

Annual Meeting and Awards

The Newton Conservators 55th Annual Meeting, held on May 4, 2016, reflected the concerns of the nation at large; illegal aliens, attacks from within, the urgent need for rapid response. Fortunately, the discussion was a lot less contentious than it's been in the larger political arena.



Bryan Connolly

Bryan Connolly, Assistant Professor of Biology at Framingham State University and President of the New England Botanical Club, delivered the keynote address. Taking up the issue of the invasive plant species of Massachusetts, Connolly not only described the most common invasive plant species in our region, their origin and spread, but also warned about the new invaders to the Commonwealth, suggesting methods of biocontrol, early detection and rapid response.

Conservators' President Beth Wilkinson gave a quick recap of the Conservator's year. Highlights included the first annual June Doin', a family friendly day at Nahanton Park that included a fishing competition, bird walks, a fern walk, and an invasive plant pull; City approval of the Conservators' three-part plan to remove trees from the Woodcock Meadow; collaboration with the Friends of Webster Woods to advocate for the preservation of the Temple Mishkan Tefila land; successful advocacy for reduced hardscape in the Cabot School renovation and expansion plans; review of proposals for a master plan for Waban Hill Reservoir; successful expansion of our invasives removal efforts; and the decision to join with conservation groups throughout the state in the Climate Change Adaptation Coalition and with many of the same groups in supporting Green Budget, which implements Governor Baker's suggestion that 1% of the state budget go toward environmental programs.

Following tradition, the Conservators also presented three awards:

The Environmentalist of the Year Award



Jon Regosin, David Backer, Bob DeRubeis

The Environmentalist of the Year Award is presented by the Newton Conservators to an individual or group who has made a distinguished environmental contribution to our community. The 34th annual award honored an entire flock of environmentalists for their work to reclaim the open space of Woodcock

Meadow at Nahanton Park for the annual flights of the American Woodcock. Those recognized included Jon Regosin, Chief of Conservation Science at Commonwealth of Massachusetts; Bob DeRubeis, Newton Parks & Recreation Commissioner; Marc Welch, Newton's Director of Urban Forestry; and the rest of the Woodcock Meadow Team of Suzette Barbier, Chris Hepburn, Duane Hillis, Katherine Howard, Eric Olson, Larry Smith, Bruce Wenning, Beth Wilkinson, and the members of the Forestry Team in the Parks and Recreation Department.

Woodcock Meadow is not under attack by developers but is being threatened by encroaching trees (the invasive black locust as well as a group of native white pine trees) and invasive shrubs and brambles, such as dewberry. The meadow is named for the American Woodcock, the only member of the sandpiper family that is adapted to woodlands and meadows rather than shoreline habitats. The Massachusetts Division of Fisheries & Wildlife lists them as a Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN). Like all meadows, Woodcock Meadow (along with all the shrubs surrounding it) has been home to migratory songbirds, wildflowers, bees and other pollinators, and many butterflies. As the grassland is diminished, so, too, will be the population of those valued inhabitants, among them the American Woodcock. But thanks to the efforts of our award winners, the Woodcocks have already found the more open meadow and are again using it this spring.

Charles Johnson Maynard Award



Jon Orren, Bill Hagar, Thomas Gwin

Charles Johnson Maynard was a naturalist and ornithologist who was born in Newton in 1845. Each year the Conservators give the Charles Johnson Maynard Award to recognize efforts "to improve biodiversity, habitat reclamation, and natural resource protection." This year the Conservators recognized two individuals, Thomas Gwin and Jon Orren, for their work at Newton North and Newton South High Schools to educate and to inspire the next generation of Newton's conservationists and scientists.

Jon Orren is a chef of many hats. Jon is a teacher at Newton South High School (NSHS) for more than 200 students in culinary arts, nutrition, food science, and special education life skills classes. He also directs NSHS's Sustainable Agriculture Program and advises the students who manage the school's 2,500 square foot organic garden

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and composting program. And if that's not enough, Jon is Education Committee Chairperson for the Newton Community Farm. Jon is a certified culinary instructor and food handler with many years of experience as a personal chef, food writer, and cook in numerous Boston and New York City gourmet restaurants. As part of his culinary adventures, he also launched, owned, and managed a successful specialty pickle business in NYC for many years. Jon is a graduate of Newton North High School and Columbia University.

Tom Gwin just can't seem to quit. Recently called out of retirement to be Newton North High School's Interim Science Department Head, Tom had been Principal at Winchester High School for 13 years. But before that he'd influenced thousands of Newton students as he taught at NNHS from 1986 to 2003, fifteen years of those as the Science Department Head, and for nearly nine years as a science teacher at F.A. Day Junior High School. Tom is always on the lookout for new ways to engage students with conservation and science, whether it is in his role as manager of the Newton North Science Department Blog or encouraging NNHS Advanced Placement Biology students in conducting a study of salamanders in Edmunds Park. A graduate of Dartmouth College, Tom has M.A. in Technical and Professional Writing from Northeastern University and an Ed.D in Educational Administration from Boston College.

The Directors' Award

The Directors' Award for 2016 recognized Attorney Leigh Gilligan, a partner at the firm of McCarter & English in their Environment and Energy practice group, for her legal



Beth Wilkinson, Leigh Gilligan

expertise and guidance in creating the Conservation Restriction for the Waban Hill Reservoir. Lee was recognized as a Massachusetts *SuperLawyer* for 2004-2015 and is listed as a Leader in her Field by Chambers USA.

"Without a doubt, she was a super lawyer for the Newton Conservators!" enthused Conservators president Beth Wilkinson as she presented the award, going on to explain, "I first heard about Leigh when fellow NC director Willis Wang recommended her as a perfect lawyer — and pro bono at that — to help us with the conservation restriction for the Waban Hill Reservoir."

The Conservators team, while committed, had no previous direct experience with drafting a conservation restriction. "She quickly explained what we needed to know, talked with the City's team on our behalf," said Wilkinson. "She worked with Bob Waddick to produce the first draft of the conservation restriction (called a CR by those "in the know") and then with the Conservators' board to work on the amendments that we felt would do most to protect the land for future generations."

But Leigh's support doesn't stop there. "Fortunately for us," said Wilkerson, "she has agreed to help us again with the CR for Nahanton Park." ■

— Margaret Doris

ALL PHOTOS: HENRY FINCH

MISSION Newton Conservators, Inc.

The Newton Conservators promotes the protection and preservation of natural areas, including parks, playgrounds, forests and streams, which are open or may be converted to open space for the enjoyment and benefit of the people of Newton. It further aims to disseminate information about these and other environmental matters.

A primary goal is to foster the acquisition of land, buildings and other facilities to be used for the encouragement of scientific, educational, recreational, literary and other public pursuits that will promote good citizenship and the general welfare of the people of our community.

The Newton Conservators was formed as a not-for-profit organization 55 years ago in June 1961.

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We welcome material related to our mission from any source. Send proposed articles or letters by email in MS Word or rich text format to bethwilkinson@mac.com. Digitized photographs, maps and diagrams are also welcome.

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