



Expanding the Conservation Land Tax Credit Program

By Cynthia Henshaw

Conserving land is the ‘bread and butter’ work of the East Quabbin Land Trust. Willing landowners make land conservation possible. Their love of their properties is palpable, and their joy in knowing that the trees, plants and wildlife can continue to grow is contagious.

Finding the needed funding to conserve their land is not always possible, but thanks to the Massachusetts Conservation Land Tax Credit (CLTC) program, more landowners are able to make their conservation dreams come true. The East Quabbin Land Trust is currently working with seven landowners, and another application will be submitted soon. Here’s a brief synopsis of lands that will be permanently protected in the coming years with funding support from the Mass CLTC program:

- A beautiful eight-acre hayfield in Hardwick
- 77-acres of woods in New Braintree

that are part of a silvopasture cattle farm

- Over 60-acres of woods that line Danforth Brook in Hardwick
- 34-acres of fields, pasture, and woods of a small historic farm in Oakham
- 12-acres of woods adjacent to existing conservation lands in Petersham
- 34-acres of woods along the Ware River in Wheelwright
- 26-acres of woods and pasture along Muddy Brook in Hardwick

What makes the Mass CLTC program so important is the combination of 1) prioritizing lands with critical natural and historic assets, and 2) providing a financial incentive to participating landowners who are donating their land or conservation restriction. The Mass CLTC program is so effective and popular that there is a backlog of

landowner applications, so many in fact that conservation donations requested today cannot happen until 2025.

Hopefully, by the time you read this article in July, our state senate and representatives will have found a compromise to scale up the annual funding cap. This will make it possible for landowners to conserve their lands when they are ready, and not be forced to wait until funding is available several years in the future (read below for more details.) We are fortunate in central Massachusetts that all our current legislators – Senator Anne Gobi, Rep. Donald Berthiaume, Rep. Susanna Whipps, and Rep. Todd Smola – are supportive of expanding the Mass CLTC program funding. Please thank them when you see them next. Their support is critical to conserving the vital farms and woods that make the East Quabbin region such a beautiful place to live. ■



Hayfield on the soon-to-be conserved eight-acre property in Hardwick

Why Expand the Conservation Land Tax Credit Program?

The Mass CLTC program provides a tax credit payment to landowners who donate their land or conservation restriction for permanent conservation. The payment is 50% of the donation value, up to \$75,000. This program funding means that landowners who want to see their lands conserved into the future but can’t afford an outright gift have a viable option to fulfill their dreams.

Currently the Mass CLTC program has an annual cap of \$2 million, effectively limiting the number of donations across the Commonwealth to approximately 30 a year. So many landowners are

interested in this program that there is a waiting list to 2025. Expanding the cap to \$5 million over the next several years will allow more landowners to conserve their lands when they are ready, and not have to wait in line. Our hope is that the state legislature has compromised and come to agreement on expanding the tax credit funding for critical land conservation.

Since 2011, the Mass CLTC program has permanently conserved 13,380 acres of land with significant conservation value, including prime forest soils, prime agricultural soils, drinking water lands, and habitat for fish and wildlife, including rare species. Each \$1 of state tax credit has leveraged \$4.25 of private land donated value.

MESSAGE FROM THE Executive Director

Cynthia Henshaw



During a recent visit to the Mass Central Rail Trail segment at the Frohloff Farm in Ware, I met a couple walking their dog. They enjoyed seeing the river and imagined bringing her mom back for a visit. They especially appreciated the opportunity to get outdoors on a trail where a scooter can be used because of limited mobility challenges. We are glad they tried it, because the firm mixed stone dust surface is great for strollers, wheelchairs, scooters, and bicycles.

National Grid owns the 2.3 miles of former railroad bed on either side of EQLT's finished half-mile section off Church Street. We are requesting a license agreement with National Grid to expand the Mass Central Rail Trail, and the paperwork included a survey of the electrical wire heights where they cross and run alongside the trail. The wetland permitting is approved. We are hopeful that approval from National Grid comes soon so that the first phase of construction can begin this fall.

