



WINTER 2024 NEWSLETTER

P.O. Box 5, 120 Ridge Road,
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EQLT.org

Conserving Farmland in Petersham

East Street and Maple Lane are one of the agricultural hubs in the Town of Petersham. Particularly after crossing the East Branch of the Swift River at Brown Pond and rising up the hill, there's a stretch of hay and crop fields interspersed by hedgerows along stone walls or stream corridors. Many of these fields are already permanently protected and available for continued farming into the future. For instance, in 2016 EQLT facilitated the Town's conservation restriction purchase of the former 235-acre Gross family farm.

Across Quaker Lane from the former Gross family farm are two parcels that are part of the Barnes family history in Petersham. The house (now removed) located on East Street was once a tavern welcoming guests as they traveled between Petersham and Barre and beyond. The farm was a traditional homestead with several cows, horses, chickens and vegetable plot. More recently the fields were hayed for animal feed and keep the prime agricultural soils open and productive.



Just about half of this 25-acre property is wooded and slopes southerly down to Moccasin Brook. The woods are heavy to white pine, reflecting the past agricultural history of cleared pasture for animal grazing along the slopes. There are mixed hardwoods found in pockets along the slopes and brook corridor. Remnants of a dam and mill structure are still visible along the brook.

Last winter EQLT was approached by representatives of the two brothers who own the land with their spouses. "Would EQLT be interested in assisting these families in conserving the land and transitioning to the next owners?" After reviewing the natural values of the land – prime agricultural

soils, important waterway, and connection to already preserved lands – the EQLT land committee and board responded with a resounding "Yes!"

The Commonwealth's Conservation Partnership grant program agreed that conservation of these acres is important, awarding a reimbursement grant up to \$115,250 to EQLT once a conservation restriction is recorded over the bulk of the property. Several key steps have started and more to come before finalizing the transaction by June 30, 2025.

- The property is listed "For Sale" on New England Farmland Finder, the central on-line listing for farm seekers in our region. Responses to the request for proposal will be reviewed and awarded to the best farmer-farm family candidate. EQLT will keep looking until the next farmers/owners are found.
- The conservation restriction language allows agriculture and forest management uses in ways that sustain healthy soils and provide flexibility into the future.
- The Petersham Conservation Commission agreed to co-hold the conservation restriction with EQLT, which meets an important requirement for acceptance of state land conservation funds.
- Matching dollars to make all this happen are being requested. Already \$50,000 is secured. If you'd like to support conservation of this property, go to the website to learn more.
- A percolation test and survey are needed to designate approximately 2-acres for future housing. The location will be along East Street and based on soil quality.

Placing a conservation restriction on the property lowers the purchase price making the land more affordable to farmers. Plus, retaining a building lot allows a farm-family to live on the land to care for the crops and animals that they'll raise for themselves and for market.

Excerpt from the Town of Petersham's 2024 Open Space and Recreation Plan:

"The Petersham community is determined to protect local farming operations, with special emphasis on supporting farms producing food for local residents. However, prime agricultural soils, those that the USDA has identified as best for producing food, make up less than 5% of Petersham's area. A significant portion of the prime agricultural soils in the Eastern Agricultural District are in active agricultural use and are under permanent protection from development, which goes a long way to ensure this precious resource is available for generations to come."

Conserving land supports our local land-based economy while retaining the option for growing our own food and wood products into the future.

MESSAGE FROM THE
**Executive
Director**

Cynthia Henshaw



All Flourishing Is Mutual.

Robin Wall Kimmerer’s new book “*The Serviceberry: Abundance and Reciprocity in the Natural World*” is the focus of EQLT winter book club meeting, coming up on February 6th. We’ll meet at our offices, 120 Ridge Road in Hardwick, at 6pm for a potluck meal and discussion of her impactful insights about human community and our relationship to the natural world. No need to read the book in advance—we will start the conversation with specific passages.

Below are just a few to give you a sense of her writing style and insights:

“This abundance of berries feels like a pure gift from the land. I have not earned, paid for, nor labored for them. There is no mathematics of worthiness that reckons I deserve them in any way. And yet here they are – along with the sun and the air and the birds and the rain, gathering towers of cumulonimbi, a distant storm building. You could call them natural resources or ecosystem services, but the Robins and I know them as gifts. We both sing gratitude with our mouths full.”

