

# Orford Conservation Commission

Approved Meeting Minutes, September 3, 2026

Meeting held in person in the Niles Room at the Town Offices

**Commissioners Present:** *In person:* Regular members: Bob Hedges (Chair), Ted Cooley (Vice-Chair), Chris Gothberg, Adair Mulligan, Harry Pease; Alternates: Emily Bryant, John Miller, Fran Plaisted (arrived part way through meeting) *Via Zoom:* no Zoom participants.

**Others present:** Charlie Smith (Selectboard representative), Rick Ullrich

**1. Call to Order:** 6:30 PM. Emily was seated as Commissioner.

**2. Approve Minutes:**

- a. July 2 minutes: Discussion on Section 3o and the need to remove “resurvey the property and”. Motion (Made by Chris, seconded by Harry) to approve the July 2, 2026 minutes as corrected. The motion carried.
- b. August 6 minutes: Motion: (made by Adair, seconded by Harry): to approve the August 6, 2026 as written. The motion carried.

**3. Regular Business:**

- a. **Water Test Results:** Harry reported that the most recent E. coli test results were all within the safe level for E. coli. The last water samples for the year will be taken on September 14. Test results this year have been relatively good- only 3 or 4 were high (above 88). These were in Upper and Lower Baker Pond; Indian Pond never got too high.
- b. **Star-gazing program (Aug. 9):** John reported that around 100 people attended. Skies were not crystal clear, but the program was still great – the presenter [Bobby Farlice-Rubio] is wonderful.
- c. **Cement Silos hike with the Orford Libraries’ Summer Reading Program and Northeast Wilderness Trust (NEWT) (Aug 15):** Bob reported that there were about 15 participants. Shelby Perry [Ecologist and Engineer with NEWT] joined the walk. Shelby volunteered to help organize a quarterly Spruce Ridge ecology/education event with the Rivendell Schools, and suggested having a Bio Blitz. There are now about 20 “forest growth” research/observation stations placed around the Spruce Ridge property.
- d. **Peaked Mountain hike (in Piermont – Aug. 22):** Chris reported that there were about 30 hikers, including 3 from the Piermont Conservation Commission and 4 from the Orford Conservation Commission. Landowner Eric Underhill joined the hike and gave us some history of the mountain when we were at the summit. Bob wondered whether OCC should offer to help maintain the trail if the landowner would like it. Adair reminded us that we should bring first aid kits along on hikes, and to make sure they are fully equipped.
- e. **Birding Outing on Mountain View Farm (Aug. 29):** Earl led the outing; 15 people attended, including 2 young “aspiring birders”. They saw 111 birds of 26 species, including a loon that flew over, and an unexpected olive-sided flycatcher.
- f. **Plans for “Ridge to River” hike (Sept 19):** Chris described the route (same as last year -- from the Rte. 25A Appalachian Trail trailhead up Mt Cube, then down via the Cross Rivendell Trail, continuing over Sunday Mountain to Rivendell Academy (RA), and then down to the River at the boat launch 14+ miles). Logistics for the hike (park at RA, carpool to the start, 3 aid stations, maps at the aid stations, etc.) are all set.

- g. **Update on Spruce Ridge / Mountain View Farm / Stonehouse Mountain trail system with NEWT / Upper Valley Land Trust (UVLT):** Flagging and routing of trails is done, and construction is almost done. Still to do: clear the connection from the “North Connector” trail to the snowmobile trail (NEWT approved the shorter 70-ft option for this). NEWT has cleared the part of the trails that is on their property; work on the “Southeast Connector” from the summit of Stonehouse Mtn to the NEWT property is underway. Jason Berard of UVLT has offered a full day of corporate volunteer work with 12-15 volunteers to address priority trail work needs. Jesse Cutting from UVLT has offered to do the required chainsaw work to cut the view on the Southeast Connector. A Grand Opening celebration of the new trail system is planned for Tuesday, November 10<sup>th</sup>. Manning Rountree of UVLT and Jon Liebowitz of NEWT will attend. We need to help support NEWT’s public outreach and publicize the event.
- h. **Progress in developing a formal Orford Trails Inventory:** Chris passed out the initial inventory work that he has completed on Orford trails and Class VI roads, including Mileage, Elevation, Maintainer, and Permitted Uses for each trail. The Orford Trails Inventory will be used to both promote hiking/recreational programs and more systematically manage trail maintenance efforts. Commissioners gave input on other trails and kinds of information to include. Emily is developing map information for the trails. Chris suggested seeing if OCC can get formal permission to maintain two Class VI roads (Baker Road and Grimes Hill Road) as footpaths. We would need formal permission from the Selectboard to do this. To ensure appropriate Town insurance coverage of trail work volunteers, we need to maintain a formal record of who is doing maintenance work on town land, and where and when. Bob will investigate the procedure for this.
- i. **Future programming ideas for the coming winter season or Spring/2027:** We will address this in the October meeting. Chris suggested we could have an award (a patch?) to recognize people who have hiked all the trails in town.
- j. **Update on Richmond (aka Orford Conservation Land) Property issue:** Bob reported that the surveyor said the survey takes about a week and can be completed in 2-3 weeks. Bob will send a letter to the abutter notifying them of the upcoming survey.
- k. **Update on High Bridge Road bridge project:** To gain design resources and expertise, Adair has sent an application to the Dartmouth Thayer School of Engineering class describing the High Bridge Road pedestrian bridge “design project”. We should hear back soon whether a student team will be assigned/awarded to take on the project. David Hubbard is getting cost estimates for cleaning up the trees that are impacting the bridge abutments.
- l. **Follow-up/next steps on Foreign Invasive plants for 2027:** We need to have a plan ready to implement coming out of 2027 Town Meeting. Harry mentioned that the Grafton County Conservation District is having a workshop on Knotweed control in Campton on Sept 24 at 5 pm. (They are also having a workshop on collaborative trail maintenance in Lyme on Sept 25 at 11:00am.) He also said that Northern Woodlands magazine has an article on knotweed control.
- m. **Starting to think about 2027 Town meeting on Tuesday, March 9<sup>th</sup>:** Topics to work on: Invasives, Trails Inventory, Having a board with a display. Charlie emphasized getting the word out to the town about what the Conservation Commission does and about all the opportunities (like trails) there are in town.
- 4. **Adjourn: Motion** (made by Ted and seconded by Chris) to adjourn the meeting. The motion carried. Meeting was adjourned at 7:45PM.

Minutes taken by Emily Bryant.