



Pascommuck post

Fall 2021

The covid fiasco has certainly curtailed progress on many fronts of our lives, but the Trust's workload continues unabated. Saving open space is a continuous battle, and there's never a dull moment. So, here is a list of some of the more important issues/chores we have been contending with so far this year:

Memorial Bench Fundraiser – Choose a designated location at one of our conservation areas for a bench that will be a memorial to honor a loved one. Spring Plant sale, May 29'th – It was cold and rainy, but they came, and we sold. Our fall sale will be October 2 at the Municipal Building parking lot.

Work Sessions – Two so far: Repotting plants left over from the spring plant sale. Cleaning out branches and lawn debris deposited by neighbors along a drainage ditch at the Old Trolley Line trail off Clapp Street.

Properties Maintenance – PCT Maintenance Manager Kevin Mulligan has been busy clearing trails and repairing/replacing the infrastructure on our properties.

Cherry Street Outfall Repair Project – The City has applied for grants to address the deteriorating culvert drainage issues on Cherry Street and Mt Tom Avenue, resulting in erosion issues affecting Brickyard Brook. We will be involved in the monitoring/consulting process.

Land Protection – Three projects are in the works that involve PCT, Kestrel, the City, and the State: Advocating to secure the old quarry on Mt Tom by DCR. Saving a parcel on Reservation Road from being developed into five house lots. Mt Tom North Entrance Project off East Street: Some funding has been secured, and the planning stage virtually completed to begin construction of an accessible trail and viewing area that will connect to the New England Scenic Trail (M&M) on the Easthampton side of the mountain.

Calendar Of Events/Organizational List – This recent compilation will guide us from year to year in planning out our workload of chores and activities. It will also serve as an orientation package for new Board members. All our archival information is being re-organized, as well.

PCT High School Scholarship – Awarded to Lucia Rea.

New Board Members – Scott Tundermann, Kala Champagne, and Marylou Dodge have joined the Board, and they are just the kind of members we need to push forward.

And the beat goes on. As you can see, we never have time to rest on our laurels. Enjoy the following articles, and stay connected with the earth – visit our trails when you can.

John Bator



President's Report

Trailhead Park Progress

An Accessible Trail Coming Soon

With the protection of the Mt. Tom North Trailhead Park property in 2019, the Kestrel Trust and City of Easthampton (with assistance from PCT) permanently secured 23 acres adjacent to the state reservation, with the vision of creating a welcoming gateway to Mt. Tom from Easthampton. Since then, supported by state and Community Preservation funding, project partners have developed a plan for improvements to the site, and are moving toward construction—and not a moment too soon.

Around the world, people are increasingly seeking parks and other open space for enjoyment, health, social connection, and refuge, and without exception local conservation areas have experienced high demand. Full parking lots and busy trails reflect the benefits these lands bring to so many, and yet increased visitation also can potentially harm conservation values including wildlife habitat quality, tranquility, and aesthetics. The key to managing these benefits and risks is a thoughtfully-designed trail system. Gladly, plans for the Mt. Tom Trailhead Park promise an inviting experience by incorporating an accessible trail, improving pollinator habitat, keeping vehicles in a small parking lot near East St., and providing a wide, outstanding vista north and west across the valley and Berkshire foothills.

Among the conservation assets of the Mt. Tom North Trailhead Park, an old field, overgrown with white pine, probably strikes most visitors as sort of shabby. But looks can be deceiving: this scrubby area hosts populations of Prairie Warbler, American Woodcock, Field Sparrow, and Eastern Towhee, all designated as Species of Greatest Conservation Need in the state's wildlife action plan, among other species associated with old fields. By keeping the trail corridor at the edge of this habitat, trail designers minimize the potential for visitors (and especially visitors' dogs!) to disrupt the activities of these birds through the breeding season. Other trail loops through adjacent forest offer hikers a woodland experience, with a connection to the long-distance New England Trail (formerly the M&M Trail).

The proposed trail at the Park also incorporates planting native trees, shrubs, wildflowers, and ferns to shade the trail, enhance aesthetics, and provide increased wildlife food resources. These improvements ensure a varied, interesting experience for visitors at any time of year, with the reward of one of the best sunset views in the Valley. Keep an eye out for further news on trail construction and Park opening!