The Mass Central Railroad was built in the 1880's and connected Northampton with Boston, travelling 104 miles across

the central part of the Commonwealth. The train was built to carry freight and passengers. Ultimately the economics and severe storm events, like the hurricane of 1938, proved too much to keep the whole line open. The western portion continued onto Wheelwright in the early 70's when the paper mill closed down. With the loss of the active railroad, the abandoned rail bed segments are being converted to the Mass Central Rail Trail and providing residents and visitors alike the opportunity to exercise on a safe, level trail outdoors.

Advocates for the Mass Central Rail Trail across the Commonwealth will be meeting this fall in Gilbertville at the Stone Church to learn from each other. To date, nearly half of the rail trail mileage is completed, with plans to build out more miles in the works. It's inspiring to share a common vision of reconnecting our communities and to show others how the Mass Central Rail Trail is having a positive impact in our region. ■

THE EAST QUABBIN LAND TRUST

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

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
Email: EQLT@comcast.net

**Visit our website at www.EQLT.org
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Get to Know Our Seasonal Tree Planting Crew: Pam Skowyra and Janelle Paradis

By Cynthia Henshaw

The East Quabbin Land Trust and its partners (Opacum Land Trust, MassConn Sustainable Forest Partnership, US Forest Service, and Mass. Dept. Conservation and Recreation), are expanding the urban forest canopy in Ware and Southbridge. More trees are cut down each year than replanted in both communities. Trees provide more than shade on hot summer days - they prevent soil erosion, provide wildlife habitat, and clean the air we breathe. The goal is to plant 2,000 new trees in Ware and Southbridge. If you own a property in the downtown areas of either town, contact us to see if your property is eligible: (413) 477-8229.

Why are you interested in planting trees?

PS: I love trees, and hate when trees need to be cut down. Trees are wonderful, all that photosynthesis is so needed for life on Earth. Trees help the wildlife, bring shade to our yards, and everyone feels better around trees!

JP: I love working outside and making things grow. This position is a natural fit.

Why did you want to get involved with this planting project?

PS: It sounded like a great idea, to bring nature to areas that don't have enough trees. I like to be physical and work outdoors. The whole initiative sounded very appealing to me, kind of like planting a garden, only on a larger scale. I love the natural world and bringing that into areas that don't have enough trees is important, especially in places where kid's play because we know children do better when there are trees in their environment.

JP: This project seemed like a good opportunity to do the type of work that I enjoy while giving back to the community and the environment.

What experiences did you bring to this tree planting effort?

PS: I am a retired nuclear medicine technologist, so no direct professional knowledge. Just lots of garden work and other outdoor projects. I did bring a willingness to learn, get dirty, and I know how to use a shovel! I learned a lot about how to plant a tree through this experience and am looking forward to planting more trees in the fall.

JP: I have quite a few years of experience in landscaping as well as some experience in tree work. I'm also a biology major. It has been very rewarding to be able to apply the knowledge and skills that I have to a project that I care about.

What was the best thing about planting trees this spring?

PS: Definitely meeting and talking with the homeowners. They were so grateful and appreciative to have the trees planted. It was very rewarding to be part of this project and getting more trees into the ground.

JP: The best thing about planting this spring has been feeling the sun on

my face and the dirt between my fingers after a long winter. It's also been rewarding to know how much people appreciate what we are doing.

Any specific goals for the fall planting season?

P.S. I'd like to learn more about the trees themselves. There's a whole variety of shapes, sizes, and conditions that are available for homeowners. It would be nice to know more about why specific varieties get planted in certain areas. After planting 45+ trees this spring, the mechanics of tree planting are familiar even though each tree is different, with different challenges with the roots or branches. It will be great to learn more about the varieties and how they fit into specific site constraints.

JP: I would love to see an increase in the number of trees we are able to plant next season. I think having a stronger online presence would be very beneficial to project outreach and encourage more homeowners to want one or more free trees planted for them. ■



Janelle and Pam after planting and staking a tree.



