



Pascommuck post

Spring 2009

A Conservation Success Story



This is a good news story...the kind that seems to be in short supply of late. It begins in 2007, when the Board of Directors of the Pascommuck Conservation Trust (PCT) approved an idea I proposed. At the time, a friend of mine (a good woodworker), was incarcerated at the Hampshire County House of Corrections. My idea – PCT purchases wood and my friend, under the guidance of the wood shop supervisor, Wally Hlava, builds bird nesting boxes we would install on some of our conservation properties. 12 such boxes were constructed, according to the needs of various bird species. That fall, we held a well attended (by volunteers and Board members) event we dubbed – “Bird Box Sunday.”

Two of the nest boxes, the largest, were attached to trees along the Manhan River for wood ducks. If you’ve never seen a wood duck, then search for pictures on Google or elsewhere...they are gorgeous...easily our most beautiful waterfowl! Males sport iridescent greens,

purples, and blues with distinctive white chin patch and face stripes, a red bill and a crest on their head. They nest in cavities in trees near the water but will take to a properly sited nest box.

Late this winter, ladder in hand, MA Audubon ecologist and fellow PCT Board member Tom Lautzenheiser and I went to the banks of the Manhan River to put fresh sawdust into those wood duck boxes. When we opened the first one and took out the old sawdust, we noticed what looked like old eggshells in the mix. We estimated a total of six eggs had been hatched. We were thrilled that our efforts had succeeded!

The second box told a different tale. It was nearly filled up with leaves and instead of ducks; squirrels had appropriated it for their use. We put in fresh sawdust, hopeful for new tenants, preferably ones with wings! Maybe ducks raised in the first box, downstream of this one, would move in this time. To be continued...

The moral of the story – with a small amount of money and lots of volunteer help from the community, we can have an impact on our natural resources. The Trust plans to build and install more boxes this fall. Volunteers and donations are always welcome.

Marty Klein



The Annual Meeting – February 24, 2009

Having the Pascommuck Conservation Trust Annual Meeting in February is so inspiring. Winter has had its firm grasp on us for several months at that point and it is so refreshing to begin thinking about the earth returning to its more vernal and prolific time of year. It's heartening to ponder the upcoming signs of life that we are now so fully enjoying. This experience was particularly successfully achieved this year with our guest speaker, John Sheirer, who spoke of his book, *Loop Year - 365 Days on the Trail*, which chronicles his walks along the same trail in Connecticut through all four seasons. He spoke of both the natural and personal changes that occurred over the course of his year's wanderings. He is a huge proponent of the world of nature and was very supportive of our cause by sharing his experiences with us, by inspiring us all to get out on the land, by becoming a PCT member and volunteer and by donating a share of any books sold that evening to PCT! This alone made the Annual Meeting a success!!

In addition, we were awed as usual by president John Bator's unique presentation of our past year's successes and goals for the coming year. He outlined the Summary of Activities under the headings of Fundraising/Grants, Outreach, Properties Maintenance/Volunteer Activities, Land Preservation and Miscellaneous. Some of the highlights included a \$10,000 grant from Massachusetts Land Trust Commission for site assessments of our properties done by Molly Hale and outreach management done by Marty Klein, the Easthampton Cultural Council Grant and Trust donation to Claire Darcey for her documentary on the Ed Dwyer Conservation Area and the surrounding Manhan River greenbelt, the John Bator Park work party done by volunteers from the Center for International Studies in Northampton, the collaborative effort with the city and Valley Land Fund to preserve 15 acres on the slopes of Mt. Tom off of East Street, renewed outreach efforts to local land owners to explore conservation options, the sale of 45 acres of farmland in the White Brook Plains Conservation Area to farmer Kristen Wilmer of Connecticut, planning for an updated website, the July 13 Celebration of the sale of Echodale Farm to Rodney Britt and Gail Flood, two successful plant sales, two newsletters including the 25th Anniversary edition in the spring, new property maps being compiled by Tom Lautzenheiser and several nature walks and work parties. It was a full year!!

Goals for the new year are equally ambitious with plans to continue outreach to local land owners, on-going efforts to improve the website and to continue improvements on the properties, the establishment of a Butterfly Garden at White Brook Plains, continued efforts to save land on the slopes of Mt. Tom, increased involvement from our valued volunteers, expanded membership and recruitment of new board members including a new treasurer.

It was an evening of warmth and renewal on a chilly February evening. Great snacks and good conversation in the lovely room at the Lathrop Center rounded out the night. Look for our Annual Meeting in February, 2010 to hear what new successes we've achieved and to remind yourself that, once again, spring is coming!