Tom Lautzenheiser





Image: Dodson & Flinker for the City of Easthampton, 2020 (color original)

Project at a Glance - Information provided by Jeff Bagg, City Planner

Funding:

- \$374,000 state PARC Grant and \$176,000 Easthampton CPA fund

Features:

- new 9-car paved parking area on East St.
- 1,200-foot accessible trail to picnic overlook
interpretive signage
- hiking loop extending to adjacent Kestrel Land Trust property
- connection to Eyrie House trail system on adjacent Mt. Tom
State Reservation
- trailhead for New England Scenic Trail
- 3-acre meadow habitat restoration

Construction:

- Gagliarducci Construction, September/October 2021 – June 2022

Design plans and more information: Mt. Tom North Trailhead Park |
Easthampton, MA (easthamptonma.gov)

Acknowledgements: What are they and why do them?

Giving a land acknowledgement is the act of acknowledging that the north American land mass is land that was inhabited for centuries by Indigenous peoples before it was colonized by white settlers. Here in New England, the land was mostly unceded by Indigenous tribes; it was taken by misunderstanding, deception or force.

Land acknowledgement has been a custom among Native communities for centuries. But, in the words of the Duwamish People of the northwest, “for non-Indigenous communities, land acknowledgement is a powerful way of showing respect and honoring the Indigenous Peoples of the land on which we work and live. Acknowledgement is a simple way of resisting the erasure of Indigenous histories and working towards honoring and inviting the truth.” (Duwamishtribe.org) When given by an Indigenous person, a land acknowledgement might include a brief history of the land and a prayer of gratitude for its bounty. It is not necessarily the place of non-natives to copy that model, as that could cross over into appropriation of their beliefs and customs, but it is appropriate to, as the name states, acknowledge the place and the history.



It is sometimes hard to know what one can do to help right long-ago wrongs, but one thing we can do is to acknowledge the wrongs and their continuing reach in our communities, and to make sure that we are not perpetuating white-washed and erroneous history. An example of the erasure of indigenous history is our federal Thanksgiving holiday. Countless history books and Presidential Thanksgiving proclamations note that the first Thanksgiving celebration took place in 1621, in a feast shared by the Puritans and the Wampanoag Tribe, to celebrate their cooperation and harvest bounty. Here, however, are some takes on Thanksgiving in the words of Wampanoags (native people from eastern MA and RI):

“The way that I try to explain Thanksgiving to teachers is that there are many thanksgivings, it is not just that one day. As for the first Thanksgiving, it wasn’t necessarily that they (the Pilgrims) invited our ancestors to eat. It just happened that it was a time when the leader of our people was coming into their (the Pilgrim) village on business. So they invited the men to stay and partake in the feast.”

-- Tobias Vanderhoop - Aquinnah Wampanoag

“Wampanoags are a fishing, hunting, and planting people. There was always enough bounty for feasts throughout the year. With four distinct prolific seasons, the Wampanoag harvested different types of food

each season. The animal, fish, bird, and plant relatives of the Native people have life cycles and migration patterns which make this possible. Thanksgiving is a commitment to all living things we accept as food to sustain our lives. More important than a feast or occasion, Thanksgiving is a concept from ancient times.”

-- Ramona Peters - Mashpee Wampanoag

“The irony is that these people’s (Pilgrim’s) religion even [forbad] them to sit down at a table and break bread with ‘heathens,’ with non-Christians. You see all these wonderful little picture books of little Indian children and Pilgrim children eating and smiling at each other. It just would never have happened.”

-- Jessie Little Doe Baird - Mashpee Wampanoag

Since 1970, the United American Indians of New England have held a National Day of Mourning in Plymouth, MA on the same day that Thanksgiving is observed in the United States.

Robin Wall Kimmerer, a writer, botanist and member of the Potawatomi Nation, writes of the indigenous belief that we are all human delegates to the democracy of species. The students at the indigenous school near her home, which lies within the boundaries of the Onondaga nation, have a morning Thanks Giving ritual every day, as has been their practice for centuries. They are, in her words, “a culture of gratitude.” (Braiding Sweetgrass, p. 115)

From these examples, it is clear that the picture of Thanksgiving that we have held for the past few centuries is a colonial interpretation, representing a puritan version of giving thanks, and doesn’t reflect what the concept meant for Native Americans or the true nature of the event in 1621.

