

PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE

By Cynthia Henshaw

The work of the East Quabbin Land Trust can be fast-paced and have direct impacts. For instance, recently we had an emergency board member conference call to discuss whether or not to bid on a property that was up for auction the following day. Our board of directors made the time to talk and rallied to move forward – all with 12 hours of notice. It's great to have a nimble organization that can move quickly when needed.

But, sometimes it's good to slow down and think about the future. 'Who do we want to be when we grow up?' kinds of questions. Next year we are celebrating 25-years of land conservation and stewardship and education. That's a big deal and we've got some big goals and projects in mind to accomplish in the next five-years.

In general, feedback from our volunteers and members is that overall we're on the right track with our current scope of conservation, stewardship and educational programs. It's most helpful to engage people of all ages and abilities outdoors, to really experience the beauty and resilience of the land that sustains us. The Mass Central Rail Trail, Wendemuth Meadow, Mandell Hill, Frohloff Farm, Henry's Grove and Pynchon's Grist Mill Preserve form the core of our flagship properties network. Each preserve has trails that take visitors to unique features or historic structures. We've also completed stewardship projects and shared the results. Like using llamas to graze and control multiflora rose, or intentionally burning the pitch pine and grassland area at Frohloff Farm, or monitoring for breeding pairs of bobolinks at Wendemuth Meadow. Having at least one flagship property in each of our eight core communities continues to be a major priority.

Another top priority for the next five years is to increase the mileage of the Mass Central Rail Trail through Ware, Hardwick, New Braintree and Barre. We know how important the three-mile section in Hardwick and New Braintree has become. Just look at the number of cars regularly parked at the site of the

former New Braintree railroad station. Currently we are preparing a license request application to National Grid, who owns 2.7 miles of the former railroad bed in Ware and Hardwick. We hope to receive their approval this year. Then the process of building the rail trail can begin, and this time with no bridges to repair! Success will mean more miles available for residents to exercise on and use for commuting.



*Board members at last year's fall retreat:
seated (l to r) Ann Hicks, Mark Mattson and Rick Romano,
standing (l to r) Ginny Rich, Jerry Reilly, Judith Jones,
Stan White and Cynthia Henshaw
Not pictured: Stephen Brewer, Martha Klassanos, and Harry Webb*

Conserving the land is a good first step, but lasting conservation needs real engagement. That includes getting our hands and knees dirty while exploring and doing things outdoors. Building our fledgling citizen science program is a priority for the next five-years. So far, we set up vegetation monitoring plots, check soil fertility, set insect traps to check for invasive beetles, and counted breeding bobolink pairs. Monitoring bird, insect and mammal populations over

time will help guide our stewardship – such as, create more clearings in the woods, adjust the time of mowing hay fields, and even the dog-walking policy are informed by this information. Join us in early May as we count the number of male bobolinks setting up nesting territories at Wendemuth Meadow and Mandell Hill.

We know that our fields, woods and wetlands are open to visitors, but not everyone feels comfortable or welcome to explore. So, we are planning targeted events and activities to encourage a broader diversity of people to get outdoors. On Saturday, June 30th we are hosting a Wheel-a-thon at the Mass Central Rail Trail. The goal is to encourage individuals and families that need wheels – especially wheelchairs and strollers – to get around. We'll have volunteers available to help push, if needed. Also, information stops, a wagon ride, music, and food. This is an opportunity to expose people with mobility challenges to the wonders of the rail trail and encourage them to visit again and again. Please get in touch if you'd like to help plan this event or volunteer to help that day.

Keeping the mission at the forefront means

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MESSAGE FROM THE Executive Director

Cynthia Henshaw



The annual Massachusetts Land Conservation Conference is a great opportunity to connect with colleagues, dive-in deeper on specific topics of interest and get energized to continue the important work of conserving the land that is vital for ourselves and communities. Here is a little bit of what I learned.

