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## From the President

In the last issue of *Common Ground*, I promised that the BCT would encourage its membership to get involved in stewardship activities. We did, and on September 7, a terrific group of workers assembled at the Patch Hill Conservation Area to install four boardwalks. The BCT donated \$4,100 for the construction of the boardwalks, and Howard Davis did a superb job building them and keeping down the cost of construction. The installation crew included Scott Bundy, Dan Handman, Dave Koonce, Erik and Peg Molander, Jim Moss, Paul Rea, and Dan Tappan. Our brute force was aided by a large truck and trailer provided by Jim Moss, and by "La Machine" (don't know how else to describe it), provided by Dan Tappan. The first allowed us to move all of the boardwalks in one trip from Howard's property to the parking lot at Patch Hill; the second made it possible for us to haul the boardwalks over the winding, uneven trails into the conservation land. After about four hours of truly grueling work, the team got all four boardwalks solidly in place. Thanks to all for a job very well done!

Looking forward, we will surely have a wide variety of work to do as we help to provide the labor for the stewardship projects that the Conservation Commission initiates. I look forward to working together with BCT members on this important part of our mission. We'll be in touch.

*Jeffrey C. Fuhrer*

## Stewards Sought

BY TARA ZANTOW, EDITOR

In May of 2002, the Town of Boxborough purchased the Panek, Howe, and Richards lands for the purposes of conservation and passive recreation. The former Howe-Panek parcels are now called the Patch Hill Conservation Area, and the Richards land is known as Headwaters, since the property is at the source of Guggin's Brook. All three parcels fit together with previously existing conservation lands to create a contiguous protected area of over 200 acres.

The land is managed by the Boxborough Conservation Commission, who have drafted a *Land Use and Management Plan*. This plan was developed in accordance with a Conservation Restriction (CR) jointly held by the BCT and the Harvard Conservation Trust on the portion of the land formerly owned by the Paneks. A CR specifies allowed uses for the land and, as holder of the deed, we are required to manage an on-going stewardship program to monitor the property and enforce the restrictions specified in the deed. These restrictions are intended to promote the conservation of native bio-diversity and the permitted uses and stewardship practices have been established to be consistent with that objective. This conservation area provides wonderful opportunities for hiking, snowshoeing, cross-country skiing, bird watching, and animal tracking; horse-back riding is allowed on some of the trails.

The Conservation Commission and BCT are working cooperatively to establish a stewardship team for the entire Patch

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Web address: [www.bctrust.org](http://www.bctrust.org)

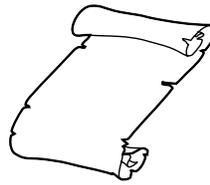
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# Conserving the Land Through Estate Planning

BY FRANK COOLIDGE, BCT BOARD MEMBER



One way in which many choose to conserve land is to keep it in the family rather than to sell it to a developer. To do so, following the extraordinary rise in real estate values in recent years, requires careful planning to minimize or avoid estate taxes. This may not appear to be a problem since each individual's federal estate tax exemption is scheduled to rise to \$1.5M in 2004, \$2M in 2006-2008, 3.5M in 2009 and an unlimited amount in 2010 before reverting to \$1M in 2011 and thereafter (assuming Congress does not modify these exemptions). Furthermore, the Mass. estate tax of 8% now kicks in at \$700K and levels off at \$1M in 2006. Thus it is worth considering some simple steps to avoid potential estate taxes, which can exceed 50% (federal and state combined) on assets that are not sheltered.

For a married couple it is desirable that both husband and wife individually own assets of roughly equivalent value up to the estate tax exemption level for each. If one owns the bulk of the assets and is the first to die, those assets pass tax-free to the survivor, but the survivor's estate may be inflated above the exemption level, thus wasting at least part of the first-to-die's exemption.

## Establishing a Trust

One technique for taking advantage of both exemptions is for each spouse to create a family trust. Upon the death of the first spouse, the trust will be funded up to the exemption limit. Assets in excess of the exemption will pass tax-free to the surviving spouse. When the survivor dies, the value of assets in the family trust will not be subject to estate taxes, and the trustees can be empowered to distribute income and principal to the decedent's

heirs. Other types of trusts that can be established to avoid estate taxes include life insurance trusts and generation skipping trusts.

## Making Gifts

Another approach is to give assets to charities or individuals. Under present law, one may give up to \$11,000 a year to any other person without that person being subject to the federal gift tax. This applies to real estate as well as to cash or other assets. Alternatively, donating land to a conservation organization such as the BCT not only protects the land, but reduces the property tax burden, creates an income tax deduction, avoids capital gains taxes, and reduces potential estate taxes.

