Pronouns mean a lot these days. When I talk about the New Hampshire Association of Conservation Commissions (NHACC) I always refer to the organization as We. It is my strong belief that what we accomplish at NHACC is not just about the work of the staff and the board, but it is the commitment, and support of the 217 conservation commissions in NH that make us successful. It’s the volunteers with their boots on the ground that accomplish great things. This year it was especially true in response to the update of the NH Wetland Rules. The NH Department of Environmental Services was influenced by the great number of conservation commissions who wrote letters, attended public meetings and spoke out so that commission will remain part of the permit review process—no matter how seemingly small the impact. Thank you for joining forces and making a difference. NHACC played a critical role in coordinating the efforts, voicing concerns and making recommendations.

It started in January with a work session at NH DES to discuss the Wetland Rules and conservation commission’s role in the permit review process. More than 30 commission members spoke up regarding the proposed changes to the Rules and made sure that commissions were part of the review process, even for the lower scrutiny applications. DES listened and made major changes to the final version of the draft Wetland Rules in response to conservation commission comments. Conservation commissions will continue to have the opportunity to intervene on both Expedited permits and Permit by Notification as well as the Standard Dredge and Fill applications.

Another positive result of the DES Wetland Rules review is a stronger relationship between NHACC and NH Department of Environmental Services. We have testified at the State Legislature in support of funding for DES by increasing fees for wetland permit applications, in support of clarifying the definition of prime wetlands and establishing wetland buffers. We are joined today by DES Commissioner Robert Scott and several staff members who will share their expertise and train our members to better respond to wetland permit applications.

NHACC is here to help commissions learn what is possible. We offer support when commissions need to defend Land Use Change Tax for your Conservation Fund or prepare for public hearings. We are here to keep you up-to-date on best practices in land management, natural resource planning, and current trends and threats. We encourage towns to look beyond their boundaries at roundtables and regional meetings. We are here to share stories and case studies to help you envision the opportunities open to every town. We work hard provide you with the tools you need to ensure the protection of the environment we care so much about.
Aside from speaking at the State House, NHACC continues to represent our members at more than a dozen state-wide committees and initiatives. We have a seat at the table on the Taking Action for Wildlife Team, Current Use Board, DES Source Water Protection Advisory Committee, the State Conservation Commission and many other boards and committees. Last year I attended 49 meetings to address state-wide issues of concern to conservation commissions. These meetings provide me with the foundation for trainings and best practices to make sure conservation commissions remain effective and relevant on the local level.

While I attend the majority of the state-wide meetings, we also have conservation commission members who represent NHACC and your commission’s interest. Lake Management Advisory Committee, Wetlands Council, Natural Areas Council, Rivers Advisory Committee, Geological Resource Advisory Committee, and the ARM Fund site selection committee are just a few that have commission members on board. These conservation commission members ensure our network is strong and far-reaching.

While it is important to stay connected to state trends, the most valuable use of my time is meeting our members in their communities. I especially enjoyed attending 19 different roundtables and regional gatherings in 2019. Partnering with land trusts and county conservation districts on these local meetings expands outreach opportunities and builds stronger connections and efficiencies. Simply put, it makes my job possible and I am grateful to our many partners.

At NHACC we have many people to thank for the success of our organization. We rely on our organization 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.

First, I would like to thank the NHACC Board of Directors for their time, energy and leadership of this extraordinary organization. I rely heavily on their good advice, leadership and connection to community. They respond to issues and concerns facing conservation commissions and provide feedback from their experience as commission members.

I would also like to thank our session presenters. We are very lucky to have such talented instructors who are willing to share their experiences to help us better protect NH’s natural resources. I also want to thank our business members for their continued support of NHACC and the support they provide to keep this conference going year after year.

Finally, I want to thank all of our members who paid dues to NHACC and have made it possible to ensure that conservation commissions remain relevant and effective. This year was filled with opportunities that commissions met head on. I appreciate all the work you do and your time and energy serving on your commissions. NH would not have the level of clean water, clean air, and scenic vistas and trail systems without municipal conservation commission members who care about their communities, continually working to protect natural resources and the places they love. Together we can accomplish much more, effect change on the local and state level, and build strength in solidarity. It is my pleasure to encourage, assist, and facilitate the work you do.

Respectfully submitted,

Barbara Richter
NHACC Executive Director