

# NEWSLETTER



## HOPKINTON AREA LAND TRUST, INC.

Fall/Winter

December 2019

### *A Word from the New President*



Greetings, residents of Hopkinton! David Goldman, HALT's founder and president since its inception in 1995, has resigned (after moving *very* far away), and I was honored to be elected by the Board of Directors to become HALT's second president. I can't promise to last 24 years, but I can promise to continue Dave's legacy and do my best to ensure that HALT remains the #1 conservation organization serving the people of this town.

Since its founding 24 years ago, the Hopkinton Area Land Trust has worked tirelessly to protect and care for land in our town. Working with town government, landowners and other conservation organizations, HALT plays a key role in acquiring and managing the land that makes this area a unique and wonderful place to live.

By preserving open space in Hopkinton, HALT helps maintain the beauty of the town, which protects and increases the value of your property. **HALT manages over 1,100 acres of land**, almost all of it open to the public, with **15 miles** of trails. This secures the rural character of Hopkinton and provides great opportunities for outdoor recreation.

If you enjoy the use of the open spaces of Hopkinton, *please help support the Trust, by becoming a member or by making a donation*, so that we can continue to preserve open space. HALT is a non-profit 501(c)(3) corporation and your contributions are tax-deductible to the extent allowed by law.

This year has seen some major changes in the organization. In addition to the new leadership, we filled a vacancy on the board and we developed a new website with up-to-date news, events, detailed property descriptions and trail maps. Several of our nine directors are on town committees focused on trails and open space, and we work closely with Sudbury Valley Trustees, the most influential conservation organization in our area.

Our trail network has expanded, with the addition of the Dave Goldman Trail on the Ora Cheney Conservation Area, a new loop off the Susan DeGozzaldi Memorial Trail at Brook Hollow, and a new trail at Rockwood Meadows to Peppercorn Hill. We also significantly improved trails at Cameron Woods, Wiley Woods, the Deneen Conservation Area and Hopkinton Meadows, with clearing, bridges and boardwalks. Check our website to find more information about these trails and please take a walk. Even this time of year when the days are short and it always seems dreary, you might be surprised how a pleasant walk in the sublime forest can lift your spirits.

Finally, to make our trails accessible to a wider audience, we have opened them up to bicycling.

HALT is an all-volunteer organization. We have a small budget and don't buy land, but when we acquire land by gift or conservation easement, we have to manage it, and this does not come for free. Our Board of Directors is dedicated and energetic, but it takes effort to ensure that all this land with all those trails, spread out over dozens of properties, remains protected in its natural state. I hope you can join us in this cause by becoming a member and making a generous contribution. It's easy—just go to [hopkintonlandtrust.org/join-or-renew](http://hopkintonlandtrust.org/join-or-renew). If you don't want to join right now, you can still get on our mailing list at [hopkintonlandtrust.org/subscribe](http://hopkintonlandtrust.org/subscribe).

—Morrie Gasser, President

## Who is the New President?

Most of you probably haven't heard of me, so I want to take this opportunity to tell you a little about myself. My wife Kate and I grew up in Chicago, lived in Saugus for 20 years, and then moved to Hopkinton 28 years ago after our kids went off to college.

What do I bring to HALT? I've been a conservationist and outdoor enthusiast all my life, escaping from my desk job as a software engineer to go hiking, camping, skiing (and caving!) at every opportunity. Good hiking was a long way from the Windy City, so as soon as I moved to New England, I began regularly hiking New Hampshire's White Mountains. I have climbed the 48 Four Thousand Footers many times in summer and winter. I still try to get to up there at least once a month—not for adventure, but for the love of nature. When not in the mountains, I walk, ski or snowshoe the trails in town in any weather in all seasons. Believe it or not, I *love* winter and especially, snowstorms.

I joined HALT as soon as it started accepting members, and was elected to the Board of Directors four years ago. I follow environmental issues regularly and am a member of outdoor and conservation organizations, such as Sudbury Valley Trustees, Appalachian Mountain Club, Sierra Club, Nature Conservancy, National Speleological Society, Wilderness Society, Earthworks, Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, and others. In my spare time I have tried to record and photograph every species of wildflower in town, and I maintain a Wildflowers of Hopkinton website (Google it) to document them.

