

Annual Report for 2024 Carlisle Trails Committee

The theme of 2024 was improving trails with mud and water problems. We had a successful three-day project to harden a section of Two Rod Road, with assistance from the Appalachian Mountain Club, our largest volunteer effort in a long time. There were also numerous smaller bridge and boardwalk projects. Fortunately, the trails finally dried out later in the year.

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 Select Board on trails issues.

Public education –The Committee led four public walks this year. Our March full moon walk was canceled for bad weather. In April, biologist Bryan Windmiller led ten participants on a vernal pool exploration at the Conant Land. The Double Sundae Sunday Saunter on Old Home Day weekend attracted 29 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 trail map books and talked to many people about trails. In July, 15 people walked from Foss Farm to Greenough and back for Riverfest. Most were from out of town. The day after Thanksgiving, 45 people walked off their stuffing in the Davis Corridor, including viewing the newly repaired sections of Two Rod Road.

The Trails Committee’s page on the Town website is <https://www.carlislema.gov/189/Trails-Committee>. The website was recently updated, with more updates planned. Individual trail maps are available on the website, along with information on the Carlisle Trekker Award and notices for upcoming walks and workdays. The Trails Committee has an Instagram account, @CarlisleTrails, that continues to attract new followers. The Trails Committee’s guidebook to Carlisle’s conservation lands, “Trails in Carlisle”, is available at the Town Hall and Clark Farm Market in season.

This year nine people earned their Carlisle Trekker awards for hiking all of Carlisle’s trails: Patricia Wolfe (#77), Peter Yakutis (#78), Nina Nielsen (#79), John Zielinski (#80), Rosella Cappella (#81), Lewis Zielinski (#82), Sarah Oinonen (#83), Emma Boettcher (#84), and Charlie Boettcher (#85).

QR codes were added to intersection marker posts at Towle, Greenough, Foss, and Great Meadows. 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, or to make suggestions.

To enhance clarity of trail use and etiquette, ten signs showing bikes yield to hikers and horses, and hikers yield to horses, were purchased. A list of installation sites is being

developed.

Trail maintenance and construction – The Trails Committee undertook many projects to improve wet and muddy trails after 14 months of rain stretching back to early 2023. The largest one addressed a longstanding mud problem on Two Rod Road. We called in the Appalachian Mountain Club trail crew for help. After a site visit in February and a virtual meeting in March, we settled on a “turnpike” solution. This replaces the mucky organic soil with a raised stone and gravel tread. After getting needed approvals, construction of a 60-foot demonstration project occurred over three days at the end of September. AMC provided supervision, hard hats, and tools. Thirty-six volunteers provided 258 hours of labor in morning and afternoon shifts. We had important help from the DPW (purchasing and delivering crushed stone), Bryan Sorrows (backhoe), Jason Suderman (tractor loader), and Bob Goldsmith (power wheelbarrow). Nature cooperated with beautiful weather. We finished a day ahead of schedule and were very happy with the results. We used the same techniques in October to direct water from a Malcolm Meadows drainage pipe across the trail. Bryan Sorrows again helped by moving large rocks and we had nine volunteers.

We repaired a damaged bridge at the Elliott Preserve in April and replaced it in October. Permitting took longer than usual as the Massachusetts Endangered Species Program required hiring an expert to map an endangered wildflower. Nine volunteers built the 35-foot bridge. We split the cost with Sudbury Valley Trustees, the landowner.

Two bridges were built on the Twin Peaks Trail in July. Wetland plantings and design changes (for longer and narrower bridges) were made to meet DEP requirements. We split the cost with Carlisle Conservation Foundation, the landowner. The long boardwalk near West St was also repaired.

In July, we replaced a small bridge on the River Trail in Greenough that had floated away. In March, we designed and staked out a boardwalk and bridge at the Malcolm Preserve in perennially wet areas. The property co-owner, Trustees of Reservations, preferred a different design that they use on other properties. We met on-site in September and by phone in November and are closing in on a design to be built next year if we can get a wetland permit through DEP. Other projects where we started design work include a washout on the Wood Duck Trail at Greenough, a large muddy area at Bartlett Farm, and intermittent flooding on the Otter Slide Trail.

In March, six duckboards were installed in muddy spots at Towle. The boardwalk in the Russell Conservation Land was cabled down so it wouldn't float away in floods. We rerouted an eroded section of the Shoreline Trail at the Cranberry Bog and put up signage that has prevented further erosion. Steve Loutrel cleaned out the stone culvert on the Sachs Greenway Trail to improve drainage, and we added stepping stones. Graffiti was removed from the Greenough Dam bridge with a grinding wheel. A rotted gate post was replaced at Conant. A signpost that had been crushed by a tree was replaced at

Greenough. Mud that had accumulated at the end of a boardwalk in the Davis Corridor was scraped out, revealing gravel beneath. In the Spring, several drainage dips and ditches were added to muddy sections of Old Morse Road and the Ember Lane connector. Part of Old Morse was rerouted to higher ground. We had help from a group of 8th graders doing community service clearing brush in the Davis Corridor and on our Two Rod Road and Elliott projects.