“Enumerating the gifts you’ve received creates a sense of abundance, the knowing that you already have what you need. Recognizing “enoughness” is a radical act in an economy that is always urging us to consume more.”

“Abundance is fueled by constantly circulating materials, not wasting them.”

“Saskatoon, Juneberry, Shadbush, Shadblow, Sugarplum, Sarvis, Serviceberry – these are among the many names for Amelanchier. Ethnobotanists know that the more names a plant has, the greater the cultural importance. The tree is beloved for its fruits, for medicinal use, and for the early froth of flowers that whiten woodland edges at the first hint of spring. Serviceberry is known as a calendar plant, so faithful is it to seasonal weather patterns. Its bloom is a sign that the ground has thawed.”

There are many more nuggets of inspiration encouraging the reader to see a world full of abundance and recognizing our role in passing along the gifts.

Please join us!

THE EAST QUABBIN LAND TRUST

fosters a meaningful relationship with the natural world by conserving, connecting with and caring for the farmlands, woodlands and waters in the East Quabbin 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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Two-Eyed Seeing - Braiding Together Indigenous and Western Knowledges

By Catriona Standfield

The beginning of a new year is a time when we reflect on the year gone by and plan for the next one. It's therefore a fitting moment to think about the future of conservation as it relates to our past, especially the legacies of colonialism in North America. What can we learn from this history? What should we keep or leave behind? Increasingly, partnerships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people reveal new possibilities for the future of land care. In this short piece, I discuss how we can 'braid' Indigenous and Western approaches together in ways that benefit the land and people.

'Braiding together' Indigenous and Western ecological knowledges means appreciating each tradition's knowledge and practices and finding ways to bring them together. Integrating them isn't about restoring some pre-colonial past, but about equipping our communities to deal with current and future challenges. A concept from the Mi'kmaw nation that helps to explain this approach is 'Two-Eyed Seeing.' This is described by elder Albert Marshall:

*'...Two-Eyed Seeing is the gift of multiple perspective...It refers to learning to see from one eye with the strengths of Indigenous knowledges and ways of knowing, and from the other eye with the strengths of Western knowledges and ways of knowing, and to using both these eyes together, for the benefit of all.'*¹

Both Indigenous and Western knowledges provide valuable Two-Eyed Seeing brings together the best of Indigenous and Western land care approaches in ways that benefit both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people.

What can Two-Eyed Seeing look like in practice? Fortunately, we don't have to go very far for examples. For instance, take the partnership between Dennis Conservation Land Trust (DCLT), whose lands fall within the current and ancestral home of the Wampanoag people on Cape Cod, and the Native Land Conservancy (NLC), the first Native-run conservancy in the Eastern US. Founded in 2012, the NLC aims to restore ties between Indigenous people and the land, and repair land damaged through colonial practices. The NLC has a range of strategies, from outright legal ownership to co-management with local land trusts.

In 2016, DCLT negotiated a Cultural Respect Agreement with the NLC to allow access to its largest property. In 2021, DCLT decided to go further by creating a Cultural Respect Easement, which gives NLC access to all DCLT lands for ceremony and other traditional purposes,

forever. According to Ramona Peters, the NLC President:

*'A Cultural Respect Easement is the closest expression of land repatriation to indigenous people achieved without an actual transfer of deed. It offers assurance for us to safely access areas of our ancestral homelands to exercise spiritual and cultural practices. Respect for our culture includes respect for our relationship with the earth, especially in areas where our ancestors prayed, danced, toiled, lived and were buried.'*²

Since then, the NLC has partnered with other land trusts. The New England Wilderness Trust (NEWT) donated part of the Muddy Pond Preserve in Kingston, to NLC. The Wampanoag Common Lands project is restoring Muddy Pond's native plants and animals. It is also a place for ceremony and passing on cultural knowledge.

