

**Orford Conservation Commission**  
**Meeting Minutes September 18, 2025**  
**Meeting held in person at the Niles Room in the Town Offices and via Zoom**

**Present-in-person:** Commission Members: Ted Cooley (Vice Chair), Chris Gothberg, Harry Pease, Earl Johnson. Alternates: John Miller, Emily Bryant, Fran Plaisted; Selectboard Representative: Kevin Follensbee.  
**Present remotely via Zoom:** Bob Hedges (Chair)

1. **Meeting called to order** 7:03 PM. John Miller and Emily Bryant were seated. Fran arrived a few minutes later and was seated when she came.
2. **Minutes: Motion** (Harry/Ted): to accept the minutes of 8/21/2025 as written. Motion passed.
3. **Regular Business**
  - a) *Water Quality Testing:* Harry summarized the water testing program for this past summer: There were only 4 individual tests over the course of the summer that exceeded the safe E. coli level, perhaps due to the drought we have been having. Harry sent copies of the water test results to the Camps (Moosilauke, Merriwood, and Pemi), Orford Parks and Playgrounds, and the NH State beach organization, all of whom appreciated receiving the results. Invoices for the tests are all paid.
  - b) *Mount Cube to River hike (held Sept. 13):* Chris reported that the event was promoted on social media, and received 4400 views. The Upper Valley Trails Alliance (UVTA) helped promote the event and provided tables and large water jugs for the aid stations. Nineteen people participated – some did parts of the route, and some did the whole distance. The group was divided into fast and slow groups. Chris thinks there might have been more participants if there had not been competing trail events happening on the same day. There was excitement among members of the group. Overall, it was a great success, which we can definitely build on for next year. [Ed: lovely to see the finishers dip their toes in the Connecticut River water as the sun started going down behind the western shore.] He thought that an ideal number of participants might be 30-40. A mystery person set out some drinks and snacks for the hikers on the west side of Sunday Mountain, which was much appreciated. Emily helped with the aid stations. Earl made a list of lots of birds seen on the trail. There is already healthy enthusiasm for next year.
  - c) *Observations on the condition of the Cross-Rivendell Trail:* Chris reported the following:
    - At the top of Mt Cube, there needs to be some more “brushing-in” so people stay on the trail.
    - The section between Baker Road and Rte 25A is in good condition.
    - On Creamery Road, the fence needs fixing.
    - There is a rotting bridge near the school that should be repaired.
    - The trail is a little confusing near Rivendell Academy with old and new routes.
  - d) *Other Trail work priorities:*
    - Orford Heritage Trail: Andy Schwaegler kindly did brush hogging on the section of trail just west of Indian Pond Road. Other parts of the trail near there, where brush-hogging is not possible (too wet), have grown in with thick, high brush. It was suggested that maintenance of this part of the trail could be done at the end of October (before rifle hunting season). Chris is going to develop some recommended trail work days.
    - Cross-Rivendell Trail: The Rivendell Trail Association has a meeting on November 9. Bob plans to attend; perhaps the OCC could coordinate with the RTA on trails maintenance.
  - e) *Planning for various upcoming activities:*
    - The Cottonstone Mountain hike planned for October 18<sup>th</sup> will be moved to October 25<sup>th</sup> or 26<sup>th</sup> so the landowner can participate. Bob will coordinate finalizing the date with our co-sponsor, the Upper Valley Land Trust (UVLT).

- Upcoming Birding Programs: To increase participation we need more outreach (social media, promotion through the Orford list serve, etc.) Earl is planning for these bird outings:

October 4 (Sat): Mountain View Farm - Hawk Watch.

November 2 (Sun.): Upper Baker Pond – Ducks.

- Developing a calendar for Winter Programs: Bob suggested that we review plans for the November through March hikes at the October meeting. Fran volunteered to help with the moonlight snowshoe hike (likely in January). Chris and Bob will develop a proposed winter calendar for the October meeting.

*f) Northeast Wilderness Trust (NEWT)/Spruce Ridge Property:* Bob reported that NEWT is due to close on the property in early October. NEWT recently sponsored a public hike on the property, near Mason Pond; OCC members Bob and John participated as well as NEWT Executive Director Jon Leibowitz. In talking with Bob on the hike, and in a subsequent “debriefing” phone meeting, Jon L. indicated informally commitments to public access and hiking on the Spruce Ridge property:

- NEWT would plan for a parking lot near the Mousley Brook Road turnaround at the trailhead of the Daniel Doan Trail up Smarts Mountain for visitors to the Southern edge of the property.

- NEWT would plan for public hiking access down to Mason Pond on the existing road/track from that parking lot, extending down to the water’s edge.

- NEWT would support the planned trail from Stonehouse Mountain to the Upper Valley Land Trust’s Mountain View Farm to cross NEWT’s property “four corners.”- NEWT would support a trail along the existing woods road that goes Southwest from the access trail to Mason Pond about 400 ft from the shore of the pond, through Tax Map 8-31/6 and Map 8-33 Lot 7A and back into the northwest corner of Map 8-31 Lot 6, then cutting West/Southwest to meet up with the Stonehouse Mountain property and connect with existing woods trails and roads there. This trail commitment would allow for multiple trail loops in the Stonehouse Mountain / Mason Pond area. Emily, Chris, and Bob will help locate the Stonehouse Mountain existing woods roads.

*g) Initial efforts to organize a working group for the High Bridge Road project:* David Hubbard is the lead commissioner for this group. There is some urgency to make progress on this project before next town meeting. Shawn Washburn has indicated that he is happy to give advice on bridge repair. Note: Meetings of this group need to be noticed if a quorum of the OCC is present.

*h) Review approach to working groups:* Create working groups of 3 or fewer (eliminating the need for notice and minutes). Get work done in the working groups and then use the monthly meetings to report back on what the working groups have done.

*i) Ongoing recruiting of new commissioners:* Motion: (John/Chris) to nominate Adair Mulligan for OCC Commissioner for the term ending 3/31/2026. The motion passed.

#### **4. Other Business**

*a) Budget:* Kevin noted that the (2026) OCC budget needs to be submitted to the Selectboard by Oct 14. *Motion* (Fran/Harry) That the OCC approve the 2026 budget that Bob creates as long as it does not exceed the current budget by more than 10%. The motion passed.

*b) Jacobs Book:* Emily reported that Shawn Washburn said that the work on his property along Jacobs Brook (Near Brook Road and Rte 25A) should take place soon.

*Motion (Ted / John)* to adjourn the meeting. The motion passed.

Meeting adjourned at 7:47 pm

Minutes taken by Emily Bryant