



P.O. Box 5, 120 Ridge Road,  
Hardwick, MA 01037

413.477.8229 |  
EQLT.org



## SPRING 2026

# Grant Support For Our Local Food System

There are a variety of ways that the East Quabbin Land Trust supports our local food system. Conserving farmland to keep it open for farming long into the future is the traditional role of a land trust. Whether that's by purchasing a conservation restriction (CR) or agricultural preservation restriction (APR), the land is dedicated for farming purposes and the purchase cost is lowered making it more affordable for future farmers.

With generous additional support from an anonymous funder, EQLT continues to support our local food system through farm micro-grants. These grants usually range between \$2,000 - \$5,000, providing added support for critical infrastructure to expand or enhance their operations or productivity. We are pleased to share that fourteen farms are receiving grant support in 2026.

- Bell Brook Farm, West Brookfield - \$2,000. Purchase of a brush cutter to maintain the no-spray Christmas tree and flower farm while retaining ground cover across the rows.
- Free Living Farm, Petersham - \$2,000. Establish perennial berry bushes and fruit trees to diversify their organic produce offerings.
- Front Yard Farm, Ware - \$2,050. Create an adequate compost bay to enhance production of their own organic compost from garden waste and woody materials.
- Heavens Harvest Farm, New Braintree - \$5,000. Support transformation of a former dairy barn foundation into a roadside produce stand and purchase a produce wash station.
- Juahkumbah Farm, North Brookfield - \$3,056. Expand poultry and egg production with secure and moveable chicken enclosures.
- Ladybug Farm Produce, Hubbardston - \$1,500. Improve drainage and fertility of additional growing space to increase the volume of vegetables, culinary herbs and cut flowers produced.
- Mitus Family Farm, Hubbardston - \$1,250. Establish new beds for field crops that build soil organic matter through composting, mulching, cover cropping and crop rotation with minimal soil disturbance.
- Noel's Farms, Petersham - \$5,000. Purchase a utility trailer, precision seeder, and mechanical transplanter to increase vegetable production and reduce soil disturbance.
- Rock Harvest Farm, New Braintree - \$3,900. Purchase a tractor-mounted flail mower for use in cover-crop management allowing larger low-till acreage with improved soil health, water efficiency and climate resilience.

- Root and Rock Farm, West Brookfield - \$1,250. Establish growing beds and berry bushes to expand food production as the land is cleared of invasive plants.
- Running Ragged Farm, West Brookfield - \$2,000. Purchase fencing and supplies to establish a small sheep herd for wool production.
- Slate Hill Farm, West Brookfield - \$3,000. Enhance the existing orchard by repairing fences and trellises, and augment the fruit tree orchard stock.
- Sunset Valley Farm, New Braintree - \$5,000. Repair the existing cow barn that is home to a cattle, goats and seasonal pasture-raised pigs.
- Tending Tomorrow Farm, Petersham - \$3,310. Purchase a small-scale electric power system with leaf blower used to expand available organic mulch, and purchase cover crop seed. ■

*Moonrise at Tending Tomorrow Farm*



MESSAGE FROM THE  
**Executive  
Director**

*Cynthia Henshaw*



The Mass Central Rail Trail (MCRT) is a critical recreational area for the East Quabbin region. People come from all over to walk with friends, take the dog(s), or just enjoy some solitude. Currently there are eight miles open, more or less, in several sections with multiple access points in our region, including Barre, Hardwick, New Braintree and Ware. Connecting these pieces by filling in the missing trail sections or traveling on-road segments is underway.

For instance, the Town of Ware is building an accessible connector trail from the paved road in Grenville Park to the MCRT off Church Street. This trail will be cut through the woods and look down on the ponded portion of Ware River. The trail work is funded by generous support from the Mass Trails grant program and the Edward and Barbara Urban Foundation. We look forward to a completed accessible trail by June 30<sup>th</sup>.

Another break in the MCRT is at the Ware River crossing in Wheelwright. A funding request is under review to support the permitting and engineering design for a new bridge that will be approximately 150 feet long. The design won't be ready until 2027. We anticipate that the bridge cost will be between \$1.5 - \$2M.

Currently EQLT is building another mile and a half of MCRT in New Braintree and Barre, thanks to funding from the Mass Trails grant program. There are several beautiful sections that run along the Ware River. The goal is to open the trail between Station Road in Barre and McEvoy Road in New Braintree by June 30<sup>th</sup>. We will host multiple volunteer sessions to cut vegetation and open up the former railroad bed for the MCRT. Please join us if you can!

