



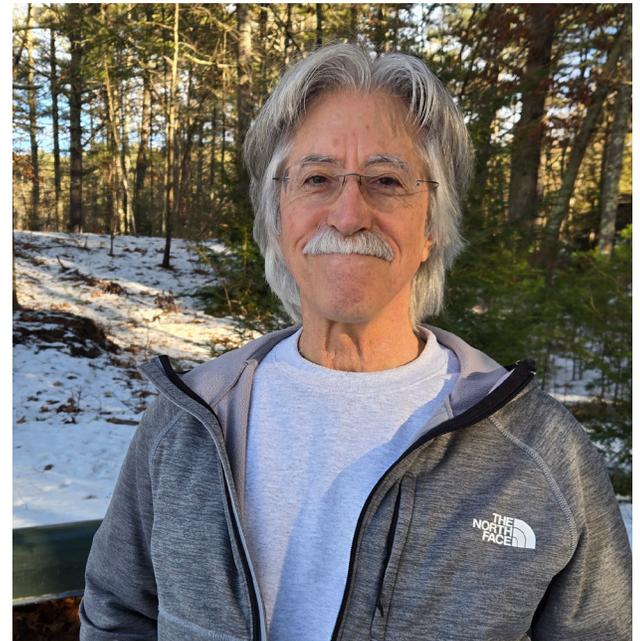
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# WINTER 2026

## Conserving Hardwick Pond Shoreline



Hardwick Pond is a 72-acre freshwater pond located in the southwest corner of Hardwick. The pond is in the Muddy Brook watershed. There is a dam in Ware that backs up the water, constructed in earlier times to deepen the original Hardwick Pond. The outflow was also impeded decades ago when an acre of floating bog dislodged from the northern shores and floated down to the outlet.

The Muddy Brook watershed is noted in Hardwick town plans as a priority conservation area for its wetlands, water resources, and rare plants and animals. Over the years, large wooded parcels were sold to MassWildlife which created the Muddy Brook Wildlife Management Area (WMA) with public access from Patrill Hollow Road. In 2023, the Great Lakes Camp (locally known as the Music Camp) was added to the Muddy Brook WMA. Those 90 acres are along the southern shoreline of Hardwick Pond and outflow of Muddy Brook. The original WMA lands are along the northern shoreline of Hardwick Pond and Muddy Brook.

With the recent Conservation Restriction donation on 36-acres from William (Bill) Zinni, Jr., the remaining portion of Hardwick Pond's eastern shoreline is now permanently protected from additional residential development. These 36 acres of primarily woods and wetlands are the lynch pin for conservation of the Hardwick Pond eastern shoreline.

Bill will continue to live on the property, and when he is ready, can sell the entire 36 acres to the next owner to enjoy the peaceful solitude of the woods and Hardwick Pond. This grant of a Conservation Restriction does not allow

public access. Wildlife can continue to roam freely without being interrupted by more housing in the future. And wildlife does roam freely – clearly evident by the images from the wildlife cameras located across the property.

“Granting this Conservation Restriction to the East Quabbin land Trust fulfills a commitment I made to MassWildlife staff years ago. I agreed to permanently conserve my land, ensuring the north-south wildlife corridor connectivity, when they purchased the former Music Camp,” stated Bill. “I am proud to be part of the cadre of land conservationists in Hardwick leaving an open space legacy for future generations.”

Bill is no stranger to land conservation. Professionally Bill spent decades with the US Fish and Wildlife Service as a biologist; part of their northeast lands acquisition team creating and expanding National Wildlife Refuges in the northeastern US, including the Silvio O. Conte National Fish and Wildlife Refuge. He's dedicated his adult years to promoting wildlife habitat preservation, thinking about salamanders, New England cottontails, bald eagles, waterfowl and shorebirds. Currently he serves as the chair of the Hardwick Conservation Commission and is a member of EQLT's land committee. Bill is a talented musician (check him out at the next Petersham Jams concert) and is a conservationist known for wearing his red-winged blackbird shirt in early spring when he first hears their calls from the local wetlands. Please thank Bill when you see him next for leaving a lasting legacy of land conservation! ■

MESSAGE FROM THE  
**Executive  
Director**

*Cynthia Henshaw*



We are thrilled to share this exciting news in the life of the East Quabbin Land Trust!

