

CONSERVATION COMMISSION DECEMBER 2017

The Plainfield Conservation Commission (PCC) is an advisory commission to the Plainfield Selectboard. This year the commission concentrated on planning and improving the signage within the French's Ledges trail system. As we were completing our "normal" duties, e.g., monitoring the public lands within the town's boundaries and stewarding our town's wetlands, we heard feedback that the trail system is difficult to use by some of our users enjoying the French's Ledges experience.

The most frequent challenge voiced was, "There are so many trails and so many intersections. We don't know which way to go when we come to one intersection after another. We get so lost we're afraid to walk in there again. And, we want to walk in there again!"

This dilemma is a challenge since this is a multi-use, recreation area offering multiple opportunities for so many at any time of day. It is extremely important that a trail user knows where they are in the trail system! How can we organize a space where everyone (no matter their capabilities/experience) has the freedom to enjoy what they can when they want to?

There are so many "moving parts" within the boundaries of the French's Ledges trail system: unfettered access to public and private land (twelve separate landowners) without obvious boundary lines; people on bicycles, skis, or foot moving at full speed or slowly; dogs on- or off-leash; toddlers to senior citizens; strenuous, hilly terrain or flat; etc. How do we make all of this work well to the majority's satisfaction and keep everyone safe and happy?

The PCC's preliminary plan for everyone's safety and enjoyment is to...

Clearly blaze/mark the trails closest to the Townsend Bridge.

Enhance the current notification system telling all when competitive practice and meets occurs on specific trails. For instance, school competitions will occur during winter cross-country ski season—as well as mountain biking in warmer weather. Currently this website reports the grooming of the snow.

We'll make these enhancements gradually as we learn what is needed to share this space with all abilities and types of usage within the trail system—one trail at a time and one current practice enhancement at a time. Crucial to the success of these preliminary plans is your considered input. (See your contacts at the end of this report.)

Phase One: Blaze only the shorter, flatter trails by the bridge for now.

We will blaze the introductory trails by the Townsend Bridge, e.g., school parking-lot kiosk to bridge, Townsend Loop, Brook Loop, Blue Trail to the ledges. We have purchased plastic blazes that are standard trail markers in bright primary colors (e.g., yellow, red, blue, or green) in the shape of a 7-by-5-inch diamond. Each diamond is nailed (with aluminum nails) to both sides of a tree along the trail (about 150 ft. apart) to mark the entire trail as it wanders through its part of the trail system. The color of the diamond blaze is unique to its trail.

Phase Two: What's next? We think we know what's next, but need your input. We want to hear from you before we go beyond the few trails by the bridge (e.g., Red Trail from Colby Hill, Smokehouse Loop). For example, we know that some users do not feel the forest should be cluttered with brightly colored, blazed tree stems. They enjoy the pristine landscape with the natural colors and dancing sunlight that only a forest like our forest can provide. We will not blaze every trail in the French's Ledges system. Some explorers want to find their own way without relying on maps and signage—using other knowledge/instinct to find their way through the forest.

Also some of our twelve, generous landowners do not want their private property punctuated with signage. It is their understandable right to decline signage.

Another user of the trail system is Kimball Union Academy and Lebanon High School athletic teams. Both of these users involve ski and bicycle competitions at the middle and high school levels. That means someone moving at a fast pace, during practice or competition, and concentrating on the trail in front, not any human enjoying that forest trail! These competitive and unique uses of the French's Ledges trails is sanctioned and completely acceptable at those times of year.

The PCC wants to modify the current system whereby an announcement will broadcast when the specific trails will be used for competition and practices. Currently, you can log on to www.meridentrails.org for trail grooming updates, competitions and practice sessions before you venture to the trails on a certain day to enjoy certain trails.

Sharing French’s Ledges with all users:

The goal of the PCC is to organize and develop the trail system so the many types of users, types of ownership and modes of recreation coexist seamlessly and without incident on this relatively small piece of earth.

Please be patient and open to our efforts. Contribute your comments, suggestions and time to the volunteer groups that make the Ledges such a special place for us to share with all comers.

On that website mentioned above, you will find that the Plainfield Trailblazers welcome donations.

Respectfully Submitted, *Myra Ferguson*, Chair
pcc@plainfieldnh.org

CONSERVATION COMMISSION FUNDS YEAR END BALANCES

Forestry Maintenance Fund	01/01/17 Beg. Balance	\$18,994
Interest earned		\$75
Balance	12/31/17	\$19,069
Conservation Fund	01/01/17 Beg. Balance	\$74,401
Current use penalties In		\$10,345
Interest earned		\$698
Murray Easement Assistance Out		\$10,700
Balance	12/31/17	\$ 74,744