

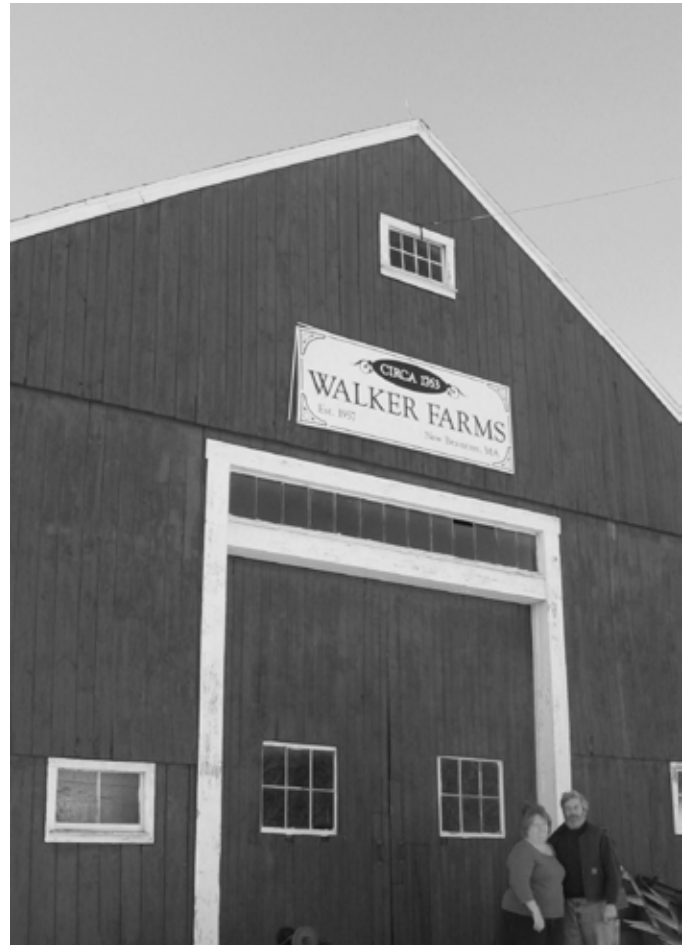
Iconic Farm and Viewscape Preserved!

The first thing you notice driving up to the Walker Farm is how beautiful it is. It's the classic New England beauty with a white farm house and big red barn set among hay fields. But it's more than that. What is startling and breathtaking is the expanse of mowed fields after driving through woods and smaller open areas. The fields show the rolling hills, which make up the backbone of central Massachusetts. There is a stream in the valley that separates more fields before a hiker hits the woods again as they head west. And in talking to Joan Walker, we learn that the beavers enjoy that stream, have created dams and wetlands to suit their needs. The beavers all have names, unbeknownst to them, and are appreciated by the people that "own" the land.

Randy and Joan Walker are very clear that they are the temporary caretakers of the land. What they do today is done with the knowledge that others will be making decisions in the future. They know that prime agricultural soils are an essential element to running a successful farm business. Having the capital resources and affordable land are also critical. "We want to set up the farm so that it is possible for our children and grandchildren to live here, to farm the land and enjoy this tremendous way of life," stated Randy Walker. "Selling the Agricultural Preservation Restriction (APR) was a key step in making that vision for Walker Farms LLC a reality."

In December Walker Farms LLC, Randy and Sherman Walker co-owners, sold an APR on 90 acres along the main road between New Braintree and West Brookfield to the Department of Agricultural Resources (DAR). That step means that the land is now dedicated to farming, ensuring that the productive soils will generate food for humans or animals in the years to come. An APR is similar yet significantly different than a conservation restriction. It's true that residential housing, mining, dumping and paving are restricted, but one difference is that agricultural structures such as greenhouses, sheds or barns and the utilities that service them can be built with approval. Also, the DAR has an affirmative right to approve future farm purchasers when the land transfers owners. Both APRs and conservation restrictions provide tremendous benefits to the land owners, neighbors and general public.

