

Open Space Committee 2023 Annual Report

The Open Space Committee's mandate is to manage, care for, and augment the town's protected conservation areas. We had a very busy 2023 with some important initiatives that bode well for our continuing efforts to improve and maintain these important and popular Hubbardston resources.

Activities

One significant opportunity arose with the ARPA Committee and Select Board award of \$16,000 from the town's ARPA funds to be put towards an 'all-persons accessible' trail at our Malone Conservation Area that can serve those with mobility challenges as well as the general public. While this amount is not sufficient in itself to create the trail, it will serve to leverage a Mass Trails Grant of \$85,000 in additional funding. This significant trail would be built in accordance with the specifications of Forest Service Trail Accessibility and the Architectural Barriers Act (ABA) guidelines for ADA compliance and lead visitors to the spectacular Dottie Rock overlook. Committee member Mark Kresge wrote a compelling grant proposal that will hopefully lead to an award in late spring of 2024. He also created a grant proposal to install flashing yellow beacons warning approaching Burnshirt Road motorists of Ware River Rail Trail travelers crossing at their intersection, thus alleviating a dangerous situation.

Work also began at the new Hidden Meadow Conservation Area on Lombard Road. Following approval of East Quabbin Land Trust's Land Management Plan, they created a parking area, erected a kiosk, and cut a new mountain bike trail there with help from local volunteers. Additional trails are in the planning stages.

The committee also formed the "Hubbardston Hikers" program led by committee member Tim Hawley. He organized and led enthusiastic hikers on educational walks for National Trails Day at Mount Jefferson Conservation Area, a guide to Hemlock trees on the Ware River Rail Trail, and accompanied a group on the DCR sponsored 'Forestry Walk' at the Barre Heathlands. Look for information on future walks on the town website – all are welcome!

Administration

Land conservation planning is an important function of the committee that supports Hubbardston's efforts to protect our valuable, local natural resources. The committee continued work creating a comprehensive prioritization process for evaluating existing open land that will provide the town with the detailed information to assist our boards and committees in making decisions on available open land.

We also began work on the required five-year update of Hubbardston's Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP) that expired this past Spring. This important document assists in developing the town's Master Plan and establishes goals for the next seven years. It is also an important element for consideration of the town's eligibility for many grant programs and independent project funding. Rick and Tim led an Ad hoc committee consisting of town committee members and residents and conducted a town public survey to obtain input from residents for its creation. The Plan will be submitted for approval by the state early in 2024.

Maintenance

Another primary committee task is management of the town's conservation areas and open spaces. Removing the previous winter's trail-blocking tree falls and widening trails from encroaching saplings is an annual event. This year Stephanie and Bob were fortunate to get help from local school youth and riders at their equestrian barn while Stephanie and Rick mowed brush overgrowth at Malone. A shout-out goes to Travis Brown's stalwart DPW crew for keeping the meadow walks at Mt. Jefferson and Malone Conservation Areas neatly mowed.

The Hubbardston Open Space Committee

Bob Hatch, Chair
Stephanie Frend
Mark Kresge

Todd Livdahl
Susan Worth
Rick Jones

Dave Marsh
Tim Hawley