These practices of Two-Eyed Seeing benefit Indigenous and non-Indigenous people alike. Wampanoag and other Indigenous people are able to reaffirm their relations to the land. NLC carries out care practices including ceremonies, restoring native plants and animals, and removing invasive species. They are also

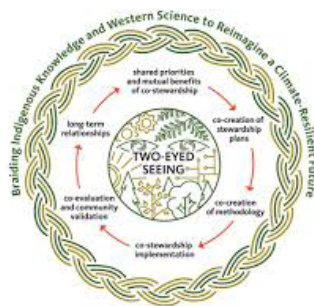
able to foster good management based on the principle of restoring balance. Alongside the cultural benefits, this has had positive ecological outcomes: NEWT has recently reported on the flourishing of rare plants, including the Plymouth Rose Gentian (*Sabata kennedyana*) and New England Boneset (*Eupatorium novae-angliae*).

The partnerships between NLC and land trusts are just some examples of Two-Eyed Seeing in practice: We can imagine many ways we could adapt it to EQLT's context. My hope is that these practices can inspire us to see conservation as not just about the land, plants, birds, and animals, but also about how we can establish good relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, value diverse ways of relating to nature, and make our outdoors communities accessible to all. Building a strong, diverse, and broad coalition of people is the only way we will address existential threats to the ecosystems we depend on and love.

Sources

1 Bartlett, C., Marshall, M., & Marshall, A. (2012). Two-Eyed Seeing and Other Lessons Learned Within a Co-Learning Journey of Bringing Together Indigenous and Mainstream Knowledges and Ways of Knowing. *Journal of Environmental Studies and Sciences*, 2(4), 331-340. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13412-012-0086-8>, p. 335.

2 Early, J. (2022). DCLT-NLC Cultural Respect Easement. *Dennis Conservation Land Trust*. <https://denniscsvlervationlandtrust.org/dclt-nlc-cultural-respect-easement/>



Graphic from *Braiding Indigenous and Western Knowledge for Climate-Adapted Forests: An Ecocultural State of Science Report*. March 2024

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Ramp Up

By Cynthia Henshaw

EQLT’s Access & Equity committee (A&E) thinks deeply about how to improve our projects and programs, including making our preserves and properties more accessible to people of all physical abilities. With currently twenty-five areas open to visitation, there’s a lot to cover. A&E teamed up with our Stewardship Committee to work on this project. Architect Phillip Warbasse, Warbasse Associates, is a key member of this work.

The Petersham Country Store welcomes thousands of people each year to purchase wholesome food, groceries, gift items, and to meet socially. The store business is a privately run operation that pays rental income to EQLT. In turn, EQLT uses the rental revenue to pay the property taxes, insurance and building maintenance costs.

This historic structure was built in 1840 and run as a store nearly its whole lifespan. Since EQLT’s purchase in 2013, community members suggested and helped implement multiple improvements. Those include a mini-split heater, solar panels to partially off-set electrical use, water filtration system that eliminates PFAS chemicals, emergency generator for back-up power, and an improved exit to East Street.

