

HOPKINTON AREA LAND TRUST INC.

NEWSLETTER



Volume XXXVII, Almost Winter

November, 2012

A Word from the President

David Goldman

Summer is over. Fall is upon us and the leaf peeping season is gone. Events of the last few days of October and early November included Hurricane Sandy and our national Presidential election. Sandy wrecked heavy damage in New York and New Jersey but, thankfully, the damage in the local area was at a minimum. With respect to the Trusts properties and conservation easement areas, we were also lucky to have only a minimum of a few trees damaged from the winds of the storm, interior to the open spaces. The next big event is Thanksgiving and we should all be thankful that Sandy's and the subsequent Nor'easter's damage was light.

The Geocaching program for our trails and properties continues to be very popular. The Trust now has geocaches on the following properties/trails: **Whitehall Conservation Area (WCA) (GC34KJH, N 42° 14.142 W 071° 34.299); Karl Mighton Trail (KMT) (GC34X6Q, N 42° 13.085 W 071° 28.333); Deer Run, Andersen's Trail (DRT) (GC34X5Y, N 42° 14.870 W 071° 29.895)**. Since May of this year the Trust has had 24 visits to the WCA, 21 visits to DRT, and 26 visits to the KMT. The Trust is planning to place another three caches in the next month or two so stay tuned. If you compare these numbers with the ones in the prior newsletter you will find that there is a significant increase in the number of visits and use of the trails/properties.

An update on the Joint Conservation Restriction on the 125 acres of open space in the Fruit Street property. The last/final revision of the CR has cleared the State DEP for approval. The survey on the approximately 125 acres of open space land is complete and has received the approval of the Planning Board on September 10th. Baseline documentation field work has been completed and the baseline report is in preparation. Once complete, it goes to the town for record purposes. It should be noted again that the Town has decided to ban the discharge of any firearms on the entire Fruit Street property (245 acres) because of the danger to kids and adults using the Fruit Street Fields. Signs are being designed and priced and hopefully, they should be erected in the next few months.

We all know that economic times are still tough, and the economic future is still an unknown. But if you think about it, the Trusts' open space in town provides some very real benefits to each of you. It provides open space land that is always open to you and your family for your fun and enjoyment. Also, by maintaining the open space, the Trust is helping to preserve and increase the value of your property in Hopkinton. **We are closing in on 750 to 800 acres of open space land in Trust ownership or under Conservation restriction**, which provides for the preservation of that rural character we all want in Hopkinton. We are at the end of the year when we make our donation decisions, so please remember to *help support the Trust, by becoming a member or making a tax deductible donation.* so that we can continue to provide this value to you the residents. Happy Holidays.

Very truly: *David Goldman*, President

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STEWARDSHIP

By Mavis O'Leary

The word "Stewardship" has a long history. From humble beginnings in Old English and other variations of old world language, the word 'styward' evolved from stige, a sty, a pen, and weard, a keeper. Originally, this term referred to steward or one who took charge of the cattle, which constituted the chief wealth of a household.

Over time, a steward's duties developed into employment on a large estate or establishment to manage the domestic concerns, superintend other servants, and keep accounts, etc. Today, the duties of a steward may include superintending businesses such as hotels, restaurants, ships and airplanes, for example.

The word Stewardship has been incorporated into the language and duties of Land Trusts to insure that land holdings are managed and 'superintended' for their designated purpose. Land Trusts, organizations which oversee the preservation and use of acquired Open Space land for towns, conservation lands, neighborhoods and community groups, define Stewardship as a key principle duty to insure that the land or property continues to meet the obligations of the initial agreement. Some examples of these obligations are protection of natural resources, preservation of open space in a natural state, approved passive recreation uses, maintenance of trails, removal of invasive plants and keeping the land open to public use, if applicable.

Performing Stewardship duties is a very active part of a Land Trust. This is performed annually through a monitoring program by volunteers following basic guidelines starting from a baseline documentation, adding updated photos, descriptive recorded information on plants/trees noted, presence of vernal pools, evidence of animal life, observed signs of property use such as horseback riding, animal prints, unusual plant or animal life, trail use and/or incursions from outside the property such as abutters' sheds, littering, brush dumping, motorized vehicle use, and any other change to the property's distinctive attributes.

Walking the boundaries of the property are an important part of stewardship, providing an overview of the entire open space and the present state of the property being managed. If the property is protected by a Conservation Restriction, the property is inspected to insure that any additional restrictions are being observed, such as hunting, fishing, public access, removal of plants, stone walls or other changes to the property's characteristics. On completion of the Stewardship monitoring all information is deposited with the Land Trust for safekeeping and continuity of records for the future.

The Hopkinton Area Land Trust (H.A.L.T.) was established in 1995 by a small group of residents who were interested in preserving and protecting open space and the rural character of Hopkinton. Today H.A.L.T. is served by a volunteer Board of Directors and led by President, David Goldman. It is a non-profit organization with the goals of land protection,

preservation of natural resources, land conservation and education of the public in land conservation and land stewardship. The organization is dependent on contributions and membership dues as its sole source of income.

