



## Grazing Under the Trees

By Cynthia Henshaw

There's a lot that goes into raising cattle. As ruminants, cattle have four stomach chambers and primarily eat grass, so they need a lot of land to graze. Each animal needs at least one-and-a-half acres of pasture. As you can imagine, the need for grazing land can conflict with our society's primary "value" of that land, namely where more houses can be built. That's where conservation restrictions can help!

Walker Farm at Whortleberry Hill raises red Devon cattle for beef that Joanie and Randy Walker sell at their farm stand on West Brookfield Road in New Braintree. As Joanie's business builds and her herd size increases, the need for more grazing land also grows.

The Town of New Braintree held a 67-acre property next to the Walker Farm for failure to pay property taxes. The opportunity to add that land to their farm came up several years ago with a tax-title auction and the Walkers jumped at the chance.

To fund the land purchase, the East Quabbin Land Trust supported that first step and the Walkers agreed to

donate a conservation restriction, removing the right to build houses, while still using the acreage outside of the wetland for forest and farm practices. With federal tax deductions and state Conservation Land Tax Credit support, the initial purchase price is nearly covered. A grant from MassConn Sustainable Forest Partnership covered much of the legal and transfer costs necessary for this donation.

Even better, there's more grazing land. The land runs up-slope to the west after crossing the low, wet area near the road. Trees cover the entire parcel, connecting with neighboring wooded lands. Maybe you're wondering how cattle can graze in the woods? This agricultural practice is called silvopasture. Silva is forest in Latin. Silvopasture is the practice of integrating trees, forage, and grazing of domesticated animals in a mutually beneficial way. To grow more grass in the woods, the trees are thinned out, allowing more sunshine to reach the forest floor. You'd be amazed at how many grass and other plant seeds there are in soil, just

waiting for enough sunlight to sprout.

Remember, this hillside, along with most of New England, was cleared for sheep and cattle grazing in the 19th and 20th centuries. It's only in the last 70 years that the trees have grown back. In the coming years the red Devons will enjoy strolling through the woods as the grasses and herbaceous plant growth return. We offer a hearty 'thank you' to the Walkers for conserving these acres, and acknowledge all those who cared for the land over the centuries. ■



*Red Devons grazing at the Walker Farm*

## Prince River Wildlife Management Area Expanded

By Cynthia Henshaw

The Prince River WMA includes 700 acres of woods and wetlands along the Prince River in Barre and Phillipston. This summer, 90 acres were added to the WMA at the end of Flaherty Road, Barre, when the Department of Fish and Game purchased the property. That land was most recently owned by the late Forrest Fessenden, bought by his family in the 1920's. Forrest's family harvested the trees for lumber and firewood. The fields once grazed cows and horses. Forrest's passion for all things with a motor was evident by the old-time car and pickup bodies found along the edge of the old woods roads. He

kept the lawn mowers up by his house.

As the farming activities slowed down in recent years, the trees advanced and wildlife repopulated the area. Steaming piles of moose scat were seen last winter in the lower field, plus two porcupines waddling along the field edge. Animals of all sizes can be found in the area.

The land nestles between the WMA and EQLT's 68-acre Prince River Preserve, making the permanent conservation of the 90 acres an important step to ensure that wildlife can continue to thrive. The wetlands and streams all flow to the west, down-slope to the Old Reservoir,

whose waters once provided the power for the mills along the Prince River.

Unfortunately, Forrest passed away before the land was permanently protected, but this end result was what he wanted when the process started in 2018. Our special thanks goes out to Lucinda Childs, who stepped forward to act as an intermediary owner to allow the conservation funding pieces to fall into place, which took over three years. It just goes to show that effective land conservation can take time and many hands to coordinate the myriad of steps! ■

## MESSAGE FROM THE Executive Director

Cynthia Henshaw



This summer started with high hopes! First, it looked like the state legislature was going to pass the bill to expand the spending cap for the Conservation Land Tax Credit (CLTC) program. Unfortunately, that didn't happen.

For landowners in our region, the CLTC program provides an important opportunity to conserve their lands. Over the past year, we helped six landowners sign up for CLTC, so now they wait two or three years before they can officially conserve the land that they love. This delay continues because the legislation didn't pass this session. We will be asking for your help in the next session to push harder to ensure expansion of the spending cap to \$5 million a year. Once approved, that means the backlog of applications can be processed quickly and in the future landowners wanting to donate their land or a conservation restriction won't have to wait multiple years to achieve their goals. We all benefit by having woods, fields and wetlands conserved in our neighborhoods. Let's do this!

