



# New Hampshire Association of Conservation Commissions

SERVING NEW HAMPSHIRE'S COMMUNITIES SINCE 1970

## Executive Director's Report 2018

It has been an industrious year at NH Association of Conservation Commissions assisting our members, tracking bills in the legislature and working closely with partners. NHACC is engaged as members of workgroups, state committees, and roundtables, but I always consider the direct technical assistance to our members as the backbone of what we do. It is my pleasure to encourage, assist, and facilitate the work you do all over NH.

NHACC's goal is to ensure that all NH conservation commissions remain strong and relevant within their communities, making NH a healthy, desirable place to live and work. But, what does it mean to be relevant as a conservation commission? Being relevant means staying connected to other boards and committees in your community. It requires the commission to be informed on current topics of interest and provide applicable comments and advice to the public and town officials. Commissions need to have a working knowledge of land management, land protection, wetland rules and water quality. This is not an easy job to ask of volunteers, and that is why NHACC is here to help communities achieve their conservation goals.

Last year NHACC provided education and assistance to dozens of conservation commissions. In 2018, some of the highlights of our efforts include:

- Coordinated regional roundtables to encourage networking and best practices;
- Provided technical assistance to CCs for help with conservation funding, land management, natural resource planning and working with other boards;
- Started to update the NHACC Handbook with relevant guidance and education for our members;
- Followed bills in the State Legislative Session to help keep our members informed and up-to-date on any bills that would affect CC or natural resources such as proposed changes to timelines for wetland permitting, defending current use and clarifying RSA 36-A;
- Lobbied the legislature to support CC's ability to request extensions when reviewing wetland permit applications;
- Worked closely with NH Dept. of Environmental Services on the Draft Wetland Rules review to ensure CC concerns are addressed;
- Worked with the UNH Cooperative Extension, and NH Fish & Game as a team member of Taking Action for Wildlife and
- Assisted the Community and Town and Community Forest Committee with an outreach plan to help towns better track and manage town owned land;
- Encouraged schools to work with CC on environmental education programs through the School Partnership Program.

We work hard to represent our members around the state. We followed bills in the State Legislative Session to help keep our members informed and aware of any bills that would affect commissions or natural resources. This year we supported a bill to strengthen RSA 36-A and opposed a bill that threatened current use. We successfully lobbied the legislature to allow commissions the option to request an extension when reviewing dredge and fill permit applications in HB 1104, which amended RSA 482-A. This was a small victory but commissions must continue to respond quickly (within 14 days) to notify DES if they plan to comment on a permit application. We could not keep track of all the bills in the legislature without the help and expertise of our administrative assistant, Elaine Planchet. Her organization and diligence made it possible for NHACC to attend public hearings and provide testimony on several proposed bills in the 2018 Legislative Session.

NHACC was a member of the Wetland Rules Workgroup and we focused on ensuring wetlands are protected in the state of NH. The draft Wetland Rules focused on streamlining the process while still protecting the most critical wetland resources. The draft Wetland Rules change the role of conservation commissions in the review process, so NHACC is committed to supporting DES in the development of training and guidance documents to educate conservation commission members. We will continue to monitor these changes as the rulemaking process for these important wetlands rules now moves to the Joint Legislative Committee on Administrative Rules.

At NHACC we have many people to thank for the success of our organization. We rely on our partners, business members, board and volunteers to accomplish all the work we do to ensure NH remains a healthy, beautiful place to live and work. I would also like to thank our session presenters. We are very lucky to have such talented instructors who are willing to share their knowledge and expertise. Additionally, I would like to thank the NHACC Board of Directors for their time, energy and leadership of this extraordinary organization.

NH is a patchwork of villages, towns and cities and the work being done by conservation commissions is a reflection of that variety. All year long, municipal conservation commissions work to protect clean water, clean air, and wildlife habitat. You engage communities to develop trail systems, coordinate land protection efforts and establish local ordinances to ensure NH's natural resources will endure into the future. I would like to thank you all for the work you do and your time and commitment involved in serving on your commissions.

Thank you to all of our members who paid dues to NHACC in 2018 and have made it possible to continue our mission: *to foster conservation and appropriate use of New Hampshire's natural resources by providing assistance to conservation commissions, facilitating communication and cooperation among commissions, and helping to create a climate in which commissions can be successful.*

We look forward to serving our members in the coming year.

Respectfully submitted,

Barbara Richter

NHACC Executive Director