Being newly retired, I have the opportunity to devote more time to helping HALT secure Hopkinton's remaining open space. Over the coming months, expect to see my face often as I advocate for open space at meetings with town boards and committees. You'll also see me at events promoting HALT, and if you walk our trails, there's a chance you'll run into me. Look for the guy handing out brochures.

—Morrie Gasser

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## Mark Your Calendar - Birds of Prey Lecture

On January 25, 2020 at 12 PM the Hopkinton Area Land Trust, along with the Hopkinton Public Library, will sponsor a lecture on Birds of Prey by Kathleen Regan. Kathleen is a Hopkinton resident and is well known for her wildlife knowledge. She plans to bring a hawk and banded kestrel to the lecture. Details to follow on the Trust's web site in late December.

## 20 Signs of a Hard Winter Ahead

Before there were weather apps for your smartphone, Doppler radar, or the National Weather Service, people looked to the signs of nature to prepare for what's to come. A wonderful friend of *Farmers' Almanac's* Editor, Ray Geiger's, Cleveland weather guru Dick Goddard put together a laundry list of 20 signs of nature that can predict a harsh winter ahead.

- 1) Thicker than normal corn husks.
- 2) Woodpeckers sharing a tree.
- 3) The early arrival of the snowy owl.
- 4) The early departure of geese and ducks.
- 5) The early migration of the Monarch butterfly.
- 6) Thick hair on the nape of a cow's neck.
- 7) Heavy and numerous fogs during August.
- 8) Raccoons with thick tails and bright bands.
- 9) Mice chewing furiously to get into your home.
- 10) The early arrival of crickets on the hearth.
- 11) Spiders spinning larger than usual webs and entering the house in great numbers.
- 12) Pigs gathering sticks.
- 13) Ants marching in a line rather than meandering.
- 14) Early seclusion of bees within the hive.
- 15) Unusual abundance of acorns.
- 16) Muskrats burrowing holes high on the river bank.
- 17) "See how high the hornet's nest, 'twill tell how high the snow will rest."
- 18) The size of the orange band on the Woollybear (Woollyworm) caterpillar. According to folklore, if the caterpillar's orange band is narrow, the winter will be snowy; conversely, a wide orange band means a mild winter. All black caterpillars are not Woollybears. And fuzzy than normal Woollybear caterpillars are said to mean the winter will be very cold.
- 19) Squirrels gathering nuts early to fortify against a hard winter.
- 20) Frequent halos or rings around the sun or moon forecasts numerous snowfalls.

What do you think, folklore or true? Have you seen any of these signs of winter?

From Farmers Almanac web site

## What Are The Tax Perks of Donating Land in the US?

### Q: Are there any tax benefits to donating some of my land in the U.S.?

A: Tax benefits are available to those who opt to donate land to a private land conservation organization, aka a land trust, or to a government entity, according to Jessica E. Jay, the founder and principal attorney at Conservation Law, based in Colorado.

Donations are often partial donations of land, or conservation easements, said Leslie Ratley-Beach, a lawyer and the conservation defense director at the Washington, D.C.-based Land Trust Alliance.

In order for land to qualify for an easement, it must have value as a conservation resource, according to the IRS. Conservation easements allow a landowner to stay on the land, but he or she agrees not to further develop it or sell off its resources, such as water or minerals, Ms. Jay said. The agreement is usually made between the landowner and a land trust or a government body.

In exchange for that, the federal government provides income tax benefits, Ms. Jay said.

"If you grant a perpetual conservation easement on your land, you can gain up to, at the federal level, a 50% income tax deduction against your adjusted gross income with a carry-forward of 15 years," according to Ms. Jay. That's a total of 16 years, she added; the year of the gift and 15 additional years.

For those who own agricultural land, used for farming or other related purposes, a similar benefit exists. Those owners can get a 100% income tax deduction, Ms. Jay said, and it is also for 16 years.

These deductions were made permanent a few years ago, and the tax law doesn't need to be renewed. Since then, the rate of land protection using this particular tool has quadrupled, Ms. Jay said.

These tax benefits are offered as incentives for landowners to agree not to develop the land now or anytime in the future, according to Ms. Jay. That's the nature of the "perpetual" easement; it extends past the life of the owner who donated and is overseen by the land trust or government forever.

