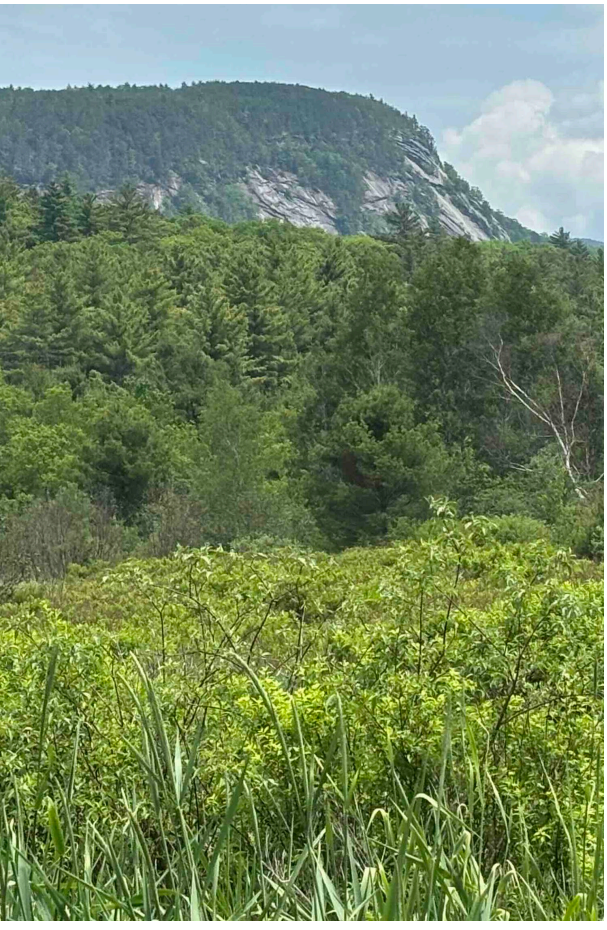
Natural and Conservation Burial Grounds

What Conservation Commissioners Need to Know

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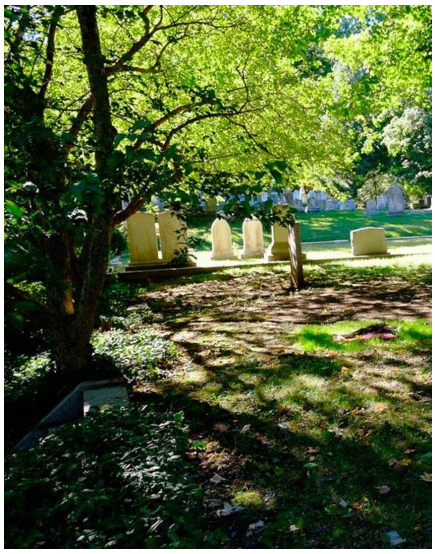
Natural Burial Basics

- Eliminate the use of non-biodegradable products and processes, including:
  - Chemical embalming
  - Metals, exotic woods, synthetics, plastics in burial containers
  - Concrete, fiberglass vaults
- Bury at 3.5 – 4 feet

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Types of Public Burial Grounds

Hybrid



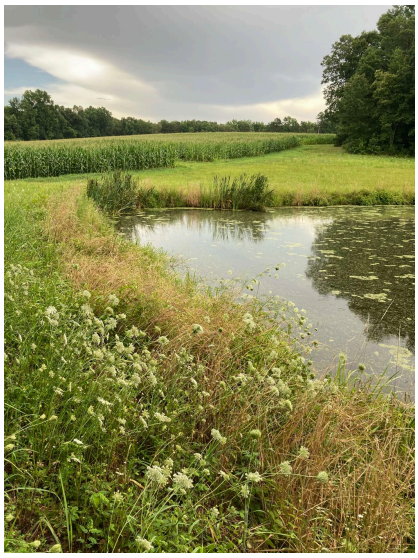
Mount Auburn, Cambridge, MA

Natural



Green Meadow Cemetery, Fountain Hill, PA

Conservation



Bluestem Conservation Cemetery, Cedar Grove, NC

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Conservation Commissions Can Play a Key Role

1. How municipal/conventional cemeteries work
2. How natural cemeteries work
3. How cemetery trustees and conservation commissioners can work together
4. Why changing burial practices locally matters
5. Locating community partners

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What All Public NH Cemeteries Have in Common

- All cemeteries are operated by tax-exempt nonprofits (municipalities, religious institutions, cemetery and association nonprofits)
- Rules are determined by elected cemetery trustees, the town selectboard, or nonprofit board trustees
- Community burial space
- Burial rights (not real estate) purchase

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How Conventional and Natural Models Differ

Conventional Municipal Burial

- Single purpose
- RSA 289:2 requires each town provide access for burial of its own citizens
- Acceptance is usually limited to residents with some exceptions
- Taxpayers pay for land that is then taken off tax roles
- Condensed, carrying capacity 1,200 – 1,500 per acre

