

SUMMER 2022



NEWSLETTER

Mass Central Rail Trail Construction Underway

By Cynthia Henshaw

The Mass Central Railroad was built in the 1880s designed to service the towns along the center of the Commonwealth between Boston and Northampton. It was originally part of the Boston & Maine Railroad network, though changed hands several times and ultimately was broken into smaller ownership pieces once the railroad companies no longer wanted to maintain the corridor.

Today, various segments of the 104-mile former railroad bed were converted to a mixed-use recreation and transportation corridor; it's identified as the Mass Central Rail Trail (MCRT). In the east Quabbin region, the MCRT goes through Ware, Hardwick, New Braintree and Barre. Hopefully you've explored the three miles between the village of Wheelwright and Creamery Road in Hardwick, with the main parking area at the former New Braintree train station site in the triangle between Hardwick and West Roads. Back in 2019 we completed construction of a half-mile section off Church Street at the Frohloff Farm in Ware. The exciting news is that this summer the adjacent 2+ miles are under construction.

Grant funding from the Mass Trails grant program, the Edward and Barbara Urban Foundation, the Fields

Pond Foundation, and many generous individual contributors is providing the bulk of the funds needed for the construction. However, more financial support and volunteer efforts are needed to successfully finish this latest project. You can learn more at EQLT.org.

These 2+ miles are being built on land owned by National Grid (a.k.a. Mass Electric Co.), that runs from the Ware River crossing near Grenville Park, heading northward crossing Church Street, then passing the Covered Bridge up to North Street in Gilbertville. The 1936 and 1938 hurricanes washed out a big chunk of the former railroad bed below the Covered Bridge, but the rest is still usable as the MCRT.

The lack of maintenance over the years means that the drainage on several sections failed and wetland plants are now growing on the former railroad bed. In one area, the trail will be re-routed to the top of the adjacent fill pile. Though mostly there's no way to avoid those sections, which means the wetlands must be altered. Under Massachusetts' law, when wetlands are filled in, then a similar acreage size of wetlands need to be created in another location. So, we've recently installed a wetland replication area next to the farm pond

at the Frohloff Farm. A dozen volunteers came to plant high-bush blueberry, dogwood and viburnum, along with sedges and grasses in the newly created wetland area. Many thanks for their hard work completing the planting!

Construction of the MCRT is now underway. First, the excavator will be heading south of Church Street clearing the top of the trail approximately fourteen feet wide to allow for a 10-foot trail with shoulders. The trail will swoop away from the supports of the overhead powerlines and repairs are needed from a recent washout when a culvert got plugged sending water overtop of the railroad bed. This section will end at the Ware River crossing, a beautiful spot to listen to the birds and have a picnic!

Soon there will be more activity heading north of Church Street, too. The river sways back and forth, while the former railroad bed shoots north on a straight line. This means that there are points where the Ware River is right next to the trail, spitting distance as they say, and other times where the woods are on both sides. It's a wonderful section to explore. We expect the construction to be complete this summer. Go to <https://eqlt.org/mass-central-rail-trail-expansion/> for more information. ■



Volunteers planted hundreds of plants to create the wetland replication area



The southern portion of new MCRT heads from Church St. toward Grenville Park

MESSAGE FROM THE Executive Director

Cynthia Henshaw



Transitions can be hard. It's unsettling to move from the known to the unknown. But transition times are also an opportunity to grow and try new things. The East Quabbin Land Trust is in the midst of two transitions this summer.

The first transition is our search for the 2022-23 season Youth Education Coordinator. Louisa has done a great job leading story times with the local libraries, assisting the Quabbin Regional High School Envirothon team, growing plants with the North Brookfield elementary students, and creating a Forest Play Trail at our headquarters on Ridge Road. In August she's off to a permanent position with the New England Botanical Garden in Boylston, MA, and we couldn't be happier for her!