H.A.L.T. monitors its ownership and easement properties regularly and maintains documentation records of each monitoring site. With a small group of volunteers H.A.L.T. continues trail maintenance and mapping of new trails as needed and works collaboratively with other local land trusts, open space and trails groups in Hopkinton, in keeping with its mission of land preservation and conservation easements. Since 1995, 750 acres and many miles of trails are managed and maintained by H.A.L.T., some independently and some in partnership with other local land trust organizations.

Additional information can be found on H.A.L.T. website: www.hopkintonlandtrust.org.

America Gone Wild

By JIM STERBA

This year, Princeton, N.J., has hired sharpshooters to cull 250 deer from the town's herd of 550 over the winter. The cost: \$58,700. Columbia, S.C., is spending \$1 million to rid its drainage systems of beavers and their dams. The 2009 "miracle on the Hudson," when US Airways flight 1549 had to make an emergency landing after its engines ingested Canada geese, saved 155 passengers and crew, but the \$60 million A320 Airbus was a complete loss. In the U.S., the total cost of wildlife damage to crops, landscaping and infrastructure now exceeds \$28 billion a year (\$1.5 billion from deer-vehicle crashes alone), according to Michael Conover of Utah State University, who monitors conflicts between people and wildlife.

The resurgence of wildlife in the U.S. has led to an increase in conflict between wildlife and people.

Those conflicts often pit neighbor against neighbor. After a small dog in Wheaton, Ill., was mauled by a coyote and had to be euthanized, officials hired a nuisance wildlife mitigation company. Its operator killed four coyotes and got voice-mail death threats. A brick was tossed through a city official's window, city-council members were peppered with threatening emails and letters, and the FBI was called in. After Princeton began culling deer 12 years ago, someone splattered the mayor's car with deer innards.

Welcome to the nature wars, in which Americans fight each other over too much of a good thing—expanding wildlife populations produced by our conservation and environmental successes. We now routinely encounter wild birds and animals that our parents and grandparents rarely saw. As their numbers have grown, wild creatures have spread far beyond their historic ranges into new habitats, including ours. It is very likely that in the eastern United States today more people live in closer proximity to more wildlife than anywhere on Earth at any time in history.

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In a world full of eco-woes like species extinctions, this should be wonderful news—unless, perhaps, you are one of more than 4,000 drivers who will hit a deer today, or your child's soccer field is carpeted with goose droppings, or feral cats have turned your bird feeder into a fast-food outlet, or wild turkeys have eaten your newly planted seed corn, or beavers have flooded your driveway, or bears are looting your trash cans. And that's just the beginning.

In just a few decades we have turned a wildlife comeback miracle into a mess that's getting messier, and costlier. How did this happen? The simple answer: Forests grew back over the past two centuries, wildlife came back over the past century and people sprawled across the landscape over the past half-century.

Today, the eastern third of the country has the largest forest in the contiguous U.S., as well as two-thirds of its people. Since the 19th century, forests have grown back to cover 60% of the land within this area. In New England, an astonishing 86.7% of the land that was forested in 1630 had been reforested by 2007, according to the U.S. Forest Service. Not since the collapse of Mayan civilization 1,200 years ago has reforestation on this scale happened in the Americas, says David Foster, director of the Harvard Forest, an ecology research unit of Harvard University. In 2007, forests covered 63.2% of Massachusetts and 58% of Connecticut, the third and fourth most densely populated states in the country, not counting forested suburban and exurban sprawl (though a lot of sprawl has enough trees to be called a real forest if people and their infrastructure weren't there).

It all started with a 50-pound rodent. The "fur trade" is a feeble euphemism for the massacre of beavers, America's first commodity animal. By the late 19th century, a population once estimated at as many as 400 million was down to perhaps 100,000, mostly in the Canadian outback. By 1894, the largest forest left in the eastern U.S., the Adirondacks, was down to a single family of five beavers.

Beyond beavers, by 1890, a pre-Columbian whitetail deer population of perhaps 30 million had been reduced to an estimated 350,000. Ten million wild turkeys had been reduced to no more than 30,000 by 1920. Geese and ducks were migrating remnants. Bears, wolves and other "vermin" were all but gone. The passenger pigeon would soon be extinct. The feathered skins of hummingbirds, used to make women's bonnets, sold for two cents apiece.

With toothless laws and lax enforcement, the carnage was slow to end. But conservationists slowly gained strength. Elected governor of New York in 1898, Theodore Roosevelt was so incensed that plume-hunters were killing egrets, whooping cranes and other exotic shore birds for women's hats that he outlawed their sale in his state and went on, as president, to create the first federal wildlife refuges and national forests.