The East Quabbin Land Trust facilitated conservation of the Walker Farms LLC fields by assisting with the initial application, discussions with DAR and raising the local financial match contribution of \$25,000. Supporters included many individuals, the J. Irving & Jane L. England Charitable Trust, the Trustees of Reservations and the Towns of New Braintree and West Brookfield. These financial



Randy and Joan Walker at the farm.

The farm provides meaningful family activities like apple cider pressing in the fall and lots of gardening. Conservation of the land allows those opportunities to continue for future generations.
--Randy and Joan Walker

contributions were essential elements in successful conservation of the 90 acres. "Over the years, there were many conversations expressing concern for the potential loss of the Walker Farm to development and now with the APR the fields will remain agriculturally productive," said Cynthia Henshaw. "We want to express our sincere thanks to all those that supported the effort, and especially the Walkers."

Walker Farms LLC owns 300 more acres in New Braintree, West Brookfield and North Brookfield. In coming years the opportunity exists to build on the success of 2010 and expand the scope of conserved land in our region.

MESSAGE FROM THE Executive Director

Cynthia Henshaw



The second half of 2010 continued with strong results in the land conservation arena. As the cover article highlights, we are blessed with another farm, the Walker Farm fields and its prime agricultural soils, that is protected for future farming uses.

We are delighted to announce that Harry and Michelle Webb of Hardwick protected nearly 70 acres of land this year. In December they generously donated a conservation restriction to the Land Trust on 12 acres of woods. Muddy Brook snakes across the northern edge of the parcel and large old oak trees line a section of the brook banking. The Webbs intend to cut some of the trees this winter to improve the health and quality of those that remain, but will be leaving the largest trees to develop into an area of “old growth” along Muddy Brook. Earlier in the year the Webb’s sold over fifty acres across the road to the Mass. Department of Fish and Game to expand the Muddy Brook Wildlife Management Area.

Conservation nationwide got a boost at year end when Congress renewed a popular 2006 conservation tax incentive. The incentive now applies to tax years 2010 and 2011. Key pieces for Massachusetts landowners are: 1) the deduction limit a landowner can take for donating a conservation restriction moves from 30% of their income in any year to 50%; and 2) increases the number of years over which a donor can take deductions from 6 years to 16 years. The logic behind the continuation of this conservation tax incentive is so that landowners of moderate or lower income levels are better able to take full advantage of a conservation restriction donation.

One added benefit for Massachusetts landowners is the new state income tax credit for donations of conservation land to a municipality, state agency or non-profit corporations. The tax credit is valued at 50% of the appraised fair market value of the gift and capped at \$50,000. This tax credit is new in Massachusetts and many of the details still need to be ironed out, but this provides an added financial benefit to landowners interested in donating their land or conservation restriction for conservation purposes.

We all benefit so much from permanently protected land that it makes good tax policy to promote the voluntary donation of conservation restrictions. If you or someone you know wants more information about options for land conservation feel free to contact me.

Here at the East Quabbin Land Trust we expect another productive year promoting land conservation and stewardship within our communities. We greatly appreciate all the ways that you support conservation and wish you all the best in 2011. ■

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 trust, to become a member, or request a change of address, please contact our office at:

East Quabbin Land Trust
 120 Ridge Road, PO Box 5
 Hardwick, MA 01037-0005
 413.477.8229 (tel & fax)
 email: eqlt@comcast.net

Visit our website at www.eqlt.org

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VOLUNTEER PROFILE... A Word with Ginny Rich

EQLT ■ You've been on the Board since 2009. What is your favorite project?

GR ■ My favorite project is definitely the Massachusetts Central Rail Trail. I think it's fantastic that the abandoned rail bed can be used for recreation purposes. Eventually our section will connect to the other segments and traverse the Commonwealth from west to east; it can be used by the community for biking, walking, bird watching and cross country skiing. Rail trail development also preserves some of the history of railroading in our area.

EQLT ■ You've done a lot of volunteering over the years. What volunteer efforts were you a part of before joining the Board?