## Transferring Ownership

One intriguing way of transferring one's home to the children is through a so-called Qualified Personal Residence Trust (QPRT). The donor transfers his/her home to the trust, and the children become owners at the end of a predetermined period of time. If the donor dies before the end of this period, the house reverts to the donor's estate. However, any appreciation in value during the time it was in the QPRT is ignored for gift tax purposes.

Estate planning is easy to postpone or neglect entirely, but that can be costly to your loved ones and impair their ability to keep your land protected.

*Source: Hemenway & Barnes, a Boston firm of lawyers and trustees*

*While the BCT (and this article) cannot offer professional tax advice, the BCT can help landowners (and their own tax counsel) look carefully at various options to preserve their land.*

# Stewards Sought

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Hill property to help with trail maintenance, implementation of the *Land Use and Management Plan*, and general oversight of the property. Steward membership will be open to the community. In addition to providing a valuable service to our community, stewards will enjoy spending time in the great outdoors.

Some objectives of the plan have already been completed, such as the building of a 6-car parking lot off Liberty Square Rd., blazing new trails to connect to other parcels, some removal of invasive species along the road, and the installation of boardwalks over sensitive wetland areas. Future projects include compiling and updating a natural resource inventory, restoring the meadow adjacent to Liberty Square Rd., on-going routine trail maintenance, certification of vernal pools, and eradication of invasive species, most notably Oriental bittersweet, Japanese barberry, multiflora rose, and burning bush.

If you want more information about the *Land Use and Management Plan* or wish to participate, contact David Koonce.

*David Koonce, Deborah Gray and Mary Fuhrer all contributed to this article. Source: Land Use and Management Plan by Barbara Warren.*

Your comments and letters are welcome! Write to: Editor, **Common Ground**, 1093 Liberty Square Road, Boxborough, MA 01719.

*For an informative article on **Saving the American Elm** written by Acton native, Bruce Carley, check out this website: [www.elmpost.org](http://www.elmpost.org)*

*The BCT donated labor and materials to rebuild the bridge at Have Not Pond Conservation Area.*

# Alien Invaders - Here Today . . . Gone Tomorrow?

BY GLYNIS HAMEL, STAFF WRITER



Non-native invasive plants are not going to disappear from the landscape any time soon. But there is some good news along with the bad news. In the interest of ending this series about invasive plants on a positive note, why don't we look at the bad news first:

✘ The invasive plant problem is enormous. Three alien invaders have been highlighted in recent issues of *Common Ground*. Unfortunately, there are dozens of other species of non-native plants in Metrowest which are just as invasive and just as destructive.

✘ The general public is largely unaware of the invasive plant problem, and misinformation abounds. The most recent issue of *Yankee* magazine, for example, features an article on Oriental bittersweet. The plant is attractively displayed on the magazine's front cover, and the accompanying article touts the vine's use as a decoration. A small sidebar warns of the invasive nature of bittersweet, but suggests a method of "control" that actually strengthens the plant, thus making it more difficult to eradicate.

✘ Acting responsibly sometimes takes a back seat to making a profit. Nurseries continue to offer invasive plants for sale, and landscapers and developers often plant shrubs like burning bush, *Euonymus alatus*, a notoriously noxious invader (see sidebar). Burning bush is one of the most widely-sold plants in the industry; and why not? It's easy to establish, it's attractive, and it's almost impossible to kill. A short drive down Rt. 111 will reveal the pervasiveness of this shrub as the planting of choice on many private, commercial, and public properties, including the police and fire stations and Blanchard Memorial School.

## BURNING BUSH

*Burning bush is a deciduous shrub whose leaves turn a brilliant red in the fall. It is characterized by corky-winged twigs and purple-to-red fruits. These fruits are dispersed by birds and other wildlife; although you may not see signs of invasiveness on your own property, be assured that the seeds from your bush are being planted elsewhere. The bush produces dense shade, impeding the survival of other plants beneath it. Its root system forms a carpet-like mat just below the surface of the soil, which makes the plant difficult to eradicate. Like other invasives, burning bush has escaped cultivation and is prevalent in open woods and upland forests. It crowds out native species and reduces biodiversity.*

On the other hand, there are reasons to be hopeful. On a more positive note:

