication coming back to us, two-way communication. When I attend meetings, I feel very comfortable saying "Our board is in favor of this plan" or "Our board would not like to see that happen," but I feel much less confident saying that about the membership as a whole. Please make me feel more comfortable—talk to us!

How? Well, the first way is to respond to the questionnaire that Chris Hepburn made and that's on your table. There are extra copies. Please take some to share with neighbors whom you think should be talking to us, too.

We'd like to see more of you, too. Our walks, listed in all the places that I talked about above, are a great place for that. And, we're determined to give you more opportunities to interact with us.

The board is very excited about an event taking place exactly one month from today—on June 6. Someone—George Mansfield?—gave it the name June Doin'. There are copies of that on the table, too. It's going to be a celebration for the whole family. As you can see, there will be a whole range of events, starting with an early-morning fishing contest for those under 16 and an early morning bird walk with Pete Gilmore and proceeding through Don Lubin's fern walk, Henry Finch's walk to Cutler Park, craft projects, an invasive-plant-pulling contest—and more. It should be a lot of fun!

With everything that is going on, we need the help of many of you in the audience. "What can I do?" you may ask. Well, you will find a variety of ways listed at the end of the slightly different president's message included in your program. Many of them are short, one-time projects. For example, you could help us direct people at the June Doin' or write a book review for the newsletter—or suggest something that hasn't yet occurred to us.

That's enough from me. Now, it's time for us to honor three people who have made conservation a major part of their lives and, in the process, have improved our lives.