Youth Education Coordinators at EQLT get to bring their personal skills and passions to youth in our communities. Some priority projects might include pollinator plant propagation, tree planting in Ware, stream water quality testing, vernal pool exploration, trail creation, and creating nature-based books. This is only

a partial list! If you know a recent college graduate or adult wanting to change careers who is interested in getting youth engaged in caring for the natural world that sustains us, please encourage them to visit <https://eqlt.org/apply-for-terracorps-position/> for more information.

The second transition is seeking new farmers for the Frohloff Farm on Church Street in Ware. The farm includes use of the historic barn, four and a half acres in three fenced pastures with room to expand. The farmhouse is 3,200 sq.ft. with four bedrooms, 2.5 baths, an office, and attached workshop.

We hope to attract a farm family or farm business that wants the opportunity to expand and diversify their farm-based enterprises. The land is ideal for goats, with plenty of shrub and early tree growth that can be grazed. Starting in 2023 the farmer will also have two acres of prime vegetable growing land. Interested farmers can read more details at EQLT.org. The request for proposals will remain open until a farm family or farm business is successfully identified. ■

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:

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Hardwick, MA 01037-0005
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Meet Merlon Bassett

By Jess Cusworth

Spring is always a busy season at the Land Trust, and it's only with the generous help of volunteers that we accomplish our ambitious conservation and stewardship goals. Earlier this year, EQLT was fortunate to connect with Merlon Bassett. He enthusiastically jumped at the opportunity to work on a variety of volunteer projects this spring and has contributed so much of his time and positive energy already.

Merlon moved to West Brookfield in 1983 after leaving his work as a consulting forester for a log cabin company in the Berkshires. His career is full of varied and impressive environmental experience, which includes working for the Army Corps of Engineers for over 20 years as a natural resource specialist. One of his most notable accomplishments in that role was locating and taking inventory of over 8,000 acres of fragmented lands across 16 towns, from Medford to Boston. It took a decade to complete the project with the help of volunteer interns, and just locating those fragmented lands over such an expansive area was a major accomplishment. Even more impressive is that he and his team completed the environmental assessments for that acreage so that they had the whole package of information to create a master plan.

Since retiring in 2015, Merlon has turned his attention to volunteering. After working with and managing volunteers during his career, he knows what an impact they make. "Volunteers are some of our best resources, and I always knew that I wanted to be a volunteer myself one day. That's why I feel so comfortable here at EQLT," he adds.

Merlon heard about

EQLT through word-of-mouth and decided to head out to the trails at Mandell Hill first. He loved hiking those trails and saw that there was work that could be done to make them even better, so he got in touch with EQLT to see how he could help. Shortly after, Merlon dove right into our springtime volunteer projects. He's helped install new kestrel boxes, cleared trees and completed erosion monitoring at the new segment of Mass Central Rail Trail in Ware, and enthusiastically jumped into the Preserve Steward Program to steward Pynchon's Grist Mill in West Brookfield. Merlon commented that taking ownership of a preserve like Pynchon's "has been one of the more satisfying things to do. I love making improvements there and keeping it nice so that everyone can enjoy it."

Outside of volunteering with EQLT, Merlon spends time tending to his small piece of property in West Brookfield, doing landscaping and home projects. He also has some antique cars that he works on in his car barn, which he refers to as his "man cave". He loves hiking, biking, and doing trail work with his friends as well.

As an avid outdoorsman, Merlon is passionate about conserving land for others to enjoy. "In my over 70 years, I've been able to see so many beautiful landscapes. I want to do what I can to help make sure that future generations get to enjoy them the same way I did. We can't take the land for granted."

We give a hearty "thank you!" to Merlon for all his hard work and enthusiasm for land stewardship and conservation! ■



Merlon clearing trees at the new section of Mass Central Rail Trail in Ware



Merlon and Mike installing a kestrel box

"I've been able to see so many beautiful landscapes. I want to do what I can to help make sure that future generations get to enjoy them the same way I did. We can't take the land for granted."
- Merlon Bassett

Shaping Little Marshy Meadow

By Cynthia Henshaw

Caring for the land that sustains us comes in all shapes and sizes.

