



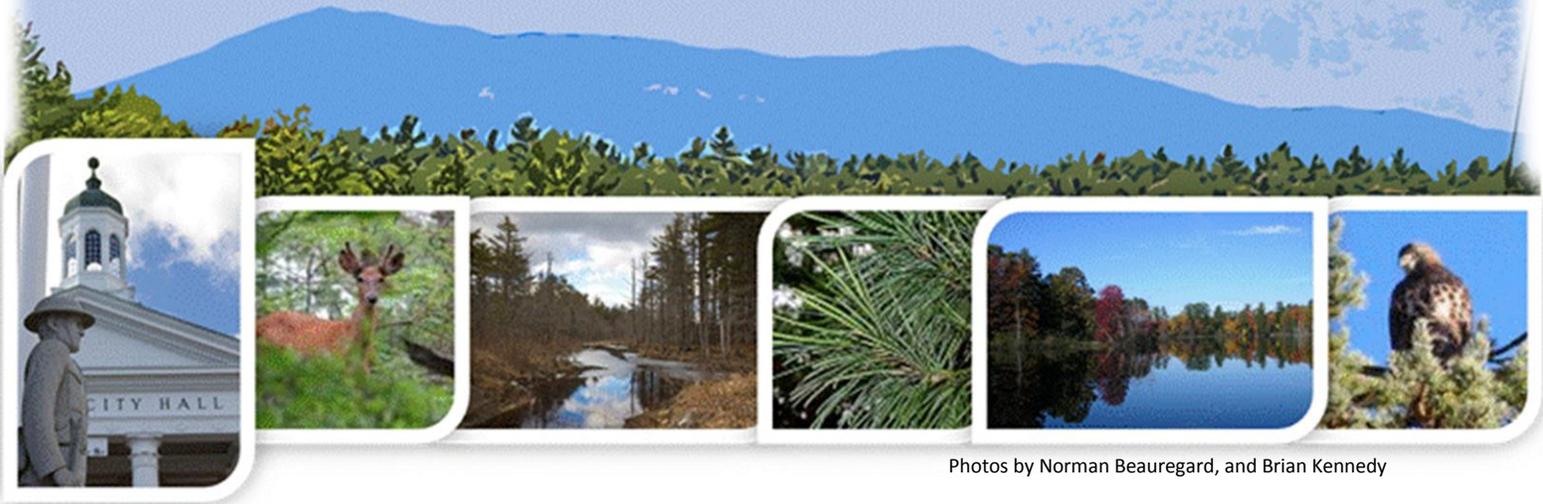
CITY OF GARDNER

CONSERVATION COMMISSION

To His Honor the Mayor and Members of the City Council:

The Gardner Conservation Commission is pleased to submit its Annual Report for the Calendar Year 2014:

Gardner Conservation Commission Annual Report – 2014



Photos by Norman Beauregard, and Brian Kennedy

The Commission

Members:

The [City of Gardner Conservation Commission](#) ('the Commission') is made up of seven (7) members and a Conservation Agent ('the Agent') with a considerable, combined amount of service time and relevant skills and experiences. In particular, the members possess a strong combined set of practical experience that includes backgrounds in education, forestry, ecology, natural resources management, conservation, recreation, research, finance, business, technology, customer service, and public relations.

Conservation Commission Members and Staff:

Greg Dumas, Chairman

David Beauregard, Member

Norman Beauregard, Member

Duncan Burns, Member

Jane Cullen, Member

Donna Lehtinen, Member

David Orwig, Member

[Jeffrey Legros, Agent](#)

Christine Fucile, Administrative Coordinator



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In 2014 the Commission experienced the appointment of a new Conservation Agent, Jeffrey Legros, a new member, David Orwig, and the re-appointment of several members including the Commission Chairman, Greg Dumas.

Wetlands Protection Administration and Commission Activities

Public Meetings:

The Conservation Commission held twenty (20) regular public meetings during the calendar year 2014. These meetings included a combination of thirty-three (33) different hearings, actions, decisions, or issuances by the Commission in the form of Notices, Orders, Certificates, Requests, Determinations, or Extensions related to the administration of the Wetlands Protection Act and [Gardner Wetlands Protection Ordinance](#). As part of these meetings and their related filings the Commission held ten (10) Public Hearings for Notice of Intent Filings, issued ten (10) Orders of Conditions, six (6) Certificates of Compliance, two (2) Determinations of Applicability, and four (4) Permit Extensions.

