

Our President's Reflections on the State of Our Organization

From the Annual Meeting on May 11, 2016

2016 has been a busy and productive year for the Newton Conservators! Congratulations and thanks to all the members who have helped us to accomplish these valuable projects:

June Doin' — The first June Doin' took place at Nahanton Park soon after our 2015 annual meeting and was a terrific day that included a fishing competition, bird walks, a fern walk, three nature events led by Eric Olson, a planting opportunity from the Newton Community Farm, and an invasive plant pull.

This year's second June Doin' on Saturday, June 11, promises many of the same events — and even more varied events. Look for canoeing demos, a salamander hunt, tours of Woodcock Meadow.

Woodcock Meadow — We are very proud of this year's work at Woodcock Meadow. Trees had encroached on the native grassland so much that the meadow was beginning to disappear. The number of American woodcocks using the meadow for their amazing annual mating displays (see more information in our spring newsletter) was decreasing significantly.

We presented a three-part plan to remove trees from the meadow to the Parks and Rec Department and Commission and received the approval of both. We were delighted that the Forestry Department did the first large set of removals, and our team of volunteers spent two days removing brush.

The Woodcocks have already found the more open meadow and are again using it this spring.

Later this year, we hope to begin work with the Parks and Rec Department and the City Law Department on the conservation restriction for all of Nahanton Park.

Waban Hill Reservoir — After the annual meeting last year, the state approved the conservation restriction, which we helped draft, for Waban Hill Reservoir.

This spring, I worked with project leader Carol Schein and City Councilor Ruthanne Fuller to review the eight proposals that firms submitted to create a master plan for the property. Weston and Sampson emerged as the best team to do the project.

Carol Schein led an informative Conservators walk to this property on April 9.

Over the next few months, Weston and Sampson will conduct three public meetings to learn what city residents would like on the site. If you have an interest, please watch for the announcements and attend.

Webster Woods — Throughout the past year, we've worked with the Friends of Webster Woods to advocate for the preservation of the land that's been home to Temple Mishkan Tefila for decades. The temple had preserved the beautiful wooded land that forms a critical link between city and state conservation land and contains a vernal pool that is home to many salamanders in the spring.

Sale of the land to Boston College is scheduled to occur this month, and the future of the wooded section of the land is uncertain. We will continue to talk with city staff and to reach out to Boston College in hopes of maintaining a portion of this land as open space and preserving it as a biological access path between the city and state parcels.

Cabot Park — When the proposals for the renovation and expansion of Cabot School were unveiled last year, there were plans to put a teachers' parking lot in Cabot Park and to locate a paved roundabout for student drop-offs as well as paved playground areas in the park. After we participated in a small City subcommittee and presented our thoughts to members of the Parks and Rec. Commission, city councilors and the design team, we were delighted that the plans for a parking lot and the roundabout were dropped and that the paved area was reduced.

Invasives Work — Our invasives-removal season opened with three projects for Newton Serves and quickly progressed to many other sites in the city. Our volunteers started with the earliest garlic mustard and then expanded their work to include black swallow-wort, Japanese knotweed, and Oriental bittersweet.

The work is satisfying, and we see ongoing progress wherever we work. However, the invasive plants continue to spread throughout the city. Conservators groups will continue to work on removing invasives this summer, please join them if you can. (See the schedule in the spring newsletter.)

Wider Horizons — We joined with conservation groups throughout the state in the Climate Change Adaptation Coalition. The goal of the group is “the establishment of a comprehensive adaptation management plan in response to climate change” for Massachusetts. In addition, we joined with many of the same groups to support the Green Budget, which implements Governor Baker’s suggestion that 1% of the state budget go toward environmental programs.

Annual Tasks — In addition, we did upkeep on the properties we own, did active monitoring of the city properties for which we hold the conservation restrictions, awarded grant money to teachers and students throughout the Newton schools and to the Environmental Science Summer Program, and led walks in many of the city’s open spaces.

The Future — As much as we delight in all that members have done this year, we must keep our eyes turned to the future — to the work yet to be done. We have to continue the work we’ve started as well as the following projects:

- We are concerned about the future of 122 Islington Road, a 5.6 acre property with frontage on the Lakes Region of the Charles River adjoining Norumbega Park Conservation Area, and will assist efforts to obtain a conservation restriction, as listed on the City’s Open Space Plan.
- Herrick Green at the Andover Newton Theological School also is at risk of being developed. We have given our support to the Friends of Herrick Green, and there will be more work to do.
- We would like to train people throughout Newton in what needs to be done to identify and remove invasive plants. There is more work to be done than our volunteers can manage. We have discussed taking on an intern to help us with that work.
- We would like to start discussion groups and projects with students at both of the city’s high schools.

We Need You! If you would like to work on one of those projects—or have ideas of your own, please talk with a member of the Conservators’ board.

Beth Wilkinson

Thanks very much to our friends for their generous and continuing support!

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