

## FARMLAND NOW WENDEMUTH MEADOW PRESERVE

By Cynthia Henshaw

Looking out across the distant tree tops you can see the church steeple to the north. That's the way to the center of North Brookfield, just a few minutes' walk away. Down the hill is a rolling expanse of open fields and grassy wetlands that sweep over several stone walls and end at the tree line to the east. A few majestic maples line the stone walls, providing shade to all who pass beneath them. The walls speak of clearing the fields, making way for the scythe and tractor.

Two streams enter from the east and meet in the middle, at the base of the hill. When the land was more actively farmed the water glided through rock lined channels.

After decades of neglect, the channels have filled in allowing the wetland to expand onto what was once hay land. From here the water glides downhill towards Coy Brook, while the bobolinks and dragonflies wheel around in the sky, feeding and nesting for another year.

The barn rests at the northern edge, right along Bates Street, waiting for the loads of hay to get backed in the front door and loaded up to the third level. The old grapple and winch are still there, ready to get greased up. Odds and ends are all that remain inside. Extensive repairs of the barn started in the mid-2000s but didn't quite finish. The windows and main door header remain open to the weather.

The community cares about the land! The East Quabbin Land Trust recently purchased the thirty acre property to protect and steward the fields, the wetlands, and the barn. The Land Trust took that step partly in response to tremendous community support. A group of North Brookfield residents have formed Friends of Wendemuth Meadow to help make permanent conservation of the land a

reality.

With the Friends of Wendemuth Meadow group, the Land Trust is facilitating the Town's purchase of a conservation restriction on the land. Once in place, the Land Trust will own and manage the land, and the North Brookfield Conservation Commission will hold the conservation restriction and collaborate on stewardship of the fields and wetland. Sale of the conservation restriction to the town makes it financially feasible for the East Quabbin Land Trust to keep the property. Funds from the recently completed capital campaign will cover the land trust's investment in ownership of Wendemuth Meadow – our first foray into Farmland for the Future.

Several walks and events are planned to introduce residents to the land. In the afternoon of May 3<sup>rd</sup> we will be on site from 1pm until 4pm to welcome curious visitors of all ages as they explore Wendemuth. In the height of summer we've planned to host a BioBlitz to begin documenting the plants, animals, fungi and

insects that share this space. On Saturday, July 12<sup>th</sup> professional naturalists will join us throughout the day to lend their expertise. Volunteers are needed to assist by helping to find, identify and document all the living creatures at the property that day. Please join us for these events! ■



*A view over the Wendemuth Meadow*



*EQLT volunteers visiting Wendemuth Meadow*

The East Quabbin Land Trust is participating in  
**Greater Worcester GIVES**

*A 24-hour giving event on May 6, 2014*

Support EQLT and help us win one of the prizes for most supported organization! Go to [www.gwgives.org](http://www.gwgives.org), scroll down the list and connect to the donation page for EQLT. We greatly appreciate your support!

## MESSAGE FROM THE Executive Director

*Cynthia Henshaw*



I continue to be amazed at how important the land and community is for property owners throughout the East Quabbin region. The dedication and commitment is awe inspiring. Maybe I shouldn't be too surprised because we live among the legacy of permanently protected farms, woods and wetlands that past generations had the foresight to create. This network gives current landowners a positive roadmap for the places that we live and work in. I'm thankful to be part of that heritage.

Just recently we co-hosted two gatherings for landowners to learn more about conservation options and estate planning. At the first, over a dozen neighbors from West Hardwick sat around Henry and Judy Kohn's living room and shared their thoughts about the neighborhood, the wildlife they see and the reasons they love living there. We shared details on the new state tax credit program for qualified conservation donations of land or conservation restrictions. This casual gathering got the wheels spinning and more neighborhood discussions will follow.

At the second gathering, last Thursday, over sixty landowners came to the New Braintree Town Hall to learn more about estate planning. Normally estate planning isn't a hot topic. Who likes to think about their death and what will happen to their property after they are gone? But people love their land and that is making the connection. We ran through many of the questions that should be answered in a forum about estate planning – wills and trusts and homestead provisions among others. It was the stories of real families working their way through these decisions that brought these complicated issues to life. Joan and Randy Walker of New Braintree, and Martha Klassanos of Ware shared the challenges they faced and why they valued the land. Both families choose to conserve their land as part of their estate plan, which leaves a lasting legacy for their families and our communities.