Currently, we are partnering with the West Brookfield Historical Commission and local residents to convert the 0.97-acre parcel at the corner of Foster Hill Road and East Main Street (Rte. 9) into Little Marshy Meadow. The property is roughly shaped like half an arrowhead sliced from tip to tail, and runs nearly to Coys Brook. The Nipmuc tribe called Coys Brook “Massequokummis”, which translates to Little Marshy Meadow.

This space will be transformed into a park, or more precisely a ‘pocket park’ because of its small size. The goal is to create a welcoming community space. There will be interpretive signage, seating, youth play stations, open spaces, artistic creations,

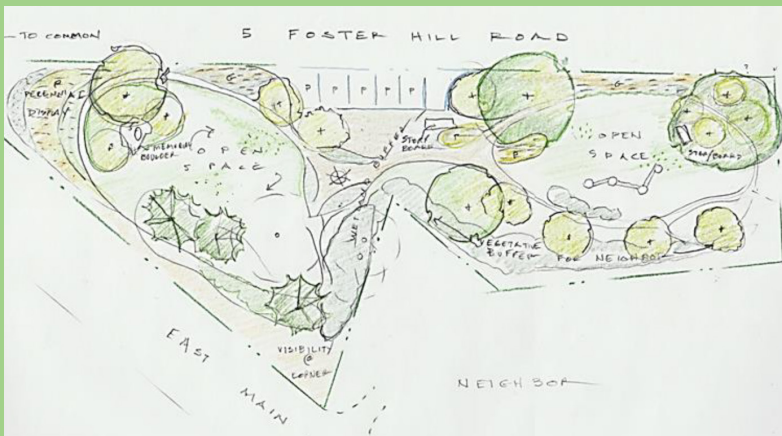
and native species plantings that encourage exploration, appreciation, and reflection. If you have an idea or design element to incorporate, please share it. Recent suggestions include having a bike rack, painted plant name tags, edible plantings, and turn-around parking options. Including information about human habitation of the region over the millennium will also be a priority.

A “Friends” group has formed and is leading the charge in creating Little Marshy Meadow. So far, the two volunteer clean-up days focused on clearing the brushy overgrowth and removing trash and debris. We uncovered a planting of black raspberries and a strawberry patch. A pile of old roofing slates can be re-used as plant labels and the bricks might become a garden border. Just recently

a mama snapping turtle was spotted laying her eggs in a sandy spot!

We recognize that Little Marshy Meadow will evolve and change over time, but getting the basic elements of entrance areas, parking, and planting areas is the current priority. This small corner of West Brookfield is expected to have an outsized impact – bringing a focused place to honor the connections between humans and the natural landscape; bringing a sense of fun and adventure to each visitor of Little Marshy Meadow.

Please join this effort. Go to <https://eqlt.org/west-brookfield-pocket-park/> to contribute. ■



Draft landscape plan by Louise Garwood



Removing rubbish at the May work day



More rubbish removal at the June work day



There's been great progress so far this spring!

Thank You to Our Geocache & \$40k Challenge Sponsors!

Intrepid trekkers gathered on Magi's Lawn at the EQLT office on April 24th to reveal their cards from the Geocache Scavenger Hunt. Participants spent the week before checking out various EQLT preserves using the given coordinates to find the hidden geocache boxes.

The 'hiker' level searched for small (2"x 3") boxes that were painted to provide more camouflage. They were tucked into stone walls or tree hollows or underneath railroad ties. The 'trekker' level searched for small metal discs about the size of a penny. On the discs were numbers, after putting together the numbers from all six

original locations, the trekkers went to the seventh spot and found the box where they collected five sealed envelopes with their cards. During the reveal party, everyone opened their envelopes and posted their poker hands.