A gift of approximately \$250,000 was received in December with the express purpose of establishing an organizational endowment. Appreciated stocks were donated, providing EQLT future funding dedicated in support of our operations and land conservation initiatives. As with any endowment, only the fund’s growth can be spent. Working with our finance committee and financial advisor the funds will be invested with the endowment goals in mind.

East Quabbin Land Trust supporters give generously, whether that is \$50, \$500, \$5,000 or more. The list on pages 4 and 5 attest to your generosity. Thank you! These gifts make it possible to complete important land conservation projects, care for the lands under EQLT’s control, and to invite you and others to join us for walks, talks, and educational programming throughout the year. EQLT has a strong financial footing because of your gifts and those of your neighbors.

During 2026, the East Quabbin Land Trust anticipates leveraging annual funding from 2025 to hire an additional full-time staff person, namely a forester/stewardship coordinator. With over 2,000 acres in EQLT’s care, more focus is needed to ensure quality stewardship practices in the coming years.

The vast majority of EQLT’s lands are wooded, and some of our forest stewardship plans need revisiting. EQLT’s consulting forester, Roger Plourde, will work with the new staff person to ensure that our multi-pronged approach to caring for the land continues. Maintaining high-quality wildlife habitat, expanding recreational trails for diverse user groups, and controlling invasive plant populations in critical areas are all part of EQLT’s land stewardship mix. Volunteers will continue to be a critical component of our land caring practices, their efforts accomplished in collaboration with a new staff person.

**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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# Caring for Our Kids: Meet Beth Cafarella

“We need to take care of our kids,” commented Beth Cafarella during our recent interview. “It often only takes one positive adult to change the trajectory of a young person’s life. To show them they are acknowledged and supported. I want to be one of those positive adults.”

We sat in the corner booth of a newly renovated café in the center of Barre, sipping hot tea and cocoa. Beth is a regular volunteer with the East Quabbin Land Trust. She’s recently joined our Stewardship Committee, but her primary interest is with the Forest Play Trail found outside EQLT’s headquarters building, at 120 Ridge Road in Hardwick.

“The Forest Play Trail is only 10 minutes from home, and the trail is a wonderful combination of kids play opportunity and being in the outdoors,” stated Beth. “I look forward to working with Ellie Shea in creating an accessible section this spring and summer. We hope that families will come explore, bring a picnic, and spend time outdoors.”

The Forest Play Trail was originally installed by Louisa Rossell, the AmeriCorps Youth Education Coordinator (YEC) in 2022. Ellie is the current YEC, with plans to convert half of the trail to an accessible width and surface, and to add more play stations. The kindness rocks, log jumping and tic-tac-toe stations will remain.

Beth worked for the Department of Mental Health as a case manager, supervisor and director over her professional career. She’s always cared for others. Beth originally planned to be a physical therapist, but her volunteer stint at a group home changed her trajectory. “I loved being at the group home, meeting the individuals, and hearing their history. Our society often still stigmatizes people with mental illness, I think primarily due to fear and not understanding their stories.”

Since retiring, Beth also volunteers at the Hardwick Youth Center. It is fun being with the town’s young people and encouraging them. “I love it!”

Beth and her husband, Ron, bought their land in the early 90s. They actively worked on their home construction together. Despite the commute to work, they agreed that they loved the area and decided to stay. “Our kids went to

the Hardwick Pre-School when that was active.” Now, they plan to grow old in place, supporting neighbors and each other as long as they can.