A second disappointment was a late summer spike in COVID cases in our area. We decided to delay the Farm-to-Table

dinner until 2022, with a date to be determined. The region's farmers work hard all season long and it's disappointing to not share their bounty as we break bread together. Instead, please support them through direct sales! Ashland Farm, Brookfield Orchard, Deer Valley Farm, Front Yard Farm, Ragged Hill Orchard, Rice's Roots Farm, Round Table Farm, Still Life Farm, and Stillman's Farm.

A positive counterbalance is the permanent conservation of the former Fessenden property in Barre, former Fieldstone Farm in Hubbardston, and silvopasture woods at Walker Farm in New Braintree. These 400+ acres conserve important lands that build on permanent protection corridors, enhancing wildlife habitat, expanding recreational trail networks, and ensuring clean water for the future. Assisting these landowners and providing a path for conservation is a central role for what we do. Please know that we are here to assist you and your neighbors through the countless questions and steps to conserve your beloved land. It's such a pleasure to be part of making your dreams come true. ■

## 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](http://www.EQLT.org)  
or "Like" us on Facebook!**

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# Meet the Salvadore Family

By Jess Cusworth

Next time you admire the pollinator flowers or enjoy the riverside bench along the accessible trail at Frohloff Farm, give a nod to the Salvadore Family! These were the first EQLT projects the Salvadores helped with in April 2020 as part of our accessible trail beautification project.

A busy family of five, Michele, Joe, and their three children still find time to volunteer with the East Quabbin Land Trust. Michele first got involved with the Land Trust after meeting EQLT Board President, Judith Jones, who lives nearby. After exchanging some favorite hiking spots, Judith let her know that there were plenty of opportunities to get outdoors with EQLT. Since then, the family has helped with a variety of projects at Frohloff Farm, including gardening, apple tree pruning, and brush clearing. They also created salvaged metal art projects as part of an art installation at the Mass Central Rail Trail in New Braintree. The family loves the opportunity to get outdoors and meet new folks from the area through volunteering.

Both Michele and Joe grew up in the area and have lived in this region for their whole lives. Having grown up in West Brookfield, Michele has fond memories of exploring what's now EQLT's Pynchon's Grist Mill Preserve, before it was conservation land. She appreciates that the property has now been conserved and is fascinated to learn the history of the land. The Salvadores have now lived in New Braintree for 21 years. They sought out a home in New Braintree because they love the town so much - between

the beautiful countryside and the friendly people, it was a perfect fit.

Both Michele and Joe keep busy with their careers. Joe is a history teacher at Quaboag Regional High School and has worked at the school in different capacities since the mid-'90's. Michele also used to work in the Quaboag school district as a nurse, but is now the nurse at Dawson Elementary in Holden. She also teaches nursing, health, and wellness classes at Bay-path University, in addition to being President of the Friends of the New Braintree Library.

Outside of work and after-school sports for the kids, the Salvadores spend time hiking and biking in the area, especially around the north side of the Quabbin. Michele also loves spending time tending to her vegetable and flower gardens. This year she experienced the joy of winter seed sowing, which provided her with a wonderful variety of hardy and healthy new plants to add to her gardens this year (to learn more about winter seed sowing for pollinators, visit the "online resource" section of EQLT.org). Getting outdoors for fresh air is a priority, and like many of us, the family appreciated slowing down and getting outdoors more amidst the stress of the last year and a half, which made it possible for them to spend more time volunteering for the Land Trust.

We give the Salvadores a big "thank you!" for all their hard work and positivity! We are grateful to have their support. ■



*The Salvadores assembled the cinder block bench at the loop of the accessible trail at Frohloff Farm*



*Michele and Zoe planting pollinator flowers at the accessible trail*



*Zoe and Ethan with their salvaged metal art project at the Mass Central Rail Trail in New Braintree*



# 10th Annual Station Loop Ramble

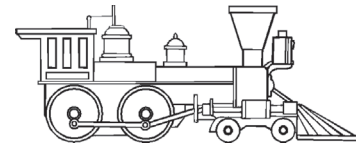
Sunday, October 10th was an excellent day for a run or walk. All the participants used a portion of the Mass Central Rail Trail in New Braintree and Hardwick as they started and finished at the site of the former New Braintree Rail Station. THANK YOU to all the volunteers that made this race possible, the sponsoring businesses and others who donated prizes, and to all who participated! We are already looking forward to next year's race. Stay tuned for details! ■



We appreciate donations from the following businesses for runner awards:

