

FACES *of* CONSERVATION

Across New Hampshire, unsung heroes are working to conserve land and keep it open for outdoor recreation.

In every corner of New Hampshire, people are at work protecting open land, improving habitat, educating communities about conservation and keeping land open for hunters and anglers. The N.H. Fish and Game Commission's award of excellence program was created to recognize outstanding conservation efforts in support of the N.H. Fish and Game Department's mission. It brings into focus a range of conservation activity that bodes well for the future of wild New Hampshire.

Let's meet this year's winners:

CONSERVATION LEGACY

Cynthia Wyatt of Milton Mills, N.H., is carrying on a legacy begun by her father, Carl Siemon. Carl would be proud. Wyatt has been instrumental in keeping thousands of acres of land open to hunting, fishing and other forms of outdoor recreation through her contributions to Moose Mountain Regional Greenways, along with the Carl Siemon Family Trust and the Branch Hill Farm. In recognition of this work, Wyatt received the Ellis Hatch Award, the Commission's highest honor.

"Ms. Wyatt exemplifies the legacy of Ellis Hatch, a long-term advocate of the outdoor life," said Fish and Game Commission Chair Robert Phillipson. Wyatt is a founding member of and presently co-chairs the board of the Moose Mountain Regional Greenways and has worked to conserve 2,200 acres on Moose Mountain, which coincidentally abuts the Ellis Hatch Wildlife Management Unit owned by Fish and Game. Another 3,000 conservation acres form the "Siemon Access," of which Wyatt is the director and which is open to the public for hunting, fishing and other recreation.

In 2006, through the Moose Mountain Regional Greenways, Wyatt helped secure 197 acres of land along the Mad River in Farmington, providing 2,700 feet of river frontage managed by Fish and Game. Wyatt also has been instrumental in securing 116 acres along the Union Meadows in Wakefield for conservation, allowing sportsmen and women a quality fishery. She has been involved in the Salmon Falls Headwater project to protect 300 acres in the upper reaches of the Salmon Falls River, a large portion of which Fish and Game will manage as a fishery. The Siemon Family Trust agreed to

donate 375 acres of property along Jones Brook to Fish and Game as part of the match for the Salmon Falls Headwater Project. This land is also part of the Siemon Access. The Siemon Family Trust's 3000-acre Branch Hill Farm includes miles of multi-use trails and borders Jones Brook and the Salmon Falls and Branch rivers. Wyatt has hosted many outdoor education events at her farm, including nature walks and other conservation learning opportunities – such as the yearly Branch River Paddle and the Woods, Water and Wildlife Festival.

Wyatt's activities build on her father's years of conservation work. She established the Moose Mountain Regional Greenways, which today is a strong advocacy group for protecting networks of public and private land in the region of Brookfield, Wakefield, Middleton, Milton, Farmington and New Durham. She said, "My father was certain that the Greenways would help realize his vision of corridors of protected lands providing, in his words, 'an oasis of forests, fields, wildlife, recreation, clean water and air. Perhaps these protected lands will inspire others to find ways to protect their lands – to keep New Hampshire, New Hampshire.'"

In nominating Wyatt for the award, Conservation Officer Mark Hensel summed it up: "The State of New Hampshire, Fish and Game and all sportsmen owe Wyatt a debt of gratitude for her work and contributions."

BY JANE VACHON



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Cynthia Wyatt of Milton Mills has helped keep thousands of acres of land open to hunting and fishing.



The Forest Society's 2,300-acre Moose Mountain Forest Reservation in Middleton adjoins the Ellis Hatch WMA. Moose Mountain Regional Greenways assisted in its conservation.

PHOTO © JERRY AND MARCY MONKMAN
COURTESY THE SOCIETY FOR THE PROTECTION OF NEW HAMPSHIRE FORESTS

WELCOMING MANY USERS

If you hike the miles of trails traversing the forests, meadows and wetlands owned by the **Amherst Conservation Commission (ACC)**, you learn right away that you may be sharing the woods with other outdoor enthusiasts, including hunters. It says so right on the bright orange trailhead signs: “ACC allows for many users of our public land and trails. This includes hunters. Below are the hunting seasons and dates for this year. As a precaution, please wear bright clothing and recognize that there are many people using this public land.”

ACC treasurer Bill Wichman spends a lot of time maintaining the trails. “We used to get calls from residents asking why in the world would we permit hunting. We simply always have permitted it. But now we’ve put up the signs and it’s helped,” he said.

Leadership in promoting a multi-use philosophy toward its land earned the ACC the Conservation Organization Award. Unlike towns such as Bedford and Hollis, which have large tracts of land that restrict or prohibit hunting, Amherst welcomes it.

Trail signs are just one ACC initiative. An active land acquisition program, invigorated by a 5-year, \$5.5 million town warrant, helps protect vital open lands in accordance with the town’s Master Plan. “We’re buying land that developers want, not swamps,” said Wichman. The Commission has compiled a Natural Resources Inventory; created specific

management plans for forestland and meadows; and works closely with the Amherst Land Trust and the Souhegan Valley Watershed Association.