Molly Goodwin

Of Sand Plains & Swallowtails:

Enhancing Butterfly Habitat at the White Brook Plains Conservation Area



When PCT hired wildlife biologist Molly Hale last year to conduct surveys of our conservation lands, we asked her to think creatively about opportunities for improving their wildlife habitat values. Among Molly's many ideas, one that we are particularly excited about is the concept of improving habitat for butterflies at the White Brook Plains Conservation Area. Due to its configuration, prior land use, and neighborhood context, this property has posed some management challenges for the Trust; Molly's idea presents an excellent approach to enhancing wildlife habitat in a way that is compatible with the ecological and social constraints on this parcel of land, as well as working with its natural assets.



This oddly-shaped property – consisting of scraps of land reserved from subdivision – breaks most of the rules of conservation planning, which dictate that reserves should be essentially circular or square to minimize disturbance in the interior of the parcel. To compound the conservation challenges, the meadow-dominated property gives more the impression of an extension of neighboring lawns than a protected open space. Many species of wildlife native to New England, including birds and mammals, occur most reliably in interior-dominated areas, insulated from human activities beyond the perimeter. This requirement cannot be readily satisfied at the White Brook Plains Conservation Area. However, some species, including most insects, don't particularly need large interior areas to satisfy their lives' requirements. These species do just fine in small patches of habitat, and can occur in human-dominated areas. From a butterfly's perspective, if an area has adequate host and nectar plants, chances are the area will meet its needs. Also, butterflies aren't controversial. Their presence won't have any unwanted impacts on neighbors, and managing for them essentially means leaving the land much as it is

while adding a greater variety of flowering plants, which in themselves would be an improvement over the existing conditions. Finally, there is evidence to suggest that this humble parcel may be capable of providing habitat for a number of butterflies that are unusual or imperiled in our area.

PCT has a few management goals relating to the enhancement of butterfly habitat at White Brook Plains. First, we want to provide host or nectar plants for a variety of relatively common butterfly species already found to be present on the property, including spring azure, American lady, Eastern tiger swallowtail, and monarch. We envision meeting this goal through supplemental planting of wildflowers such as New England aster, butterflyweed, bee balm, and Joe-Pye weed. Second, we believe that elements of the landscape are potentially favorable for several rare and uncommon species, so we want to provide host or nectar plants for these, too. Frosted elfin, wild indigo duskywing, and oak hairstreak, for examples, are not known to occur on the property, but perhaps if we establish the right conditions, they or related species will find the area and take up residence.

Our hope for attracting rare butterflies to the White Brook Plains property rests on the geological setting of the area, and the habitat the land likely supported before European settlement. Based on the sandiness of soils in the Plains section of Easthampton, its flat terrain, and the occurrence of pitch pine in undeveloped areas, this part of the city may have once hosted a similar forest as presently occurs on the Montague sandplains. This forest type, a pitch pine/scrub oak barren, is the habitat for numerous rare butterflies and moths where it occurs in Massachusetts (mainly in the Connecticut River Valley and the southeast portion of the state). Given the dry, mineral soils of the White Brook Plains site, it is an ideal location to attempt to reconstruct part of this uncommon forest type. We envision adding species such as lowbush blueberry, wild indigo, New Jersey tea, and wild lupine to the driest portions of the property. These species will provide interesting and attractive color and structure to this area, and, with luck, will draw in some unusual butterflies and moths – some of which have few remaining habitats available to them in the state.

While we have a good idea of what we want to accomplish with our butterfly-friendly plantings at White Brook Plains, we are still working out details and discussing the best way to implement our vision. However we proceed, we think this will be a project that our volunteers and neighbors around the site can adopt, with support from the Directors. If you want to participate in this project in any way, from creating a part of a planting plan, to donating plant material or labor, please contact Molly Goodwin, our Volunteer Coordinator.

Tom Lautzenheiser

conservation



A Beehive of Activity....The Plant Sale



In early May the Earth is just awakening from its' winter slumber. The residents of this area are itching for some green color after months of white and brown. Pascommuck Conservation Trust plans the Spring Plant Sale for as near to Earth Day as the weather permits. The many volunteers, Board Members and gardeners start gathering plant divisions, hold potting parties and eagerly await the big day. On the morning of the sale, the parking lot of Big E's grocery store is like a beehive, so much activity coming and going! There are truckloads of plants arriving, a big red tent going up, people unloading plants, tables, chairs, etc., people pricing and labeling, raffles being set up, and eager customers who know the prices can't be beat. As fast as plants arrive they are bought and loaded into other vehicles to be brought home and planted. This event is one of PCT's primary fundraisers for each year. The hours of labor and generosity of volunteers and donors help make it successful. The sale is fast paced, chaotic and a fun-filled day. We always wonder how we will get everything done but it cheerfully gets done. The many perennials,