The accounting session reviewed many critical aspects of an organizations financial statements, Annual Report, Form PC and federal 990; all good reminders of what EQLT is already doing. The session started out with a discussion on the changes to the tax code and what they might mean to land trusts. For instance, the standard deduction levels are increased significantly, meaning that donors may no longer get a financial break for their gifts because they won't need to itemize the deductions. That may mean that potential donors will stop giving to their favorite charities. Also, there is now a charitable gift cap of 50% of the donors adjusted gross income. This may impact some land donations or larger cash donations at times when the donor does not have a high annual income. The real implications of these tax changes are still unknown. However, please know that we are grateful for all your contributions, at all levels.

Another session explored Ceremonial Stone Landscapes, which are found across the Commonwealth and the country. Now, I'll be keeping my eyes open when exploring more properties because not all stone walls or cairns were made as fences or trail waypoints. Doug Harris, a member of the Narragansett tribe, described serpentine rows of rocks that have a large, vertical beginning rock that is the head. Just behind, in a small cavity is an orange rock and the linear row of rock is not perfectly straight. Rock piles were made when the tribal medicine man picked up a smaller rock, spoke a prayer for healing and to focus the trauma into the rock. By placing the rock on a larger boulder or outcropping, then the trauma would stay in that location and not continue to be a problem because the balance with Mother Earth is restored.

The third session described how drone images combined with high-altitude aerial photograph, and ground-truthing provide essential information about changes to the land. Critical information when others are cutting trees or making other changes to land trust properties or lands conserved with a Conservation Restriction. Members of the Wellesley Conservation Council described the way they are using a drone to bring high-resolution images from 200 feet above ground into their stewardship and engagement work. We'd like to do this, too! If you have a drone, and want to volunteer to help map and monitor our Preserves please contact me. ■

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 farms, woods 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.

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
 P.O. Box 5, 120 Ridge Road
 Hardwick, MA 01037-0005
 413-477-8229 (tel)
 email: EQLT@comcast.net

Visit our website at www.EQLT.org
 or "Like" us on Facebook!

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PASSIONS FOR THEATER AND WILDLIFE ABOUND

An interview with Linda and John Tomasi

By Cynthia Henshaw

John came out the door to greet me as I arrived to interview John and Linda Tomasi. I'm used to dogs barking and the mad scramble to keep various pets in the house, or out of the house, or not to jump and lick strangers. But at the Tomasi's an insistent cooing noise caught my attention, and there was Kramer strutting back and forth along the eave, begging to be let in. John relented, and a full-grown Rock Dove swept through the door and over to the top of his cabinet, in clear view of the kitchen and all the goings-on that happens there.

Kramer has stuck around, while many other animals that Linda and John rescued over the years took their food and hospitality, and went off to live their lives. Growing up at Maple Hill Farm on Prouty Road in Hardwick provided an excellent background for the care of wildlife. Linda remembers people dropping off injured wildlife or ones too young to survive on their own. Daily, her father and brothers would drive around to find road-kill to feed the animals.

Just last spring, Linda and John rescued four phoebe chicks when their mother didn't return. From previous rescues and research, Linda carefully mixed a combination of oddities to feed and nourish the nearly featherless baby birds crushed meal worm, dried cat food soaked in water until mushy, ground crickets, avian powder, exact and calcium carbonate. Happily, Eeny, Meeny, Miney and Moe flew away in the early fall. Now Linda and John anxiously await the spring to see if the phoebes return to nest at their house this year!

Kramer has been with the Tomasi's for nine years. They've also raised squirrels, bats, an otter, rabbits, and other birds. From these experiences, Linda marvels at the intelligence and native skills of many wildlife. John's grandfather had a farm, so he too had similar wildlife encounters during his youth, even though much of his time was spent in urban areas close to New York City.