Blue Darner Granola, Barre | Clover Hill Farm, Hardwick | Ragged Hill Orchard, West Brookfield | The Centered Place, Warren





2021 - 10th Annual

# Station Loop Ramble

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# Growing Gratitude and Connection with the Place We Call “Home”

By Louisa Rossel

For as long as I can remember, I’ve dreamed of a world where communities, all living beings, and the land we share coexist in harmony. As “too good to be true” as my vision may sound, I’ve decided I cannot stand back and wait expectantly for the chasm between people and the planet to heal with time. It’s easy to feel powerless to create the changes you wish to see in the world, and if you have been caught in this web before too, I applaud you for your perseverance. My favorite quote, “Unless someone like you cares a whole awful lot, nothing is going to get better. It’s not,” from “The Lorax” fuels my inner fire to re-envision a world that values inter-connectedness with nature. My own love for the Earth has led me to where I stand today: an AmeriCorps Member just beginning my year of service with the East Quabbin Land Trust.

Although I was raised in Trumbull, Connecticut, I am no stranger to Massachusetts, having spent every summer splashing on the beaches of Dennis, Cape Cod. There, I fell in love with everything from the tiniest hermit crabs scuttling about in tide pools to vast and breathtaking sunsets. These childhood experiences shaped my decision to study environmental studies and education at Stonehill College in North Easton, Massachusetts. Although far from the beaches of Cape Cod, I sought other ways to connect students of all ages to the land and other living beings. Through volun-

teering at the Farm at Stonehill College, I began to see how gardening is not only a powerful hands-on tool to engage children and “get their hands dirty,” but it also actively contributes towards food sovereignty. I worked for two summers as a Farm Education Specialist in Dartmouth, MA. There, my students harvested and planted an array of fruits and vegetables on a five and a half-acre farm. Their harvest was donated each week to local hunger relief agencies, and students were continually reminded of how their seemingly small actions at the farm make a world of a difference for their community.

One of the reasons I was drawn to serve in Central Massachusetts was due to the monumental role of the Quabbin Reservoir ecosystem. Living in Hardwick this summer, I witnessed the Quabbin and surrounding protected forests as expansive wildlife sanctuaries. Additionally, I learned how towns and cities across Massachusetts, including Boston, depend on the protection and supply of this invaluable source of freshwater. I began to look at my own actions and determined their larger impact on the surrounding flora and fauna, soil, air, and water. This transformational journey to redefine my relationship with the land prompted me to assist others, particularly the youth, in following suit. During my short time with the East Quabbin Land Trust so far, I have already witnessed ways in which communities can actively preserve this vital ecosys-

tem so that neighboring towns and cities “downstream” have equitable access to freshwater for generations to come.

As a Youth Education Coordinator, I will contribute towards this mission by providing place-based educational experiences and activities for children. We have reached a critical time when developing a land ethic, even within the minds and hearts of the youngest people in our community, is essential. I will live out this statement by creating a space outside the EQLT office where children can play in an outdoor setting, learn the names of plant species native to Massachusetts, and families can enjoy the gifts of nature together. My goal is to provide activities where children can interact with and ask questions about elements of the forest that spark their curiosity. After speaking with members of the community and learning of the increased need for outdoor play spaces, especially given the uncertainty of the pandemic, I am thrilled to take part in filling this gap. Additionally, acknowledging that children engage with nature in a variety of different ways, I am planning to also build a straw bale sensory garden for children to taste, touch, smell, and see a variety of plants. These projects, alongside library book talks and garden volunteer days, will all be upheld by my core mission of fostering lasting, positive relationships between the youth of the East Quabbin region and the land they call “home.” ■



Louisa weeding the pollinator meadow at Seven Acre Preserve

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-Louisa Rossel

# Living Soil

By Ann Hicks

I'm learning to grow healthy plants. Although my parents were avid gardeners, during childhood I never really learned much more than how to pick green beans. But now, in the era of climate change, I've learned that the soil I've taken for granted is vital to the health of our planet and ourselves.

When the pandemic arrived, I started taking online classes about ecosystem restoration and began to learn about our amazing soil. Since it's difficult to move from reading to actually growing things, I was excited to help with EQLT's community garden at Wendemuth Preserve. Knowing a little about soil biology has helped me to visualize the life beneath our feet and how it affects the bounty above.

Our soils derive from rock that has been weathered over eons. But they only become fertile through the actions of a myriad of species of microorganisms that live within them. These tiny living things engage in a symbiotic relationship with the plants growing in the soil. Symbiosis occurs when two different species provide to each other the things necessary for life. Each species benefits from the actions of the other.