Many organizations are now making a practice of giving a formal land acknowledgement when they gather for meetings. The PCT Board has voted to craft a land acknowledgement, as well. This seems particularly appropriate for the Pascommuck Conservation Trust, whose name is borrowed from a Native American word (which, according to the PCT website, is of unknown origin but means “where the river bends”), and whose mission is to protect the land.

Jane Andresen

acknowledgement

Reservation Road

On August 19, Pascommuck Conservation Trust personnel joined city and state officials for a site walk at the top of Reservation Road, near the boundary of the Mount Tom Reservation. The officials were Easthampton City Planner Jeff Bagg and Melissa Cryan of the Commonwealth's Local Acquisition for Natural Diversity (LAND) grant program. The visit was the latest step in a long process, involving a number of groups, to resolve what will happen to a parcel of land that has proven very controversial. By late fall, when the City learns whether it has received this state funding, there might finally be an answer.

BACKGROUND

Friends of the PCT have probably heard this spring and summer about the proposed sale of five building lots at the top of Reservation Road, beyond the Reservation gate. It turns out that the story of these plots goes back decades.

The land in question was sold in 1983 to a developer and eventually sold again in 2002 to the current landowners, who built what remains the highest elevation house on the mountain. Then, in 2008, they submitted plans to subdivide the remainder of their land into five new lots, marching up the south side of the road. They sold the house and its lot in 2016 and moved away.

Those five plots went up for sale (again) this past spring, each assessed at over \$100,000. The renewed listings provoked an upswell of concern from neighbors and conservation groups concerned that construction on these steep plots could do damage and diminish the natural and recreational value of the adjacent Reservation, as well as open the door to additional houses high up on the ridge. Opponents have decried that the Planning Board accepted these tracts as "approval not required" lots in the first place, apparently unaware of the issues involved.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS

The Mount Tom Reservation was created in 1902 under a commission with "powers to acquire lands... and vested with full power and authority to care for, protect, and maintain the same in behalf of the Commonwealth". Now almost 2000 acres, the Reservation encompasses Mount Tom, Mount Nonotuck, and the smaller peaks between them. The Mount Tom range is traversed by the New England National Scenic Trail and contains other hiking and recreational features. The steep, rocky slopes are well-known as habitat and hunting grounds for migrating raptors, which soar on the rising "thermals" of air warmed by the sun-drenched rock (sometimes joined by human para-gliders). A number of other plant and animal species call Mount Tom home, several of which are rare and at-risk at the state or global level.

Of course, that critical and diverse habitat doesn't end at the man-made boundaries of the Reservation, and much of the unprotected lower slopes in Easthampton—including the five lots—have been designated as



conservation

“BioMap Core Habitat” by the state, putting it under the authority of the Division of Fisheries and Wildlife to protect. In 2008, the state’s Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Program (NHESP) notified the landowners that their Massachusetts Endangered Species Act filing remained incomplete because there weren’t engineering plans for the clearing, building, and road improvements required to develop the plots. The letter stated that “Until the NHESP approves final plans in writing, no soil or vegetation disturbance, work, clearing, or grading shall be conducted.”

Not only could development in the area affect plant and animal species living there, but neighbors downhill worry that clearing and building could contribute significantly to erosion and run-off problems, with consequences for a much larger area on the slopes of the Mt. Tom range.

RECREATIONAL CONCERNS

The last of the five new plots would be only 60 feet from the boundary of the Mt. Tom Reservation, and Bray Tower, one of the observation sites on the range, is only 500 feet away. Many visitors go to the Reservation to get away from “civilization,” and if homes are built so close to the edges of the Reservation, some of that escape could be diminished.

Neighbors along Reservation Road have also expressed their displeasure. Donal Carbaugh has been a vocal representative of the current residents on Reservation Road who have opposed the development of the new sites for at least 15 years, supported by PCT and other advocates of permanent protection of Easthampton’s share of Mount Tom.

