

Conservation Commission Monthly Report
Jess Gugino, Interim Conservation Office Administrator
April 2022

Conservation Agent. The Commission was pleased to recommend the hiring of Heather Hampson to fill its vacancy. Heather will start her job with us on June 6 and we are looking forward to working with her.

Long Pond Dam. Beaver Solutions, Inc., installed a new flow control device (aka ‘beaver deceiver’) at the end of April. The previous device, installed in 2014, failed last fall due to its workings being circumvented by the wily beaver denizens of Long Pond. This led to the impoundment of a great deal of excess water in the pond as the beavers were successful in building up a working dam of their own on top of the existing concrete spillway. The excess flooding put at risk trees along the shoreline as well as a nearby resident’s driveway. An attempt at trapping the beavers last fall – reluctantly agreed to by the Commission – also failed as an unknown person(s) tampered with the traps, releasing beavers that were caught and making it unlikely to catch them again. The new beaver deceiver, which is slightly different from the old one, is working fine for now and the water level on Long Pond dropped about 18 inches over the following two weeks. This sudden drop, in turn, led to some calls from concerned residents, but it was explained to them that this was both necessary and intentional. The installation of a flow control device cannot, in any case, drop the water lower than the level set by the concrete spillway. Now we wait to see just how smart our resident beavers are and whether they will learn to outwit the deceiver!

Open Space Residential Development (OSRD) regulations. Chair Jon Schmalenberger and Jess Gugino have been working with Mark Archambault and two members of the Planning Board to finalize the draft of regulations for OSRD subdivisions. In addition to its review of jurisdictional wetlands/buffer zones, the Commission was given an additional role by the updated Zoning Bylaw of providing the Planning Board with a Conservation Recommendation.

Applications for permitting to the Commission continue to be unusually low in volume for the time being. Looking ahead, we expect this to change as the Stratton Hill OSRD comes back before the Town in the next month or so. In addition, the friendly 40b “Ayer Commons,” as that begins to progress, will have to undergo Commission review under the Wetlands Protection Act – something that is outside the bounds of the comprehensive permit process.

Ongoing projects include oversight of the 2022 invasive weed management on Sandy, Flannagan, and Pine Meadow ponds (funding approved at Spring Town Meeting 2022); the Waterways signs project; reviewing and assisting with Laurie Nehring/PACE’s proposed volunteer invasive water chestnut pull on Grove Pond, assuming testing (taking place now) indicates it is safe to do so.

Please contact the Conservation office with any questions at concom@ayer.ma.us or 978-772-8220 x143.