

Orford Conservation Commission

Approved Meeting Minutes February 19, 2026 Meeting held in-person in Niles Room at the Town Offices

Commissioners Present: Bob Hedges (Chair), Ted Cooley (Vice-Chair), Chris Gothberg, Harry Pease; **Alternates:** Emily Bryant, Fran Plaisted, John Miller

Meeting called to order: 7:02 PM. Fran Plaisted, Emily Bryant and John Miller were seated as Commissioners.

Approval of the minutes from past meetings:

December 18, 2025 Minutes: A question was raised about what future obligations were implied in the December 18 minutes regarding the maintenance of any new trails on the NEWT Spruce Ridge Wilderness Preserve property. Bob clarified that the only obligation was to have a formal Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between NEWT, UVLT, and the Conservation Commission to make clear the accountabilities, if any, for ongoing trail maintenance. We need to make sure that the MOU clarifies the different groups' accountabilities. The MOU will lay out the agreed-upon future responsibilities for trail maintenance.

Following the discussion, Fran moved to accept minutes. Chris seconded. Motion carried.

January 6, 2026 (Special Meeting) Minutes: Fran moved to accept the minutes. Ted seconded. Motion carried.

January 15, 2026 Minutes: Chris moved to accept the minutes. Harry seconded. Motion carried.

Regular Business

1. Spruce Ridge Wilderness Preserve: Emily, Chris, and Bob have been working with NEWT and UVLT to define and map out the future trails on the NEWT and UVLT properties. Both NEWT and UVLT have expressed full support of proposed trail system. Emily has been collaborating closely with NEWT staff. A draft map of the proposed trail network was reviewed and discussed. Work should begin on the trails starting in April. Work will be pursued using a potential combination of UVLT staff, Orford volunteers, volunteers rallied from local companies (e.g., Hypertherm), and contract summer high school trail work crews from UVTA.

A formal MOU will be developed to document the plan for developing and maintaining the trails across the NEWT and UVLT properties. Bob will be working on this document with NEWT and UVLT.

A representative from NEWT will attend the Orford Town Meeting at the Conservation Commission table to provide updates on the new Wilderness Preserve conserved area with maps and details on land use.

2. High Bridge Road bridge project: Warrant Article 12, the warrant article that supports the project, has been finalized and included in the Town Meeting materials. In the Town Meeting, Harry will recognize Bob to review the project proposal. After Bob's opening comments, the discussion will be opened up for comments.
3. Proposed changes in NH's Current Use Land Program: After the public hearing, HB 1691 did not leave committee. Public feedback on the proposed regulatory changes was overwhelmingly negative.
4. Snowshoe hike up Stonehouse Mountain on Sunday, February 22nd: Everything is all set for the hike. We have had good collaboration with the UVLT team. We have lots of great snow.
5. **Hike Orford!** calendar: Chris provided a draft of the full calendar of 2026 hike outings to hand out at Town Meeting. Feedback and final comments were requested.
6. Conservation Commission table at Town Meeting: Ted will prepare an Orford "nature" photo review; NEWT will have representative to discuss Spruce Ridge; we will have a information hand-out on the High Bridge Road bridge project; we will have a sign-up sheet for trail work volunteers; and we will pass out **Hike Orford!** calendars.
7. OCC Meeting time: Our monthly meetings will now change to the First Thursday of the month at 6:30 PM. The next meeting will be on March 5, 2026.
8. Discussion about OCC priorities and project: Bob indicated that over our March and April meetings, we will have a review of all the priorities of the OCC, discuss what issues/opportunities need to be prioritized, and look for new members/alternates to assist with the priority projects. Members should develop a list of responsibilities to review at the April meeting.

Adjourn: Ted moved that we adjourn. Chris seconded. Motion carried.

Meeting adjourned at 7:55pm.

Minutes taken/prepared by Fran Plaisted and Emily Bryant