The Commission issued two Orders of Conditions prohibiting work for projects that could not be conditioned to meet the performance standards of the Wetlands Protection Act or the City of Gardner Wetlands Protection Ordinance as proposed. Both of these Orders were for work proposed within Riverfront Areas which have performance standards requirements that are considerably greater than those of other protected Resource Areas. One of these projects was appealed to the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (Mass DEP) and was subsequently allowed under a Superseding Order of Conditions issued by Mass DEP. In this case, the Commission actively participated in a site visit and discussions moderated by Mass DEP and worked together with the applicant to reach a solution. Upon the recommendation of Mass DEP, the applicant was asked to develop an alternative plan that would include enhanced restoration activities beneficial to the Riverfront Resource Area and be agreeable to all parties. The Commission was given the opportunity to review and comment on the newly proposed plan, made recommendations, and was ultimately satisfied that the resulting Superseding Orders of Conditions, issued by Mass DEP, served to protect the interests of the Wetlands Protection Act. As a result an adjudicatory hearing was not required, the project was permitted, and the Resource Area was substantially improved upon.

Site Visits and Assessment & Monitoring Activities:

Agent Legros and the Commission conducted regular site visits and monitoring activities throughout the year. Some notable examples were: Mill Street and West Street Solar Sites, Cummings Conservation Area, Otter River Conservation Area, City Forest – Route 140, Crystal Lake, and Cowee Pond, Park Street Substation Project, Sapphire Park Subdivision Development Project, Wilder Brook Subdivision Development Project, Biomedical Polymers, Risley and John Street – Chair City Realty Trust/Salvador Site, Walmart Expansion Project, Gardner District Courthouse Project, Crystal Lake – Heywood Hospital



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Wellness Trail, 140 South Main Street, Clark Street DPW Paving Project, Pearl Street Unitil Gas Pipe Extension Project, New England Peptide, Mill Street, Dyer Street, Betty Spring Road railroad culvert and downstream dam, Lovewell Street, Betty Spring Road and Linus Allain Avenue Fuel Spill, North Central Pathway – Proposed extension off Stone Street, 115 Coburn Avenue, Mechanic Street Ball-field and Conservation Area, Kendall Pond, Parker Pond Spillway, and others.

Presentations to the Commission:

During 2014, the Commission hosted several presentations during public meetings: Steve Coswell of Plantscape Services, presented a Landscape Plan to the Commission for the Watkins Family Plot at the Crystal Lake Cemetery; Gary Gouldroup of New England Forestry Consultants, updated and informed the Commission on the City of Gardner's Forest Stewardship Program and recent forest cuttings at the Route 140/Perly Brook and Crystal Lake areas of the City Forest; Jeffrey Tylor of Vegetation Control Services, presented an informative talk on Invasive Plant Control and Eradication; and Rob Hubbard, former City of Gardner Director of Community Development and Planning, presented the 2014 Open Space and Recreation Update Plan for the Commission's review and approval.

Operations and Finances

Operational Activities:

In the past year Agent Legros and the Commission have worked to improve the work-flow, organization, operation, and record-keeping and documentation processes of the Commission, its office, and administrative activities. In particular, the Agent has worked to familiarize himself with the Commission's files, documents, and plans and has improved organization of the office and its files to increase accessibility to information for the public, staff, and Commission. Recently, the Agent created a database of Wetlands Protection Filings for the last fifteen (15) years. These actions have helped to increase work-flow and productivity, and enhance the Commission's ability to administer the Wetlands Protection Act in a more timely and orderly fashion.

During this year the Commission has developed plans to improve signage at Conservation Areas and major waterbodies and stream crossings. They have also developed plans to improve the Commission's website with the addition of information and the inclusion of maps of Conservation Areas. Mapping of the [trails](#) of our Conservation Areas and Open Spaces and development of informational materials, descriptions, and identification of amenities available at each area is planned for the calendar year 2015. Overall, these plans will serve to improve public awareness and access to the City's Conservation Areas and Open Spaces and provide enhanced, conservation, recreation, and wellness opportunities. These goals and objectives are directly in line with the City's recent Open Space and Recreation Plan Update.



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The Conservation Commission will utilize Wetlands Protection funds, gift accounts, and seek additional sources of funding to implement these objectives.

Commission Payroll, Income, Purchases and Acquisitions (2014):

Agent Salary: **\$23,560.74**

Commission Member Stipends: **\$3,450**

Wetland Fees – WPA and Local Ordinance Income: **\$4,096.98**

Purchases, Requisitions, and other expenses: **\$1,472**

Committee Participation:

As part of his duties to the Commission and [City of Gardner](#), Agent Legros actively participated as a member of several Committees, and sought or provided review for several [City Departments](#), and their related [Boards, Commissions, and Committees](#).