Through photosynthesis, the plants provide the organisms, especially fungi, with their food in the form of carbohydrates, something healthy plants have in excess. During photosynthesis, plants use the energy of the sun to break down and recombine the elements in water and carbon dioxide to make food sugars and oxygen. It's magical:  $6\text{CO}_2 + 6\text{H}_2\text{O} + \text{Light energy} \rightarrow \text{C}_6\text{H}_{12}\text{O}_6$  (sugar) +  $6\text{O}_2$ .

In exchange, through their dense network of tubules, the fungi extend the reach of plant roots, and with the help of bacteria, find and deliver the minerals and other nutrients the plants need. Fungi even bring water to the roots in times of drought. Without these symbiotic relationships, 90% of plant species could not survive.

Healthy soil stores vast amounts of carbon that would otherwise exist in the atmosphere as  $\text{CO}_2$ . As the plants break down  $\text{CO}_2$  through photosynthesis and deliver the carbon molecules to the microorganisms, part of it is stored in the ground as humus. Humus is a stable compound that remains after many organisms have used and transformed the original organic carbon. Some of the carbon can be stored for decades, even centuries. This is one of the most important processes we must protect and enhance in order to reduce the excessive amount of  $\text{CO}_2$  in our atmosphere. One solution to climate change lies in fostering abundant photosynthesis.

The plant-soil life symbiotic relationship also creates soil tilth—the porous, crumbly character of fertile soil that traps and holds water. Fungi make something called glomalin, a sticky substance that binds soil particles together. Meanwhile, tiny animals build pathways through the soil. The sticky glomalin and small critters create a sponge-like soil texture, with lots of holes and channels for the water to flow into and be held. The soil acts as a sponge and absorbs rain, increasing the long-term availability of water to the plants and greatly reducing the chance of floods.

Unfortunately, conventional agriculture does not foster life in the soil. Plants fed a diet of chemical fertilizer do not need to invest in establishing relationships with fungi, and thus become completely dependent upon the macro-nutrients of nitrogen, potassium and phosphorus. Plowing breaks up the network of fungi so they cannot search the soil for nutrients to bring to the plants. The plants are missing health-giving micro-nutrients, and lose the resistance to pests and disease that healthy plants have. (Those micro-nutrients are important for human health too.) Soil tilth also suffers because it is the microorganisms that create the spongy, humus-rich soil that holds water and sequesters carbon. The symbiotic relationships and all the benefits they provide are lost.

Although plants can survive with inputs of chemical fertilizer, the soil is dead. It has reverted back to a mineral substrate of sand, silt, and clay. The prairie soils of the Midwest, which used to be ten feet deep, are now gone. Very little soil carbon remains, almost all of it having combined with oxygen to form  $\text{CO}_2$ . In fact, industrial agriculture puts more carbon into the air than burning fossil fuels. The antidote to this is regenerative agriculture, which builds soil health by mimicking nature's processes.

As a nature lover, I'm fascinated to learn more about the natural functions that sustain life. Our soils are the base of the food chain as plants directly or indirectly provide food for all terrestrial animals. The health of all of us living above begins in the soil, and depends upon the life within it. ■

*"Our soils are the base of the food chain as plants directly or indirectly provide food for all terrestrial animals. The health of all of us living above begins in the soil, and depends upon the life within it."*

-Ann Hicks



Soil tilth at Wendemuth Meadow





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## INSIDE: Grazing Under the Trees



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# GIVING TUESDAY – November 30th

Giving Tuesday - a day when millions of people across the world come together to support the causes they believe in - is especially important to the East Quabbin Land Trust. **We have received a generous challenge where up to \$20,000 in any gifts made in recognition of Giving Tuesday will be matched!** Please don't let this opportunity pass by.

We hope you'll join in on the excitement and help EQLT reach this goal on November 30th, but **you don't need to wait until then to make your gift count.** Make your gift online or by mail to the East Quabbin Land Trust, P.O. Box 5, Hardwick, MA 01037, and simply designate "Giving Tuesday" on your gift to ensure it's doubled!

Are you required to take a minimum distribution from a retirement savings account? By giving all or a portion of it to a qualified charity like the East Quabbin Land Trust, you can generally exclude that amount from your taxable income. Check in with your tax advisor.

Thanks, and we look forward to sharing news on December 1st that you've helped us meet the Giving Tuesday challenge!



*Planting trees at Frohloff Farm*



*Story time at the Paige Memorial Library*



*Weeding the pollinator meadow at  
Seven Acre Preserve*