Natural Burial on Town Land

- Multipurpose, portions used for burial
- All may be welcome
- Community use encouraged
  - Nature studies
  - Education
  - Recreation
  - Lifecycle events
  - Community events
- Diversified, lower carrying capacity 300 – 800 per acre

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What Happens in Conventional Burials

- Chemically embalmed or treated bodies
- Metal and exotic rainforest wood caskets
- Concrete or fiberglass vault
- Herbicides, pesticides, fertilizers
- Asphalt driveways
- Concrete columbarium
- Upright markers, non-native stone
- Hybrids mix vaults and embalming with natural

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What Happens in Natural Burial Grounds

- Organically prepared
- Biodegradable containers
- No outer burial containers
- Naturalized burial areas
- Pollinator gardens
- Meditative spaces
- Nonmotorized mobility-enhanced pathways
- Flat native stone; digital records
- All burials are natural

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Next Step:
Conservation Level Burial

Natural burial cemeteries that partner with a conservation entity for:

- Extra layer of land protection
- Experience with implementing conservation best practices
- Monitoring and defense oversight

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Conservation Drivers
Natural Burial Addresses

- Saving, restoring, and protecting land
- Reducing death-related carbon release; sequestering carbon, nitrogen, phosphorus, potassium
- Highlighting conservation burial as a climate resiliency strategy
- Responding to projected migratory patterns due to water scarcity, flooding, and rising heat

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Reconciling Town Responsibilities and Goals

Cemetery Trustees

- Protect the financial interests of the taxpayers by maximizing use of cemetery property
- Historically they have done so by implementing products and processes that have adverse environmental effects

Conservation Commissioners

- Exist to protect vulnerable community properties from environmental hazards
- They do so by monitoring and overseeing activity on town lands, implementing conservation best practices

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What Working Together Could Look Like

Conservation Commissions manage:

- Easement negotiations
- Conservation plan development
- Boundary monitoring and boundary defense

Cemeteries/Municipalities manage:

- Contract negotiations
- Burial operations
- Hiring of subcontractors
- Liability insurance

Collaborative opportunities:

- Site design
- Educational and recreational programming
- Restoration and community projects

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Why It Matters

- Impacting public perception
- Reducing local funeral poverty
- Engaging people with the land in new ways
- Reducing taxpayer cemetery costs by changing maintenance load and increasing sustainable practices
- Adding to town income stream
- Reallocating funds and resources
- Utilizing land fit for multi-purposes

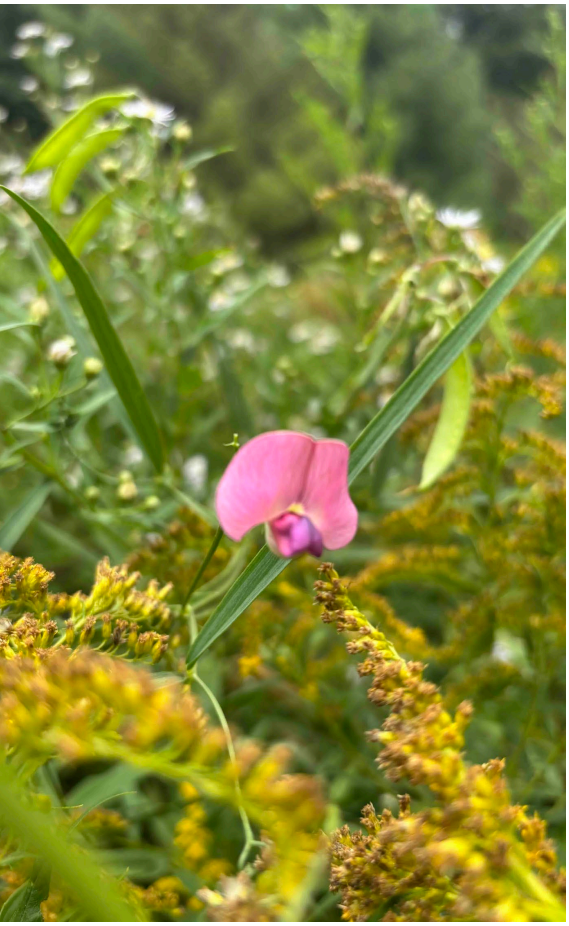
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Building Community Support

- Form a small exploratory community-based working group
- Provide community education
- Float a town-wide questionnaire
- Hold a town-wide forum
- Explore potential town properties and potential land donors

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Help with Easements

- Assessment criteria is available for determining eligibility for amending an existing easement based on Land Trust Alliance standards
- Newly developed language for including public burial on town-protected land is also available

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Resources



naturalburialnh@gmail.com

- **Natural Burial New Hampshire**
  www.naturalburialnh.org
- **New Hampshire Funeral Resources**
  www.nhfuneral.org
- **White Mountain Conservation Burial**
  www.whitemountainconservationburial.org
- **Land Trust Alliance**
  www.landtrustalliance
- **Conservation Burial Alliance**
  www.conservationburialalliance.org
- **Green Burial Council**
  www.greenburialcouncil.org

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RICHARD
LANGAN
MAY 21, 1950
JUNE 4, 2026



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