

Annual Report for 2023 Carlisle Trails Committee

2023 was a sad year for the Carlisle Trails Committee. Three of our members died. Roy Herold was a 6-year member and active volunteer before that. He brought countless innovations to the Committee and cleared countless blowdowns from the trails. He and his wife Helen were prolific trail walkers. Charlene Hinton was a 3-year member. She was the most enthusiastic member of the Committee, volunteering for every project she could, and a huge supporter of Trails while she was Town Clerk. She made sure every newcomer to Carlisle had a trail book. Christian Hedlund was a 3-year associate member. His illness limited his ability to do trail work but he had many good suggestions.

It was also a difficult year in terms of increasing climate chaos. Record-breaking rainfall and multiple violent storms caused unprecedented damage to our trails. Our work log included 248 entries for trees down across trails that needed to be cleared, many with multiple trees. This does not include trees cleared by other individuals and large trees in the State Park. Our prior yearly high was 167 log entries. After widespread mud problems all year from constant rain, a group ride by 65 mountain bikers on wet trails in October left damaged trails all over town. It was also sad that four trail signs in three different parcels were destroyed by vandalism in the fall. This is a new and troubling problem.

On the positive side, the Committee had nine people apply for the two openings as voting members. Sarah Carmichael and Adam Chojnacki brought enthusiasm, new ideas, and a younger perspective to the Committee. Kath Hardcastle, Mark Longwell, and Merritt Maxim were appointed Associate members. They and other frequent volunteers now form a Carlisle Trail Crew that can be called to respond to pop-up problems. Henry Cox, Bob Goldsmith, Gordon Means and Mary Russell have been particularly active. Also on the positive side, the Committee held its first in-person meeting since Feb. 2020 in July and opened new trails on the Woodward conservation land.

Throughout the year the Committee pursued its five major goals: 1) public education, 2) maintaining existing trails on public land, 3) working to preserve trails on private land being developed, 4) creating new trails, and 5) advising the Selectmen on trails issues.

Public education –The Committee led five public walks this year. A January full moon walk with mild weather attracted 40 people to the trails around Foss Farm with refreshments afterward including a fire and s'mores. In April, biologist Bryan Windmiller led eight participants on a vernal pool exploration at the Conant Land where the highlight was the discovery of fairy shrimp. The Double Sundae Sunday Saunter on Old Home Day weekend attracted 16 people who walked all or part of the 7-mile loop between Carlisle's ice cream stands. The Committee had a booth at Old Home Day where we sold 11 trail map books and talked to many people about trails. On a nice day in August, 18 people walked from Foss Farm to Greenough and back for Riverfest. Most were from

out of town. The day after Thanksgiving, 21 people walked off their stuffing from Foss to the new Woodward Land trails.

Volunteer webmaster Lisa Ankers maintains the Trails Committee's website, carlisletrails.pbworks.com, part of which is linked to the Town website (carlislema.gov/189/Trails-Committee). Individual trail maps are available on the websites, along with information on the Carlisle Trekker Award and notices for upcoming walks and workdays.

The Trails Committee has a new Instagram account, @CarlisleTrails, thanks to Sarah Carmichael and Mary Russell. It had 77 followers as of December 1.

The 2018 edition of the Trails Committee's guidebook to Carlisle's conservation lands, "Trails in Carlisle", is available at the Town Hall. Ferns Country Store, which previously sold books, changed hands; books are now available there only seasonally.

This year eight people earned their Carlisle Trekker awards for hiking all of Carlisle's trails: Saul Jacobowitz (#69), Lee Tatistcheff (#70), Darlene and Warren Spence (#71 & 72), Sarah Carmichael (#73), Mark Longwell (#74), and Ali and Jason Walsh (#75 & 76).

The Committee's multi-year project to add uniquely numbered intersection markers at all major trail junctions in town got closer to completion. 16 markers were completed by Carlisle Middle School Art Club students and installed on posts in the fall. Only three markers remain to be painted. The field condition of all 156 installed markers was surveyed in the fall. 22 were rated poor, mostly from degradation in full sun, and need to be replaced.

Thanks to Marc Lamere and Bob Goldsmith, the Committee started adding QR codes to intersection marker posts. They have links to the Committee's trail map of the property, an OpenStreetMap map with the user's current location, the Trails Committee website, and a form to report trail problems. QR codes have been added to the Town Forest and Rangeway properties with more to follow.

To try to mitigate trail damage on wet trails, signs were put up in the spring at each end of the muddiest section of Two Rod Road asking cyclists to come back when the trail was dry and to use the Highwater Trail instead. The signs were stolen in September and never recovered. After unapproved bicycle jumps were built on the Towle Land Inner Loop Trail in December and dismantled, a sign was put up asking for such activity to be reported to the Conservation Commission. The sign was destroyed and thrown into the woods. Also in December, a welcome sign in SVT's Elliott Preserve was torn down and thrown into the woods. This sign vandalism is new and troubling.

Trail maintenance and construction – Trails Committee volunteers replaced 18 rotting boards on the large bridge connecting Spalding Field with Banta Davis in October. The Recreation Commission bought 400 boards for future repairs, enough to do 2/3 of the bridge. The Trails Committee is storing them.

Both boardwalks in the Town Forest were repaired after being damaged by falling trees. Boardwalks were also repaired at Foss Farm, Greenough, Great Meadows (3), Great Brook (3), and on the Rockstrom and Holmes-Avery trails. In an August flood three bridges were washed downstream and moved back into place by the Committee (Towle, Bisbee, and Elliott). This had never happened before. A new bridge was built on Marion's Trail over 3 days in October. Three new duckboards were built below the Towle parking lot after a deluge in March flooded the trail. They were moved to a muddy beaver-flooded area on the Bingham Connector in November just before a December storm flooded the first area again. Three new duckboards were built in December in a low spot between the two Fox Hill fields that turned into a stream after storms. This addition prompted much positive feedback on the City in the Woods discussion group by trail users.