We replaced 32 rotting deck boards on the large bridge connecting Spalding Field with Banta Davis in October and replaced rotting handrails in November. Rotting boards were replaced in boardwalks at Towle, Foss, Benfield, Davis Corridor, and Rockstrom. A Town Forest boardwalk was scrubbed to remove slippery algae.

Throughout the year, the Trails Committee cleared 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 198 entries for the year, compared to 248 last year and 165, 153, 155, and 167 in preceding years. Many entries contained multiple trees, and this does not include trees cleared by others or trees in the State Park where we are no longer allowed to clear blowdowns. Within the State Park, we now just report blowdowns (9 reported in 2024). In a novel solution to the prohibition on using chainsaws in Great Meadows National Wildlife Refuge, antique saw collector Gwyn Jones worked with a Trails Committee member to clear some very large fallen oaks on the River and Mist trails with a two-man crosscut saw, lumberjack style.

Rising and falling winter ice levels on the River Trail left a huge number of shrubs, mostly buckthorn, broken and leaning over the trail. A Committee member spent 8 days with loppers clearing the mess.

The Committee mowed trails, including Red Tail, Piggery, River, and Beaver Loop trails at Great Meadows, Benfield, Bisbee, Davis Corridor, Elliott, Foss, Fox Hill, Malcolm, Otter Slide, Sachs Greenway, Spencer Brook, Two Rod Road, and Woodward. Most trails were mowed multiple times through the summer and fall. We instituted a signup sheet to spread the mowing load across the Committee, which was helpful. We welcomed mowing help from Shane Usher of LSC at Towle, Jonathan DeKock at Foss, Luke Ascolillo at Woodhaven, and Bill Brady at Russell. However, in the long term, the current model of relying on the Trails Committee and other volunteers is not sustainable – there is too much mowing and too few volunteers. We began talks with the Land Stewardship Committee, Town Administrator, and DPW about transferring most of the mowing on Town land to DPW (Benfield, Bisbee, Cranberry Bog, Foss, Fox Hill, Towle, Woodward). The plan is to start the transfer in 2026 if DPW can acquire the extra equipment that would be needed.

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.

The Committee worked with MTB50 mountain bike ride organizers to institute safeguards against the trail damage experienced in wet conditions last year. Under Jason Suderman's leadership, procedures were developed and agreed to by the Trails Committee and Cons Com. The ride went off without a hitch under dry conditions. We also met with Mary McCarthy of the New England Mountain Bike Association, who offered technical and manpower help hardening trails.

Trail benches were installed at Fox Hill, Rangeway, and Towle lands. Trail markers were added at Conant and on the River Trail in Greenough.

Preserving trails and new trails – (1) We met with the Land Stewardship Committee and abutters about the location of trails through the field at the Woodward Conservation Land. (2) The entrance to the Otter Slide trail was relocated to accommodate new guard rails on Curve Street. (3) A trail easement allowing future access to the Greenough Land from Estey Road in Billerica was signed. There is currently no plan to build a connecting trail from Estey Road to the Greenough trails. Thanks are owed to volunteer Jonathan DeKock for working with the developer's and the Town's attorneys. (4) The State Park is buying a 23-acre parcel owned by Wendy Davis. This will give public trail access to historic Old Babson Road, also part of the Tophet East Trail. The Committee sent a letter to the Select Board supporting transfer of a Conservation Restriction on the property from the Town of Carlisle to the State, a necessary step to allow the sale to go through.

Interfacing with other boards and committees – The Trails Committee met with the Environmental Sustainability Committee and had a display at their Earth Day event in April. We participated in the Conservation Commission's workday in February to remove saplings from the Cranberry Bog. We developed guidelines for bicycle use on conservation land trails that the Conservation Commission adopted. We worked with the Town and demolition contractor to keep trails open during the removal of the Greenough barn. We had a table at the Council on Aging Resource Fair. We made a presentation to Cub Scouts about the Trails Committee. We met with the Safety Committee, Select Board, Police Chief, Fire Chief, and DPW head about reduced safety for trail users on Maple Street after new guard rails were installed. Marc Lamere is the Committee's representative on the Conservation Restriction Advisory Committee.

Finances – At year's end, there were \$15,906 in the Trail Maps revolving fund, \$7,336 in the CPA account, and \$15,014 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.

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

Report submitted by Steve Tobin.



Photos of Two Rod Road Trail reconstruction courtesy of the Carlisle Mosquito.