Conservation Commissioner of the Year

Dennis Houle

Dennis Houle was appointed to the Barnstable Conservation Commission in 2005. Since then, he has served with distinction as Chair (8 years), Vice Chair (2 years) and Clerk (since July 2016). Dennis assumed chairmanship of the Commission very early in his tenure. He applied an enviable work ethic, meticulous attention to detail and a commitment to the environment. He quickly became the recognized “go to” resource for other Commissioners, related Town entities, and members of the public. Dennis is supportive and constructive when working with people. When considering applications, Dennis is meticulous about working within the limits set by regulations and ordinances. However, when applicants find themselves caught between their needs and regulatory constraints, he often provides a workable compromise to satisfy both.

Dennis has a history of updating and developing new local ordinances/guidance including an update to Chapter 703 – Private Docks and Piers, Chapter 704- Governing Activity in the 100 ft buffer zone, Chapter 711 – Shore Outhauls, Guidelines for Private Freshwater Docks, Piers & Floats, and the upcoming Guidelines on Land Subject to Coastal Storm Flowage. These have not only helped the Commission to establish clear guidelines, but also enabled consultants and the public at large to better understand the Commission’s expectations.

Consultants working with Dennis for almost 15 years have stated “I have presented countless projects to the Barnstable Conservation Commission, specifically to Dennis Houle. Dennis has a thorough understanding of the Wetlands Protection Act and Barnstable Ordinances. He does an exceptional job
focusing the discussion on the regulations, reviews all projects with an unbiased lens, and has been a fair and consistent Commissioner since being appointed to the Commission.”

When it comes to working for the environment, no task is too menial for Dennis. His neighbors/fellow commissioners have witnessed him bringing home bags of litter collected during hikes in the Crocker’s Neck Conservation Area. And when municipal dollars were tight, Dennis assumed the tedious, daily task of opening and closing gates on conservation land from Memorial through Columbus Days. He walks the talk! The Barnstable Conservation Commission thanks Dennis for his service and immeasurable contribution to the Town.

Long Time Service Award

Greg McGregor

Greg is an active member of the environmental community: one who gets results, promotes new leaders, and reaches out to everyone. He has provided tremendous value to environmental law, MACC, Conservation Commissions and numerous organizations. Greg has practiced environmental law for more than four decades and his court cases have impacted multiple areas of law and regulation, including NEPA, MEPA, wetland and floodplain protection, hazardous waste, tax exemptions for land conservation, and home rule wetland protection bylaws and ordinances. Before Greg entered private practice, he was an Assistant Attorney General (AG) (in Massachusetts) and the first chief of the Attorney General’s Division of Environmental Protection. In that capacity, he advised and represented the Commonwealth during the formative years of Massachusetts environmental statutes, agencies, regulations, enforcement and cases in court. In 1975, he left the AG’s Office and started his own firm. Over the years, he has taught and mentored many law students and young lawyers who have gone on to take prominent roles in environmental protection working at MassDEP, EOEEA, EPA, and local and regional non-profit organizations.

Greg successfully represented the Town of Dennis in one of the seminal cases establishing the right of a city or town to have a non-zoning wetlands protection bylaw under its “Home Rule Authority” – a doctrine many have heard Greg cite many times over the years. Notably, he also authored and submitted an amicus curiae brief o/b/o MACC! Lovequist v. Conservation Commission of Town of Dennis, 379 Mass. 7 (1979). Later, in Ten Local Citizen Group v. New England Wind, LLC, 457 Mass. 222 (2010), representing the wind farm developer, Greg supported DEP’s definition of Inland Bank and analysis of work within
Buffer Zone. Through client and pro-bono work, Greg has been involved in two seminal cases that help us to determine whether land is protected by Article 97. Mahajan v. DEP, 464 Mass. 604 (2013) and Smith v. City of Westfield, 478 Mass. 49 (2017). Greg has also been generous in his pro bono work for MACC, providing his firm’s resources to prepare at no or minimal cost to MACC “friend of the court” (amici curiae) briefs to the Massachusetts courts. These memoranda of law help the court consider the important environmental implications of the issues before it while arguing for an environmentally-friendly outcome.

Greg also chairs the Environmental Committee of the Real Estate Bar Association for Massachusetts (REBA) and serves as a member of the REBA Board of Directors. At the National CLE Conference in Vail, CO, Greg co-chairs an annual seminar on Environmental Law, Land Use, Energy & Litigation for attorneys from across the United States. Greg has contributed to several editions of MACC’s Environmental Handbook and is the editor of the two-volume Massachusetts Environmental Law, published by Massachusetts Continuing Legal Education, Inc. (MCLE).

