

## **Atkinson Conservation Commission 2004 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 2004, 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.

### **Wetlands Zoning Revisions**

During all of 2004, Commission representatives met monthly with the Planning Board to develop revisions to the portions of the Atkinson Zoning Ordinances which deal with wetlands and their surrounding buffer zones. After much discussion, many revisions, and three public hearings in November and December, zoning for a new Wetlands Conservation District was crafted and moved to this year's ballot with a unanimous recommendation by the Planning Board. We hope that you will give your support to this much-improved zoning language. You may read more about the proposed amendment on the Commission's website at <http://www.atkinsonconservation.org> (click on "Wetlands Zoning Amendment" on the side).

### **Conservation Land Mapping**

In 2004, the Commission continued work on our conservation land mapping project, which is being paid for by a "Moose Plate" Grant under the NH Conservation License Plate Program. Our project is 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. Under the last phase of the project, due to be completed in June of this year, brochures will be professionally printed and distributed to Town residents. The Commission is still looking for volunteers to help in the final phases of this effort, as well as in a more extensive and detailed trail mapping project which will follow the initial production of the brochure. Please let us know if you can help!

In related work, the Commission held two trail work days in the fall. Volunteers gathered to clean up and brush out trails on the Sawyer parcel and on a newly-acquired right-of-way which crosses the former Dickey parcel just off of Woodlawn Avenue and connects with existing conservation land around Sawmill Swamp. We would especially like to thank the Boy Scouts of Troop 9, as well as all the other volunteers who gave their time to help out on these projects. Look for announcements about additional work days this spring on our website at <http://www.atkinsonconservation.org>

## **ATV Problems Continue**

Commission members continued to spend 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 continue to follow multiple attempts at the State Legislature level to address this issue and are continuously trying to understand how these laws will apply to our town lands. For now, the Commission and the Atkinson Police Department encourage you to call the Department with any complaints about improper operation of these vehicles around your home.

## **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 expanding our 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.

And again, please check out our website at <http://www.atkinsonconservation.org> (or follow the link off the Town's website at <http://www.town-atkinsonnh.com>).

Respectfully submitted,

Scott Kukshel  
Chairman, Atkinson Conservation Commission