Linda and John met while performing in theater on Martha's Vineyard. Linda was managing and designing hotel interiors and John was woodworking and building custom furniture. Onto New York they traveled and were able to actually afford an apartment for

eight years. They continued to do design work and managed to stay in the music and theater scenes. John can build or create just about anything needed and Linda has a great eye for color and imagining the possibilities. Jonda Design was created combining their complimentary and creative forces. In fact, Linda and John finished the first round of renovations at the East Quabbin Land Trust offices.



Being involved with renovations, they attend auctions seeking out furniture or decorative items to use in their projects. Auctions are great places to find good deals. For instance, at an auction from a Lowell textile museum, they picked up an amazing spinning wheel, carding machine and several other items. These are the real thing, and will make amazing accent pieces for someone's house. Linda

and John donate a large number of items to the land trust's annual Dinner and Silent Auction fundraising event. Last year, their donations included a stool that Linda completely refurbished, historic maps of area towns, and various curios and prints. Can't wait to see what they collected for the silent auction this year. We are pleased to honor them as Sponsors of our event.

Linda and John's creative outlets continue as they artistically and music direct, costume, build sets, and paint scenery for their Theater production group "Gilbert Players". They found a new home at the Eagle Hill Center ten years ago and have been going strong since. With an amazing cast of performers and a directors dream stage, the Tomasi's can boast sold out performances for most of their shows. Past (almost Broadway quality shows) include, Little Mermaid, Annie, Wizard of Oz, Into the Woods, The Producers and countless others. They are preparing for their mid-April Spring show, a comical Cabaret!!!! Keep an eye out for their family Fall show 'SHREK' The Musical. Auditions coming up in May!

Linda and John are incredibly talented people, combining their creativity, enthusiasm and hard work to develop wonderful theatrical productions, bold renovations, and benefiting community organizations like the East Quabbin Land Trust. ■

GARAGE TAKES SHAPE

Last year the East Quabbin Land Trust embarked on a project to build a garage in our parking area at 120 Ridge Road in Hardwick. The goal is to have dedicated space for our Stewardship team. With over 1,200 acres of land and 850 acres of conservation restrictions to manage, our volunteers need space to store tools and tractor, work benches for projects and repairs. Students from Pathfinder Regional Vocational Technical High School's carpentry program are doing the lion-share of

the construction project. The goal is to finish the building before school ends in June. The winter weather and other school demands have crimped the amount of time the students can be on site, but members of the junior and senior class are learning the ins and outs of construction through this process and from their teacher, Mr. Z. We thank them all for making this garage a reality for the Stewardship team. We will have a celebration once it is completed, and hope you can join us. ■



SPRING INTERNSHIP WITH EQLT

By Ashley Dziejma, Senior at Worcester State University

Currently, an accessible trail is in the works on the Frohloff Farm in Ware. The trail will use the former railroad bed as its base and create a loop to the Ware River. An accessible trail is designed with different physical ability levels in mind to allow for maximum participation with nature. The trails are wider than a single-track trail, between three to six feet, and with a harder surface to allow better stability for wheelchair and mobility-aid users. Did you know there are specific ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) guidelines for accessible trails for width, surface, slope and other characteristics?

As an intern to the East Quabbin Land Trust, my role is to research and draft an interpretive plan and several signs. Over the course of this semester, I researched best practices for accessible trails. Some books I've found helpful, for those who are interested, are *Everyone's Nature* (2002) by Carol Hunter and the Mass Audubon's *All Persons Trail Guide*, which is available online for free. The final interpretation plan may include color signage, hands-on learning experiences, and audio-tour stops where detailed information can be listened to through visitor's phones.

I've created a sign for trail users to learn more about the pitch pines along the trail. When they read the sign, they'll discover that where they're standing used to be a glacial outwash, with sandy soils--the perfect environment for future pitch pines. Pitch pines thrive in sandy soils where other trees struggle. Some other trail features in the works are tactile signs and trail activities.