We are excited to continue expanding the recreational and transportation options in our region by using the former railroad bed, which provides a safe, off-road experience and an essential level surface. EQLT collaborates with our partner organizations and towns to connect all the pieces of the original 104-mile Mass Central Railroad from Northampton to Boston. ■

**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:**

**East Quabbin Land Trust**  
P.O. Box 5, 120 Ridge Road  
Hardwick, MA 01037  
413-477-8229  
Email: office@EQLT.org

**Visit our website at [www.EQLT.org](http://www.EQLT.org)  
or "Like" us on Facebook and  
Instagram!**

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# Passion for Wildlife Tracking - Pam Landry

The winter months are often thought of as a time to hunker down by the fire to read a good book or entertain friends during the long evenings. But not for Pam Landry, educator, naturalist, and wildlife tracker. All the snow makes great tracking in many of her favorite open spaces in central Massachusetts, including the lands around the Quabbin Reservoir.

Pam's lifelong passion is to empower others to deepen their connection to the natural world. She has worked as a wildlife educator throughout her career, including a stint at the New England Science Center (a.k.a. Ecotarium in Worcester) where she serendipitously met her first tracking mentor in 1986. "Tracking is very tangible. Moving with intention and awareness people get excited to learn to read the subtle stories written on the land," says Pam.

Recently retired, Pam developed customized wildlife education programs for three decades at the Mass. Division of Fisheries & Wildlife. "The satisfying part of my job was introducing, educating, and connecting a diversity of audiences (pre-Kindergarten to retirees) to the wonders and mysteries of the natural world, and encouraging them to have immersive experiences, to really experience the cold, the wind, the sounds, and sights that would make lasting memories. Being present and engaged in your surroundings is a life-long gift."

Pam leaned into her passion and started the Wildlife Tracking Collaborative in 2022 which continues today. "My intention for creating and offering this holistic approach collaborative is to provide an opportunity for trackers of varying beginner skill levels to build a welcoming community spending time in the field with enthusiastic and passionate like-minded individuals, share and expand knowledge of seasonal natural history, animal behaviors, and track and sign, build a skill set for exploring and connecting to the natural world through tracking, and grow as wildlife trackers and naturalists."

"What I'm trying to share in the wildlife tracking collaborative are observation skills that can translate to anyone's personal use of outdoor space whether it be a neighborhood, a local park local, other community open green space, or right out someone's back door." Pam's approach is to start down the trail and look for whatever tracks or animal signs present themselves. The natural world is unpredictable, but there's always incredible things to find. It is gratifying for people to have an opportunity to

change their perspective on the natural world. For instance, one Collaborative participant is an avid birder, but paid little attention to other creatures. Now she takes the time to notice the full details of her surroundings!

Wildlife tracking is one avenue to encourage people to unplug, slow down, and be present. It is an intentional activity in the winter landscape blending exploration, discovery, interpretation, and learning. It is an opportunity to gain a greater knowledge of place, and a stronger sense of belonging in the natural world. Walking or snowshoeing in the woods or along waterways is an opportunity to engage your senses.

On a recent tracking excursion, the group found a murder mystery site. The first signs were an imprint from a body landing in the snow near a tree. Around the back side of a nearby tree were two grey squirrel tails, one hind foot and some random entrails. Was it a grey fox or a fisher who caught the squirrels? There were scratch marks in the snow along with blood -- evidence that the killed squirrels were initially buried, or cached, but later retrieved. Following the predator tracks, a whole squirrel was found (the third in that area), buried in the snow as a future meal. Was the squirrels' winter nest raided, sending them running but not fast enough to elude the predator?

Pam returned the next day. Bobcat tracks were a new addition to the scene. The third squirrel was entirely gone, carted off to be eaten in a place where the predator (or scavenger) felt safer. Or maybe the squirrel needed to thaw out a bit before it could be eaten? Speculating about the animal's behavior is part of the learning process and the mystery!