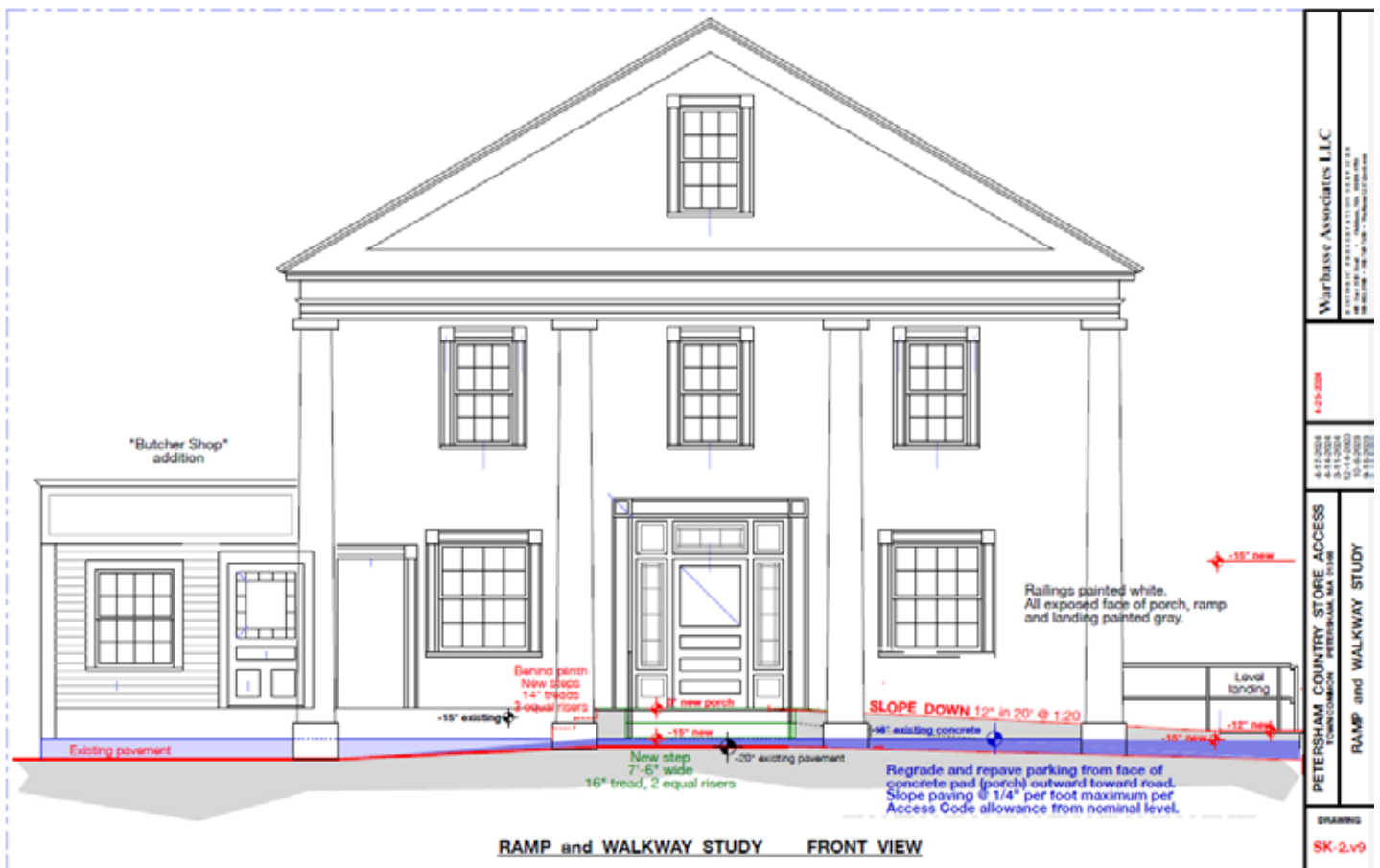
Four Roman columns dominate the front facade of the building that looks out at the town common. The main entrance sits in the center. Today visitors must navigate

three steps to access the building. By this summer there will be a new walkway system.

As you might expect, finding an access solution that meets modern code while preserving the essence of the historic structure is challenging. After a year of discussions with nine major design options proposed, one plan prevailed and was approved by the Petersham Historic District Commission. A new landing at the front door will be built, including two steps to the parking area and two steps to the north. The 1:20 walkway will run south between the building and columns. A landing off the southwestern corner of the building will provide access for those using the walkway. The parking area will be graded and paved to accommodate these changes.

Your support is needed to help fill the funding gap for this important access project. Financial contributions can be made at EQLT.org/ramp-up/ or cash deposited at the display in the Country Store building. Over \$10,000 is still needed to supplement the \$8,000 grant from the Community Foundation of North Central Massachusetts for this worthy effort. Please be generous.

It’s exciting to know that a person’s physical challenges will no longer be a barrier to access at the Country Store building.



Visitor Experience and Wayfinding

By Amy Trevvett

Whether you are going to one of EQLT's properties for hiking, mountain biking, bird watching, hunting, horseback riding or something else, it's helpful to consult a map to scope out the trails and terrain. EQLT's stewards are always looking for ways to improve our preserves, including adding benches, new trails, and even bog bridges, where needed. As a result, you can often find something new at many of our properties, even if you've visited before.

These improvements and additions reinforce the importance of periodically assessing our maps and signage to ensure a positive visitor experience at our properties. One of my TerraCorps capacity-building projects – enhancing visitor experience and access – is aimed at addressing this need at some of EQLT's larger preserves.