"This is something that people with lots of land and either a high income they would like to offset or not a lot of

income, but a very valuable land base...both those types of individuals have seen a lot of advantage in taking these type of benefits," she said.

While the deductions will eventually expire, that benefit is only one factor for donors, according to Ms. Ratley-Beach said.

"While tax benefits are one incentive, the true driver for a donation usually is a desire to conserve the places we need and love, she said.

In addition, a conservation easement can reduce estate taxes by reducing the value of the estate to be taxed. Heirs can exclude 40% of the value of land under conservation easement from estate taxes, according to the Land Trust Alliance.

The value of the land is determined by appraisal, but it is a "highly technical process," Ms. Ratley-Beach explained.

"The donor must retain a specially qualified appraiser to value the conservation easement donation value," she said. "The donor tax attorney also must review the appraisal to be certain it complies with the legal aspects of the tax code."

Ms. Ratley-Beach stressed the complicated nature of this donation.

"This is a highly technical area ... there are many precise details that must be done right," she said. "The donor would be very well advised to retain an experienced conservation tax attorney."

She also advised identifying "a reputable land trust to work with early in the process."

The Land Trust Alliance offers the guidance on individual properties around the U.S on their web site – [www.landtrustalliance.org](http://www.landtrustalliance.org)

From Mansion Global web site

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## Peppercorn Hill Conservation Area

The Peppercorn Hill Conservation Area is located in Upton. It is profiled here because it can be accessed from two points: 1) Via the Deneen Conservation Area in Hopkinton. From Deneen Road the trail begins on the right side on an easement of 50 yards or so from a driveway extending south. Continuing further down the driveway beyond the trailhead is private property and is not open to the public. The HALT property extends to the west of the driveway/easement and around the houses at the end of Deneen Road, and also extends east of the driveway

entrance. There is a sign marking the entrance to the property. And 2) School Street in Hopkinton becomes East Street in Upton. There is parking off East Street just north of Rockwood Lane on the site of the old Amato Farm.

The 283 acres in Peppercorn Hill are largely forested with oaks, maple and pine. It features cold water streams, wetlands, vernal pools, scenic vistas, and stone walls. The western slope of Peppercorn Hill is a remarkable jumble of boulders deposited by glaciers more than 10 thousand years ago. A National Grid powerline easement passes through the property and shrub habitat maintained by the easement provides excellent songbird and butterfly habitat. Trails can also be accessed from Crocket Road and from Taft Street via the Snow Family Conservation Area.

A trail map can be found on our website or at this link: [https://www.uptonma.gov/sites/uptonma/files/imce/u426/upton\\_-\\_peppercorn\\_trail\\_map\\_july\\_2019\\_web.jpg](https://www.uptonma.gov/sites/uptonma/files/imce/u426/upton_-_peppercorn_trail_map_july_2019_web.jpg)

### Berry Season?



The leaves are dropping, but many plants and shrubs in our area retain their berries through the fall, some even all winter. These include crabapple, chokecherry, winterberry, wintergreen, cranberry, greenbrier, snowberry, and two of our more common invasive plants from the far east, Japanese barberry and oriental bittersweet. Add to that the ubiquitous sweet pepperbush, whose dry seed clusters resemble tiny berries that last into next spring. Go out on some of our trails and look carefully for these spots of color, especially at the edges of wetlands. But you may need to bushwhack!

### Spring is Coming!

The Trust's next newsletter is planned for April 2020. To help get you through the winter, consider this – the amount of daylight on December 11, 2019 is 9 hours and 7 minutes. The amount of daylight on April 1, 2020 will be 12 hours and 32 minutes. Something to look forward to. Wishing you a healthy and warm winter.

"If winter comes, can spring be far behind?" — Percy Bysshe Shelley

**You can take an important step for your community: Offer your leadership, political support, and charitable gifts to a land trust like HALT. Better yet, consider donating a conservation restriction 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. Contact us for more information.**

Become a Member of HALT	
Family	\$30 _____
Sentinel	\$50 _____
Centurion	\$100 _____
Steward	\$250 _____
Protector	\$500 _____
Conservator	\$1,000 _____
President's Circle	\$1,000+ _____
Name(s)	_____
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State	_____ Zip _____
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All contributions to HALT are deductible for income tax purposes.	
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