Pam's reading changes over the seasons. Right now, she is reading several books. *The first is Life in the Cold: An Introduction to Winter Ecology* by Peter J. Marchand. The book offers a comprehensive picture of the interactions of plants and animals with their cold-weather environment. Her second reading recommendation is *The Sound of a Wild Snail Eating* by Elisabeth Tova Bailey, which is an inspiring and intimate story of Elisabeth's encounter with a *Neohelix albolabris* – a common woodland snail that she watched while bedridden with an illness. As a result, she discovers solace and sense of wonder, coming to a greater understanding of her own place in the world.

When not tracking, Pam enjoys spending time outdoors throughout the year. She enjoys biking, hiking, and kayaking. Oh, and of course, will continue to organize and offer the Wildlife Tracking Collaborative for many more years to come. ■



# Announcing the 2026 Artist-in-Residence Program



*Wendemuth Meadow by Ann Hicks*

The East Quabbin Land Trust is seeking artists in any career stage representing a variety of artistic expressions interested in exploring the intersection of:

## Art, Community, & Nature

Residencies are available during the summer:

June 1 - June 13

June 15 - June 27

June 29 - July 10

July 13 - July 25

Four artists are confirmed for other residency times this summer. The artist talk and potluck events will be advertised through email and social media. Please join us to learn about their creative process and what inspires them about the intersection of art, community, & nature.

## FREE ARTIST-IN-RESIDENCE PROGRAM 2026

- **Two- to Four- Week Residencies**

Apply for free housing/studio space during summer 2026, focused on creative discovery time.

- **Get Inspired by Nature in Central Massachusetts**

Explore some of the 2,000 acres cared for by the East Quabbin Land Trust. Other state and non-profit conservation lands also close by.

- **Diverse Artistic Expressions Welcome**

Such as: writing, music, dance, Sculpture, watercolor, collage, multimedia, and photography. Applications welcome from artists at all career stages.

- **Artistic Expression Sharing**

Lead a public workshop or learning session at the end of the residency to share your nature-based inspiration



Comet Lemmon, photographed from Mandel Hill on November 1, 2025, by Ryan Hamerly, who traveled out from Cambridge Mass in search of a “dark skies” site to set up his telescope and camera, away from urban lights. The photo was captured over several hours, facing the low western sky. Bill Zinni happened upon Ryan as he left the Volunteer gathering at the EQLT Office that Sunday evening.

“Dark skies” are yet another benefit of land conservation and preserving public access out here in our region, in addition to preservation of farmland, forestland, wildlife habitat, environmental education, and outdoor recreation. The photos from Mandel Hill are posted on Ryan’s astrophotography blog [<https://photonhammer.blog/>].

# Thank You to Our 2026 Business Partners

*Our Business Partners play an important role in helping the East Quabbin Land Trust continue to Care for the Land that Sustains Us! Together, we FLOURISH!*

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**The Westbrook Insurance Agency Inc.**

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**Eye Associates North Brookfield**

# Pallet Benches - Recycle & Reuse!

By Ellie Shea

One of my capacity building projects this service term is to add play stations to the Forest Play Trail, located outside EQLT's office at 120 Ridge Road in Hardwick. Part of the goal is to add a section of trail that follows a gentler slope and is wider in order to make it a more accessible trail.

For this project, I am working with the teens and pre-teens from the Hardwick Youth Center. Last fall, the youth helped clear the extension of the Forest Play Trail, cutting down saplings, moving rocks, and raking leaves. Now that the trail extension exists, the next steps include adding benches for rest areas, installing the gravel and stonedust for a stable walking surface, and creating new play stations along the trail that highlight the different senses. We want to thank the Barre Savings Charitable Foundation for awarding \$4,000 to purchase the gravel and stonedust for this trail enhancement.

Teens from the youth center helped build the benches, which are made from old pallets! In February, Rick D., a long-time EQLT volunteer with years of carpentry experience, worked with the kids, teaching them relevant skills for the project. The kids all took turns disassembling parts of the pallets using pry bars, brute force, determination, and teamwork. They measured the correct lengths for the seat and the back, then Rick helped cut the wood to size. Rick showed them how to assemble the pieces, and taught them how to use the electric screwdriver. They completed one and a half benches that day. These hard and soft skills can be used in so many ways in life, and doing this volunteer work was a great way for the teens to learn them.

In March, two of the teens came back on their own time to help us build more. Joseph and Stephen completed five more benches with Rick's help. Rick had done the prep work, taking off the necessary boards and cutting the pallets in half. The boys worked together to screw the seats and the backs together, add the legs, and finally the armrests. To finish off the benches, I used a grinder to round off the corners, and a sander to smooth the boards.