Assuring that there's a strong connection between the tree roots and soil is essential for the tree's survival. It's important to remove soil air pockets when the planted tree is first watered, so the soil is massaged or kneaded.

"I can't stress enough that the trees are FREE, and I'm happy to plant them for you!"
-Pam Skowyra

Thank you to our 2021 Challenge and Auction Corporate Sponsors!



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No-Till Community Garden Started

By Jess Cusworth

Want to join a community garden and get hands-on experience with no-till practices? Look no further than Wendemuth Meadow! This no-till community garden is spearheaded and maintained by three hardworking volunteers, Tom Clough, Ken Abair, and Ann Hicks. You are encouraged to join the team!

We hope to expand access to fresh produce and to share the benefits of soil rejuvenation through no-till practices - a win-win for all involved!

Not only is tilling a time-consuming chore, it's also damaging to soil health and contributing to climate change. Soils can store the excess carbon absorbed by plants through photosynthesis. When soil is tilled, the stored carbon comes in contact with the air and releases carbon dioxide back into

the atmosphere, adding more greenhouse gases that contribute to climate change. Carbon is a main component of soil organic matter, so this carbon loss reduces soil's ability to retain water and disrupts microbial activity, which decreases soil fertility. Despite the millennium-old tradition, forgoing tilling is key for maintaining soil health.

No-till gardening replaces tilling with mulching of organic matter to lock in soil moisture, suppress weeds, and add nutrients to the soil as the organic matter breaks down. This year, the vegetables in the community garden are growing in straw bales with a layer of compost added on top. These straw bales underwent a special conditioning process before planting the vegetables to begin the decomposition process, which turns the straw into compost

throughout the season. As the straw breaks down, it adds a new layer of organic matter to build the soil for next year's planting, when seeds will be sown directly into the ground. Adding this organic matter replaces tilling. The result is a garden full of rich, fertile soil that hasn't released carbon to the atmosphere.

Join the team! Come help care for and harvest the established vegetables in the community garden. Tomatoes, lettuce, cucumbers, and more will need to be taken home and enjoyed this season! Next season, we'll divvy up plots in the garden to folks who are interested in planting produce of their choice. Contact Jess at Jcusworth@eqtl.org for more information on joining! ■



Tom, Ann, and Ken preparing the garden site



Peppers growing out of the conditioned straw bales



Tom and Ken giving a tour of the garden



Tom explaining the conditioning process for the straw

Taking the Next Steps in Life: Youth Groups and a New Adventure

By Pat Allison

As we grow up, we hone in on certain skills or hobbies that we enjoy, and many are able to make a career out of them. Some, like myself, go down a route of working with nature and sharing it with others. I was obsessed with animals, science, and nature when I was young, and I had opportunities to catch critters such as crayfish at my local summer camp. Youth groups such as these are important for providing kids with a chance to learn about all kinds of different things, from the arts to sciences. During my time with the East Quabbin Land Trust, I have worked with the Hardwick Youth Center and the Quabbin Regional High School Envirothon team. Both are excellent opportunities for students to learn about the natural world at a variety of ages.

The Hardwick Youth Center serves the youth that live in Hardwick and its surrounding villages. They have several groups based on age, and I primarily work with the 6-12th graders. The Youth Center provides a fantastic opportunity for kids to meet new people and learn different skills and hobbies. This was especially important during the pandemic, as in-person learning was very limited. We've recently been enjoying the warm weather playing frisbee and badminton, along with fishing and looking for critters in our local waterways.

The Quabbin Regional High

School Envirothon team is a group of high school students participating in the Massachusetts Envirothon. The Envirothon is a state-wide environmental education program and academic competition for high school students. Students learn about water, soil, wildlife, and forest resources, with the "Current Issue" for 2021 revolving around water management and climate change. This year was more challenging than others, as almost the entire program was done virtually. However, the students were still able to learn about many different aspects of water resources in the state, while interviewing locals, biologists, and environmental stewards of our area.