You know the trickle-down effect in economics? I think of conservation working on the "ripple-out effect". By the action of one landowner who permanently conserves his property this shifts the orientation of their neighbors. The prospect of doing something else besides filling the land with new houses becomes a possibility worth exploring. The ripple brings movement and new perspective. Here at the East Quabbin Land Trust we like making waves that help shape our communities in positive ways for future generations. ■

## THE EAST QUABBIN LAND TRUST

works to foster the sustainable use of our natural and historic resources for the benefit of all generations through the conservation and stewardship of the farmlands, woodlands and waters in our region of Massachusetts.

As a non-profit organization the East Quabbin Land Trust envisions a regional community that continues to care for its natural environment and supports a sustainable local economy, ensuring a high quality of life for generations to come.

We welcome your thoughts, articles, and photographs on events in our area. For more information about the land trust, to become a member, or request a change of address, please contact us at:

### East Quabbin Land Trust

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413-477-8229 (tel & fax)  
email: [EQLT@comcast.net](mailto:EQLT@comcast.net)

Visit our website at [www.EQLT.org](http://www.EQLT.org)

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# DORIS CASTONGUAY MATTHEWS: From Wall Watcher to Conservation Advocate and Poet

By Cynthia Henshaw

Some of her fondest childhood memories are sitting on the wall that divides the two farms. Doris spent hours looking across the fields and watching the three Wendemuth brothers cutting hay. The work was done by hand with scythes, not the way everyone else did it in the sixties, with their tractor. “You could really tell that they loved the land by the way they took care of it. Always with respect,” she said. During the summer they worked hour by hour, day by day to cut the hay, rake and turn it over, then load it onto a flat-bed wagon to store in the barn and back into the field for the next load.

Doris grew up on the farm next door raising beef cattle, chickens, pigs and dairy cattle. They had a large garden. Canning, preserving and stocking the root cellar were important parts of Doris’ youth. As a family they were self-sufficient except for laundry detergent and paper products. “With seven kids and only one bathroom, paper products were essential,” she commented. The farm went out of the family, but Doris would love to get back to living from the land again.

Her father gave Doris and her siblings boundaries; you never went onto someone else’s land without permission. “At eight or nine it was a daunting thing, going and asking the Wendemuths for permission to sled down the hill.” The passel of neighborhood kids would sled at the Wendemuth’s and skate on the Castonguay’s pond. “It was an amazing, amazing place to grow up.”

When the Friends of Wendemuth Meadow group first formed in 2010, Doris was there ready to help. Same with last year, when the Friends group reconstituted and strategized about how to make conservation of the property a reality. “I’m thrilled that all these people are involved in seeing that the land is protected. Conservation of the land is a

nod to North Brookfield’s history, our agrarian heritage and a tremendous legacy to the Wendemuth family as farmers.”

Her love of the outdoors has translated into years of teaching physical education to public school children. Thirty-six years to be exact. Doris also loves gardening, hiking, kayaking and writing nature poetry. From an early age she enjoyed

writing. For her high-school yearbook Doris wrote the twenty-five year prophecies of her classmates. I didn’t check to see if she was on the mark or not! She just received a great honor: being accepted to the Frost Place in New Hampshire for a week-long poetry seminar. Expect more beautiful poems and stories from Doris in the near future. “A memoir is the next big project. Seven kids and one bathroom, yeah that’s a good story.”

Among Doris’ last comments were: “I hope that people walk the land, really enjoy the land and find peace there. It’s a beautiful spot. It’s a sacred place.” Amen.



Doris Matthews after a recent Friends of Wendemuth Meadow meeting.

## PASTURE PASTORAL

By Doris Castonguay Matthews

Originally printed in *Avocet, A Journal of Nature Poetry - 2011*

At ten years old, I was amused by play in the pasture.  
I leaped along the top stones of the wall  
ribboned between our field and the Wendemuth farm.  
Happy in my child’s imagination,  
I did not notice the two old brothers  
bowed to the sway of the scythe,  
sway of the scythe; the long soft grasses  
of the field lay down so gently upon the ground,  
straight and connected one to the next.  
Wedded to their work, no words left their lips,  
they labored with careful determination.  
Then lifted their heads, gazed in my direction,  
paralyzed my heartbeat, exploded a small alarm in my head—  
maybe I had done something wrong to disturb them  
not allowed by children when I was a kid.  
Unhurried, in unison, they gifted me a smile,  
held me in an instant, love-at-first-sight bond;  
bent their heads to the sweet, sweet swoosh  
of soft grass genuflecting down to the ground.





