

Conservation Commission – Changing of Membership

From: Jim McCracken <jcmcc211@gmail.com>
Sent: Friday, January 13, 2023 10:49 AM
To: Marion Betts <mbetts@thetfordvt.gov>
Subject: Update of Conservation commision member

Hi Martie and Sharon,

Jeff Smith has decided to reduce his work and life commitments so he can do more skiing and home projects. He is going to resign from the commission and has recommended Donn Downey who is taking over his forestry business. The commission met with Donn at our last meeting and feel like he will be a great addition to the commission with his forestry background and knowledge of the town and its inner workings. We voted to support his membership. I have asked both Jeff and Donn to write you letters confirming their intentions. Donn would be filling Jeff's position which would come up for renewal in 2026.

In anticipation of your request for background on Jeff. Here are these thoughts. Jeff Smith has been a formal member of the commission since 2013 and a strong supporter of conservation efforts in Thetford since he arrived in Thetford. His deep knowledge of forestry and the professionals in the field have been a great asset to the group. He has a very diplomatic and calm manner that has been very helpful when there have been tough discussions to be had. Let me know if you have any questions.

Thanks,
Jim

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Jim McCracken

Thu, Jan 19, 5:03 PM

Donn
<donn@uppervalleyforest.com>

Hi Sharon,

I understand Jim told you that I would be interested in filling the vacancy on the Conservation Commission. Please consider this my formal letter of interest! Let me

know if anyone on the SB needs to hear more about why I think I'd be a productive member of the group. I'm happy to expound if necessary.

My formal education is in Conservation Biology (MS, Antioch University), and I'm a consulting forester, licensed in VT and NH. My work is focused on ecologically-based forest management. That involves performing inventory of natural features, water and soil resources, and vegetation in all layers of the forest. I write management plans to achieve a variety of goals based on the existing conditions that we encounter (invasive vegetation, tree species age classes and species composition, etc), and landowner objectives. Ultimately, we prescribe and oversee management measures such as invasive vegetation control, water quality improvements, non-commercial timber stand improvement, commercial timber harvesting, boundary maintenance and so forth.

My family has lived on the Thetford/Strafford line on route 132 since 2013. We own 50 acres that straddle the border and is enrolled in current use and actively managed for a number of experimental treatments and demonstration purposes. For ten years prior we lived in Thetford Center (in)conveniently located two doors south of town hall, which leads into possibly my most relevant experience vis a vis the Conservation Commission.

From 2010 to 2015 I was on the Selectboard. My first year I was a member, the second year I was appointed vice chair, for my 3rd and 4th years I was chair, then ended my term as vice chair. During that time I initiated several conservation-oriented discussions, the most meaningful of which was establishing a capital fund to manage and maintain our town lands. The goal was to budget \$5K from the general fund to treat invasive plants at Hughes Forest that year, then conduct a harvest to improve forest health- mostly removing poor growing pioneer white pine and encourage the transition to a climax hardwood forest composition. Those revenues would seed the newly-established capital fund, which would then be used to treat invasives on the Town Forest on Five Corners Road, and the cycle would continue.

Of course, we failed to actually execute the capital fund thing, because we didn't realize that required a separate article at town meeting. And no one knew it at the time, but after the harvest, the revenues just went into the General Fund where they basically offset taxes to raise by about \$30K that one year. Chalk this up as one of the many

failures of our amateur governance model, and one of the truckload of reasons that I began the public push for the town manager in 2014....

Anyhow, thank you for your consideration!

Best,

Donn---

Donn Downey, CF, ACF

Upper Valley Forest Management

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Jeff Smith
<jeff@uppervalleyforest.com>

Jan 22,
2023, 8:28
AM (1 day
ago)

Hi Sharon,

As you now know I am stepping off the Conservation Commission but not without bringing a very capable replacement and fellow forester. As the longest current member of the commission, I know I have quite a bit of time left in my term but I feel that with the current make up of a number of new members some on the younger side this is a good time for the commission to switch thing up a bit more. Donn will bring more new energy and perspectives to the group. I have enjoyed my time serving the Town and likely I will consider it again in some capacity in the future.

Please pass this on to the rest of the selectboard.

Regards,

Jeff

Jeff Smith - Forester

Upper Valley Forest Management

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