Prizes included maple syrup from Hardwick Sugar Shack, honey from Stefan at Wendemuth Meadow, and an EQLT t-shirt and hat. Great thanks was given to geocache master Renee for her excellent work with hiding the caches. Everyone is excited for the challenge again in 2023, so stay posted and join in the fun! ■

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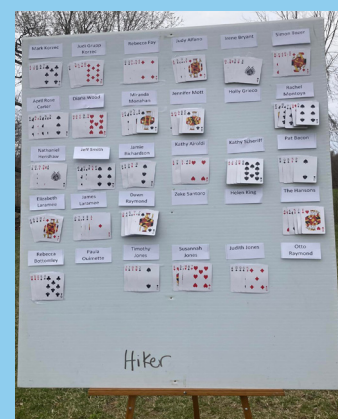
Geocache found at Wendemuth Meadow



Gathering at the poker hand reveal party



Revealing the poker hands



Poker hand results

Envirothon Wins Again!

By Louisa Rossel

The Envirothon team at Quabbin Regional High School was victorious once again in this year's competition on May 12th, 2022. The morning of Envirothon, the team drove to the Quabbin Visitors Center where students from about a dozen other schools across Massachusetts had gathered for the full-day affair. After the students practiced their presentation for the last time and took part in a final "good luck" cheer with coaches Elicia Andrews and Louisa Rossel, the team was ready to share their year-long research and project. Their group was selected to present first.

The Envirothon topic of 2022 was "Zero-waste." Since September, the students have met twice per week to research this topic, interview with professionals from both the school and out in the community, and create actionable steps to reduce waste. Some examples

of individuals interviewed for the project include Jacob Stukul from the Hardwick Recycling Center, Garry Giffith from Griff's Rubbish Removal based in Athol, MA, and Julie Rawson at Many Hands Farm in Barre, MA. The students also sent out a school-wide survey to teachers to determine if recycling efforts were taking place. Many teachers did not have recycling bins, and paper was primarily the only product being recycled. Using the feedback from this survey, the students were determined to make a change. They were able to get more recycling bins donated to the school by The Green Team in Amherst. Furthermore, they learned students needed to be responsible for taking down the recycling bins at the end of each day. The team incentivized this act by allowing students to get community service hours for their participation in recycling efforts. Finally,

the team noticed that there needed to be more educational awareness surrounding recycling habits. They released a PowerPoint to the student body listing recyclable objects, demonstrated where the recycling bins should be emptied at the end of the day, and shared local environmental organizations for students to volunteer with.

Their hard work, drive, and perseverance from start to finish of this year-long project earned them both the Community Research Award and Community Action Award at the Envirothon competition. Furthermore, they also won the "Best Use of Current Issue Theme" t-shirt award for their thrifted, hand-designed t-shirt idea. The impact these students made in their school this year is astounding, and for the juniors of the group, we cannot wait to see what they accomplish in 2023. ■

Swing by the Forest Play Trail

By Louisa Rossel

The Forest Play Trail, which meanders through the woods surrounding the East Quabbin Land Trust, is open to all! With the help of AmeriCorps members and student groups such as the Hardwick Youth Center, the trail is clear and ready for visitors. Along the trail, young children will have a blast adding sticks and leaves to the "Spider Web" and "Den Building" stations under the cool shade of the surrounding trees. Using pallets, a "mud

kitchen" was constructed for kids to use their imagination while connecting with the forest. Finally, visitors of the trail can add to the collection of "Kindness Rocks," or even play a game of rock tic-tac-toe. The trail is self-guided with signs from start to finish so families will be able to navigate their path from station to station.

Visitors are welcome to picnic on Magi's Lawn, or even relax overlooking a beautiful view. The Forest Play Trail, the

straw bale Sensory Garden, and all the stations in-between are conveniently located at the EQLT office. Just as the construction of the trail was a major community effort, the East Quabbin Land Trust will seek feedback and recommendations from all Forest Play Trail trekkers. We're excited to see the joy this trail brings to young, creative, and imaginative minds, and we hope you can swing by for a visit! ■



This year's Envirothon team



Mud kitchen at the Play Trail



Tic-tac-toe at the Play Trail

Pollinator Garden at the Ware Library

By Jess Cusworth

If you frequent downtown Ware, you'll notice there's been a change at the Ware Library! Thanks to funding from Keep Massachusetts Beautiful, the space in front of the library is full of eight interesting species of (soon to be) colorful native plants.