- ✓ Local conservation groups are jumping on the bandwagon. An effort to remove Norway maple from the Acton Arboretum is underway. Our own BCT is working to eradicate Oriental bittersweet from the Patch Hill Conservation Area.
- ✓ Nature occasionally offers an unexpected gift. For example, multiflora rose, which has moved steadily west across the continental U.S., seems to have met its match in the Rocky Mountains. There the progression of the invasion has been slowed by a blight to which multiflora rose is susceptible.
- ✓ Some commercial growers and retailers are taking the lead by refusing to grow or sell invasive plants. Weston Nurseries will no longer offer burning bush for sale. A growing number of landscapers specialize in native plant design.
- ✓ There are many fine minds at work on the invasive plant problem. In September, the first New England

Invasive Plant Summit was held in Framingham. Gathered at the summit were researchers from across the U.S. and Canada who presented their latest findings and offered practical advice on invasive plant control and the restoration of native habitat. Many of the scientists engaged in this research are young graduate students who plan to make this field their life-long work.

And what can we, as lay people, do to fight the alien invasion? Stay informed, and share what we learn with others. Vote with our pocketbook - refuse to patronize nurseries that sell invasive plants, and let the owners know why they are losing our business. Finally, take the advice of Chris Mattrick, Rare Plant Curator at New England Wildflower Society. Pick your battles. Don't be discouraged. Focus your energy where you can have a lasting and meaningful impact. And start at your own back door.

*Do you have questions about identifying, controlling, or finding suitable alternatives for invasive plants on your property? Contact Glynis Hamel.*

## Rolling Meadows Work Day Volunteers Needed



*The Boxborough Conservation Commission invites members of the BCT and the general public to assist them in trail clearing and maintenance tasks at the Rolling Meadows conservation area on Saturday, December 6 between 1:00 and 3:00 PM. Park on Littlefield Road; meet near the sign at the trail entrance. Bring pruners, loppers, bow saws and gloves. Remember to dress for the conditions! See you there!*

## New Member Registration



BCT welcomes new members to join in the effort of preserving and protecting Boxborough's undeveloped land. Anyone may join. Voting members must be 18 years of age or older and residents of Boxborough. All others are nonvoting members. Membership is on an annual basis. There are several giving levels. Please indicate the level of your tax-deductible contribution.

Name(s) \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_  \$25 - Individual  
 Address \_\_\_\_\_  \$50 - Family  
 Telephone \_\_\_\_\_ Email \_\_\_\_\_  \$75 - Friend  
 \$100 - Associate  
 \$250 - Patron  
 \$500 - Sustaining  
 \$1000 - Sponsor  
 \$2500 - Preservationist  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Other

Please make your check payable to: The Boxborough Conservation Trust, and mail, with this form to: Treasurer, BCT, 110 Barteau Lane, Boxborough, MA 01719.

An acknowledgement of your tax-deductible contribution will be mailed to you.

Please contact your employer to see if matching funds are available.

The BCT does not release information about members to third parties.

This is a fun activity to do with small children.

Without leaf cover, the shrubs and tree branches reveal a variety of bird nests, and hornet and wasp nests. How many can you find?

#### Sources:

*Alden, Peter & Cassie, Brian:* National Audubon Society Field Guide to New England, *Alfred A. Knopf, NY, 1998.*

*Heinrich, Bernd:* The Ingenuity of Animal Survival: Winter World, *HarperCollins, NY, 2003.*

*Kaufman, Kenn:* Lives of North American Birds, *Houghton Mifflin, Boston, 1996.*

## Boxborough In Season

BY RITA GIBES GROSSMAN,  
BCT BOARD MEMBER



Fall's colors have faded and the air is crisp. Without mosquitoes or black flies, it's an ideal time for a bug-free hike in Boxborough.

Look for winter flocks of blue birds or robins. Robins may be found feeding on berries and crabapples. Red-tailed hawks are easy to spot perched high on a tree overlooking an open meadow. At dusk, listen for migrating flocks of Canada geese.

In early morning or evening, look for deer, rabbits, and if you are really lucky, a red fox. Beavers and weasels are active in the winter at larger streams or ponds (try the Heron Rookery, accessible from Depot Road).

After a light snow, look for animal tracks near a woodpile, in undergrowth, or across an open field. For more information on tracking, see [www.keepingtrack.org](http://www.keepingtrack.org).

Rolling Meadows on Littlefield Road had a spectacular crop of milkweed pods in late October. Find remaining pods and pop them open to release their silky, parachuted seeds.



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