

## VERMONT CONSERVATION COMMISSIONS

If you want to learn about conservation commissions in Vermont, the Association of Vermont Conservation Commissions is a good place to start.

**ASSOCIATION OF VERMONT CONSERVATION COMMISSIONS:** <http://vtconservation.com/>

### **What Are Conservation Commissions?**

In Vermont, conservation commissions are advisory bodies that exist in many towns across the state. Broadly, they are established to help communities protect and enhance their natural resources. In 1977, Vermont passed the enabling legislation (24 V.S.A. 4501) to establish municipal conservation commissions. By 1996, 96 Vermont towns had conservation commissions or similar committees. Today there are just over 100 conservation commissions in Vermont.

### **What Can Conservation Commissions Do?**

Under state law, municipal conservation commissions may do things like make inventories of the town's natural resources including lands that have agricultural, scientific, historical, educational, or cultural value or important, or provide ecosystem services like groundwater recharge, stormwater control, flood protection, wildlife habitat and other values; receive gifts of land for conservation purposes; assist and advise the local planning commission and select board on natural resource issues; and encouraging the public's understanding of their local environment through educational activities. Conservation commissions do not have regulatory power as do some other bodies, like select boards or planning commissions; conservation commissions are advisory boards only.

### **What's the Relationship between Conservation Commissions and Planning Commissions?**

Conservation commissions can work effectively with local planning commissions and other local, regional, and state organizations and agencies. Often planning commissions are overburdened with the details of other town work. A conservation commission can focus its energies on that town's natural resources and thereby ensure that the conservation interests of its community are being addressed. Conservation commissions can also assist planning commissions with the review and evaluation of development proposals. The mere presence of conservation commissions has encouraged residents to approach commissions with conservation concerns and goals to protect or donate their land.



Following are the links to some conservation commissions in neighboring or nearby towns:

**TINMOUTH:** <http://www.tinmouthvt.org/conservation-commission/>

The mission of the Tinmouth Conservation Commission is to conserve the town's natural and cultural resources, such as historic sites, scenic views, etc. The Conservation Commission works with the town's other governmental entities and the public to identify and assess resources, to offer the town and landowners guidance on planning for the conservation of these resources, and to educate the residents of Tinmouth as to why conserving these resources is so important. It organizes hikes to explore the town and work parties to maintain trails and other town resources. Updates on the commission's work appear regularly in the Tales of Tinmouth (Tinmouth's monthly newsletter) and on Front Porch Forum.

The Conservation Commission's seven volunteer members are appointed by the Select Board for staggered terms of 4 years. Citizens are encouraged to attend meetings on the third Monday of every month at 7:00 pm at the Town Office.

**MANCHESTER:** <http://manchester-vt.gov/boards/>

The Conservation Commission is responsible for making an inventory and conduct studies of the municipal natural resources and open lands, administer municipal lands and advising the Selectboard and the Planning Commission and working on long-term environmental projects. The Conservation Commission also owns deed restrictions on Adams Park and the Factory Point Town Green. Members of the Conservation Commission are appointed by the Selectboard.

**WALLINGFORD:** <http://www.wallingfordvt.com/boards-minutes/conservation-commission/>

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The Wallingford Conservation Commission members built scenic walking trails at Stone Meadow Park off Waldo Lane and a kayak/canoe launch into Otter Creek off Waldo Lane. They created a kiosk with maps detailing trails and they even planted wildflowers that support a healthy bee population.

**LONDONDERRY:** <https://www.londonderryvt.org/conservation-commission/>

The commission is authorized by State of Vermont statute (Title 24, Chapter 118) and reports to the Londonderry Town Select Board.

Commission members are volunteers; the work of the commission is supported by an administrative assistant. Appointments to the commission are made by the Select Board, usually for a period of 4 years.

The commission advises the Select Board and Planning Commission concerning matters pertaining to conservation of natural resources in the town of Londonderry and undertakes projects on behalf of conservation.

Projects range from studies to actual 'in the field' programs. Examples of recent projects include mapping the town's year round flowing streams, creating a database of water wells in the town, assisting owners of larger properties to learn about development rights and other methods that would prevent subdivision of their land, crop tree management of town wood lots.

The Commission meets at the Town Offices on the third Thursday of each month. The Commission can be reached through the Town Clerk.

**DORSET:** <http://www.dorsetvt.org/conservation.html>

The Gettysburg Quarry property is home to a fantastic marble quarry, the hiking trail to Gilbert Lookout at Owls Head, and many rare plants and natural communities.

Recently the Dorset Conservation Commission set out to conserve the Gettysburg Quarry property by having the Town purchase the land to expand the current Town Forest on Owls Head. The cost for the purchase of the land and establishment of a maintenance fund is tabbed at \$650,000.

In 2014 the Town received nearly \$450,000 in grant funding from the United States Forest Service Community Forest and Open Space Program/ and the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board. In addition we have raised \$205,000 from pledges and donations.