Both the Hardwick Youth Center and Quabbin Regional High School Envirothon team are important for the development of our youth. By experimenting with different skills and hobbies, youth are able to find what they enjoy the most. This is especially important for high school students, who will be making decisions about attending college, tech schools, or other specialized schools. By working with these groups, I am able to provide some background experience in nature, especially freshwater ecosystems. For some, it may not be for them. Others may really enjoy exploring nature and catching critters, and may want to pursue it as a career in the future. Even if they do not choose to

go down that path, they still come away with a greater appreciation for the natural world.

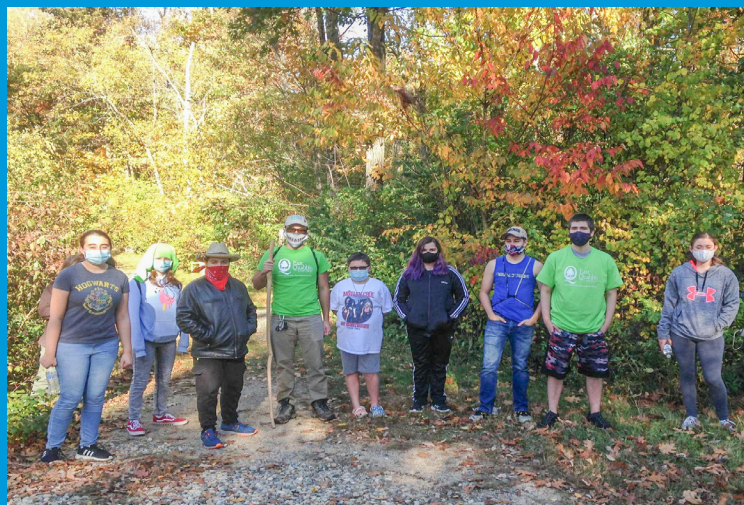
As adults, we have to figure out what we want to do for a living. I have known for a long time that I want to be a professor in academia, where I can have my own crayfish laboratory. I want my lab to work with local schools, libraries, and youth groups to provide educational outreach and opportunities for kids to learn about crayfish. Serving as the Youth Education Coordinator at the East Quabbin Land Trust has only reinforced this desire. It is very easy to captivate the hearts of youth with crayfish, and my favorite animals have been excellent ambassadors for freshwater ecosystems in our area.

I will conclude my service with TerraCorps and the East Quabbin Land Trust at the end of July. Shortly after that, I'll move down to Mississippi, where I'll start my PhD in the Department of Biology at the University of Mississippi! I am incredibly excited for this opportunity, as I will be in one of the global hotspots for freshwater (and crayfish) biodiversity. I will miss all of the friends I've made here in Massachusetts, and I thank them, TerraCorps, and the East Quabbin Land Trust for helping me become a better person and educator.

Until next time! ■



Pat ice fishing with the Hardwick Youth Center



Pat leading the Hardwick Youth Center on a hike on the Mass Central Rail Trail

Tackling Invasive Plants: Herbicide Use at Preserves

By Jess Cusworth

Nuisance, invasive plants are found at all our preserves. Multiflora rose, Japanese barberry, honeysuckle, bittersweet, and burning bush are a few species that we contend with every year as we care for the land. While the Land Trust prefers tackling invasive and nuisance plants with a weed-whacker and loppers, there are instances that call for herbicide applications. EQLT Program Coordinator, Jess Cusworth, underwent training to become a licensed pesticide applicator this year to ensure the safety of trail-goers, wildlife, and the environment when applying herbicide at EQLT preserves.

Herbicide applications are needed for large-scale invasive plant management. For example, last spring, EQLT received state funding to hire profession-

als to spot-spray invasive knapweed that was impacting grassland bird habitat at Wendemuth Meadow with aminopyralid (Milestone). This season, our grasslands at Wendemuth Meadow are looking healthier than ever!