# THIRTEENTH ANNUAL DINNER AND SILENT AUCTION

The Board of Directors announced the **successful completion of a \$1.5 million capital campaign** to raise funds for farmland conservation, organization sustainability and conservation restriction responsibilities. Thank you to all our contributors for supporting this groundbreaking fundraising effort for the East Quabbin Land Trust. On February 15, 2014 over 160 people came together to celebrate conservation throughout the East Quabbin region. We are especially appreciative of the financial support received from the following underwriters:



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*Please support these businesses and thank them for underwriting the Land Trust dinner!*

# THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT!

*This wonderful evening would not have been possible without the support of many individuals and businesses. The silent auction raised over \$11,000 in support of the programs and activities of the East Quabbin Land Trust. Thank You!*

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### **MANY THANKS TO:**

**Rose 32 Bread** for donating bread,  
**Robinson's Farm** for donating cheese,  
**Nancy Grimes** for donating the flowers, and  
**Nancy Grimes** for organizing the event and all  
 those who volunteered to set-up and clean-up for  
 the event.





## CHILDREN'S LITERATURE PROJECT

By Nathan Grady

"Where once a beautiful forest stood and supported a diverse array of creatures, there is now an ugly development." "Where once kids splashed in the clear mountain stream, there is now just a trickle of sludgy black muck." "Where once the farm was quaint and productive, now invasives run rampant across the abandoned fields." Pretty bleak outlook for children's books morals, huh?

That's what we thought too. In fact, children's books that address conservation ideas and still maintain a positive perspective are surprisingly rare. Yet who will manage the CR's a few decades down the line? Who will carry out the stewardship on all the millions of acres being conserved right now, if not today's youth?

"Well," you might counter, "environmentalists these days are like the hippies of yesterday – it's a cool thing, pushing mainstream, everyone's signing up. If the kids don't find it when they're young, they'll just come to it when they are of age. No problem." Yet almost every major environmental thinker or activist in history, anyone you can name, from John Muir to Aldo Leopold, Rachel Carson to E. O. Wilson cite early childhood exposure to the outdoors and to basic environmental morals as a major influence in their lifelong dedication to preserving and safeguarding the natural world. Indeed recent studies show that experiences such as making forts in the woods, catching bugs, and splashing through streams at a young age are critical for shaping all people's interactions with the natural world, and enhancing those experiences with a few positive morals about creatures and the land can only help instill the stewardship values necessary for humans to live through this changing climate.

With that in mind, we at the East Quabbin Land Trust thought it time the conservation movement deliberately reached out to a younger audience, and did it with a tale of empowerment instead of despair. Since mid October, I have been writing and illustrating a story that I hope will do just that.

The story follows a young beaver named Woody Pondmaker who, in a fit of teenage angst, declares his home swamp boring and sets off to explore the world. Unfortunately, as he does so, he notices that things away from home are not as peachy and pleasant as he always assumed. An ambitious and single-minded mayor of a nearby city has used his political influence to expand the city (naturally he

ran on an urban-sprawl campaign) and in doing so he first paved over the expansive prairie, and is now chopping down the forest that contains Woody's home swamp. Realizing that something must be done, Woody teams up with other displaced creatures to convince the mayor that non-urban ecosystems are good and worth saving, that not everyone wants to live in the city, and above all, that this sprawl must stop. The mayor, a city-born pigeon himself, has long been convinced of quite the opposite, believing that all creatures would be happier in the city the way he and his fellow pigeons have always been. With his mind stubbornly set and the power in his hands, convincing him otherwise is no small task, but Woody and his friends rise to the challenge, nonetheless.

Writing this story and drafting the accompanying illustrations has been a great experience for me; I find this type of creative work incomparably fulfilling, and have learned a lot about conveying complex ideas to a young audience through both pictures and words. Though I have long been an artist, I have never before tried my hand at illustrating, and I've enjoyed the challenges this new style presents.