Later this spring, the benches will be painted and the youth can decorate them. These benches will be placed along the Forest Play Trail, as well as the Edible Plant Path that is being created next to the Mass Central Rail Trail off Church Street in Ware.

Each bench uses one pallet, and one two-by-four that was eight feet long. The design came from Mitre tutorial.

A huge shout-out to Rick, he was great with the kids. The Hardwick Youth Center teens came in with a variety of skill levels and experience, some had built their own projects in the past, while others had never held a screwdriver before. Rick was an enthusiastic teacher, and the kids all gained some new hands-on building experience. Having adults who are willing to set a positive example is so important for growing minds. A big thank you to all the Hardwick Youth Center teens, Laurie Desjardins, and Beth Cafarella. ■



# Tracking through the woods

By Michael Bellefleur

Tracking is fun and a puzzle! Identifying which animal left a track is accomplished through various steps, with snow and other conditions effecting accuracy. Fresh snowfall that is not too deep and a moist texture is ideal for tracking to show the most amount of detail and increase identification accuracy. Deeper, fluffy snow leaves less of an impression while kicking other snow into the track, while icy snow leaves less of an impression. Some distinguishing factors that help with wildlife identification includes following the tracks up and down their trail to note walking pattern, habitat type and behaviors.

Noticing differences, or anomalies, in the environment is the beginning of tracking wildlife through the landscape. Whether you notice a small oak bullet gall or a large antler rub on an oak trunk, each observation adds to the story of the forest and its characters. Observing various wildlife tracks along a trail can give you a lot of information even without a distinct track. Certain animals walk with obvious tracks going left and right, compared to others who seem to be hopping along the trail. These observations combined with the walking gait and/or hopping distance, as well as the track depth in snow, can help estimate animal size. With this information you may be able to rule out certain animals, such as deer tracks obviously not being the size of mouse tracks.

Paying closer attention to the scene, other information can be gathered from the surrounding habitat. Such as noting where tracks lead up to and stop at a tree, which may indicate this animal climbed the tree. With this observation among other signs could lead one to leaning more toward a species of squirrel, rather than the often-confused track of an eastern cottontail. The winter months with snow on the ground provide special opportunities to observe signs of wildlife species folks may not come across often, such as fishers or bobcats. This time also allows us to better understand the

movements, behaviors and species interactions of our local wildlife, an opportunity more should seek out.

My love for wildlife tracking and behavior was greatly strengthened through my experiences tracking out in all the snow we got this year. Getting out there and beginning to understand the tracks for myself was a great start, however my attendance in local tracking events has greatly built upon my knowledge and understanding of our local wildlife. Connecting with Pam Landry through the Wildlife Tracking Collaborative has given me countless unforgettable observations in the wild. These include a predator feeding site involving three squirrels with only remnants left of two, and the third buried & saved for later. It is incredible fun putting the pieces together to find the most likely species interaction.

Other incredible observations and experiences during our time out tracking wildlife include following the tracks of a bonded pair of coyotes down the trail a long way with male and female scent marks indicating breeding behavior from a species who usually travel alone. Porcupine signs are also easily identified when observed, such as a pungent musky scent of their urine, as well as the angle of chewed branch remnants they leave after consuming newer growth of tree branches. Wildlife tracks and other signs can be seen not only during the winter months, but also throughout the year. EQLT encourages you to explore these wildlife signs on your own at our preserves to help uncover the story of our local woods. ■

*The top track picture is of a mouse showing the trail drag. The bottom picture is a grey squirrel hopping up a snow bank. Normally their larger hind prints are in front of the smaller front prints.*





*Caring for the Land that Sustains Us*

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# Annual Dinner & Silent Auction



Grasshopper Sparrow  
(*Ammodramus saviannarum*)

Join us for this annual celebration of land conservation in our region while greeting your friends and meeting new neighbors on Saturday, April 25th beginning at 5:30pm.

The evening includes a cocktail hour, music, delicious meal and fund-raising auction. Auction items include vacations, experiences, consumables and essential items. Don't miss the fun!

We're proud to announce we have a \$50,000 challenge this year! Join us for a great evening and support a great cause! ■

The Center at Eagle Hill  
242 Old Petersham Road, Hardwick  
Tickets are \$80 per person