This fall, I partnered with EQLT volunteer, Bill Dobson, to take a look at the accuracy of existing maps, signage, and wayfinding at seven properties: Moose Brook, Mandell Hill, Deer Park, and Patrill Hollow in Hardwick; Pynchon's Grist Mill in West Brookfield; Henry's Grove in Hubbardston; and the Mass Central Rail Trail segments. It involved walking the trails at each property, taking a lot of photos and notes on what we saw, and tracking our route in Landscape, a data management app that EQLT uses to track stewardship activities for each of the preserves. In other words, it was something close to a "dream job"!

We took our task seriously, though, and found that each of the properties could benefit from updates to maps or wayfinding. We encountered new or rerouted trails that weren't on existing maps, trails to adjacent properties, mismatched trail names, and trail colors on maps that didn't correspond to on-trail blazes. We also noted worn-out or missing blaze placards and found that a single 8x11" map posted in the kiosks was often the sole wayfinding resource available at a property.

In December, I shared our findings with the Stewardship Committee along with a set of potential improvements and recommendations. These included:

- Creating prominent property maps at kiosks with QR codes to EQLT's website for downloadable maps
- Introducing a new trail blazing standard to mark specific paths and aid orientation rather than denoting perceived trail difficulty
- Ensuring individual trail colors match across blazes, signs, and maps
- Phasing out the use of plastic blazes in favor of paint
- When possible, using colors and labeling on maps and signs that are color-blind friendly
- Introducing new wayfinding signage at key trail intersections
- Ensuring all preserve maps are up to date, reflect the current trail system and key features, and incorporate the recommended color standardization
- Making a limited number of printed maps available at kiosks.

The Stewardship Committee aligned on a stepwise plan to improve mapping and/or navigation for the seven properties, and all seven will be upgraded with one or more of the recommendations noted here, depending on need. For example, the Rail Trail does not require typical wayfinding, but we will be updating kiosk maps and directions to the next rail trail segment. For the majority, a combination of mapping updates, re-blazing, and intersection wayfinding will be the most significant changes. Materials for all but two properties will be semi-permanent to give the land trust flexibility to make tweaks to the new approach or to accommodate future adjustments, like new trails or boundary expansions.

Deer Park and Mandell Hill will be trial sites for new, more permanent wayfinding. This spring, we will be introducing new 4x4 wooden posts with aluminum trail direction signs at key junctions. By using Mandell Hill and Deer Park as test cases for this more formal signage, we will have the chance to see how well the new signs are received and if they are cost-effective over the long-term.

In the immediate term, I will be revising maps and revisiting the properties with Bill to determine sign locations, orientations, and quantities, as well as capturing new trails in Landscape to ensure they are accurately mapped. Once the temperatures are more favorable for paint, I will be ready to get started on the fun-stuff of rolling out the signage and re-blazing.

Signage and wayfinding are important navigation features and go a long way in ensuring a fun, comfortable, and safe visitor experience. I am excited about this project and am looking forward to making EQLT's already awesome properties even more user-friendly.

See you out on the trail!





Caring for the Land that Sustains Us

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Coming Events:

Join EQLT's email list to get up-to-date information about events and activities by contacting Pattie at office@EQLT.org or us follow on Facebook or Instagram. Here are few of the coming events, with more to be confirmed soon:

- Who Goes There? Wildlife Tracks and Signs - Jan. 25th
- Create your own Pysanky eggs - Jan. 26th
- Book discussion *"The Serviceberry: Abundance & Reciprocity in the Natural World"* by Robin Wall Kimmerer - Feb. 6th
- Map and Compass Reading - Mar. 9th

Geocache Scavenger Hunt

A family-friendly event for intrepid explorers of EQLT Preserves around the region, from April 12th - 27th. You can complete all five geocache searches in a day or take your time. Registration is \$20.



Dinner & Silent Auction Fundraiser

Join us for this annual celebration of land conservation in our region while greeting your friends and meeting new neighbors on April 26th beginning at 5:30 p.m. The evening includes a delicious meal and eclectic auction items to bid on. Tickets are \$75.