In early May, EQLT and library staff worked together to coordinate several families of volunteer gardeners to get 40 native flowers planted. There was even a big bumblebee buzzing around us the whole time we were planting – soon the flowers will bloom and make that bee very happy!

The Ware Library is located at the heart of the historic downtown area at 37 Main Street. Adding a pollinator garden to this area not only provides important habitat in the urban area, but it also expands opportunities for community members to

work together and learn about the importance of pollinators through gardening and educational events.

We're thrilled to watch the garden grow and bloom this summer. Colorful plants such as bright orange Butterfly Weed, deep blue Lobelia and False Indigo, and bright yellow Stiff Goldenrod - yes, goldenrod - are sure to put on quite a show each year. These plants were carefully picked to ensure a variety of bloom times throughout the spring, summer, and fall. We're particularly excited for the opportunity to showcase how goldenrod is a great addition to any garden. It's one of the most beneficial plants for biodiversity and provides critical late-season pollen and nectar for pollinators.

A big "thank you!" to Cathy, Heidi, and all the families who came out to help! ■



Families planting the garden in May



Early June at the garden

Wendemuth Community Garden Updates

By Jess Cusworth

The growing season is well-underway at the no-till community garden! Several families set up their own plots in one half of the garden, while EQLT staff and volunteers maintain the other half to supply produce to the North Brookfield Senior Center.

As temperatures warm as the season goes on, we're patiently awaiting the fruits of our labors. Tomatoes, squash, zucchini, carrots, peppers, and more are establishing their root systems and growing plenty of leaves to supply ample surface area for photosynthesis.

When the growing season is over, the straw bales will have mostly decomposed, adding another layer of rich organic matter to the soil. Be sure to swing by the garden this summer to see it for yourself! ■



April 2022



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INSIDE: Mass Central Rail Trail Construction Underway



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Leadership Circle Spends Afternoon with Author

By Rich Cavanaugh

Members of the East Quabbin Land Trust's Leadership Circle enjoyed an afternoon meeting and speaking with author Elisabeth Rosenberg about her book, *Before the Flood: Destruction, Community, and Survival of the Drowned Towns of the Quabbin*. The May weather cooperated so that everyone could enjoy the vista from the Enfield Lookout that served as a backdrop for the story that began unfolding there a century ago.

"Ms. Rosenberg helped separate some of the local lore from the factual record, shedding light on both for us," remarked Sam Lovejoy of Montague. "She even indicated that she has enjoyed so many people coming to her to share stories passed down to them, maybe there'll be another edition."

According to EQLT

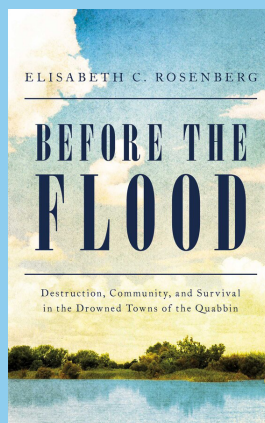
Executive Director, Cynthia Henshaw, "This outing was a way for us to say thank you to members of the Leadership Circle. I'd also like to again express my sincere thanks to Elisabeth Rosenberg who graciously offered her time and expertise to provide such a fun and informative afternoon."

Membership in EQLT's Leadership Circle is available to supporters who donate annual operating gifts totaling \$500 or more, whether as one gift or through periodic contributions. The Leadership Circle provides critical organizational funding which sustains the East Quabbin Land Trust's diverse program offerings.

Copies of *Before the Flood* are available through our friends at Tidepool Bookshop, www.tidepoolbookshop.com, or other booksellers. ■



Elisabeth Rosenberg discussing her book, Before the Flood, at the Enfield Lookout at the Quabbin Park & Reservoir.



"Rosenberg seeks to challenge 'binary' histories of the event, which cast townspeople as the 'losers' and state government officials and Boston residents as the 'victors.' Rosenberg spotlights the engineers, who lived in the towns and became active community members, even as they plotted 'the death of the Swift River,' [and] she uncovers the mutual respect that grew between them over the course of the project. Intriguing."

— Publishers Weekly