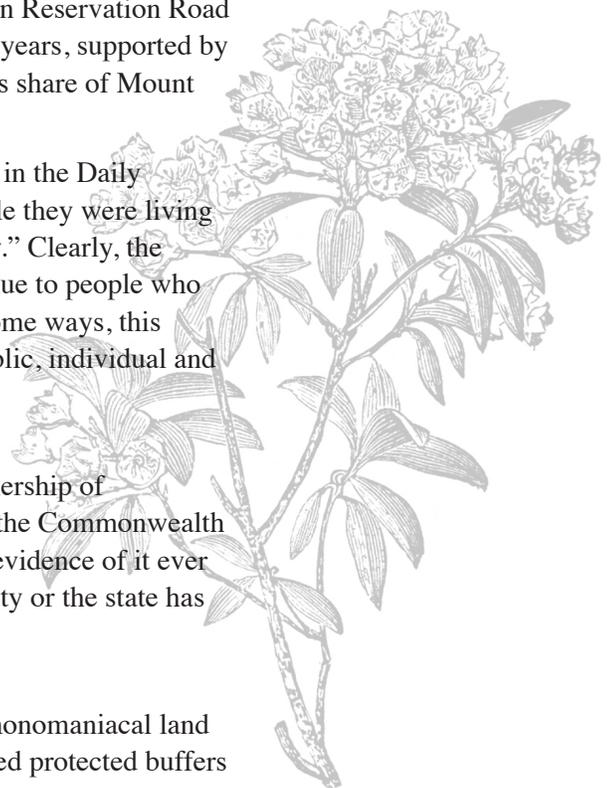
Ironically, Peter Lane, the attorney for the landowners, was quoted in the Daily Hampshire Gazette saying “previous development on the road while they were living there ruined their own quiet enjoyment and led them to move away.” Clearly, the undeveloped land in and around the Reservation has significant value to people who seek communion with nature and the peace of the wilderness. In some ways, this whole issue could be considered a conflict between private and public, individual and communal access to enjoyment of nature.

LEGAL QUESTIONS

To further complicate matters, there is some question as to the ownership of Reservation Road itself. The City of Easthampton transferred it to the Commonwealth in 1917, and people involved in the issue haven’t found definitive evidence of it ever having been transferred back. As such, it’s not clear whether the City or the state has authority to approve or deny permission for developing the lots.

FINDING SOLUTIONS

It would be unfair to characterize this story as a conflict between monomaniacal land developers and conservationists. The 2008 subdivision plan included protected buffers of land at the back of each lot as conservation restrictions. MassWildlife indicated in a letter that such restrictions likely would earn approval for the project. But those restrictions were never officially established, so that approval was never given.



Reservation Road continued

The simplest solution was always to buy the land for conservation. The owners have expressed willingness, and according to their attorney “waited a full year at the request of the City to see if grant funding for an access project would come through” (quoted in the Gazette).

Of course, the owners would like to receive the best price for their land; across the table, the City, state agencies, and conservation groups like PCT and the Kestrel Land Trust operate on limited budgets and work to secure funding through grants and donations. And the complicated factors affecting these lots—conservation laws, the legal status of the road, and so on—make it extremely difficult to establish a fair market price. Remote land with beautiful surroundings can command a high price, but lots that can’t legally be developed lose a huge amount of their potential cash value.

AN END IN SIGHT

But thanks to City Planner Jeff Bagg’s negotiations, the landowners have signed an option agreement to sell at a price based on a recent appraisal. The site visit with Melissa Cryan from the LAND Program was the final step in the grant application, following Mr. Bagg’s hard work consolidating support from PCT, Kestrel Land Trust (which will hold the conservation restriction over the protected land), and Mayor Nicole LaChapelle, the City’s Community Preservation Act (CPA) Committee, State Representative

Dan Carey, and State Senator John Velis. Meanwhile, there is a request before the CPA Committee to appropriate the balance of the funds needed.