GR ■ My volunteer work began with the Tri Parish Community Church where everyone volunteered to help out in many ways such as suppers, choir, teaching, etc. When I moved to Barre I felt that it was time to become involved in the community and volunteered for the Recreation Commission of which I was a member for about 13 years. My husband, Don, and I were active in the Upper Ware River Watershed Association for many years. For awhile we were affiliated with the Chicopee River Association and had access to professional leadership etc. We had annual cleanups of the watershed, adopted a portion of the river and fostered an interest in the river with the Quabbin Regional High School students. Now that organization has disbanded and the smaller Upper Ware River Watershed Association is no longer active. I guess that these activities encouraged me to be active and make positive changes in the community in which we live.

EQLT ■ Sounds like the Ware River is an important place to you.

GR ■ Absolutely! At this point the Upper Ware River Watershed Association is no longer active, but the Ware River is still an area that needs love and attention. Mostly we need one or two good boat launch sites with parking available. The river is a beautiful place that can be enjoyed by people of all canoeing abilities. Mapping of the river would also be helpful as well as the ever-needed clean-up of trash from the watershed.

EQLT ■ What do you hope to help the land trust accomplish in the next couple years?

GR ■ I am every encouraged that the Land Trust is actively seeking to conserve land in certain contiguous areas to provide habitat for critters as well as trails that do not stop at the edge of the properties. The Board is a great group of people with very different backgrounds and abilities who work together very well. I hope that the Land Trust will be able to complete their section of the rail trail and spend more time clearing and marking trails of other land trust properties as well as acquiring more critical properties to conserve.

EQLT ■ You travel some in the winter-time. How do those experiences make you feel about living in our part of the country?

GR ■ In the winter we head south and enjoy the scenery and culture of other parts of the country. We camp at a lot of state parks and learn about their particular problems and their particular beauty. We spend several weeks camping on a Seminole Indian



Ginny Rich out at another evening meeting promoting conservation and the Ware River.

Reservation and learning more about their culture and how they care for the land on their own Reservation. It's wonderful to get away and enjoy warmer weather in the winter but it is also great to get home to see the crocuses pushing up from the ground followed by many months of flowers, vegetables and pleasant summer weather in New England. It's our home!

EQLT ■ From your travels do you see things that can we do better around here with regards to land conservation or stewardship?

GR ■ We, here in New England are more aware of the problems in the environment and are further ahead working toward solving them. Down South, particularly in Florida, the soil is very thin on top of coral and if they want to raise crops it requires a lot of fertilization. Also, there are more monocultures such as acres of citrus, corn, tomatoes, sugar cane, and other cash crops. These monocultures often encourage diseases that can be devastating to an entire harvest. Also, the migrant workers are not paid very well and don't have very good education and living conditions. We should spend more time educating our neighbors about the many benefits of buying locally produced food, using safe fertilizers and minimizing harmful pesticides. I often wonder why we all need to have lush green lawns full of chemicals that must watered frequently.

EQLT ■ Any final thoughts?

GR ■ I would add that it is a pleasure and privilege to be on the Board of the East Quabbin Land Trust. I value every member (those on the Board and the supporting members as well), support the mission of the Land Trust and only hope that I have added some of my own skills to help the EQLT to move forward.

Thank You to Our 2010 Donors

Generous support from the individuals and organizations listed allows us to continue to care for our natural environment and support a sustainable local economy. All contributions are greatly appreciated and are vital to our success. Every gift is important to us and helps us to fulfill our mission. We apologize for any errors or omissions. Thank you.

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Hands on Learning Projects

by Sarah Mildren

The service learning program is up and running here at the East Quabbin Land Trust. Since coming on board, I have been hard at work reaching out to the community to make everyone aware of this great new program, and the excellent service learning opportunities that we have to offer. I have also been out in the field visiting the properties, and formulating ideas on the types of projects that could be done on our land. One service learning project has been completed, and two others are currently underway.

The first project that I was involved in was a work day down at the rail trail. Becky Bottomley, the Envirothon coach at Quabbin Regional High School, brought some of her students out to help us put up some split rail fencing, and do some light trail maintenance. The group volunteered to do this work as part of the 350 project.

