

## CONSERVATION COMMISSION PROJECT 2019



**Beaver Deceiver Hedgehog Rd**

**Photo S. Halleran**

## CONSERVATION COMMISSION

The Plainfield Conservation Commission spent 2019 adrift after our Chairperson of ten years, Myra Ferguson, moved out of town. Myra was always an enthusiastic advocate for, and energetic practitioner of, land conservation and stewardship. She spent enough time on her tractor and on foot in the fields and forest so that we knew she preferred practicing to preaching, and was a natural fit to lead the Conservation Commission. Like when a large tree is removed from the forest, we trust that Myra's replacement will eventually grow to fill the opening.

In reading through the annual reports that Myra submitted, she clearly recognized the necessity and value of collaborating with other town departments. She would be pleased to know that we assisted the Highway Department in contracting for the construction of a Beaver Deceiver on Hedgehog Road. This device is a non-lethal, non-destructive means of permitting beavers to coexist with our road system by foiling the beavers' instinctive need to block road culverts.

We will continue with many of the other items that have been on our plan of work over the past years, and one in particular cannot be overlooked. There are well over two dozen properties in town that are protected from development by some form of easement. Some of these are owned privately while others are owned publically or by a conservation organization. The Conservation Commission has responsibility for monitoring at least five of these properties to assure the owners' compliance with the terms of their particular easement. We may not have gotten to them all in 2019, but will strive to do better in 2020.

The Conservation Commission continues to have respectable fund balances available for undertaking special projects. The Forest Maintenance Fund was first funded with income from a timber harvest at the Benson Town Forest and has a balance of almost \$20,000. In the past we have received town meeting approval to use this fund for projects like tree planting and boundary marking at our town forests.

<b>Forest Maintenance Fund</b>	
December 31, 2018	\$19,422.52
2019 Interest	<u>\$421.67</u>
December 31, 2019	<b>\$19,844.19</b>
<b>Conservation Fund</b>	
December 31, 2018	\$88,611.01
Current Use Change Tax (50%)	\$8,750.00
2019 Interest	\$2,044.07
2019 Expense (Beaver Deceiver)	<u>(\$2,500.00)</u>
December 31, 2019	<b>\$96,905.08</b>

The Conservation Fund is financed primarily with one-half of the current use change tax proceeds paid when a landowner decides to forego the current use assessment, typically as a prelude to converting the open space to residential or commercial use. This fund has facilitated a number of conservation easement transactions and planning efforts. The balance fluctuates but is now approaching six figures, so we'll be looking for opportunities to advance conservation of open space critical for wildlife habitat, wetland protection, recreational opportunities, scenic value, or other qualities the town determines to be beneficial. Broad public input on planning and implementing these conservation projects will greatly enhance the success of this program, and we hope that we can engage our residents in this process.

Respectfully Submitted,

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