

The citizens of Cornish have always valued their environment and to confirm this, at the 1971 Town Meeting, they voted to establish a Conservation Commission and set up the Conservation Fund. This fund has proven to be invaluable in the Commission's work.

During the early years the Commission focused on mapping different aspects of the Town, and creating a Natural Resource Inventory now commonly known as "The Menke Report" after the U. Mass graduate who wrote it. Flood Plain maps were also developed.

Around 1977 the focus of the Commission shifted to education and developing trails and an outdoor lab near the elementary school. To this end the Commission wrote a CETA (Comprehensive Employment and Training Act) grant to hire workers to start trail work around the school. Sue Shofner (now Sue Fitch) was hired as coordinator with Fred Hier and Brian Devenger as assistants. They cut trails, researched class six roads and fire ponds and worked with students in the sciences.

From this work interest grew in having the Davidson property (now CREA) become part of an outdoor lab and recreation area and led to a Land and Water Conservation grant that when approved allowed the Town to purchase the land. The 50% matching funds came from the Conservation Fund, The Cornish Fair and the Davidsons. Through a generous gift the Palmer Fund for outdoor education was established. With the land secured and second major gift to spur the project on, a second grant for the development of the property was written and awarded. Fund raising for the 50% match was successful and by late 1989 CREA was ready for soccer, baseball and initial trails and bridge were complete.

In the late 1980s the Commission's energies shifted to protecting open space and during 1989 the Commission accepted the development rights to Virginia Colby's White Swan Farm, the first conservation easement in town. This has been followed by 22 additional easements for a total of 2950+ acres that remain on the tax roles but are kept open, many that allow public access. The commission took an active role in 11 of them, using the Conservation fund for five and holding the easements on six.

In 1998 the Commission was able to purchase, at a bargain price and using Conservation Funds, a 270-acre tract of hilly, wooded land in the southwest corner of the town from the The Society for Protection of New Hampshire Forests (SPNHF). A deed restriction was place on the property to prevent development. This property is now referred to as "The Town Forest".

It is open to the public for recreation, education, hunting and spiritual renewal and its unique natural habitats, vernal pools, mesic forests, wetland, and near "old growth" forests, are preserved. Selected areas are designated for minimum impact sustainable harvests for improved forest health as well as cash income to finance town forest projects.

In addition to these major projects many other smaller ones are worthy of mention. For years, the Commission, with the help of the Cornish Fair, sent Cornish students, teachers and youth leaders to the SPNHF week long conservation camps. They have organized the annual "Green Up" program, reviewed dredge and fill applications, monitored acid rain and supported the schools "River Fest" and ELF/Four Winds programs. Trees and lilacs (our State flower) have been planted on Town properties and, in 2001 they helped the NH Non-game and Endangered Species Dept. build a bat house behind the Town Offices to house the nursing colony of little brown bats that were living in the attic of the Town Offices. In 1983 the first annual Conservation Award was presented. The Commission commissioned Augie Dworak to create a Totem pole for the Town offices that highlights our Town's environmental and cultural heritage. Suzanne Lupien designed a logo for the Commission in 2000 which is on markers posted on the boundaries of the lands the Town has a vested interest in and often on the Conservation Award.

As the Town enters its 250th year and the Commission its 41st, they are working to update the Natural Resources Inventory. This work should be finished by year's end and will help guide the commission's future work.