Planning for the Future continued from page 1...

ensuring that people want to be involved; whether that is supporting the mission through direct financial gifts or gifts of their time. Both types of gifts are valuable and encouraging both types of gifts is also a priority for the next five-year period. We will roll out a planned giving program that recognizes the diverse ways people can support conservation and stewardship and education through end-of-life contributions. These types of gifts are often larger than annual contributions and, if desired, targeted to specific initiatives. Planned gifts can be transformative for an organization. For instance, the gift from the Estate of Betty Mixter Morss propelled the East Quabbin Land Trust forward with its stewardship program through the gift of her house, property and endowment. From this gift, Mandell Hill was born, giving the opportunity to explore the intersection of animal grazing, grassland bird management and inviting people to explore the property. We learned a lot in the past 15 years, and continue to experiment, like introducing llamas to the stewardship mix. It's likely that planned gifts of the future will provide new, transformative opportunities for the East Quabbin Land Trust and our communities. ■

Learning about the land trust community is another aspect of this internship I've enjoyed. I've attended a few committee meetings to plan for an accessibility event this summer. The "Wheel-A-Thon" is scheduled for Saturday, June 30th at the Mass Central Rail Trail in New Braintree. The event will have volunteers ready to help visitors with mobility challenges, a wagon ride, food and activities. The interpretive information I've collected about the railroad, Ware River and wildlife habitats in region will be shared with visitors. Participating in these planning meetings has been an enriching and eye-opening experience.

Seniors in geography at Worcester State are encouraged to intern to learn more about careers in their field. For the past four years, I worked summers at Mass Audubon, so I wanted to gain experience with a different side of education and conservation. This internship is a valuable learning opportunity because I think accessibility through universal design is really important. No one should be barred from experiencing our natural world because of inaccessibility. I'm thankful to have a hand in this important project.

After graduation I'd love to continue working in the environment and helping kids and adults of all abilities and backgrounds learn about and appreciate the great outdoors. Being able to lend my knowledge, research, and past experience to such an important goal as this has been a joy. I hope to continue increasing access to nature in more locations in the future. ■

Recent Gifts Made in Memory of:

Richard Bachtold
JoAnn Waite Bennett
Henry Gainley
Mick Huppert
Lorna Henshaw
Jack Hinckley
Chuck Kidd
Robert Potter
Great Grandmother Provi
William Rogers
Robert G. Smith
Hans Thoma
Donald T. Williams
Magi Ziff

Recent Gifts Made in Honor of:

Ted Cady
Caren Caljouw
Barbara Corey
Mary Griffin
Mick Huppert
Roger Henshaw
Alan Hodder and Harbour Fraser Hodder
Jerry and Liz Reilly
Wendemuth Meadow

VARIETY IS THE SPICE OF LIFE

By Cynthia Henshaw

Taking care of any piece of land can be tricky. The decisions about what to do, or not to do, revolves around your frame of reference; what do you want to accomplish? Right now, the East Quabbin Land Trust is responsible for over 1,200 acres, and the vast majority of that is growing trees. We achieve our over-arching goal of keeping the land as open space because the land is permanently conserved through conservation restrictions. Since we have many other goals, things get more complicated. We want diverse wildlife, healthy trees, clean water, recreational trails, local food, deeper soils, and good community, to name a few. Finding the balance between goals is the job of each landowner. Fortunately, we have a dedicated stewardship team, excellent professional support, and the willingness to consider the latest science and diverse opinions.

It's no longer cost-effective to prune white pines or plant new trees, and we are fortunate to live in New England where the soils have enough nutrients and water is plentiful. Trees grow quickly. That leaves our basic management options about whether or not to cut the trees, and if so, how to do the cutting to best accomplish our goals. Forestry and wildlife research shows that having a diversity of the types of trees and trees of different ages makes the woods more resilient to changes. That's true whether it's an ice storm, invading insect, flood or wind storm. So, that saying "variety is the spice of life" definitely applies to long-term woodland management, too.