Ultimately, the effort to save this small but very significant piece of land is an example of the critical, time-intensive conservation work of groups like PCT and others. Neighbors, land trust volunteers and staff, and City employees who care deeply about protecting sensitive natural resources give their time and talents to navigate a whole raft of state and local agencies towards a solution that works for land-owners, the community, and the plants and animals that can’t represent their own welfare. The

work to preserve Mount Tom—exemplified by past PST projects involving the Broad Brook, Boruchowski, and Ciak/Papelegis properties and the forthcoming Mount Tom Trailhead Park—continues!



Scott Tunderman

Pascommuck Conservation Trust Scholarship Award

Hi, My name is Lucia Rea and I am grateful to have received the scholarship funding this year, as awarded by Pascommuck Conservation Trust, to help further my education. I am really excited to attend Wesleyan University in the fall. I plan on using my time there to study both Environmental Studies and Government. I am passionate about environmental advocacy and hope to pursue a career in environmental litigation and policy making.



Save the Date

October 9, 2021

Tom Lautzenheiser will be conducting a fall *Ferns and Wildflower* nature walk at 10 a.m. Rain or shine at the Edward Dwyer Conservation area off Terrace View. At 35 acres, this is the largest of PCT's holdings. It features a well marked and well maintained set of trails that enter from the parking spot along Terrace View. Parking is available on this street. We hope to see you there.

April 2022

Earth Day 2022, PCT will become part of Give Back the Land, a 24 hour on-line fundraiser. We hope you will take part. More info to follow at a later date.

Newest Board Member

My name is Kala Marie Champagne and I am the newest board member of The Pascommuck Conservation Trust (PCT). From our members to our volunteers, our desire to protect the land and other natural resources in Easthampton, MA is an emotion we all have in common. Presently the PCT holds 16 properties. Can you believe back in 1982, PCT started with just one property! I cannot be more excited to see what the future holds.

I first heard about The Pascommuck Conservation Trust through my employer, bankESB (Easthampton Savings Bank). I have been in the banking industry for 6 years and joined bankESB back in August 2020 as a loan closer for the Residential Lending Department. Hometown Financial Group is a mutual holding company headquartered in Easthampton, Massachusetts, and is the parent company of bankESB, bankHometown and Abington Bank. This collaboration has resulted in 34 branches located throughout western, central and eastern Massachusetts and northeastern Connecticut. This collaboration allows greater efficiency and resources for our customers, while our banks can still operate independently in their core markets.

Why do I feel an attraction to The Pascommuck Conservation Trust? Well, my love for land preservation all started when I was a child. I grew up in Vermont and throughout my childhood I would go to Red Rocks Park, located in South Burlington, Vermont. This land faced deforestation on a couple of occasions. Then in 1970, South Burlington purchased the park and continues to protect the land. I would walk the trails, go cliff jumping, enjoy the beach area and I even went on my first date with my husband there. Later I moved to Connecticut, where I was just a couple miles away from the Quinebaug River Trail. I would walk this trail and would find the same safety and comfort as I did with Red Rocks Park. Now living in Massachusetts, I am still able to enjoy the Connecticut River and the Manhan River, a focus area for PCT, which flows into the Connecticut River.

If you feel love for land preservation please reach out, there are many ways to help! You could be a volunteer or a member, maybe just attend a board meeting or enjoy purchasing a memorial bench! I hope you all enjoy our trails just as much as I do!

“You must be the change you wish to see in the world.” ~

Mahatma Gandhi

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PLEASE PROVIDE YOUR CONTACT INFORMATION

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PLEASE CHECK YOUR DESIRED MEMBERSHIP LEVEL

- Supporter (\$6)
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MAKE AN ADDITIONAL DONATION FOR:

- Unrestricted \$ _____
- Mutter Field Stewardship Fund \$ _____
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PLEASE INDICATE VOLUNTEER INTERESTS

- Donate plants for plant sale
- Prepare plants for plant sale
- Setup/take down at plant sale
- Monitor a Trust area near me
- Grant Writing /Fundraising
- Land Conservation
(Landowner contacts, Planning, etc.)
- Trail/Property Maintenance
- Social Media Coordinator



THANK YOU!

MAIL THIS FORM WITH YOUR CHECK TO:

Pascommuck Conservation Trust, P.O. Box 806, Easthampton, Massachusetts 01027

Pascommuck is a 501 (3) (C) non-profit charitable organization. Your gift is tax deductible.



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