

Orford Conservation Commission
Meeting Minutes March 5, 2026
Meeting held in person in Niles Room at the Town Offices and via Zoom

Commissioners Present: Regular members: Bob Hedges (Chair) (via Zoom), Ted Cooley (Vice-Chair), Chris Gothberg, Dave Hubbard, Adair Mulligan (via Zoom); Alternates: Emily Bryant, John Miller.

Others present: Kevin Follensbee (Selectboard representative).

1. **Call to Order:** 6:35 pm. Emily Bryant and John Miller were seated as Commissioners.
2. **Approve Minutes:**
 - a. *February 19th meeting:* A Motion was made by John and seconded by Chris to accept the February 19 minutes as written. The motion carried with five in favor and two abstaining.
3. **Regular Business.**
 - a. *Update on High Bridge Road bridge project:* The Conservation Commission-sponsored Warrant Article to (1) remove the existing bridge and construct a pedestrian bridge, and (2) reclassify part of High Bridge Road from Class VI to Class A trail, was included in the 2026 Town Meeting Warrant (Article 18). A change in the article's wording after the official public hearing was reviewed and deemed legal to use in the official printed warrant. Bob contacted two abutters (Phil Magruder and David Roby), who were both supportive of the project. Bob will prepare a handout on the project for Town Meeting and Emily will help with a map of it. Chris will put the text of the article on social media.
 - b. *Update on the Northeast Wilderness Trust (NEWT)'s the Spruce Ridge Wilderness Preserve project:* Bob passed the OCC members' comments on NEWT's Spruce Ridge handout back to NEWT. Caitlin Mather of NEWT will be at Town Meeting to answer questions from Orford residents. Bob will check with Jason Berard of Upper Valley Land Trust (UFLT) to confirm UFLT's approval of the part of the proposed Stonehouse Mtn trail network that is on UFLT land.
 - c. *Report on the Feb 22nd Stonehouse Mtn snowshoe hike:* Chris reported a successful hike with about 20 people, some new faces, some repeats. The weather and snow conditions were great. John suggested that we should develop more formal safety procedures. (e.g. have two sweeps, so if someone was disabled, one sweep could stay and the other go for help). One participant on the hike was having a hard time (but made it down OK). Adair suggested having a nose count.
 - d. *Plan for the March 15th hike up to Brackett Falls:* Chris talked with Harry – parking may be on the old county road as before or at Harry's, but a lot depends on the weather and mud conditions. Chris thought it might be good to move the start time to the morning when the ground might be frozen. There is currently a lot of snow. Chris will break trail, snowshoes will probably be required. If parking / hiking conditions are bad, the

hike may have to be canceled. Adair suggested, and Emily agreed, to make a map of the Brackett Brook watershed for the information of participants.

- e. *Trail Counters for Mount Cube and Sunday Mountain trails:* Dave researched trail counters, including discussions with the Upper Valley Trails Alliance (UVTA), and recommended the Trafx brand. The Trafx system includes 3 counters (trail or vehicle), one dock (to download information from counters), an online DataNet subscription with 5 users and a 3-year subscription, and cables and manual. It uses infrared technology, so it does not need two units at each location. Battery life is more than 1 year. Total cost: \$2490. Adair pointed out that this kind of trail use data would be very useful in applying for grants. Adair said that a lock or some form of security is good to have.

A Motion was made by Dave and seconded by John to purchase the Trafx trail counter system. The motion carried unanimously. Bob noted that the funds for the purchase would come from the Conservation Fund.

- f. *Planning for Orford Town Meeting in March.*
 - i. Table reserved? Ted will confirm with Esther.
 - ii. Handout of Warrant Article 12 [Ed:18]. Bob will create, Esther will make copies
 - iii. **Hike Orford!** calendar of outings: Chris will make, Emily will print.
 - iv. NEWT attendees and Spruce Ridge handout: Caitlin will come in the afternoon and stay at least until the start of Town Meeting.
 - v. Slide Show and Photos: Ted will organize. He has lots of photos.
 - vi. Sign-up sheets for Conservation Commission volunteers: We could have one for people interested in helping with trail maintenance, and a separate one for those interested in volunteering in other ways. Ted can set up an email group so that email can be sent to volunteers from the official OCC email account.
- g. *Prioritization and assignments on other OCC efforts*
 - i. *Formalizing a calendar of birding outings:* Ted will check with the local birding group to see if there are any people who could lead bird outings (not just attend).
 - ii. *Approach to foreign invasive plants:* Adair has some experience with invasives; perhaps the volunteer sign-up list could include invasives.
 - iii. *Updating outdated/required agreements (e.g. Boat Landing and Orford conservation Land, Heritage trail easement).* Bob will look into this.
 - iv. *Updating the Natural Resources Inventory:* Emily will look into requirements and report back.
 - v. *(Projects with Native Plants and Pollinators – follow up on this at April meeting.)*
 - vi. *(Other programming opportunities – follow up on this at April meeting.)*

4. Non Public Closed Session: Not held.

5. Next Meetings: First Thursday of the month at 6:30 pm in the Niles Room of the Town Offices: April 2, 2026, May 7, 2026.

6. Adjourn. A Motion was made by Ted and seconded by John to adjourn the meeting. The motion carried unanimously.

Meeting was adjourned at 7:38.

Minutes taken by Emily Bryant