

Warrant Article #7 -- Town Forest Conservation Easement

At the upcoming Annual Town Meeting business session on Saturday, March 14, the Lyme Conservation Commission will ask voters to authorize the Commission to convey a conservation easement on the property known as the Lyme Town Forest "to a qualifying organization on such terms and conditions as the Conservation Commission may deem advisable." The Conservation Commission is asking for this authorization to ensure the Lyme Town Forest is protected in perpetuity for future generations to enjoy as we do today.

The Lyme Town Forest's total area is 425 acres, comprised of three parcels, the first of which was acquired in the 1950s from the Sevigny Lumber Co. In 1994, Annual Town Meeting voted to designate it a "town forest." Subsequent parcels were added in 2002 and 2009 bringing the Lyme Town Forest to its current size. It is shown on the Town's tax maps as Map 406/Lot 30 and Map 407/Lot 77. The parcel is bounded by Orfordville Rd. to the east. The south boundary backs up to residential properties on Whipple Hill Rd, the west boundary is 200 yards or so in from NH Route 10, and the north border runs roughly 400 yards south of and parallel to the Orford town line.

Among the Town Forest's topographical features, Whipple Brook and the Class VI Mud Turtle Pond Rd. divide the forest north to south in its eastern section, and there is an unnamed stream on its westside with a waterfall. There are several miles of hiking trails and a seasonal camping site. The "Ledge Trail" has an overlook affording a splendid northward facing view towards Mt. Cube and Mt. Moosilauke. There also are three significant archaeological sites along Mud Turtle Pond Rd., comprising the cellar hole remains of farms that existed there in the 1800s.

In 2024, the Conservation Commission funded an extensive ecological assessment of the Lyme Town Forest, its first natural resource inventory since 2007. The study identified a variety of noteworthy natural communities and habitats scattered throughout the property, including a dozen vernal pools that provide excellent amphibian habitat and an abandoned beaver pond complex. The property was largely logged over during the 1800s for sheep pasturage and farming, but today it is almost completely covered by second and third generation regrowth of coniferous and deciduous trees. Some sections of the forest were less extensively logged and have trees up to 200 years old remaining, and there is a patch with a few red oaks estimated to be over 300 years old.

There is evidence of extensive wildlife presence throughout the property including black bear, white-tailed deer, moose, bobcat, porcupine, fox, coyotes, snowshoe hare, and fishers. Indeed, NH Fish & Game Dept.'s 2025 Wildlife Action Plan ranks the Lyme Town Forest's lands in the top category of wildlife habitat value in the State.

The Conservation Commission has been tasked with the Lyme Town Forest's management since the "town forest" designation was first applied in 1994. This stewardship has involved the creation and implementation of a periodically reviewed and updated management plan along with the laying out and maintenance of trails and their supporting structures. A conservation easement sets forth goals to be accomplished by conserving the property and defines the activities permitted on the property consistent with achieving those ends. Creating this easement

is consistent with the State of New Hampshire's policy position (RSA 79-A:1) that "It is hereby declared to be in the public interest to encourage the preservation of open space, thus providing a healthful and attractive outdoor environment for work and recreation of the state's citizens, maintaining the character of the state's landscape, and conserving the land, water, forest, agricultural and wildlife resources"

If Article 7 is approved by Annual Meeting, the Lyme Conservation Commission will assume responsibility for finding a qualified agency to hold said easement and will cover all costs associated with that process using money from the Lyme Conservation Fund.

Blake Allison, Chair
March 2, 2026

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