In addition to his professional achievements and contributions to the protection of wetlands and waterways, Greg has maintained a respectful and gracious demeanor. He extends friendships and keeps friends. His colleagues agree that it’s not Greg’s specific individual accomplishments that make him so special, it’s his deep dedication and sharing of that commitment, with a witty style, that is so exceptional and worthy of recognition.

Conservation Administrator of the Year

Angela Panaccione

Angela has been an environmental steward and activist for the vast majority of her life and has channeled her passion for the environment into her profession as Conservation Agent and Stormwater Coordinator for the Town of Palmer. Angela’s background in conservation and environmental matters is extensive and she continues to stay current on the latest science and information by regularly attending conferences and trainings. She is a Certified Stormwater Inspector, has completed the Fundamentals Certificate Training Course through MACC, and is Keystone Cooperator through the UMass Keystone Program. As such, she truly serves as a resource in the local community, assisting others with conservation and stewardship of their land.

Angela actively engages with many conservation organizations to facilitate collaboration and to utilize regional information at a local level. She serves on the board of the Massachusetts Municipal Society of Conservation Professionals and the Chicopee 4 Rivers Watershed Council. She represents the Palmer Conservation Commission regularly with the MassConn Sustainable Forest Partnership. Angela is also a Lead Observer through the North Atlantic Aquatic Connectivity Collaborative and provides opportunities for people to shadow her during culvert assessments.

Not only does Angela actively engage with conservation issues at a regional scale, she also works in the local community to share her passion for the environment with people of all demographics. She regularly attends town events and serves as the face of the Commission. As Stormwater Coordinator, she uses interactive methods of demonstrating stormwater impacts for people of all ages, but especially children.
She also reads environmental stories to preschool children during the annual Young Child/Brain Building Week at a preschool in town. She appreciates the vital role children play in the future as the next generation of conservationists, law makers, and scientists.

Some of her specific accomplishments include: administration of the 2017 MA Recreational Trails Grant, administration of LAND grant and the acquisition of the “Turnpike” Property administration of a Culvert Replacement Grant, administration of the MVP Grant, and the Three Rivers Earth Day Clean-up and 2018 Source 2 Sea Clean-up.

Angela’s colleagues describe her as the “ideal recipient of this prestigious award” because without her in-depth knowledge of the Wetlands Protection Act (WPA) and familiarity with diverse conservation issues at a regional scale, the Commission would not be able to navigate complex development projects and difficult enforcement cases. Senator Gobi recognizes Angela as a dedicated public servant who has worked diligently to ensure the WPA is fully upheld in her jurisdiction and the Opacum Land Trust refers to Angela as the “go to” person for conservation and other issues in Palmer. Angela strives to build community relations and partnerships and is fully committed to upholding the duties and responsibilities of the Palmer Conservation Commission as its Agent. She works above and beyond the call of duty in this role with a high level of personal commitment to the job.

**Youth Environmental Service Award**

*Joel Jablonowski*

Joel Jablonowski is a 15-year-old sophomore at Acton Boxborough Regional Highschool. When not attending classes and conquering homework assignments, Joel volunteers his time to support natural resource protection in the Town of Acton. He has been volunteering for the Town of Acton Natural Resources Division for two years. Joel volunteered all summer 2018 and returned to the Arboretum in the spring of 2019.

Joel was often the sole volunteer for grueling work, including disassembling wooden cement forms in a stream...in the freezing cold! It was uncomfortable and muddy work, but Joel enjoyed the challenge. Similarly, during the summer of 2019, Joel assisted in the construction of a 180’ boardwalk on the Assabet River. He enthusiastically put on waders in 90-degree heat, helped carry heavy frames through the mud, and pounded pilings with a sledge hammer. In addition to donating his free time, Joel has gone above and beyond to give his all to natural resources projects including:

- Attending volunteer tree and shrub pruning classes offered by the town to assist in caring for important specimen trees at the arboretum.
- Applying knowledge acquired his high school carpentry class to cut lumber for boardwalks/trails.

His friends in the Natural Resource Division state “whenever I work with Joel, I am continuously astounded with the comments and breadth of knowledge Joel possesses. He has an intuitive understanding of many environmental issues and an incredibly sophisticated understanding of our time and place in the progress and evolution of more sustainable methods of living.” He listens acutely to the venerable gardeners.
volunteering alongside him and appreciates the knowledge and experience offered by this team. As such, he gives more and more each day.