

I am here to request that this Commission hold a revote on the decision to close a third of our trails.

In 2020, the Town invested in a Forest Management Plan prepared by a licensed forester. That plan provided a 10 year management strategy for the Town Forest and emphasized balancing conservation, habitat protection, recreation, trail management, invasive species control, and long-term stewardship.

Importantly, that plan appears to have cost the town approximately \$2,400, while the more recent assessment cost over \$16,000, yet offered a far narrower focus centered largely around trail impacts and closures. I would ask the Commission why the existing forest management framework was not expanded upon and adapted for additional trails instead of moving toward closure as the primary solution.

Rachel Stevens' report acknowledges ecological impacts associated with trails, but that is not surprising — any ecologist would agree that human activity impacts habitat to some degree. The more important question is whether those impacts can be responsibly managed short of full closure. Especially since the purchase of this land was for the purpose of conservation and access to recreation, not preservation.

I am also concerned that the report does not fully evaluate other environmental impacts such as mosquito and tick spraying, despite meeting minutes indicating spraying has occurred on some conservation lands. If habitat protection is truly the goal, then all contributing impacts should be part of the discussion.

Additionally, closing trails may not actually reduce trail use. It may instead push people into unmanaged areas, creating informal paths and potentially causing even greater environmental damage. Thoughtful trail management and education is likely more effective than closure alone.

I also am concerned about objectivity. Some members involved in these decisions own property that directly abuts conservation lands. Also, there have been longstanding discussions reflected in prior meeting minutes regarding limiting dog access to the Town Forest. This raises legitimate concerns within the community about whether closure decisions were predetermined before this process began. The only way to provide clear reassurance to the Town is through a revote with recusal of any conflicted members.

Most importantly, I believe moving forward this commission risks creating further division within the community and could expose the town to unnecessary legal and financial costs. I do not believe that is in anyone's best interest.

I respectfully ask the Commission to pause further closures, allow for additional public input, and hold a revote after a more comprehensive review of both environmental impacts and reasonable trail management alternatives.