house plants, shrubs and trees get swarmed over and disappear to new homes. The wonderful raffle items entice customers from the booth. This Spring we had a rain barrel that was made and donated by Tom Cameron and won by Beth McLain. We also had 2 nice gift baskets made and donated by Terry Perrea, which were won by Deborah Allen. Sue Bishop, a strong supporter of the Trust, made and donated a great garden bench full of garden goodies, which was won by S. Gallo. There was also a heavy duty garden cart full of garden supplies, donated by Big E's and won by Molly Goodwin. Mike Superson donated 2 great arborvitaes which went quickly as well. The smiling faces, happy customers and warm reception that we get makes the day pass so quickly. Many new residents of town stopped by to pick up literature and find out what all the buzz was about. We are always welcoming new volunteers, members of the Trust and Board Members. The Trust is a great group of people and the work that we do helps preserve open spaces and support smart development in the city. The many customers, volunteers and people who donated plants and raffle items all deserve a huge thank you. Thank you everyone! See you in the Fall!

Dawn Ackley

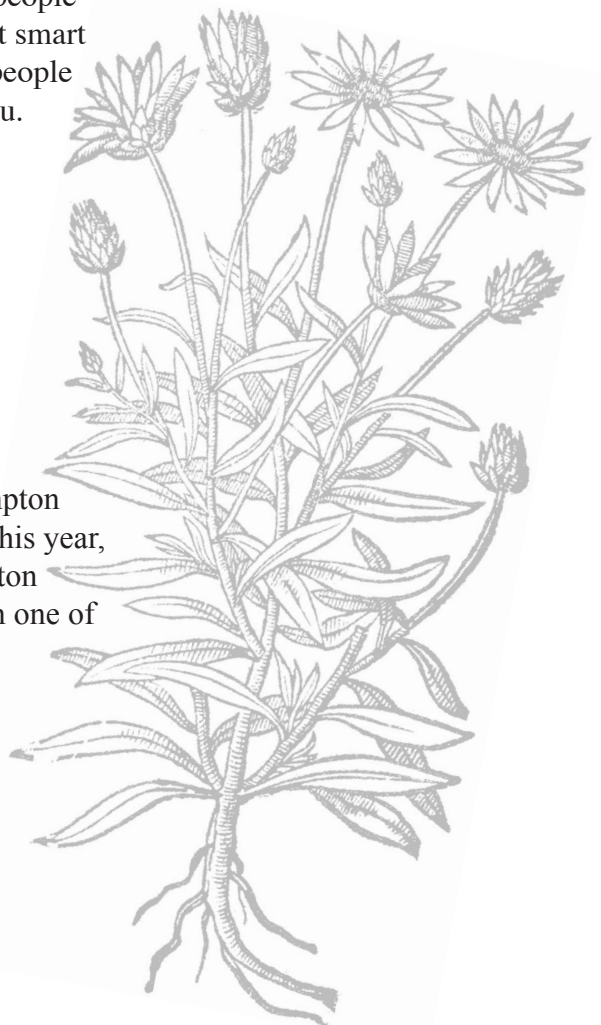
- **In other news...**

For many years, PCT has given a scholarship to an Easthampton student who demonstrates a passion for the environment. This year, we tried something new and offered a grant to an Easthampton teacher who proposed an environmentally-related project on one of our properties. The recipient is Eric Frary of EHS

A work party at John Bator Park on July 11.

Birdbox Sunday October 11 and Nature walk October 18, location and time for both events to be announced.

www.pctland.org is the site to check for more events



Property Maintenance Update

It's been awhile since we've heard some tall tales from the trails, so I've enlisted Smokey the Bear to roam our properties and give us an update.

John Bator Park, located on the corner of Williston Avenue and Lake Street, (which perhaps should be renamed "Vandal and Vagrant Haven") has seen its share of destruction and intrusion. Two benches were ripped out of their base with one being thrown in the Rubber Thread Pond recently (these were skillfully re-installed by Robert MacDonald of the "Compassionate Friends" and we thank him for this kindness). Graffiti in the Gazebo and even on the trash can keeps appearing regularly. The seats were just repainted by Bill Burgart after suffering knife gouging and unprintable comments. The Joyce Brown memorial stone lettering has been altered; and every so often, Freddy the Freeloader and friends have to be served "No Trespass" notices for loitering and sleeping in the park. This summer there are plans to re-stain the Gazebo- if it's still there! We have notified the Police of the destruction several times; have installed "No Loitering" signs and would ask that anyone seeing anything suspicious going on there, immediately call the police station and report it..

Whether you have a particular skill or just feel like spending an hour helping the ***Pascommuck Conservation Trust***, you will always be welcomed.

Please contact
Molly Goodwin
at 529-1805 or
goodmol@hotmail.com.

On May 2nd a local Boy Scout Troop, under the direction of leader Beth Tiffany, took to the trails at Edward Dwyer Conservation Area off Terrace View, picking up loads of trash and clearing the pathways of debris and overhanging vegetation. Also, Christine Yario and Kirk Peterson have been diligently pulling out garlic mustard, a terrorist invader plant that recently has been taking hold everywhere. Our thanks go out to these wonderful volunteers.