The ACC also sponsored the creation of the Peabody Mill Environmental Center, located on the 558-acre Joe English Reservation. Now part of the Amherst Recreation Department, the center offers environmental, conservation and science programs for all ages. In June, a spacious, energy-efficient environmental education building replaced the former one-room nature center. Fishing is an integral part of

the center’s programming; youngsters can rent fishing gear to try their luck in the pond.

“The ACC stands as an example of enlightened and educated community members living in a rapidly changing and complex community who support conservation and who have retained the values and beliefs of conservation, hunting and outdoor life and education,” said former Amherst Conservation Commission member David Gagne.

FEAST FOR THE FLOCKS

Winter can be a tough time for wild turkeys in N.H., especially when the snow piles high. “Pickings are slim in January and February,” said Charles Williams, a retired UNH plant science professor and president of the Durham chapter of the National Wild Turkey Federation (NWTf). “One of the limiting factors to expansion of developing turkey flocks in New Hampshire is the amount of winter food and cover.”

To address this problem, Williams created an innovative program that distributes low-cost packages of trees and shrubs that retain fruits, nuts and seeds into the winter months, providing critical food sources for wild turkeys and other wildlife. In recognition of this successful project, the **N.H. State Chapter of the NWTf** earned the Habitat Stewardship Award.

Williams, along with Fish and Game biologist Ted Walski, developed a list of suitable plants for the packages, selecting for hardiness, insect and disease tolerance and value to wildlife. Bare-root stock is provided, including shrubs such as hawthorn, hazelnut and high-bush cranberry; as well as semi-dwarf crabapple trees. This is not ornamental landscaping – landowners agree to plant in areas away from buildings and roads. The size and quality of the plants means landowners see results fast. The trees provided are 5-6 feet high; almost all have flowers and fruits the first year.

As the project grew, the NWTf chapter partnered with the state Conservation Districts to reach a broader audience. Bambi Miller is District Manager of the Strafford County Conservation District, which coordinates the statewide distribution of the plant packages. “We’ve been working together with the N.H. Chapter



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Scenic Joe English Brook in Amherst. Left to right, Amherst Conservation Commission members Richard Hart, Bill Wichman and Jim Bowen.



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COURTESY PHOTO



Dr. Charles Williams, right, and Bambi Miller accept the Habitat Stewardship Award for the N.H. Chapter of the NWF.



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of the NWF since 1997 to provide this affordable opportunity to landowners,” said Miller.

Over the past ten years, 40-50 landowners annually have purchased packages. The NWF chapter now offers a \$75 rebate as an incentive for landowners to participate. In all, more than 500 habitat plot packages have been distributed, with every county represented. Other states are now looking at the New Hampshire program – the first of its kind in the country – as an effective way to improve habitat for wildlife.

VANISHING FARMLAND

Judith and Allan Forbes of Lancaster, N.H., represent a vanishing resource in the Granite State: they own a large working farm that provides habitat for wildlife and open land for hunters and anglers. The Forbes Farm has grown from 350 acres and 150 cattle in 1968 to 2,700 acres and 2,600 head of cattle today. Their beautiful land spans both sides of

the Connecticut River from Lancaster south almost to Gilman – a mix of fields, pastures, miles of cornfields, forests and wetlands. The property is home to countless turkey, deer, moose, ducks, geese and other wildlife, including coyote, fox and bear.

The Forbes were honored with the Landowner Appreciation Award. They leave their land open to hunters, anglers, trappers and snowmobilers, providing excellent opportunities for recreation of all types. “We’ve never posted our land,” said Judith Forbes. “Once we sell our land and people from down below buy, they’ll post it.”

That’s why hunter and angler Brian Connors of Nottingham calls the Forbes Farm a precious commodity. “The Forbes’ achievements in woodland and field growth ensure plenty of game to harvest, as well as recreational activities to enjoy,” he said. “If this land were posted, we would lose 2,700 acres of beautiful wild New Hampshire.”

Sometimes hunters could be more thoughtful, sure. Like remembering to close gates and not driving their trucks over the fields. And a thank you now and then would be nice. That rarely happens, said Connors, though it should. “The Forbes are a hard-working family who have always been hospitable to people who hunt and fish,” he said.

“Today, more than ever, landowners like Allan and Judy are key to maintaining our traditional outdoor activities,” said Commissioner Phillipson. “They represent many unsung landowners who are a part of what makes this state such a great place to live, work and get outdoors.”



Jane Vachon is associate editor of the Journal.

WHO’S YOUR CONSERVATION HERO?

If you know an individual or organization making an outstanding contribution in the conservation field in support of N.H. Fish and Game’s mission, submit them for a New Hampshire Fish and Game Commission Award of Excellence. Nominations must be submitted by December 31. An application and list of the seven award categories are posted at www.WildNH.com or call (603) 271-3511.



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Allan and Judith Forbes have kept their 2,700-acre Lancaster dairy farm open for outdoor recreation. At left, haying time on their Connecticut River Valley farm.