To: Town of Andover Inland Wetlands and Watercourses Commission

From: Town of Andover Conservation Commission

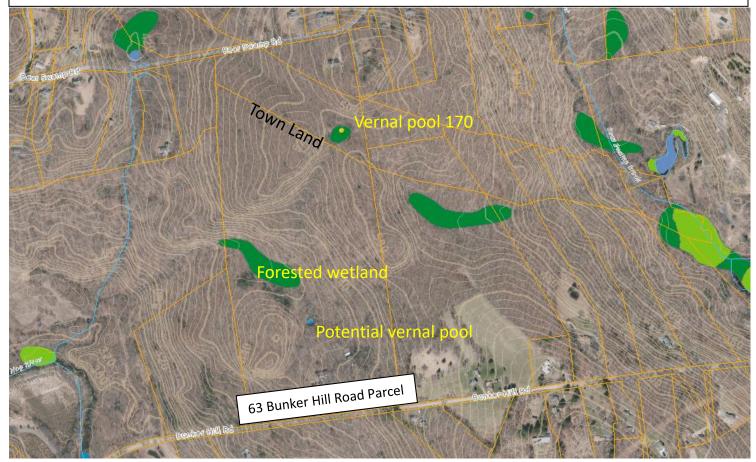
Re: Conservation recommendations regarding pending application IWWC #23-17

Date: December 4, 2023

The Conservation Commission wishes to submit advisory recommendations regarding the following pending timber harvest application: <u>IWWC #23-17, 63 Bunker Hill Road, Harmon.</u>

A natural resource inventory completed by the Conservation Commission identified several important wetland habitats associated with this primarily forested parcel (see Fig. 1 below). These include a forest/shrub wetland system, and at least one potential vernal pool. A second vernal pool is located along the northern boundary of the property adjacent to town-owned land. This vernal pool was found to be highly productive during biological surveys conducted in the spring of 2022 (>360 wood frog egg masses, 60 spotted salamander egg masses, long hydroperiod), and it likely serves as an important "refuge pool" for the population. Although this pool appears to be mostly located on town land, critical forest habitat for the amphibians breeding within this pool are located on the 63 Bunker Hill Road parcel.

Fig. 1: Location of vernal pools and forested wetland habitats



As noted during the mapping of natural resources in town, the 58- acre parcel falls within a larger 100 to 250 - acre "core forest" ecosystem. The amphibians that use the vernal pools and wetlands within this ecosystem for reproduction depend upon the surrounding forest outside of the breeding season. This community of amphibians is sensitive to alterations in either the wetland and/or surrounding upland habitats, and they are considered species of "greatest conservation need" in the State's *Wildlife Acton Plan*. It is also likely that spotted turtles move seasonally among wetlands throughout this forest. Spotted turtles are protected by the CT Threatened and Endangered Species Act.

The Conservation Commission recognizes that timber harvests are considered an "as of right" activity, providing financial value and fuel for home heating. Timber harvests can also play an important role in managing for aesthetics, water quality, and wildlife habitat, and improve overall forest health. As is often the case however, balancing these interests depends upon the "where," "how," and "when" of the timber harvest.

Therefore, the Commission requests that the landowner(s) not only consider the stewardship value of forest management, but also, that of protecting populations of conservation-sensitive wildlife and their critical habitat(s). We therefore recommend that the landowner(s) work with the forestry company to implement the following best management practices to avoid or minimize impacts to critical wildlife species and their habitat¹.

- Do not disturb or harvest trees within the vernal pool depressions or wetland boundaries.
- Maintain a minimum of 75% forest canopy cover (trees 20-30 ft. tall) within a zone of 100 feet surrounding each of the vernal pools and the forested wetland.
- Avoid operating heavy machinery within the 100 ft. zone surrounding the vernal pools and wetlands, except along the existing main forest access road.
- Limit timber harvesting operations to the winter months (November-February), ideally under frozen ground conditions.
- Use appropriate erosion control measures at wetland and drainage crossings, and removed prior to March 1st.
- Minimize the creation of ruts and smooth out any rutted areas 6 inches or greater in depth at the completion of the operation to prevent them from holding water.
- Leave tops and limbs where the trees are felled.

A representative of the Conservation Commission with expertise in vernal pool and wetlands conservation is available to provide "in the field" guidance regarding the harvest plan, should this be of interest to the landowners and/or the foresters.