

CONSERVATION COMMISSION  
ANNUAL TOWN REPORT  
FISCAL YEAR 2009/2010

The Conservation Commission's purpose is established by the CT General Statutes as "...the development, conservation, supervision and regulation of natural resources..." According to this legislation, the Conservation Commission must keep an index of all open areas, publicly or privately owned, including open marshlands, swamps and other wetlands, for the purpose of making the proper use of such areas; conduct research into the possible utilization of land areas of the municipality; and approve state grant-in-aid applications for programs to preserve or restrict the use of open space land to conservation or recreation purposes. In addition, the Conservation Commission may make recommendations on proposed land use changes to other municipal agencies (often by request of those agencies); recommend plans and programs for the development and use of all open areas; advertise, prepare and distribute booklets, maps, charts, plans and pamphlets for its purposes; inventory natural resources and formulate watershed management plans; acquire land and easements in the name of the municipality (in Old Saybrook, through the Land Acquisition Committee and with the approval of the townspeople); and manage municipally-owned open space property when the agency normally responsible for such duties (Parks & Recreation, by our Charter) delegates that power.

Old Saybrook's Plan of Conservation & Development incorporates the Conservation Commission's 2004 Plan of Conservation & Open Space. The plan's purposes and uses are many, including protecting the Town's natural resources, providing information to Land Use regulatory commissions as they process land use applications, and aiding the Town's Land Acquisition Committee in identifying properties of value to preserve for future generations. This document defines the ongoing work of the Conservation Commission. Present priorities have been placed on developing greenways and trail systems for passive recreation, a Stewardship Plan for town land, developing a Natural Heritage Tour showcasing the town's natural resources, completing an Oyster River fishway system, and attaining our 21% Open Space goal.

Since the Town purchased the 315-acre property in 1999 now known as the Great Cedars Conservation Area, residents have enjoyed the west side of this land accessed from a rustic parking area on Ingham Hill Road. The trails on the west side of this land lead through Atlantic White Cedar swamps and the forest as far west as the Town Park on Schoolhouse Road. Trails have now been completed for the east side of the Great Cedars Conservation Area, accessed by means of a new parking area off Merritt Lane.

A new version of the Natural Heritage Tour of the Town of Old Saybrook was published and distributed to the public. It contains a self-guided tour map and discussion of the town's open spaces and preserved natural resources. This has become a favorite for visitors to the Chamber of Commerce office.

For years, a fishway system for the Oyster River watershed has been a part of the Town's Plan of Conservation & Development. The purpose of the fishway system is to allow river herring and eels to reach their traditional habitat in the northwestern part of town, as part of a larger effort to preserve the overall environmental health of the Oyster river watershed area and hence the town. The third and final fish passage in the system, a natural fishway around the dam at Crystal Lake, was completed in May of 2009.

An Open Space Map of the Town of Old Saybrook was completed. At the present time, open space totals approximately 20% of the Town's land area. With the Open Space Subdivision regulations passed by the Zoning Commission that require all large developments to set aside at least 50% of their land area in open space, it would appear that it is only a matter of time before approximately 25% of the land area of the Town is set aside as open space.

In addition, the Town of Old Saybrook has met its commitment to purchase 20% of its municipal facilities energy needs from clean energy sources by the year 2010.

Looking forward, it is time to update the Plan of Conservation & Open Space. With the present concerns for sustainability, climate change and energy independence in this country, the new plan should address what we can do locally to help with these national and world efforts. At the very least, the plan should include a strong energy conservation program and a program of public education to encourage a stronger culture for environmental issues and a better understanding of what actions are most important for sustainability. Of course the new plan should include continuing efforts for acquisition and stewardship of land for open space and the preservation of our natural resources and wildlife habitat.

Robert W. Fish, *Chairman*