Throughout the year the Trails Committee cleared an unprecedented number of trees that fell across trails on every parcel of conservation land. The Google Docs spreadsheet the Committee uses to keep track of fallen trees had 248 entries for the year, compared to 165, 153, 155, and 167 in preceding years (55% increase) – and we thought those years were bad. Many entries contained multiple trees and this does not include trees cleared by others or large trees in the State Park where we are not allowed to use chainsaws.

The Committee mowed trails including Red Tail, Piggery, and Beaver Loop trails at Great Meadows, Bisbee, Davis Corridor, Elliott, Foss, Fox Hill, Malcolm, Otter Slide, Sachs Greenway, Spencer Brook, Towle, and Two Rod Road. Most trails were mowed multiple times through the summer and fall on the few days it wasn't raining. We had welcome help mowing from Jonathan DeKock at Foss, Luke Ascolillo at Woodhaven, and David Hart at the Benfield Conservation Land.

We sponsored three volunteer trail workdays. In June, 17 volunteers removed an unused decayed boardwalk on Aberdeen Drive, installed trail signs on Aberdeen Drive and Great Brook Path, and repaired boardwalks at Great Meadows and Foss. In September, 15 volunteers cleared new trails on the Woodward land. In October, 18 people worked on the Woodward trails clearing brush, installing four duckboards, and installing posts and signs. Some volunteers also installed posts and signs on the Russell land.

In late fall, Committee members raked leaves and pine needles off all the boardwalks and bridges to prevent rot. Rakes and brooms were also left at several boardwalks with signs asking trail users to help.

Bike traffic entering and exiting the Tophet East trail in the State Park was rerouted from Aberdeen Drive, where a trail easement does not allow bikes, to Great Brook Path, where bikes are allowed. The Committee worked with Aberdeen Drive and Great Brook Path homeowners, Great Brook Farm State Park, the New England Mountain Bike Association (NEMBA), the fire chief, and local bike riders to make the changes and get the word out. Nine new posts and signs were installed, funded by the Trails Committee and NEMBA.

Organizers of the MTB50 mountain bike ride made a very poor decision to hold their event soon after rain on trails that had been wet all year. 65 bike riders damaged trails by churning up mud on most conservation lands in Carlisle. Trail damage was particularly severe on Two Rod Road, Malcolm Meadows, and the Davis Trail. The Trails Committee and Conservation Commission have been discussing ways to prevent this from happening again.

The Trails Committee continues researching ways to harden the most heavily used and muddiest trails, particularly Two Rod Road.

Preserving trails and new trails – (1) New trails in the Woodward Conservation Land were cleared and opened once the Woodward Village housing construction near the trails was complete. Volunteers helped in two Fall workdays. The trails connect to Great Meadows National Wildlife Refuge. Trails also connect to Maple Street through the Woodward Land fields with exact locations to be worked out with Cons Com and the Land Stewardship Committee. (2) The Planning Board is holding hearings for a proposed Conservation Cluster at 75 West Street. The development would include trail access from West Street to the Ryan Land owned by CCF which is wet and trailless. (3) The Planning Board approved a house lot in Carlisle accessed through Estey Road in Billerica. A trail easement allowing future access to the Greenough Land from Estey Road was part of the approval. There is currently no plan to build a connecting trail in Greenough.

Interfacing with other boards and committees – The Trails Committee met with the Environmental Stewardship Committee and had a display at their Earth Day event. We gave feedback to the Town Planner on implementing the Master Plan. The Trails Committee supported Cons Com's successful request for CPA funding to repair the Cranberry Bog dam. We worked with the Recreation Commission to site the Dog Park at Banta Davis to allow a future perimeter trail and repaired the Spalding bridge. Chair Alan Ankers worked with the Planning Board on plans to relocate the start of the Otter Slide Trail after new guard rails are installed along Curve Street at the Cranberry Bog. Committee member Marc Lamere worked with the Town Planner to select Geographic Information System (GIS) contractors and to define trail-related GIS tasks. We gave input to the Planning Board on a proposed Conservation Cluster on West Street that included a trail easement. We had a table at the Council on Aging Resource Fair. We received Stop the Bleed first aid training from the Board of Health's nurse. We are working with Boy Scout Jacob Gettings on his Eagle Scout project to build a trail at the Carlisle Historical Society's Heald House. Marc Lamere is the Committee's representative on the Conservation Restriction Advisory Committee.

Finances – At year's end, there were \$14,831 in the Trail Maps revolving fund, \$9,349 in the CPA account, \$1,053 in the Trails Grant account, and \$14,484 in the Gifts account.

Acknowledgment - The Trails Committee would especially like to thank the many volunteers from the community who have helped in our trail projects throughout the year. We also wish to acknowledge the unnamed volunteers who quietly maintain trails in their

neighborhoods without the direct involvement of the Trails Committee. Without volunteers, the Town wouldn't have its wonderful trail system. We also thank Lisa Ankers for maintaining the Committee's web site.

Current members of the Trails Committee are Alan Ankers (chair), Sarah Carmichael, Chris Chiapella, Adam Chojnacki, Marc Lamere (treasurer), Warren Spence (clerk), and Steve Tobin (vice-chair and secretary). Associate members are Kath Hardcastle, Mark Longwell, and Merritt Maxim.

Report submitted by Steve Tobin.