The East Quabbin Land Trust has done several cuts. At Deer Park Preserve ten acres of mature or larger trees were cut in 2011 to create an opening along Fish Brook up to the ledges. The goal is to have young, shrubby tree growth in the area. Lots of insects, birds and mammals use the young trees for shelter, food and nesting locations. That was successful enough that we got a second grant to cut the area again in 2016.

At Mandell Hill, we've actually converted woods back into fields. That's an intensive effort, but our goal was to improve breeding habitat for bobolinks, meadowlarks and other grassland birds. Since these birds reproduce better when there is an unimpeded view across grassy fields, taking down the five-acre wedge of trees was a critical piece of our management strategy. Grassland birds are breeding at Mandell Hill and the fields are grazed each year after the young have fledged.

Henry's Grove is a 94-acre wooded property in Hubbardston. Sisters, Joyce Lofgren and Judith

Bothwell remember planting red pines, larch and spruce on the property when they were teenagers. Those trees are now 50+ feet tall and many are growing well on the sandy soils. Other areas naturally regenerated with white pine, oaks, maples and hemlock after the 1938 hurricane. The kettle holes, sandy banks, river's edge, short slopes and wetland flows are examples of a diverse landscape. Our immediate management goals are to improve the health and quality of the woods while increasing the wildlife habitat diversity. Cutting some of the trees will get the woods closer to that condition. As we plan the timber harvest, maintaining high quality wetlands and waterways is a priority, so the heavy equipment operators will take care to minimize soil erosion and compaction around the wet areas.

One area includes a thick stand of white pines 15 – 20 feet tall. Cutting the larger trees will increase light available to them, allowing faster growth. In another area the trees are crooked, with multiple stems, and not many young trees present. In this area a series of patch cuts, or groupings of ½-acre to two-acres in size, will have all the trees removed, opening up the soil to total sunlight and encouraging new seedlings to start growing. The trees

outside of these groupings will be left to continue growing. Closer to the road there are lots of well-formed saplings, and the larger trees overhead are starting to slow their growth. By removing most of the larger trees, the next generation can grow more quickly. By cutting some trees in a variety of patterns, the end result will be more resilient trees across the property.

The wildlife that uses Henry's Grove will notice the harvesting and the changes to the woods over the years. Many species that need dense stands of young trees will find more food and cover after the trees are cut, such as turkey, white-tailed deer, American woodcock, Eastern towhee, brown thrasher and wood turtles. Fortunately, Henry's Grove does not have many invasive plants growing. We expect the native trees and shrubs to grow well in the harvested area. Monitoring the changes over time, and removing any invasive plant on the property is part of our long-term work. In preparation, we will invite our neighbors and members to join us for a walk on the property, to speak with our forester and learn more about the planned harvest.

When the harvest is completed we will share the results, on-the-ground reality and how the numbers worked. ■



Forester Roger Plourde walking Henry's Grove in Hubbardston with Stewardship Committee members Phil Warbasse, Tom Clough and Halley Stillman

SUSTAINERS MAKE A HABIT OF SUPPORT

By Richard Cavanaugh

There is a saying, “We are what we repeatedly do.” Perhaps Mahatma Gandhi expressed it more eloquently when, he said, “Your beliefs become your thoughts. Your thoughts become your words. Your words become your actions. Your actions become your habits. Your habits become your values. Your values become your destiny.”

Sustainers are those who make a habit of supporting the East Quabbin Land Trust by making regular monthly gifts.

Sustainers make giving easy. You can become an EQLT Sustainer by simply going online to www.eqlt.org and hit the Donate button to set up credit card payments. You can also contact your bank to schedule regularly issued checks. Gifts of just \$10 per month, amount to \$120 by year's end. Monthly payments of \$42 a month or more entitle an individual to become a member of EQLT's Leadership Circle. Members of the Leadership Circle enjoy unique experiences to get outdoors, to gain detailed insights about existing plans, and to share ideas about conservation in our region.

