

Bolton Conservation Commission FY 2024-25 Annual Report

Rodney Parlee (Chair), Peter Van Dine (Vice-Chair/Treasurer), Brenda Cataldo, Alan Bicknell, Matt River, Kim Fofanna (Alternate) and Leslie Brand (Clerk)

The Bolton Conservation Commission continues to research the town's potential use of land and water, a responsibility essential to protecting the natural resources, conservation areas, and ecological features that define Bolton's character. Maintaining the environment while supporting economic growth requires informed, observant, and persistent conservation work. Preserving high quality, intact, and connected habitats is fundamental to a healthy landscape. As Bolton continues to develop, proposed projects must be carefully evaluated. Using peer reviewed scientific data, planning expertise, and public input helps regulatory commissions make sound decisions that protect irreplaceable resources while allowing thoughtful, well justified growth.

The Commission also monitors conditions affecting safe access to open space. In Bolton Notch, unsafe traffic patterns, including high speeds and limited sight lines, endanger pedestrians, cyclists, and park visitors. There exists a real need for improving the existing entrance to Bolton Notch State Park and the Hop River State Park.

In fiscal year 2024–2025, the Bolton Conservation Commission (BCC) made notable progress thanks to the dedication of its volunteers. Key accomplishments include:

- **Complete Streets:** Documented safety concerns about vehicular access to Bolton Notch State Park from Interstate I-384. Worked closely with alternate member Kimberly Fofana as the BCC liaison to Bike Walk Bolton, advancing principles of Complete Streets in the Town of Bolton. Provided comments regarding the Connectivity Trail and absence of clear parking-lot design criteria at Heritage Farm.
- **Stream Temperature Monitoring:** Collaborated with CTDEEP to monitor five streams and two vernal pools, completing seasonal equipment swaps and sustaining landowner engagement. Featured a Bolton Notch State Park vernal-pool temperature graph in the BCC published town calendar.
- **Watershed Conservation:** Continued partnership with local conservation alliances such as BLWCA, FBL and the SRWP. Patiently awaited approval of the Bolton Lakes Watershed Management Plan.
- **Riffle Bioassessment by Volunteers (RBV):** Organized the 20th Annual RBV event at Herrick Park Lodge, to assess stream health through macroinvertebrate collection. Implemented a new disinfection protocol for field equipment. Noted a continued decline in “Most Wanted” macroinvertebrate species, which remains a concern. The drought may have had an impact.
- **Peak Foliage Hike** The hike originated from the Bolton Commuter Lot and followed the Hop River State Park Trail to Valley Falls Park and back. Members discussed tree diversity in the Bolton Notch/Valley Falls watershed, noted trailhead properties linked to the Old Growth Forest Network, the Northern CT Land Trust, and Bolton Notch State Park, and pointed out access to Box Mountain Forest, Echo Ridge, Webster Preserve, the Tulip Tree Trail, and the Mohegan Trail.
- **Winter Faire:** Set up a well-attended tabletop exhibit, sold calendars, and hosted the Recycling Challenge. Expressed renewed concern about the continued lack of recycling bins at the Town event. Also tabled at Croyley's Garden Center and offered Recycling Challenge and calendar sales.
- **Winter Trails Day:** Wildlife advocate Ray Hardy was the special guest at Herrick Park that focused on tracking wildlife in the snow. Twelve people attended on a blustery cold day.

- **Vernal Pools Day:** Sponsored a well-attended Vernal Pool Sunset Serenade workshop at the library, followed by a sunset field review of the upland forest vernal pool behind the library with wetlands professional scientist Ed Pawlak. Ed collected obligate species on a tray to show participants.
- **Earth Day Celebration:** The Fairy House Building Contest & Mini-Bio Blitz was a success at Freja Park. Guest speakers included Wildlife Advocate Ray Hardy and Forest Ecologist Marlene Cole.
- **Kids to Parks Day:** The BCC teamed up with the Bolton Recreation Department and the Bolton Regatta at Indian Notch Park. Peter Van Dine was a judge for the annual Regatta. Rod Parlee and Matt Rivers presented the importance of a watershed and the Bolton Lakes Watershed Conservation Alliance.
- **Trails Day:** Explored the newly blazed Nathan Hale Greenway trail with special guest and nationally known arborist, Matt “Twig” Largess discussing dendrology and forest conservation.
- **Park Management:** Managed trail workparties, kiosks and provided educational material in parks.
- **Community Engagement:** Participated in monthly local and state-wide board meetings, town forums, and conservation conferences. Tabled at the CACIWC Annual Meeting and Conference and offered the Recycling Challenge and sold calendars.
- **Citizen Science:** With BCC support, urged both the BLWCA and FBL to develop base-line water level data on all three lakes and received estimates on an Onset weather station with rain gauge for LBL.
- **Trail Management:** Coordinated with local and state conservation officials on managing trail erosion and illegal motor vehicle access in parks. Volunteered for the Town and with the Bolton Land Trust in developing the Nathan Hale Greenway hiking trail.
- **Photo Contest and Calendar:** Hosted the 23rd Annual Town-wide Photo Contest and published the 14th edition of the traditional calendar, raising funds for conservation efforts. Special thanks to advertisers! The Annual Photo Contest, made possible by the Bolton Conservation Commission, recognized outstanding entries across four categories. In **Examples of Green Living & Farming**, first place went to “*Bath Time*” by Steve Niemczyk (\$100 Cropley’s Gift Card), second to “*A Gentle Girl Between Milkings*” by Leslie Manna (Highbush Blueberries), and third to “*Fall Baling*” by William Betterini (Blue Flag Iris, T-shirt, and Potted Conifer). In **Beauty of Nature and Open Space**, first place was awarded to “*Trail Blazing*” by Leslie Manna (\$100 Cropley’s Gift Card), second to “*Pink Beauties*” by Sylvia Ounpuu (Highbush Blueberries), and third to “*Fall Reflections on Tinker Pond*” by Lauren Coleman (Queen of the Prairie Perennial, T-shirt, and Potted Conifer). For **People in the Environment**, first place went to “*Stroll on the Hop River Trail*” by Jim Adams (Witch Hazel and Sheep Laurel), second to “*A Walk to Remember*” by William Betterini (Highbush Blueberries), and third to “*Shuttered Solitude*” by Rich Fitch (Cardinal Flower, T-shirt, and Potted Conifer). In **Wildlife in Bolton**, first place was awarded to “*Bumble Bee*” by Mary Catherine L. Sonntag (Button Bush and Mountain Laurel), second to “*Fox Hunting Stride*” by Lindsay Pettinicchi (Highbush Blueberries), and third to “*Vernal Pool Rockstar*” by Sharon Wilson (Summer Phlox, T-shirt, and Potted Conifer). All current and past winning photos are posted for viewing on the Town of Bolton web page under Conservation Commission Photo Contest, Previous Years.

<https://www.boltonct.gov/boards-commissions/conservation-commission/previous-years-photo-contest-results>

These actions reflect the BCC’s ongoing commitment to conservation, environmental education, and community involvement in protecting Bolton’s natural resources, and they capture a snapshot in time, preserving the conditions, decisions, and community spirit that define this moment in our stewardship history.