Beth is an avid walker. Several places in the Quabbin Reservoir lands are favorites – Goodnow Dike and Soapstone Hill are two that come to mind. The New Year’s Day walk is a great way to be outdoors with friends and family.

Currently, Beth is reading *The Choice: Embrace the*

*Possible* by Dr. Edith Eva Eger. The overarching message is that we are the sum of all our decisions and choices. But, we don’t have to be drawn down by the negative of our lives. Beth says “If we only thought about what we have, and not what we don’t have, we would be better off.”

Beth reflects that “the world feels overwhelming with so many things we can’t fix. So, I focus locally where my time and energy can make a difference.”

Travel is also of interest, especially driving across the country, stopping at

the national parks and historic landmarks. Beth has done some trips over the years, but there’s more on her bucket list. Seeing the landscape through the vehicle window is a major part of her motivation.

This is a big country, with many different landscapes. Beth loves living in New England, and wants to experience the mountains, desert, swamps and plains across the country. Seeing Italy would be nice too!

Beyond travel, Beth is constantly thinking about how she can make a difference for her family, community and the world. We’re all better off by her commitment and actions done here locally in Hardwick. ■



*Beth working with young people to create more Kindness Rocks for their own outdoor spaces and the Forest Play Trail*



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# Accessibility on the Forest Play Trail

By Ellie Shea

The Forest Play Trail was created a few years ago at the office by a former Youth Education Coordinator. The trail starts by the garage, winding its way through the trees and over rocks, leading walkers to the overlook behind the EQLT office. The trail continues on the other side of the building, down the hill to the main lawn. The trail features stations with games and activities that are designed for active kid use. The current stations include tic tac toe, log stacking, web weaving, den building, and more. One of the purposes of the Forest Play Trail is to provide a space for families to get outside to explore nature and have fun together.

The original Forest Play Trail is not accessible by many people in our community because of the rocky and steep nature of the property. Families using strollers, and people who use mobility aids such as walkers, canes and wheelchairs weren't able to successfully engage with the trail. Nature should be able to be enjoyed by everyone, and we hope to make this trail a place where this is possible. To address this, an expanded trail layout will follow a gentler slope, skirt rocks, and curve around trees. The new section of trail connects to parts of the original trail, and makes the trail longer.

Youth from the Hardwick Youth Center assisted by clearing the trail on a volunteer service day. They raked leaves, cut brush and saplings, and moved small rocks out of the path. Watching the teens use the loopers and rakes with so much enthusiasm was awesome. They created a wonderful path through a dense area of forest with tightly packed saplings and bushes. The teamwork and joy in the group was obvious as they helped each other with harder parts of the job. The trail now meanders through pines, oaks and birches, past the hay field, and eventually to the lawn below, adding a few hundred feet to the original trail.

Laying out a pathway that follows a gentler slope was only the first step in making the Forest Play Trail more accessible. A grant request was submitted in early December to the Barre Savings Charitable Foundation, and we received the full amount of \$4,000! This money is going towards purchasing stone dust and gravel to create a stable walking surface on the trail. The next steps for the project include trail widening and flattening the tread surface, building benches from recycled materials, designing the new activity stations along the trail, and, in the spring installing the gravel.

Several new activity stations are planned incorporating all our senses: sight, sound, touch, smells, taste, and perception. Some examples include a mnemonic bird call board, a squirrel-themed balance beam, a section with herbaceous plants, a color matching activity and a texture scavenger hunt.

Even though there is work left to do on the trail, we encourage people to come see it! We've already used the new part of the trail for an educational event. EQLT hosted its Gratitude Friday gathering on November 28<sup>th</sup>. Caren Caljouw lead a tree identification walk on the new section of the Forest Play Trail. We had a good turnout of people, and everyone was so engaged with Caren's lesson. Fall Forest Bingo pages were shared with participants to encourage nature observation during the walk. Since those were popular Winter Bingo sheets were created and are available for everyone at the *Youth Education Corner* page, <https://eqlt.org/youth-education-corner/>!

