

## **Atkinson Conservation Commission 2003 Annual Report**

The Atkinson Conservation Commission is an all-volunteer group which is appointed by the Board of Selectmen. It operates under the auspices of New Hampshire RSA 36-A, which empowers the Conservation Commission to provide "for the proper utilization and protection of the natural resources and for the protection of watershed resources of said city or town." The Commission is the only local board specifically charged to protect the natural resources of the Town, and as such provides a focal point within town government for environmental concerns. The Atkinson Conservation Commission serves as an advisory board to the NH State Wetlands Bureau and the Atkinson Planning Board and Zoning Board of Adjustment.

During 2003, the Conservation Commission was kept busy in a variety of efforts to oversee and protect the natural resources of our town that would be potentially impacted by development projects. In our advisory roles, we were called upon numerous times to examine plans for new developments, to conduct site walks, and to provide opinions on many wetland zoning variance requests.

### **Conservation Land Mapping**

In May, the Commission received a "Moose Plate" Grant under the Conservation Number Plate Program. The purpose of this program is to support and promote programs and partnerships throughout the state that protect, restore and enhance the state's valuable natural resources. Our project will be to research and develop a conservation brochure that will discuss the conservation efforts in Atkinson, and will describe all of the conservation lands within the Town. Ultimately, brochures will be professionally printed, and they will be placed in the town hall and in parking lots of each of the conservation areas for use by residents and visitors. The Commission is still looking for volunteers to help in this effort, which will run through June 2005. Please let us know if you can help!

### **ATV Problems**

Commission members spent a significant amount of time this year trying to address the ever increasing problem of damage caused to town lands by careless riders of all-terrain vehicles (ATVs). We attended several regional meetings with representatives from surrounding towns, where we discussed the mutual problems and potential solutions, and heard from NH State officials about what laws and tools are available to help. In May, at the urging of the Commission, the Selectmen passed a moratorium on the riding of motorized vehicles on town-owned land. At the time of this writing, a plan is in the works to enact a permanent ban on motorized vehicles during the times of year in which the land is susceptible to damage, primarily the spring, summer, and fall months.

### **Wetlands Education and Zoning**

This past summer, in an effort to inform and educate the public as to the functional importance of wetlands and the areas that surround them, the Commission sponsored two seminars featuring a speaker from the NH State Wetlands Bureau. In the fall, we began working closely with the Planning Board to develop revisions to the portions of the Atkinson Zoning Ordinances which deal with wetlands and their surrounding buffer zones. Unfortunately, the revisions were not completed to the satisfaction of the Planning Board in time for them to be placed on the ballot this year. The Planning Board and the Conservation Commission are in agreement that changes need to be made, and have pledged to continue to work on the revised ordinance this winter and spring. This will

allow plenty of time for public review and feedback before the proposal is moved to ballot next year. Please watch for announcements about relevant public meetings and informational sessions to be held in the near future.

## **Land Protection**

The Commission is always interested in talking with Atkinson landowners about the possibility of acquiring or protecting land parcels which are significant from an ecological and/or scenic perspective, and about the variety of financial arrangements and land use practices which can be mutually beneficial to both the owner/seller and to the Town. Many landowners are unaware of the significant impact that inheritance taxes can have on even a small to medium size estate that includes land whose value has significantly appreciated over the years. There have been many cases where lack of proper planning has resulted in a large inheritance tax, and the heirs have been forced to sell off or develop property which they had intended to keep in the family for generations. The Commission is always willing and available to help begin the land protection education process. Please contact us!

## **Help Wanted!**

The Conservation Commission is always seeking additional new members and volunteers for projects throughout the community. The Commission consists of 7 full-time members, appointed by the Selectmen for 3-year terms, and 2 alternates, appointed for 1 year. Meetings are held the 1<sup>st</sup> Monday of each month at 7:30 in the Town Hall. If you are interested in serving on the Commission or simply curious about the workings of the Commission, please attend a meeting or contact the Atkinson Selectmen's office.

We are also very interested in maintaining a system of volunteer "land stewards" to help us oversee and maintain our Town Forests and Conservation Lands. Perhaps you live near one of these parcels and use it on a regular basis, but just aren't interested in becoming a regular Commission member. If so, we would love to hear from you! Our small and busy group would gladly welcome any and all "eyes, ears, and hands" in the field to let us know of any issues and to help maintain the Town Lands in general. Again please contact the Commission chairman or the Atkinson Selectmen's office if you are able to help.

Respectfully submitted,

Scott Kukshel  
Chairman, Atkinson Conservation Commission