

Orford Conservation Commission
APPROVED Meeting Minutes March 31, 2026
Meeting held in person in Niles Room at the Town Offices and via Zoom

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

Others present: Charlie Smith (Selectboard representative).

1. **Call to Order:** 6:31 PM. Emily was seated as Commissioner.
2. **Approve Minutes:**
 - a. *March 5 meeting:* A MOTION was made by Adair and seconded by Ted to accept the March 5 minutes as written. The motion carried.
3. **Regular Business:**
 - a. *Report on March 15th hike to Brackett Falls:* Chris reported that conditions were good for both parking and hiking, and the waterfall was running. There were about 20 participants; all returned with no problems.
 - b. *Planning for April 25 hike - Lyme Town Forest:* Chris handed out a map of the area. Parking is planned for the trailhead; John will ask the Skellys if people could also park at the skidder landing on their land just across the road. Adair suggested that we encourage carpooling and that we reach out to the Lyme Conservation Commission since the hike is in Lyme and the LCC manages this land. Adair offered to talk about the cellar holes on the route. Exact route is to be determined, but will probably be on both sides of the Class VI part of Mud Turtle Pond Rd.
 - c. *Calendar for Water Quality Testing for Summer 2026:* Harry said that the schedule will be similar to last year: Starting the Monday before Memorial Day and ending in September. The three beaches (Indian Pond, Upper and Lower Baker Ponds) will be tested every week. The first Monday of each month, three places on Jacobs Brook will be tested as well: Dublin Road, Creamery Road, and the Heritage Center. If the test readings are high on any of the Jacobs Brook sites, the test will be repeated the following week. Cost: \$42 per sample; courier picks up Mondays at 10 AM. Results are usually back by Wednesday morning. Harry sends results to the Town, the State, and the camps: Merriwood, Moosilauke, and Pemigewasset. Chris inquired about testing for cyanobacteria. We test for E. Coli only. People should report if they see evidence of cyanobacteria or of algae blooms.
 - d. *Planning and Prioritizations of spring/summer trail work efforts:* After some discussion, we came up with the following trail sections to work on (Chris will develop a more complete list of trail projects and dates for them for our May meeting):
 - i. *Rivendell Trail:*
 1. Upper part of Mt Cube: Brush in the trail to minimize people walking outside the main track.
 2. Creamery Rd. to Town Shed Rd.: Remove the fence by Tse's land.
 3. Town Shed Rd. to School: Clarify the route (ADA trail and pedestrian trail), repair bridge.

- ii. *Orford Conservation Land (Richmond) trail*: Start trimming the trail in late April, then mow every 3-4 weeks. Harry can do the trail work but could use help. April 26 is the suggested first date. We also need to identify a new person to mow the parking area and along the corn field to the road down to the lower level. Chris will ask his neighbor to see if he is interested.
- iii. *Indian Pond Heritage Trail*: Clear brush. Upper Valley Trails Alliance (UVTA) may be able to help with this.
- iv. *Stonehouse Mtn / Spruce Ridge trails*": New trails on Northeast Wilderness Trust (NEWT) and Upper Valley Land Trust (UVLT) land: Jason Berard of UVLT will flag the planned trail routes by May 15, so others can start clearing. Bob has a upcoming call with NEWT to finalize the plans on the NEWT property.
- v. *Cement Silo trail*: Clear and down trees brush as needed. Need NEWT approval.

Charlie suggested asking Rivendell Academy if there are students who would like to do trail maintenance for their community service hours. The Rivendell Outing Club has started again and might be a source of interested students. We would need to address the administrative overhead of working with students (authorization of leaders, insurance, etc.)

Dave suggested having a common start time for trail maintenance work. The group suggested 8:00 AM.

Adair suggested recognition of volunteers. Charlie can make up a pin with a logo if someone sends him a jpg file of it.

- e. *Approach to Foreign Invasive Plants for 2026*: John gave background on what we have done in trying to control Japanese Knotweed over the past 5 years. "Smothering" the knotweed plants works well but takes a lot of up-front labor. John noted that he found out after the fact that the best approach is to eradicate colonies "at the top of the watershed"; we worked on a location closer to the bottom, but it was chosen due to possible encroachment on a rare plant. Emily mentioned that in addition to smothering, we tried strangling with woven wire (didn't work), and weeding, which takes continual effort. Disposal of the removed plants is an issue. John is looking for fresh ideas on addressing the Knotweed issue. Various ideas were brought up:
 - i. Adopt a highway.
 - ii. A more visible demonstration project.
 - iii. Cut and leave.
 - iv. Herbicide (Glyphosate). The town meeting rejected the idea of using herbicides a few years ago. Adair mentioned that the most effective way to remove it is by using water-approved glyphosate, applied by a licensed applicator under the guidance of a forester. This can be expensive. The Hanover Conservancy has used glyphosate.
 - v. Charlie said that UNH Extension has a program that might help. Also, Orford has a new Health Officer so if there are health effects of knotweed, her word would carry weight in requests for funding, etc.

Bob suggested that we first inventory where the knotweed is and then pursue means of removing it. We should write up the cause and effects of it. Given how much knotweed there is in town, we should prioritize which areas to work on. Small colonies would be top priority. [Also higher in the watershed – see above].

By the next meeting we plan to inventory the state and town roads for knotweed – John will coordinate. Harry can do East Orford. Emily can put locations on a map. Our goal is to put together a simple report on the status and challenge of knotweed to be shared with the Selectboard.

f. High Bridge Road bridge: Address this item at the next meeting.

g. Calendar of Birding Programs: Ted said that Jeff MacQueen has volunteered to lead a May migration birding outing at the beginning of May.

- 4. Election of Commission Officers for 2026:** A MOTION was made by Dave and seconded by Adair to elect the following officers:

Chair: Bob Hedges

Vice-Chair: Ted Cooley

Secretary: Fran Plaisted

Assistant Secretary: Emily Bryant

The motion carried.

- 5. Next Meetings:** First Thursday of the month at 6:30 PM in the Niles Room of the Town Offices: May 7 2026, June 4, 2026.

- 6. Adjourn.** A MOTION was made by Chris and seconded by Ted to adjourn the meeting. The motion carried unanimously.

Meeting was adjourned at 8:00 PM.

Minutes taken by Emily Bryant