Beavers -- Pre-Columbian period: 50 million to 400 million; 1900: 100,000; Today: 6 million to 12 million

Between 1901 and 1907, 34 beavers from Canada were released in the Adirondacks. With no predators and no trapping, they grew to 15,000 by 1915. Today they are almost everywhere that water flows and trees grow. Beavers are wonderful eco-engineers, a so-called keystone species building dams that create wetlands that benefit countless other species, filter pollutants, reduce erosion and control seasonal flooding. The trouble is, they share our taste in waterfront real estate but not in landscaping. We put in a driveway, they flood it. We plant expensive trees, they chew them down. The U.S. Department of Agriculture estimates that the cost of beaver damage may exceed that of any other wild species.

The founders of the conservation movement would have been astonished to learn that by the 2000 Census, a majority of Americans lived not in cities or on working farms but in that vast doughnut of sprawl in between. The assertion by animal protectionists that these conflicts are our fault because we encroached on wildlife habitat is only half the story. As our population multiplies and spreads, many wild creatures encroach right back—even species thought to be people-shy, such as wild turkeys and coyotes. (In Chicago alone, there are an estimated 2,000 coyotes.)

Why? Our habitat is better than theirs. We offer plenty of food, water, shelter and protection. We plant grass, trees, shrubs and gardens, put out birdseed, mulch and garbage.

Sprawl supports a lot more critters than a people-free forest does. For many species, sprawl's biological carrying capacity—the population limit the food and habitat can sustain—is far greater than a forest's. The rub for many species is what's called social carrying capacity, which is subjective. It means the point at which the damage a creature does outweighs its benefits in the public mind. And that's where many battles in today's wildlife wars start.

What to do? Learn to live with them? Move them? Fool them into going away? Sterilize them? Kill them? For every option and every creature there is a constituency. We have bird lovers against cat lovers; people who would save beavers from cruel traps and people who would save yards and roads from beaver flooding; Bambi saviors versus forest and garden protectors.

Wildlife biologists say that we should be managing our ecosystems for the good of all inhabitants, including people. Many people don't want to and don't know how. We have forsaken not only our ancestors' destructive ways but much of their hands-on nature know-how as well. Our knowledge of nature arrives on screens, where wild animals are often packaged to act like cuddly little people that our Earth Day instincts tell us to protect.

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White-tailed deer -- Pre-Columbian period: 30 million;
1900: 350,000; Today: 25 million to 40 million

Some people advocate bringing back natural predators, as if they really want wolves and cougars roaming the sprawl. But they overlook a deer predator that is already there: us. Indeed, research suggests that since the last ice age the top predator of deer has been man. But by blanketing sprawl with firearms restrictions and hunting prohibitions in the name of safety we have taken ourselves out of the predation business in just a few decades. Suddenly, for the first time in 11,000 years, we have put hundreds of thousands of square miles in the heart of the white-tailed deer's historic range off-limits to its biggest predator.

In Massachusetts, it is illegal to discharge a firearm within 150 feet of a hard-surfaced road or within 500 feet of an occupied dwelling without the owner's written permission. These restrictions alone put about 60% of the state off-limits to hunting with guns. And nearly half of its 351 municipalities impose more restrictions, including on bow hunters. Many states and towns have similar restrictions.

After decades of decline, the number of hunters in the U.S. grew 9% from 2006 to 2011, according to a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service survey. But they remain outcasts in many of the places where they are needed most because they are thought to be unsafe. Even that, however, may be changing. Some towns are becoming more tolerant of hunters than of deer, noting that while guns kill 31,000 Americans a year, hunters kill only about 100, mostly each other. Deer, on the other hand, kill upward of 250 people a year—drivers and passengers—and hospitalize 30,000 more. Some communities screen hunters, allowing them to use only bows and arrows and shotguns that have limited ranges.

One encouraging example is Weston, Mass., a town with a serious deer problem. Brian Donahue, associate professor of environmental studies at Brandeis University, serves on the town's conservation commission, which decided to try controlled bow hunting this fall. He sees some of his liberal suburban neighbors coming to believe that "hunting is good—one of the best, most responsible forms of stewardship of nature," he says.

"Maybe I'm dreaming," he adds, "but hunters are the new suburban heroes."

—Adapted from "Nature Wars: The Incredible Story of How Wildlife Comebacks Turned Backyards into Battlegrounds" by Jim Sterba, to be published Nov. 13 by Crown Publishers, a division of Random House Inc.

You can take an important step for your community: Offer your leadership, political support, and charitable gifts to a land trust. Better yet, consider donating a conservation easement on your land. It is an investment in the future that offers attractive tax benefits and the satisfaction that the land you love will be protected forever.

Become a Member of HALT

Family	\$30 _____
Sentinel	\$50 _____
Centurion	\$100 _____
Steward	\$250 _____
Protector	\$500 _____
Conservator	\$1,000 _____
President's Circle	\$1,000+ _____

Total Enclosed \$_____

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All contributions to HALT are deductible for income tax purposes.

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