

# Open Space meeting Notes Feb. 9th, 2026

**Called to order at 6:44 pm**

Attending: Commissioners Sam Brown, Eric Dibner, Jim Arsham, Courtney Walsh, Mike Bolk.  
Guests: David Turnbull-ATV Club, Greg LeClair, Dept Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, Amy Brown

The Casco Open Space Commission meeting focused on reviewing and providing feedback on the draft open space plan outline and list of actions, which commission members were tasked to review individually before the next meeting on March 4th. The group discussed a \$45,000 budget request for planning services, including \$15,000 for the Berry Property Work Group and \$2,500 for implementing the new open space plan. A significant portion of the meeting addressed a Maine Community Foundation grant application for bridge replacement in Otisfield, which sparked debate about prioritizing ATV trail maintenance needs in Casco. The commission also reviewed three thematic maps created by Greg LeClaire showing habitat connectivity, aquatic systems, and high-value plant and animal habitats across the region. The conversation ended with updates on upcoming trail maintenance work on the Rattlesnake trail, contingent on volunteer waivers and insurance coverage.

## Next steps

- [All Commissioners: Review the open space plan outline and draft list of actions documents and submit comments \(or "reviewed, no comments" notice\) to Sam by March 4th.](#)
- [Sam: Send \(or resend\) the plan outline and draft list of actions documents to Tom McCarthy and David Turnbull.](#)
- [Courtney: Distribute the link to the new visual brand identity survey to the commission.](#)
- [Sam: Send the finalized budget request email to Tony \(Town Manager\) by tomorrow.](#)
- [Sam and Mike \(and interested commissioners\): Conduct reconnaissance hike of the Rattlesnake trail section on May 11th at 3:30 to identify blowdowns and scope of work.](#)
- [Sam, Mike, and volunteers: Organize and participate in trail maintenance work on May 31st, including coordination of tools and volunteers.](#)
- [Sam: Contact the Huntress property owners regarding the upcoming trail work.](#)
- [Dave \(ATV Club President\): Share current year trail maintenance project list with the Open Space Commission.](#)
- [All Commissioners: For all future grant applications, consult with ATV and Snowmobile clubs before submission.](#)
- [Sam: Contact John Rand \(Raymond trail group\) to engage with trail maintenance coordination where trails cross or are of shared interest.](#)
- [Sam: Follow up with Tony Ward regarding the next meeting of the Berry Property Working Group and communicate schedule to interested commissioners.](#)

## Summary

### Berry Property Working Group Update

Eric Dibner raised concerns about the Berry Property Working Group's meeting schedule, noting that meetings have been scattered and difficult to track. He reported reaching out to Mary Fernandez to understand the path forward. Sam Brown indicated that Tony Ward has taken over stewardship of the Berry Property Working Group and that he would follow up to determine when the next meeting would be scheduled. The January 22nd meeting was canceled and had not yet been rescheduled at the time of this Commission meeting.

## **Regional Trail Collaboration and Coordination**

The meeting highlighted the importance of regional collaboration across multiple municipalities. David Turnbull noted that the Lake Region ATV Club has 60-70-80 members from multiple towns, with a significant portion of trail systems located in Casco but connecting to Naples, Otisfield, and Raymond. Sam Brown reported reaching out to John Rand (via contact from Katrina Sangster of Wawenock) to engage with Raymond's trail group where trails cross or share common interests. The Commission recognized that effective open space planning requires thinking beyond Casco's borders and treating the town as "a puzzle piece to a larger puzzle" in the regional ecosystem.

## **Maps and Resources Provided**

Greg LeClaire from Beginning with Habitat (Maine Inland Fisheries and Wildlife - Municipal Planning Biologist) provided six maps total: three standard maps plus three custom open space maps incorporating data from Resilience Works. The three thematic maps covered: (1) Habitat Connectivity - showing undeveloped areas, wildlife crossing locations, and collision data, (2) Aquatic Systems - displaying wetlands, brook trout habitat, and culvert assessments, and (3) High-Value Plant and Animal Habitats - identifying rare species, significant vernal pools, deer wintering areas, and the Jugtown Plains Focus Area of Statewide Ecological Significance. These maps will be displayed at the town office for public reference. Greg emphasized that towns can enhance their own inventory beyond what the state provides and encouraged the Commission to identify additional features not currently mapped.