Another instance where the Land Trust uses herbicide is for poison ivy along trail edges. Smaller groupings of poison ivy are weedwhacked or mowed when possible, but to protect our staff, volunteers, and trail-goers, larger patches are spot-treated with glyphosate (Roundup). We target the poison ivy plants in these patches and ensure the application is dry before leaving, which only takes about 10 minutes.

In all situations where herbicide is applied at preserves, we pay careful atten-

tion to the weather in the days before and after treatment. This ensures that rain doesn't wash the herbicide off and the wind isn't blowing the herbicide into unwanted areas. Additionally, we only use herbicides that fall in the lowest of the four toxicity categories, which are those labeled with "caution".

Invasive plants are here to stay. Controlling their spread is essential to maintaining biological diversity, scenic vistas and healthy woods. If you have questions or concerns about herbicide usage at EQLT preserves, please contact Jess at Jcusworth@eqtl.org. ■

Corporate Sponsors - Valued Partners

By Richard Cavanaugh

Do you have a business and are you looking for ways to connect to customers active in the East Quabbin region? The East Quabbin Land Trust offers sponsorship opportunities at events in the spring and fall for businesses and organizations to highlight their work as well as to support the Land Trust's work. In the spring there is the Annual Dinner and Silent Auction, and in the fall there is the Station Loop Ramble in October.

As EQLT Sponsors learn, sponsoring EQLT events offers a cost-effective way to make literally thousands of connections with active and mindful individuals and families who care deeply about the region. "We're pleased to support the land trust's Annual Dinner and Silent Auction each year," explains Glenn Wojcik of Pioneer

Valley Environmental in Ware and now Whittier Heating and Plumbing in New Salem. "Even when we haven't been able to enjoy the dinner and silent auction with good food and friends these past two years, we still enjoy sponsoring the Online Challenge and Online Auction. It is a proven effective way to reach new customers and contribute to the quality of life in our communities, too."

"We have enjoyed sponsoring both the Annual Dinner & Silent Auction and the Station Loop Ramble in past years," says Bob Segal of Atlantic Capital Strategies, Inc., an investment advisory firm based in Bedford, MA. "We're proud to be associated with the good work that East Quabbin Land Trust and its volunteers do, and we're

pleased at the quality connections to people the sponsorships offer."

Sponsors of the Annual Dinner and Silent Auction and the Station Loop Ramble receive tickets to the events as well as special recognition at the events and in EQLT's newsletters, email blasts, and social media posts that go to thousands of supporters at a time. Those sponsoring at higher levels receive more tickets and increased recognition in EQLT's written and electronic communications.

Sponsorship are currently available for the Station Loop Ramble at levels of \$100, \$250, and \$500. If you or your business would like to become a sponsor or would like more information, please contact us at (413) 477-8229 or rcavanaugh@eqtl.org. ■

"Even when we haven't been able to enjoy the dinner and silent auction with good food and friends these past two years, we still enjoy sponsoring the Online Challenge and Online Auction. It is a proven effective way to reach new customers and contribute to the quality of life in our communities, too."

-Glenn Wojcik



Pioneer Valley Environmental team in Ware



P.O. Box 5, 120 Ridge Road
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SUMMER 2021 | VOLUME 18 | ISSUE 3



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UPCOMING EVENTS...

Farm-to-Table Dinner

TBD, September 2021 | Magi's Lawn, 120 Ridge Road, Hardwick

Join us for an outdoor farm-to-table dinner featuring local produce in September! Stay tuned for more information.

Station Loop Ramble

October 10th, 9:30AM | 1700 Hardwick Road, New Braintree

The in-person Station Loop Ramble event is back! Family-friendly races begin and end at the Mass Central Rail Trail, travel past scenic farmland, through deep woods, and skirt the Ware River.

Monthly Stewardship Activities

Join us to help with the maintenance of EQLT properties. Not getting the event emails? Contact Jess at jcusworth@eqlt.org.



*Leadership Circle touring the
Norcross Wildlife Sanctuary*



*Nature arts and crafts at Outdoor Story
Time with the Ware Library*



*Finding crayfish during Pat's Brookside
Adventures program*