

## 2016 Environmental Service Award Recipients

### Congratulations to this year's recipients



#### **Conservation Commissioner of the Year: Donald Cooper**

Donald Cooper was appointed to the Andover Conservation Commission in June 1985, within a few years became Vice-Chair, and has been Chair since 2001, a tenure of over 30 years on the Commission. As Chair he built a professional and effective commission by ensuring people of various backgrounds and experience are appointed to the commission. He has increased the efficiency of commission hearings and meetings in several ways involving application review procedures and scheduling of hearings. In a busy town like Andover, that makes a big difference! A commissioner estimated that Don has been involved in more than 700 meetings and review of over 7,000 applications during this thirty plus years on the commission.

Among Don's outstanding achievements is his work on the town wetlands bylaw and regulations. He participated in the writing and successful passage of the bylaw at Town Meeting in 1999 and was one of the authors of the implementing regulations in 2002. With the wetland bylaw in place, he created the "Backyard Project Review Committee," which provides a local appeal process for applicants unsatisfied with the Commission's ruling under the bylaw.

Don has also been a leader in the protection of open space in Andover. He has been instrumental in spearheading land purchases, with almost 1,300 acres of open space protected during his 30 years on the commission. His fervor and excellent negotiating and speaking skills resulted in millions of dollars in funding from Town Meeting for land acquisition and protection. Andover now has over 2,000 acres of town conservation land. To manage that much land, Don worked with conservation staff to build the Land Management Group. There are now close to 100 volunteers that assist the commission on land projects.

Don is an environmental attorney and licensed professional engineer. His excellence in environmental law has been recognized by his inclusion in The Best Lawyers in America in the field of Litigation-Environmental since 2007. He is described by people he works with as effective, pragmatic, passionate but practical, creative and steadfast, collaborative and independent. As one of his colleagues at Nixon Peabody wrote "Don is known for his ability to find creative solutions to environmental problems that are acceptable to all parties and in compliance with applicable laws and regulations. Don has walked, hiked, biked, kayaked, canoed or birded throughout much of Massachusetts and has a personal commitment to environmental conservation and a love for the diversity and beauty of the natural resources that make the Commonwealth unique...Don's tenure in Andover is an extraordinary example of service to a conservation commission." Don has also shown his environmental dedication by serving on the Mass Audubon Board of Directors since 2009.



#### **Conservation Administrator of the Year: Mike O'Reilly**

Mike O'Reilly started as Conservation Agent for the Town of Dartmouth in 1989. Dartmouth, a town of 35,000 people, is fourth in land size among Massachusetts municipalities. During his 27 years in Dartmouth, Mike has helped lead Dartmouth to the forefront of environmental excellence. In a Town where there is much support for conservation, Mike took a leadership position in conservation in a way that few others have been able to duplicate. His presence at conservation commission meetings is like the ticking of a clock - an even, steady hand that his commission has relied upon for the mundane to the sublime. He has reviewed over 1,500 NOIs and half as many RDAs in a town that has every wetland Resource Area in the Wetlands Protection Act except Designated Port Area. In addition the Town has a local wetlands delineation service available in local procedures, through which Mike has delineated hundreds of wetlands.

Mike took an early interest in open space protection, which has led to some 2,500 acres of Conservation Commission land, a good portion of it coastal, rural, agricultural, and now perpetually coastal, rural, and agricultural land. Some of the land he spearheaded protecting is truly spectacular, looking out over Buzzards Bay. The partnerships Mike developed over the years with the local land trust and state and federal land protection organizations have resulted in the protection

of nearly 18 square miles (27%) of the Town of Dartmouth. Mike's interests and intellect have taken him even further than that.

Just helping to protect conservation land wasn't enough for Mike. Restoring wetlands was another task. He coordinated the restoration of wetlands (at least six significant salt marsh restorations and one fish passage project, among others) and initiated the grants to fund them (with \$4.2 million in total grant awards to the town). To make things like that happen, a person has to know not just how to fill out the paperwork and where to send it, but also the people. And Mike knows people. Ask him about a relevant conservation-related subject, and he'll not only tell you how to get started, but whom to call for more help on that particular topic. His restorations are of such high quality that numerous federal, state, and non-profit organizations have awarded him for his work. In 2005, NOAA awarded Mike the National Environmental Hero Award.

It may seem like an afterthought, but during all of the above, Mike became a self-taught GIS expert to tie it all together. Even before they were available to all, Mike was using infrared remote sensing to map wetlands. Starting in 1990 he headed the Town's GIS implementation and has been the town's GIS coordinator for the past 12 years. He knows the technology inside and out, which can discourage many a potential land developer from cutting corners. His dedication has led him to travel to California for GIS conferences. This is the kind of skillset that should create admiration, if not envy, in the environmental community.

When recently asked to consider a position as a Board Member with MACC, Mike replied that he was sorry but was too busy. Why? Because he was taking on the Chairmanship of the Buzzard's Bay Action Committee, using his grant-finding, GIS, and people skills to obtain, within months of his taking the position, a \$200,000 grant to enable member towns and cities to get started on Stormwater quality testing for the next phase of the expected EPA NPDES MS4 permit. Mike has always been ahead of the curve. But probably most important of all, he has always been there to help and share his knowledge with others.



### **Outstanding Achievements in Open Space Stewardship: William Keohan**

The Town of Plymouth's William Keohan is recognized for his exemplary work preserving open space, wetlands and waterways and for finding ways to utilize his town's Community Preservation Fund to protect the environment. Bill has successfully shepherded 17 major environmental projects resulting in the protection of over 1,100 acres of farmland, conservation land, waterfront properties, ponds and lakes, forests and woodlands that are

used for summer camps, environmental education centers, hiking trails, cranberry bogs and water sources and even prisoner rehabilitation (Plymouth County Farm).

Bill was appointed chairman of the newly created Open Space Committee that was included in the town charter of 1995, marking the beginning of his generous contributions towards the betterment of the town of Plymouth. As chairman of the Open Space Committee he searched for ways to protect the environment by acquiring open space, as landowners large and small were being courted by developers. Having researched various ways to do this, he became an early proponent of the Community Preservation Act (CPA) and helped lobby for its passage on Beacon Hill. After that success, he worked hard and spoke eloquently to convince Plymouth Town Meeting of its benefits and afterward campaigned to get the taxpayer's vote for its passage in the town election that followed. The CPA surcharge on residents' real estate bills needed careful explanation to get citizen approval and Bill has made it his duty to educate the population of the financial benefits of leaving land undeveloped.

Bill's understanding of the need for land and resource preservation took early root. After graduating college, travelling overseas, and working on Capitol Hill, he returned to Plymouth in the mid-1990's at a time when the town was experiencing unrelenting and unrestrained growth, and the new commuter rail line to Boston exacerbated that. Bill foresaw this development boom and took action to preserve the environment and cultural history of the town he loves. Open space stewardship is his passion and avocation as well as his vocation, yet Bill gives all the credit to the Community Preservation Act and the people of Plymouth for voting for it so he could have the honor of using the Fund to protect open space.