In addition to Caren's walk, Gratitude Friday activities included special signage, crafts, snacks, and a campfire. Beth Cafarella was a huge help with the event as well, and it was such a joy seeing her interact with the kids. Beth has been amazing to work with in planning the extension of the Forest Play Trail. We are grateful that she has helped maintain the existing trail since its creation. Make sure to check out the Volunteer Spotlight on Beth! ■



# Pollinator Conservation & Edible Plants

By Michael Bellefleur

Environmental conservation involving native plant, animal and insect biodiversity is of utmost importance across EQLT preserves especially with the perceptible impacts of climate change. From the noticeable decrease in squashed bugs on your bumper after a road trip to the estimated global annual 1-2% decline of insects, increased habitat area and quality is required to combat anthropogenic effects like insecticides for tick and mosquito control, or acres of monoculture lawns.

We are working to increase populations of native plants, such as bee balm (Monarda), northern blazing star (Liatris) and northern bush honeysuckle (Diervilla). At EQLT's headquarters on Ridge Road, Hardwick, a native plant nursery will begin growing this spring. The plants chosen are targeted to support native pollinators, and will be transplanted to our preserves as they mature. An added benefit to the increase in plant biomass and variety means more habitat for all native insects and birds.

The seed starting and plant raising process will provide plant materials for multiple projects including an edible plant pathway being created in Ware off Upper Church Street, accessed from the Mass Central Rail Trail. Edible plants like blueberry and hazelnut shrubs as well as hickory and oak trees among others will be grown at the native plant nursery before being transplanted to the edible pathway. As the plants mature, enjoyment of the edible pathway will lead to visitors gathering native fresh food, as well as providing food and shelter for wildlife.

In the plant nursery, we are following the process of 'air-pruning' to start the larger nut-producing tree seedlings. Air-pruning boxes allow the acorns and nuts to be sown densely. The base of these 3'X3' boxes is finished with wire mesh which holds the soil and provides open airflow below. The roots will naturally stop growth when they reach the open air. This process prevents taproots from growing too deep, encouraging more lateral branching which ultimately absorbs more water and nutrients while anchoring the tree in the soil once planted. When the seedlings are ready for transplanting the roots are washed, removing the soil and detangling the rootlets, allowing easier transplanting.

Some of the nut trees growing in these boxes are to be transplanted to the edible plant pathway. These environmental and habitat improvements will fill important gaps in vegetation and resources for wildlife.

Many hours this fall were spent collecting seeds; from private gardens, Lucy Stone Park, Seven Acre Preserve

and road sides. These seeds were sorted and cleaned. Instead of starting seeds indoors under grow lights, we are 'direct-sowing' many varieties. Essentially seeding directly on-site in areas we want more pollinator plants. Most seeds require seed stratification, or many months of cold, moist conditions for germination success. A variety of plants especially favored by many native pollinators were seeded, including anise hyssop, culver's root, and steeplebush. These seeds along with others were direct-sown along multiple sections of the Mass Central Rail Trail and Seven Acre Preserve's pollinator meadow. We expect good results from this work. Our native plants are accustomed to a typical New England winter and will germinate without much fanfare each spring.

We are preparing another batch of seeds for 'winter-sowing'. There are some seeds wrapped in wet papertowels in the refrigerator. Others are in the garage, protected from rodent incursions. In late January, we will sow these seeds into covered trays or pots left outside to germinate. Once the seedlings outgrow the initial container heights, they will be placed in a cold-frame generously donated by Kenny and Cathy. Once the plants outgrow the cold-frame they will be planted at our preserves in the spring.

For more information about winter seed sowing, check out the "Learn About Winter Seed Sowing" videos linked to our webpage at <https://eqlt.org/pollinator-resources/> ■

*The new native plant nursery at EQLT's offices with cold-frame, three nut growing boxes and potted plants protected with hay for the winter.*





East  
Quabbin  
LAND TRUST

*Caring for the Land that Sustains Us*

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