The 350 project is a global campaign that is working towards finding solutions to the climate crisis. Ensuring that people have access to the natural world is an important component of solving the climate crisis. Well maintained trails encourage people to get out and connect with nature by hiking, and exploring the natural surroundings. The Envirothon team did a great job cleaning up the trail, and building the split rail fences that will help guide people over the bridge, making it a safer place for outdoor recreation.

One project that is currently underway is a three part bird series with the Hardwick Tiger Cubs. Valerie Ruggles, the den leader was very excited about service learning activities that her scouts could participate in, and got involved immediately. The first part of this series had me teaching the enthusiastic 6 and 7 year old boys all about birds. I taught them 10 local bird species by showing them an interactive power point presentation, and playing a memory game with them. Then they made pinecone bird feeder that they got to take home and hang up to practice identifying birds. The second part of the series involved the boys building bird houses that are being hung at our properties. This part of the series would not have been possible if it weren't for our

expert bird house builder volunteer extraordinaire Ric Craig. Ric did a fantastic job explaining to the boys how to read the complicated bird house instructions, and use the tools to build the houses. Jim Conkey of C&M Roughcut lumber generously donated the rough cut pine with which the houses were built. Thanks to all who were involved we now have a bluebird house, a kestrel box and a wood duck box to enhance the local bird habitat. The last part of this series will take place on President's Day weekend in February, when the boys will be participating in the national Great Backyard Bird Count. The Tiger Cubs will work alongside bird experts to count birds and collect data which will then be submitted to the Audubon Society. So far the boys have put in a lot of great work, and I am looking forward to working with them on the bird count!



The Hardwick Tiger Scouts after a successful morning building bird boxes.

Another project that has begun is a quest that is being created for the Mandell Hill Property. Quabbin Regional High School senior Chrisoula Duros has taken on this task for her senior honors project. Quests are similar to scavenger hunts, and are becoming increasingly popular. Once the quest is created we will have a link up on our website in which the public will be able to access at any time. Chrisoula and I are also working on organizing an

opening day event to promote the new quest. The event is scheduled for January 22, 2011. During the event there will be several volunteers on site, and stationed throughout the questing trail to assist people trying out the quest. This will be a great opportunity to introduce quests to the general public, and provide basic instructions for beginners. We will also be serving hot refreshments for those that brave the cold to participate in this event. Chrisoula is holding this event in hopes of raising some money by collecting donations for the Feed the Hungry organization.

My term as Service Learning Coordinator ends on August 31, 2011, so there is plenty of time to organize a project for you to participate in! I do have several fun and exciting project ideas in the planning phase, so if you are looking to get outdoors, learn new things, and make a difference in our community by volunteering, get in touch with me at servicelearning@eqlt.org!

What is a Baseline Documentation Report?

by Alex Krofta

If you're renting a car and don't spring for the damage insurance, you must first walk around the car to document any existing dings, scrapes, and scratches on a tiny diagram. When you return the car, the company checks the actual car against the diagram to see if there are any new dings, scrapes, or scratches.

Conservation restriction stewardship operates on this same premise. The baseline documentation report (BDR) is like the tiny diagram, showing the condition of the property at the time the conservation restriction (CR) is recorded. CR monitoring is like the rental car attendant, using the BDR to check that the terms of the CR are being upheld.

Because the CR is a legal document stating the acceptable and unacceptable activities on the property, preparing the BDR is a legal requirement. Property boundaries must be found and marked with GPS. Photographs of relevant features must be taken. The conservation values of the property must be described, whether they are scenic, ecological, recreational, or otherwise. Any existing violations and areas of possible future violation must be reported.

Preparing a BDR begins with a virtual trip to the online records archive at the registry of deeds. Trickily worded documents like deeds and conservation restrictions are pored over. Initial CR planning is usually based on inaccurate assessor's maps, so a forester's or survey map is usually needed. Also, the MassGIS website provides maps of features from roads to rare species habitat. Once on the ground, iron pins, concrete bounds, stone walls, paint blazes, flagging tape, streams, ponds, vernal pools, paths, woods roads, clearings, house lots, and old cellar holes are eagerly sought, GPSed, and photographed. The photos, maps, documents, and a written description of the property are then assembled, and a copy is given to the property owner, the CR holder, and any government agency involved in the project.