Specifically, the Agent participated as a member on the [Open Space and Recreation](#) Update Plan Committee where he was joined by fellow Commission members Norman Beauregard (as a member) and David Orwig (as a public participant present at both public meetings). The Commission and its Agent were instrumental in developing the 2015 Open Space and Recreation Update Plan both as members and participants of the Committee. Further, the Commission provided funding for a portion of the work for the consultant, Mr. Rob Hubbard, hired to develop and compose the plan. In addition, the Commission provided considerable input, feedback, support, and technical review to the process. Perhaps most importantly, the Commission and its Agent will play a considerable role in the implementation of the Plan moving forward. (For examples of Commission activities in 2014 and planned future activities directly related to the implementation of the City's Open Space and Recreation Plan see the 'Conservation Area and Open Space Outreach and Stewardship Activities' section of this report below.)

Agent Legros also actively participated in several [Public Service Committee](#) Meetings where he provided the Committee with requested updates on Commission activities and answered questions of the Committee relating to Conservation and Open Space matters.

In addition, the Agent actively participated in Development Review Committee Meetings helping to facilitate the Development Review process with regards to Conservation and Wetlands Protection related matters.



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In general, Agent Legros and the Commission have and will continue to work cooperatively with other City Departments and Boards such as [Engineering Department](#), [Building Department](#), [Zoning Board](#), [Community Development and Planning Department](#), [Health Department](#), [Department of Public Works](#), [Forest Stewardship Program](#) and City Forestry Consultant, and [Assessor's Office](#) in an advisory and technical review capacity regarding all matters related to Conservation and Open Space and Recreation.

Memberships & Meetings Attended:

In 2014 the Conservation Commission maintained active membership to the **Massachusetts Association of Conservation Commissions (MACC)** and the **Massachusetts Society of Municipal Conservation Professionals (MSMCP)**.

Conservation Agent Legros attended several meetings in the interest of Wetlands Protection, Conservation, Sustainable Forestry and Open Space Planning, including: Massachusetts Society of Municipal Conservation Professionals (MSMCP) Meeting and Osprey Banding Event; "A Conversation with your Service Forester", Mike Downey, DCR Forest Stewardship Program Service Forester; Mass DEP Regulations Revisions Seminar Meeting; Open Space Plan Public Meeting; Meeting with Mike Hermanson, regarding Mechanic Street Ballfield; Meeting with Bill Fank, Golf Course Superintendent, regarding Mechanic Street Ballfield and Conservation Area – invasive plant eradication and control; Meetings with David Kotker, Mount Grace Land Trust, regarding Crystal Lake – Heywood Hospital Wellness Trail; Ivan Ussach, Millers River Watershed Association, regarding Otter River Blue Trail; Mrs. Rodecki and Mrs. Smith, regarding Cummings Conservation Area.

Conservation Area and Open Space Outreach and Stewardship Activities:

Conservation Agent Legros and the Commission conducted many different outreach and stewardship activities throughout the year. Many of these activities were directly related and beneficial to achieving the goals of the City's past and recent Action Plans and Goals and Objectives identified in the Open Space and Recreation Plan.

In particular, Agent Legros and the Commission conducted many activities related to trails, boating access, improved signage, improved recreation areas, and increased public awareness of the City's Open Space and Conservation Areas – all identified as goals and objectives of the [2015 Open Space and Recreation Plan](#). Specifically, the Agent worked closely with the Millers River Watershed Council Blue Trail on creating boater access to and promoting the Otter River portion of the Blue Trail – a goal of the Open Space and Recreation Plan. As part of this effort, the Commission and Ivan Ussach of the Miller's River Watershed Council planned a volunteer clean-up day at the Otter River Airport Conservation Area and removed many large bags of trash, debris, and waste from the Area.



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The Agent and the Commission also took an active role in Public Outreach of the [City's Forest Stewardship Program](#) – another goal of the Open Space and Recreation Plan – to help foster an understanding of the benefits of forestry and address public concern following the forest cutting between Crystal Lake and Heywood Hospital. The Commission hosted City Forestry Consultant, Gary Gouldrup (New England Forestry Consultants, Inc.), in a public meeting to educate themselves on the City's Forest Stewardship Program. The Commission subsequently addressed questions and concerns from the public and City Councilors with informative and educational answers during another public meeting. The Agent also received and responded to many questions from the public regarding the Forest Stewardship Program and specifically, the forest harvest at Crystal Lake City Forest. In the interest of public outreach and to answer many common and reoccurring questions, Agent Legros provided an interview for an article in the Gardner News related to the forest harvest, the City's Forest Stewardship Program, and the values and benefits of forest management.

In addition to public outreach efforts, the Commission actively worked to ensure the protection of interests of wetland resources and the Pubic. To this regard, as a proactive measure, the Commission composed a letter to Mr. Gouldrup, addressing four (4) major concerns of the Commission relative to the forest cutting with respect to: 1. Water quality of Crystal Lake Reservoir, 2. Identification and implementation of filter strips, 3. Buffer-zones and selective cutting to preserve the ecological and aesthetic character of the area and prevent erosion and sedimentation, and 4. Efforts to prevent damage to the existing infrastructure of the area with specific regard to the North Central Pathway. This letter was well-received by Mr. Gouldrup and implemented by the licensed forest harvester (Mr. Scott Anderson) along with standard protection measures, already proposed and in place, to satisfactory results. Neither the Conservation Commission, nor the Engineering Department witnessed any erosion or sedimentation during, upon completion, or in the time since the cutting.