Sustainers are in control. You'll set the amount of the credit card charges or payments from the bank account of your choice, and EQLT will keep track of



Sustainers foster EQLT's growth with regular gifts

your payments and provide you a year-end accounting for tax purposes. If your life changes, you can change or suspend your Sustainer gifts at any time by simply going back online or by contacting your bank.

Sustainers play a critical role at the East Quabbin Land Trust. You provide an ongoing source of revenue throughout the year, not just at the time of the spring and fall appeals. You help landowners find ways to protect the natural resources we care for and depend on, whether its prime agricultural soils, forests, or safe drinking water. You provide educational programming for young and old alike, and you help establish stewardship best practices that can carry this region

into the future.

Please become a Sustainer so that your habit of supporting the East Quabbin Land Trust can ultimately help shape this region's destiny.

If you want any additional information on EQLT's Sustainer program, please call (413) 477-8229 or send an email to rcavanaugh@eqlt.org. But please remember, a gift at any level and by any means is meaningful, deeply appreciated, and contributes significantly towards what the East Quabbin Land Trust can do in our region. ■

Nature – Close Up

As we prepare events and activities for this season of being outdoors, we need your help illustrating the point. Can you help? We know that a picture is worth a thousand words.

Send us your favorite photograph that exemplifies “Nature – Close Up”. But be sure to include yourself, a friend or family member in the photograph. We want to know how you see Nature – Close Up. Show us the wonder, discovery and joy that comes from deeply connecting to the natural world and to your family or friends outside. Capture the feelings of why being Close Up in Nature forges such strong bonds and emotions. Use your imagination and surprise us!

Please share your photographs with a brief description of who is in the picture, what they are doing, and where they are. Also, let us know who took the picture for photo credit, and if the pictured individuals should be named or not when the photo is used.

Photos will be used to publicize East Quabbin Land Trust events and activities, through the newsletter, website and Facebook page. Photos can be emailed to chenshaw@EQLT.org or rcavanaugh@EQLT.org. Photographers of the top five images, as chosen by the Board of Directors, will receive an East Quabbin Land Trust tee-shirt as our thanks. ■

PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE



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UPCOMING EVENTS...

APRIL... Saturday, April 28th, 5:30 PM - 9 PM

Seventeenth Annual Dinner and Silent Auction, at Eagle Hill School, Petersham Road, Hardwick: This is our signature fundraising event with a silent auction that benefits land conservation and stewardship in the East Quabbin region. Support conservation of our communities by joining us at the dinner and by donating an attic treasure, service or vacation that can be auctioned.

MAY... Saturday, May 5th, 10 AM - noon

Walk at Muddy Brook Wildlife Management Area, meet at the WMA entrance on Patrill Hollow Road, Hardwick: The habitat restoration work - large clearing and prescribed burns - is producing results. Join us to learn more about the work on the land and how things have changed.

Sunday, May 6th, 8 AM - 10 AM

Grassland Bird Monitoring, Wendemuth Meadow in North Brookfield and Mandell Hill in Hardwick: Bring your binoculars and bird books to help count the number of singing male bobolinks in the fields and other birds on the preserves. Tracking breeding success and other species helps to track how well our stewardship practices are working over time. We will start at Wendemuth Meadow, 25 Bates Street, North Brookfield and then caravan to Mandell Hill.

JUNE... Saturday, June 9th, 10 AM - noon

Reading from Witness Tree by author Lynda Mapes & EQLT Annual Membership Meeting, at the Stone Church, Gilbertville: Share brunch with fellow EQLTers and then enjoy a reading and talk by Lynda Mapes from her recent book, Witness Tree. RSVP required for brunch to Cynthia at chenshaw@EQLT.org. Program is free and open to the public.

Saturday, June 30th, 10 AM - 2 PM

Wheel-A-Thon for all who need wheels to get outdoors, at the Mass Central Rail Trail, New Braintree: Whether you use a wheelchair, stroller or other wheels to explore, join us for this fun time. There will be: volunteers to help, nature interpretation stops, wagon ride, food and more. Don't miss it!