## **Meeting Coordination and Returns**

The meeting began with technical difficulties regarding audio and video connections, which were eventually resolved. Sam Brown introduced the agenda and participants, including several commissioners, special guests, and members of the public. The group discussed the open space plan, with members reviewing two documents: a plan outline and a list of actions. Sam requested attendees to make notes while reading the outline aloud, with the intention of compiling and forwarding their comments to the resilience team. The conversation ended with plans to review the list of actions in the next session.

## **Casco Open Space Vision Review**

The meeting focused on reviewing the Casco Open Space Vision plan outline and draft list of actions. The group discussed the importance of providing feedback on the plan by March 4th, as it will be presented to the select board and town meeting in June. Steve requested that commissioners and other participants review the documents and send comments or indicate if they have no questions. The group also noted that while a dog park was mentioned in the plan, it should be maintained as a community priority.

## **Casco's Visual Brand and Maps**

The group discussed feedback from a teen outreach meeting, including a request for an older children's playground, which was found in the project documentation. Courtney shared updates on her work creating a new visual brand identity for the town of Casco, including two workshops and an upcoming online survey. Greg presented three thematic maps of Casco, highlighting key features such as high-value plant and animal habitats, habitat connectivity, and wildlife collision areas. The group also discussed the need to update some of the map data and the importance of the Jugtown Plains area for its ecological significance.

## **Aquatic Systems and Habitat Assessment**

The group discussed an aquatic systems map that includes open space parcels, wetlands, and high-value brook trout habitat. They explored the topic of culverts in detail, noting that many have been upgraded to "stream-smart" culverts through municipal and state funding programs.

**Greg LeClaire explained the culvert assessment system:** blue circles on the map indicate assessed culverts, with an X meaning fish cannot pass through, a line indicating potential passage issues, and an open circle showing full passability for aquatic organisms. The group learned about funding opportunities through the DOT Municipal Stream Crossing Grant (formerly through DEP) and the Community Resilience Partnership. A specific example was the recently replaced culvert from Heath to Thompson Lake. The discussion touched on public access to water bodies, with a particular focus on a vulnerable kayaking spot near Heath where access depends on a single property owner's goodwill, highlighting the need for the Commission to secure permanent public access rights. The group also reviewed high-value plant and animal habitats, including rare species (New England Bluet damselfly, Pygmy Snaketail dragonfly, Bridal Shiner minnow) and significant vernal pools. **Regional context was emphasized:** the trail systems and waterways cross multiple town boundaries (Casco, Naples, Otisfield, Raymond), requiring collaborative regional planning rather than single-town focus.

### **Deer Wintering Areas Budget Request**

The meeting focused on discussing deer wintering areas, habitat protection, and a proposed budget request for open space planning and land acquisition. Sam presented a \$45,000 budget request, broken down as follows: \$15,000 for planning services (including \$12,500 specifically to support the Berry Property Work Group in developing a site plan and design concept, plus \$2,500 for implementing the new open space plan), and \$30,000 for future land acquisition. The commission voted 5-0 to approve sending this request to Tony (Town Manager) as a formal budget submission. Amy and Jim expressed concerns about the town's priorities, highlighting the need for preserving open space despite budget constraints for other projects including road repairs and a new firehouse. The commission acknowledged these challenges but agreed to proceed with the request as a step toward long-term open space preservation. The group discussed the importance of presenting their case at Select Board meetings and Finance Committee hearings to justify the budget request.

### **Otisfield Bridge**

The Open Space Commission discussed a \$10,000 Maine Community Foundation grant application for bridge repair work on the Smithbrook Bridge. A significant concern was raised by David Turnbull (ATV Club President) that this bridge is actually located in Otisfield, not Casco, and that there are more pressing trail repair needs within Casco itself, particularly a bridge on the CMP pipeline/powerline easement crossing Mill Brook. David emphasized that the Mill Brook bridge in Casco has severe erosion issues and represents a critical single-point failure in the trail system, while the Smithbrook Bridge is currently functional. The discussion revealed a communication gap — the ATV Club had not been consulted before the grant application was initiated, which was based on earlier feedback from Hancock Lumber. After extensive discussion, the Commission voted 5-0 to: (1) move forward with the current Smithbrook Bridge grant application since it was already near completion, and (2) adopt a formal motion requiring that all future grant applications must consult with ATV and Snowmobile Clubs before submission. The Commission committed to supporting the ATV Club's priority projects moving forward.

They also reviewed plans for trail maintenance work on Hancock Lumber property and Huntress Property on Rattlesnake Mountain with a reconnaissance hike on May 11th at 3:30 PM, with a small group of volunteers who also need to sign waivers under Loon Echo's insurance.

**Meeting Adjourned at 8:00 PM.**