As part of these efforts and others, Agent Legros worked to develop strong working relationships within and among City Hall Departments to help meet the goals and objectives of the Commission and Community Development and Planning Department as well as those of other City departments and boards related to the mission of the Commission. In particular, the Agent worked closely with the Department of Public Works Director, Dane Arnold and reviewed several projects to ensure the protection of wetland resources and determine when filing for a Wetlands Protection Act permit was required. Together, Mr. Arnold and the Agent completed a filing for paving a section of Clark Street and improving drainage conditions at that location. Mr. Arnold and the Agent met on several other occasions to review projects in the field and Mr. Arnold also came in front of the Commission to update them on future DPW maintenance plans. Of particular importance was the completion of the much needed and long awaited maintenance and clean-out of the Parker Pond Spillway restoring proper flow conditions and protecting against potential flooding and storm damage. This accomplishment,



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identified as a necessity in former City Action Plans, was the direct result of the cooperation and effective communication between the Conservation Commission, Department of Public Works, and Public Service Committee.

The Commission also undertook activities and provided funding to help meet another goal of the Open Space Plan and former City Action Item: Development of Mechanic Street Youth Baseball and Softball Field and an adjoining Conservation, Recreation, and Wellness Area. The Commission provided funding from the Brook's Gift Account to install fencing for the ball field and began work to protect and improve the ecology of the Pond Brook by removing invasive plants from the area with the assistance of the Golf Course Superintendent, Bill Frank. Plans have been developed for signage, a walking path, and potentially a foot-bridge at that location. The plan is to implement the funding as intended to create a multi-use Conservation, Recreation, and Wellness Area that would provide substantial benefits to the health and wellness of the public and environment.

The Commission also assisted with the development of the Crystal Lake – Heywood Hospital Wellness Trail created by a local Eagle Scout as part of his Service Project. Agent Legros acted as an intermediary coordinator between the Scout, the City, Heywood Hospital, Mount Grace Land Trust (Scout Service Project sponsor), and the City Forestry Consultant to help coordinate the project during and immediately following the forest harvest at that same location. The project was an incredible success and Agent Legros was honored to present a Certificate of Honor on behalf of the Commission at his Eagle Scout Court of honor. Further, the project prompted discussions between the Commission, Mount Grace Land Trust, Heywood Hospital Diabetes Center, and Mount Wachusett Community College's Horticulture Program, to develop an interpretive native forest garden around the trail to serve as a conservation, recreation, education, and health and wellness area. The Commission hopes to allocate existing funds, identify additional funding sources, and further develop partnerships to help facilitate this project through planning and into development and practical use.

In response to other goals and objectives identified in the Open Space and Recreation Plan and former City Action Plans, and in accord with the goals of the Commission, several ideas were developed and discussed at Commission meetings throughout the year. For example, there are plans in place to improve public access and awareness of the City's Conservation Areas and Waterbodies. Specifically, the Commission plans to create and erect signage at several Conservation Areas and waterbodies with the assistance of the Department of Public Works. They also plan to work together to improve parking and recreation (including boater) access at these areas. Further, there is a plan to identify areas where multiple, compatible uses can occur together to provide combined multi-use conservation, recreation, education, and wellness experiences for the public. Two well-suited areas have been discussed by the Commission and in this report (see descriptions above) as suitable for such activities: the area adjacent



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to Pond Brook and Mechanic Street Youth Baseball and Softball Field, and the area of City Forest between Heywood Hospital and Crystal Lake. Identifying Conservation Commission funding and potential grant opportunities for these types of projects has been discussed throughout this past year; it is the hope of the Commission and its Agent to appropriate and secure these funds to implement these ideas in the coming year.

In all of these efforts the Commission and its Agent have worked closely with the City Engineer and Assistant Engineer, GIS Coordinator, Assessor, Department of Public Works Director, entire Community Development and Planning Department, and other City staff to build strong working relationships and achieve common goals. Most importantly we have worked hard to meet the goals and objectives identified in the City's [Open Space and Recreation Plan](#). It is the intent of the Commission to continue such efforts into the next year with a focus on increasing public education, awareness, use, and accessibility of our Conservation Areas to further enhance the conservation, recreation, education, and wellness opportunities that they provide to the City and the community it serves.

Respectfully Submitted,

Jeffrey D. Legros, Conservation Agent
On behalf of the Conservation Commission