

# Policies and Guidelines for the Use of Conservation Land

Atkinson Conservation Commission

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## INTRODUCTION

Pursuant to NH RSA 36-A:4, the Atkinson Conservation Commission is empowered to manage and control the town's conservation lands. In that capacity, these policies and guidelines are set forth to preserve the town's open spaces and natural resources, while at the same time making them accessible and enjoyable to the public. Any exceptions to these Policies and Guidelines must be explicitly approved ahead of time by the Atkinson Conservation Commission.

- 1. Public Use:** As is the custom with conservation areas in other municipalities, all of Atkinson's conservation lands shall be open and available equally to all, free of charge, without limitation to where people live or any other distinguishing characteristic such as race, gender, or ethnicity.
- 2. Respect the Neighbors:** Many of our conservation areas are surrounded by residential properties, and some areas have very narrow roads leading to them. Please be respectful of the neighbors. For example, don't turn around in their driveways or back onto their lawns or gardens. These things are obvious, but unfortunately, they need to be said from time to time. Visiting our conservation lands is a privilege, not a right.
- 3. Parking:** The Commission has made an effort to provide some parking for the publicly-accessible conservation lands in town. However, parking is on a first-come, first-served basis, and we cannot guarantee parking will be available during periods of high demand. Users of our conservation lands are required to follow posted signs and park only where indicated. If parking is not available, we ask visitors to return at another time. Parking on conservation land is only for the use and enjoyment of that land, and overnight parking is prohibited.
- 4. Carry-in, Carry-out:** All of the town's conservation lands are "carry-in, carry-out" locations. No trash cans are provided, and all trash must be taken with you when you leave.
- 5. Dogs:** Dogs are welcomed on the town's conservation lands and do not need to be leashed as long as they are well-behaved and under voice control of the owner. We do not enforce the town's "clean-up" regulations, just don't let your dog poop on the trail. Signs are provided at dog eye level reminding them of this. If you do clean up after your dog, you must take "it" with you (see #4 above).

- 6. Motorized Vehicles:** Motorized vehicles of any sort are strictly prohibited on the town's conservation lands. These include but are not limited to All-Terrain Vehicles, Dirt Bikes, and Snow Mobiles. Exceptions to this policy include law enforcement and other first responders, electric motorized devices for disabled people such as wheelchairs, and Commission-approved trail maintenance activities. Horseback riding is permitted.
- 7. Trails:** The conservation trails are maintained by town volunteers, and visitors are invited to assist by clearing branches or picking up trash. Maps are available on the town's web site and (while supplies lasts) in mailboxes at trail entrances. Interactive trail maps are available for your smartphone via a QR code posted at each entrance. If you choose to use a paper map, you are invited to return it to the mailbox upon completion of your walk. You are permitted to walk off-trail in the woods, but please do so "gently" so as not to harm native plants. Some of our trails are on easements across other people's land, and these are marked with red signs "Respect land owner, stay on the trail." In those cases, do what the sign says.
- 8. Trail Locations:** While the public is encouraged to help maintain existing, blazed trails on our conservation lands, any construction or maintenance of additional trails is prohibited without the explicit authorization of the Conservation Commission. Furthermore, the Conservation Commission has the authority to relocate or permanently close existing trails.
- 9. Don't Take or Harm Anything:** Except for berry picking, mushroom gathering, and invasive plants (see the next item), visitors are asked to "do no harm" and "take no souvenirs." This includes but is not limited to picking flowers, harvesting plants, disturbing stone walls, cutting trees, making new trails, paintball, and so forth. The harming or removal of official signs or trail blazes is strictly prohibited.
- 10. Invasive Plants:** The exception to the "do no harm" rule is uprooting invasive plants. If you are familiar with the state's list of invasive plants and can identify them in the field, you are more than welcome to uproot or cut them. Just don't take them with you since it's illegal to transport invasive plant materials. You may leave uprooted plants on a stone wall or other elevated object where their roots will not reach the ground. The most common invasive plant in our forests is Oriental Bittersweet, which is pretty easy to spot.
- 11. Camping and Fires:** Overnight camping or fires of any sort are not allowed on the town's conservation lands unless a camping permit is first obtained from the Conservation Commission, and/or a fire permit is obtained from the Fire Chief. Such permits are made available on an extremely limited basis, and are given only to non-profit community organizations such as the Boy or Girl Scouts. Fireworks are prohibited on all town conservation land.
- 12. Construction:** Building anything on conservation land is prohibited unless prior consent is obtained from the Commission. Consent will only be given for permanent improvements for the public good, such as a bridge across a stream.

Prohibited activities include but are not limited to shelters, dams, platforms, and signs.

- 13. Commercial Activities:** No commercial activities are allowed on conservation land. Examples include professional dog walking and professional photo shoots.
- 14. Hunting:** Limited in-season hunting is allowed on the town's conservation lands, and specific Commission-approved regulations for hunting are available from the Selectmen's office.
- 15. Dumping:** The dumping of brush or leaves (or anything else for that matter) on conservation land is prohibited.
- 16. Drones:** The use of drones on conservation land is permitted as long as all applicable state and federal laws are followed, and as long as such use is for personal enjoyment and not for commercial purposes.
- 17. Metal Detectors:** The use of metal detectors on all Town conservation lands may be done only with written permission of the Atkinson Conservation Commission. Historical artifacts found on Town land are the property of the Town of Atkinson and should be donated to the Atkinson Historical Society.