

# Common Questions about Conservation Commissions

## What is a Conservation Commission?

- The purpose of a Conservation Commission is to protect the natural resources in the municipality. They keep public records of a Town's natural resources, such as its soils, waters, and wildlife.

## Does a Conservation Commission have any regulatory powers?

- No. A Conservation Commission's purpose is to share natural resource information and advise local boards and the public. The commission does not have the authority to approve or deny permits or enforce regulations. They must work with the planning board and select board to achieve their goals.

## Can a member of a Conservation Commission enter my property without my permission?

- No. A member of a Conservation Commission must have permission to enter private property. However, when an applicant signs a wetlands permit, the signature provides the authority to enter on the applicants property to visit the site.

## What is a Conservation Commission's relationship to wetlands permits?

- A Conservation Commission may review State wetlands permit application and seek more information or provide comments to NH Department of Environmental Services.
- Having a Conservation Commission allows the town's landowners to use the simpler and quicker Expedited Minimum Impact Wetlands Permit.

## Does a Conservation Commission have to be involved in the wetlands permitting process?

- No. The Conservation Commission may review an application and decide not to comment or send a letter to NH Department of Environmental Services. The Conservation Commission may feel that they are qualified to comment or they may discuss the project and have not additional concerns or comments for NH DES.

## Are Donations to the Conservation Fund a tax deductible?

- Yes. When a town establishes a Conservation Commission, the town is allowed to create a Conservation Fund. The purpose of this fund is to protect natural resources as listed in RSA 36-A:2 and RSA 36-A:4. The fund allows individuals who want to protect the municipalities natural features to make financial donations, all of which are tax deductible. Conservation Commissions can also accept donations of land, or interests of land or easements.



**NHACC**

54 Portsmouth Street  
Concord, NH 03301  
603.224.7867  
info@nhacc.org  
NHACC.org

**I understand that a Conservation Commission is non-regulatory now, but what if the State changes the RSA?**

- There is no evidence that the State has (or will have) any interest in changing the letter or spirit of the RSA, but such a drastic change would certainly require that towns re-adopt the RSA anew. In any event, a town always has the authority to disband a Conservation Commission simply by voting it out at Town Meeting.

**What are some of the other benefits of having a Conservation Commission?**

- A Conservation Commission is responsible for inventorying the Town's natural resources - every piece of information will be freely available to every resident of the Town.
- It will open up opportunities for funds including grants for trails, natural resource inventories, and educational programs and partnership with local organizations.
- A Conservation Commission is often a huge help to the select board in managing town conservation land and town forest.
- Many planning boards rely on the advice of Conservation Commissions when reviewing site plans or development.

**Will the Conservation Commission be duplicating the efforts of other organizations in Town?**

- No, Conservation Commissions typically provide assistance and advice to other town boards. Commissions may ask for assistance from other organizations, but their focus will be different from that of other organizations.

**What if a citizen is unhappy with the way the Conservation Commission conducts business?**

- The Conservation Commission exists solely to be useful and helpful to the Town in which it belongs.
- If a citizen has concerns or issues with the Conservation Commission they can address them with the Select Board.

**Who can be on a Conservation Commission?**

- Any resident of the town may be on a Commission.

**How many towns in New Hampshire have Conservation Commissions?**

- 217 towns in New Hampshire have Conservation Commissions. This equals 90% of all towns in the State.