In general, I am very grateful for this opportunity to apply my different skill sets to

my work here at the East Quabbin Land Trust. Being able to productively merge my creative, artistic side with my passion for conservation is a unique opportunity indeed. This type of diversity of engagement is another in the long list of things that has made my AmeriCorps experience such a rich and worthwhile one. I can only hope that the product of my service, in this case my children's book, will have as positive an impact on its readers as the process of creating it has had on me. ■



Woody Pondmaker, as illustrated by Nathan Grady



# CASCADING IMPACT

By Ellen Endter

The farmers among us are confident that no matter how much snow we have on our fields and pastures now, it will be gone in a matter of weeks. There will be green grass to nourish livestock in April and the cropland will be ready for planting soon thereafter. The maples are already pouring their sap through taps and tubes. And the frosty quiet of deep winter mornings is now broken with tweets and twitters of bird who have returned.

Imagine for a moment that real miracle of seeds sprouting, those tiny delicate root hairs pushing through the swarming soil. Imagine the roots of trees stirring as the sap rises and leaves sprout. Spring is a cascade of things coming alive, waking and beginning their cycles all over. A sprout becomes a leaf, a trickle becomes a flowing stream, and soon eggs will be hatching in nests everywhere around us. We celebrate that with holidays, smiles, and relief to say goodbye to the deep freeze.

Making a charitable gift is also a cascading event. When you make a gift to the East Quabbin Land Trust, no matter how modest, it has far-reaching effects. Even if your gift is used for a mundane expense such as paying the light bill in the office up the road from Mandell Hill, the light shines over staff working on land acquisitions and

baseline studies of soils and flora and fauna, making it possible to secure the land and preserve its unique qualities for future generations. That one gift transforms into trails that we walk, habitat for songbirds and raptors; the gift you make today transforms into a vista that will be enjoyed by the family who lives down the street. Maybe your gift will become a tiny piece of what motivates that family to take good care of the land that has been entrusted to them; maybe your support of EQLT becomes an example that over time they decide to follow, a cascading piece of fruitful soil that nourishes their thoughts until they walk the Rail Trail as a family, or go bird watching at Mandell Hill. Maybe you will help inspire another gift.

Small and large acts of generous support create communities that care. As the landscape quickens around you, please consider making a gift to the Land Trust now. Write a check or go online and use a credit card, or set up a recurring, sustaining donation as a regular monthly transaction from your bank. Remember EQLT in your will with a bequest or remainder interest. Whatever method you choose, be assured that it will have effects far beyond its immediate use.



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**EQLT News | INSIDE...**

## **FARMLAND CONSERVATION**



SPRING 2014 | VOLUME 11 | ISSUE 2

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## **UPCOMING EVENTS**

*There are more events celebrating Outdoors in the East Quabbin than can be posted in the newsletter. Please check our website, [www.EQLT.org](http://www.EQLT.org) regularly for updates.*

### **APRIL...**

**Sunday, April 27, starting at 8:00 AM**

**East Quabbin Hike - Ware & Hardwick, meet at Gate 43 to carpool** – This is the first of a multi-day hiking series that traverses the east coast of the Quabbin Reservoir, the defining landscape feature of our region. The hike will start at the Quabbin tower and make our way north to Gate 43. This full-day hike will cover 11 miles. We will meet at Gate 43, off Greenwich Road in Hardwick and carpool to the starting location. RSVP to Cynthia at [chenshaw@EQLT.org](mailto:chenshaw@EQLT.org) or 413-477-8229 is required. Bring water, lunch and snacks.



### **MAY...**

**Sunday, May 18, starting at 4:00 PM**

**Annual Membership Meeting** - Join other members and supporters at this annual potluck gathering. This year we also will provide hotdogs and hamburgers. Meet at 135 Charity Hill Road in Hardwick for a fun evening. Rain location is 120 Ridge Road, Hardwick. RSVP to Cynthia is required.

### **JUNE...**

**Saturday, June 14, from 10:00 AM until 4:00 PM**

**Benefit Garden Tour in New Braintree and North Brookfield** – Explore eight gardens and learn more about how your neighbors incorporate natural features in unique ways. Tickets are \$15 and can be purchased on-line or by calling 413-477-8229. Tickets can be pre-ordered until Tuesday, June 10th to be mailed. Buy two tickets and get a third free. Tickets available on the 14th at the town commons.