At Brickyard Brook Conservation Area, accessible from Mt. Tom Avenue and/or East Street, some of the bog bridges and embankment steps installed by Americorp volunteers a few years ago are deteriorating, and overgrowth along the trail is becoming vigorous. We will have to address both of these situations at our upcoming work party on June 20th. If anyone wishes to help with this work, please call Molly Goodwin at 529-1805 and let her know you want to help. Thank you.

Old Pascommuck Conservation Area on East Street needs a new picnic table. Last November the Sewer Dept. had to contend with a main outfall sewer trunkline blockage near the lower trail that parallels the



Manhan River. Roots from three large trees were the culprits. Heavy equipment had to be brought in, the trees cut, overgrowth in their easement was cleared with a brush hog, and the pipe repaired. The Dept. has promised to return in drier weather to clean up the site.

Four of our members visited Hannum Brook Conservation Area, off Carillon Circle on May 16th, clearing trails of debris, weeds and woody overgrowth. Right now the main trail is short, and dead ends near a ravine. In the future we hope to extend the path down the slope, and then follow the brook until we can loop back to the main entrance, which is an easement between two houses.

Last on Smokey's list is the Old Trolley Line Conservation Area off Clapp Street. In the past, we put in many grueling hours of labor cutting encroaching trees and invasives in the meadow there. Now we have it much easier, thanks to Arcadia's Property Manager, Steven Walker. He mows the fields for us every fall, and this allows the meadows to remain an open habitat, which certain birds and wildlife need. Left to itself, these fields would revert to forest. This area is a good example of a mixed habitat of forest, open meadows and wetlands.

Well, that's about all for now, folks. Smokey has to get back to his regular job- eating people who start forest fires.

John Bator

Pascommuck Conservation Trust Board

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The Basics on Conservation Restrictions

Local Case in Point: Peaceful Valley Farm

Paul Kuzeja recalls that his late dad, John Kuzeja, had strong feelings about protecting the family farm on Burt Street. “He always wanted to honor the memory of his own parents, who had worked hard on the farm, and he couldn’t countenance the land ever being sold, subdivided, and developed,” says Kuzeja. This sentiment led the family, including John Kuzeja’s younger sisters, Anna Block Kuzeja and Bertha Fournier, to establish several conservation restrictions totaling some 215 acres in Easthampton, West Holyoke and Southamptton.

“In the 1970s when my dad first got the idea to protect the land,” explains Paul Kuzeja, “our place was not that special as there were so many farms around us. But now everything is all built up. What a difference a few decades can make.”

A conservation restriction is a voluntary legal agreement that provides a way for a landowner to ensure that all or a part of his or her land will remain undeveloped. The landowner retains ownership and can convey the property, by deed or by will, through gift or sale, to a family member or anyone else. Typically, a landowner wishing to protect his or her property will donate a conservation restriction to a conservation agency or nonprofit land trust.

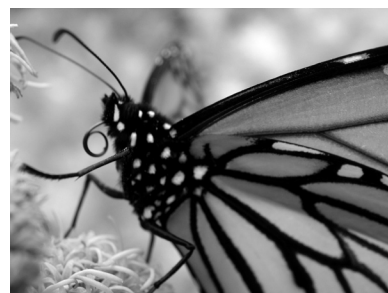
The terms of a conservation restriction can vary, depending on the wishes of the landowner and the conservation agency or land trust. Though the restriction prohibits development, some uses of the property, such as farming or timber harvesting, are frequently permitted when they are consistent with the objectives of the parties to the agreement. Conservation restrictions do not give the public any right to use the property in any way, unless the agreement specifically allows for public access or public use.

A conservation restriction is recorded like a deed and is binding upon future owners of the property. The document also legally empowers the land trust to monitor and enforce the agreement. To qualify as a tax-deductible gift, the conservation restriction must be written to be effective in perpetuity. The tax deductible provisions for donation of conservation restrictions are slated for renewal by Congress.

If you are considering a conservation restriction for your property, be sure to consult with an attorney who is familiar with land conservation strategies.

Patty Gambarini

(The above information is drawn from the chapter on Conservation Restrictions from Land Conservation Options: A Guide for Massachusetts Landowners, The Trustees of the Reservations and the Essex County Greenbelt Association Massachusetts Land Trust Coalition, October 2001.)



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*Preserving our past . . .
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I WOULD ALSO LIKE TO HELP THE TRUST BY

- ___ Donating plants for plant sales
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Pascommuck Conservation Trust

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This is a great time of year to walk on
a local trail. Nature is awakening and
bursting with new life.

*Stop, look and listen...
you'll be glad you did!*