This summer I prepared a BDR for the 40 acre Leehy CR in Hardwick. To start, I focused on boundaries and man-made features. To create an accurate digital map of the property lines, I followed the surveyor's map to all the marked points and took GPS coordinates, which I uploaded to ArcGIS (a computer mapping program) and used to create the map shapefile. I walked all the

trails with the GPS tracking feature, and added these routes to the map as well. This map, the photos, and written descriptions give future monitors a guide for navigating the property and locating key features.

These tasks are necessary, but hunting for iron pins and



Looking up Danforth Brook with winter ice forming.

staring at screens is not my first love. I work in land conservation because of a childhood fascination with bugs and snakes, their cohorts and environs, and I want to make sure there are some of those things left around. In this respect, preparing the Leehy CR was one of my favorite projects to date. I spent a lot of time wandering around, staring at trees, watching birds, and looking up plants in my Newcomb's field guide. I identified four different natural communities, and observed characteristics of a fifth, the rare Hickory – Hop Hornbeam Forest. I observed a variety of tree species –including hickories, hop hornbeam, basswood, elm, oaks, birches, maples, and conifers – and an abundance of understory shrubs and herbaceous plants. The rocky talus slopes, in particular, support unique and diverse plant communities in their nutrient-rich soil. The up-stream section of Danforth Brook fans out into smaller tributaries, mossy hummocks, and a flat, saturated landscape reminiscent of a mini-floodplain. A steep rock cliff, a

few huge old trees, and constantly circling hawks were icing on the cake during my field visits.

Ecological resource values at the site are very high, and this is not just my opinion. The Property lies in an area designated by the Mass Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program as BioMap Supporting Natural Landscape and Living Waters Critical Supporting Watershed, and contains Priority Habitat for Rare Species and Estimated Habitat of Rare Wildlife. It's also part of the 2000 acre, unfragmented habitat block known as the Dougal Range, the "Hardwick Area" of Mass Audubon's Quabbin Reservoir Watershed Important Bird Area, and protects frontage on the Danforth Brook, classified as a Coldwater Fish Resource. If that's not enough for you, the Leehys have undertaken a Wildlife Habitat Improvement Program (WHIP) project creating shrubland to enhance habitat values for rare species. The Leehy property is a real jackpot for the landscape and the ecology of Hardwick, as well as a real privilege to visit.

Conserving the land, Preserving our heritage

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EQLT News | INSIDE...



Hands on Learning

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UPCOMING EVENTS

JANUARY...

Saturday, January 22, 1:00 PM TO 3:00 PM at the Barre Senior Center

Future of Your Land – This workshop will help you and your neighbors gain a better understanding of the land conservation process. A landowner who conserved their own land will share their experiences. Cynthia Henshaw and Attorney George Dresser will present critical information and answer your questions.

FEBRUARY...

Friday, February 4, 7:00 PM at the Rutland Library

Follow the Women – Local representative, Octavia Taylor will share her experiences with other women bicycling throughout the Middle East encouraging peace in a region of great turmoil.

Saturday, February 19, 5:00 PM at the Cultural Center at Eagle Hill

Tenth Annual Dinner and Silent Auction – Come join us for a festive dinner and silent auction at the Cultural Center at Eagle Hill School in Hardwick and catered by Reed's Catering of New Braintree. Tickets are \$55.00 per person. If you have an item you wish to donate for the auction, contact the office at 413-477-8229 or chenshaw@eqlt.org before February 11th.

MARCH...

Saturday, March 19, 9:00 AM starting at 183 Mechanic Street, Gilbertville

Snowshoe or Hike the Dougal Range – Join your fellow outdoor enthusiasts to traverse the Dougal Range from north to south. We will pass through many of the properties protected in the past few years and see unique spots on the Range. Dress for the weather and bring a lunch and plenty of water.

SATURDAY WORKDAYS...

Join us at 9am on the first Saturday of the month and volunteer to help with the maintenance of EQLT properties. Please contact the office at 413-477-8229 to confirm which location will be the work site for each Saturday.