



Boxborough
Conservation
Trust

Common Ground

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Preserving & Protecting Boxborough's Undeveloped Land

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To help us with our programs, please become a member by filling out the New Member Registration form on the back page.

Common Ground is mailed to all Boxborough residents, free of charge, as a quarterly publication of the Boxborough Conservation Trust, Boxborough, Massachusetts.

Comments and letters are welcome. Write to: Editor, *Common Ground*, P.O. Box 626, Acton, MA 01720

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FROM THE PRESIDENT: Have You Joined the BCT Yet?

I hope that you all enjoy reading *Common Ground*, which is mailed free of charge to all Boxborough residents. We are lucky to have a talented and committed group of editors and writers who produce a high-quality newsletter that informs us about a wide array of conservation and land preservation issues. We are quite proud that a number of articles from *Common Ground* have been cited or reprinted by other conservation organizations around the region. Much of the credit should go to Tara Zantow who explains in this issue her decision to step down as editor. As we seek a new editor, we applaud Tara for her writing, organizational, and editing skills, and for her devotion to the BCT. Anyone interested in assuming this stimulating, voluntary position should email me at fuhrerj@comcast.net.

Receipt of *Common Ground*, however, does not necessarily mean you are a member of the BCT. Everyone is welcome to join. At present, fewer than 10 percent of the Town's households are members. As we have emphasized in past newsletters, much work remains to be done in our town to see new land preservation projects to completion, to maintain and improve existing conservation lands, and to educate ourselves about conservation issues. To that end, the Trust has set a goal to at least double its membership

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The BCT — A Land Trust

BY GLYNIS HAMEL AND DAVID KOONCE

The Boxborough Conservation Trust (BCT) was founded in 1997 by a group of Boxborough residents dedicated to the preservation and protection of Boxborough's undeveloped land. The BCT advances its mission by first working to place tracts of land under permanently protected legal status and, once that is accomplished, ensuring that the conservation value of the land is maintained through careful stewardship.

In practice there are a variety of ways, both direct and indirect, in which the BCT operates. The BCT can, for instance, buy land outright. Or it can play a supporting role by fundraising for an acquisition by the Town. One of the Trust's most important responsibilities is reaching out to the owners of undeveloped land and building productive working relationships with them. In so doing, the hope is that when it comes time for the landowners to decide what to do with their property, they will consider conserving it.

Here are several examples of BCT's involvement in land protection efforts in Boxborough over the past six and a half years:

- In 1998, the BCT was instrumental in raising public awareness and rallying support for the purchase of the Flagg Hill Conservation Area. The Trust held neighborhood informational sessions,

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Have You Joined . . . ?

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over the next two years.

That's where you come in! If you are already a member, thank you for helping with your donations of time and resources. If you are not sure if you are a member, take a minute to check the enclosed list of current members. If your name is not on the list, perhaps your membership has lapsed. Remaining current requires payment of membership dues each year. If you have never been a member, please consider joining us by filling out the membership registration form in this issue. Your generosity can take a number of forms. Your annual, tax-deductible membership fee provides the opportunity to contribute as much as you can afford. We also seek your skilled and dedicated help on many jobs, including work to keep our conservation lands beautiful and safe.

I believe that every resident of this town shares with the Trust the goal of maintaining the beautiful character of Boxborough. Help us achieve that goal by becoming a member and getting involved in the work of the Boxborough Conservation Trust.

Jeffrey C. Fuhrer

The BCT — A Land Trust

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spearheaded a letter-writing campaign to *The Beacon*, printed and distributed flyers, and organized a telephone network urging townspeople to attend Town Meeting to vote in favor of the purchase.

- In 2000, the BCT purchased, at no cost to Boxborough taxpayers, the Grady Land on Sargent Road. Besides providing an extension to the Half Moon Meadow Conservation Area, this property supports a number of important natural resources including a mature oak swamp and several vernal pools.

- In 2002, the BCT contributed \$50,000 directly toward the purchase of the Patch Hill Conservation Area, effectively reducing the cost to the Town by approximately \$500 an acre. The Trust expended an additional \$10,000 for necessary pre-acquisition engineering and appraisal work.

- Each year, the BCT has hosted a variety of speakers and presentations that are open to the general public. Past speakers include author and naturalist Tom Wessels, who led a walk on the Patch Hill Conservation Area as it relates to his book on natural history, *Reading the Forested Landscape*. In

spring 2004, Marcia Wilson delighted an enthusiastic, standing-room-only audience by introducing six live owls in her "Eyes on Owls" presentation.

- The BCT has periodically organized and sponsored stewardship work days, which have consisted of trail clearing and maintenance, building boardwalks and bridges on conservation land, and picking up trash along Boxborough's roads. The BCT recently donated a hand operated mower/brush cutter to the Boxborough DPW.

- The Trust has worked to engage and educate the public in the study of Boxborough's natural and historical features through this publication, *Common Ground*. In past issues, articles have ranged from the identification and control of invasive plants, to the unique geological features of our landscape, to practical advice on the tax advantages of preserving land for conservation purposes.

According to the Massachusetts Land Trust Coalition (<http://www.massland.org/>), "The decision to form a land trust is not easy. Founders need considerable resources in dedicated volunteers and money and a strong, long-term commitment." The BCT urgently needs more members. Development pressures on Boxborough's open space remain intense, and land values continue their endless spiral upward. Fewer than 10% of the households in Boxborough are BCT members. Our Trust could be much more effective with a larger membership. The annual dues and contributions of that larger membership could make the difference between success and failure the next time a piece of irreplaceable open space becomes available for preservation.

Please help the BCT continue its work for the Town of Boxborough by becoming a member today.

From the Editor . . .



This is my last issue as editor of *Common Ground*. It is with great sadness that I am stepping down; it has been both a joy and a privilege working with the newsletter team and board of directors these past two years. However, our family has grown through the adoption of our precious new son, Eric Carlos, from Guatemala, and I must devote more time to family and work.

We have used the printed word to advocate for the preservation of open land in our beautiful town. For our vision to be realized, the BCT is in need of new members and volunteers, in many roles, including a new editor. Whatever your talents may be, please consider donating them to our organization. Speaking from experience, it is rewarding and fulfilling to work with so many dedicated and professional people who are contributing to our community.

See you around town . . .

Tara Zantow

If you are interested in the editor position, please call or email Jeff Fuhrer.

Conservation Lands: Our Rich Legacy

BY GLYNIS HAMEL AND DAVID KOONCE

People often neglect to enjoy the local attractions that are among the first places visited by tourists. When was the last time you visited the Old North Bridge or walked the Freedom Trail? Which places come to mind when you want to enjoy a day outdoors with the kids? Instead of loading everyone into the car and fighting traffic, let me suggest a short walk from your front door. Welcome to Boxborough's conservation lands!

Over 1,000 acres of Boxborough's total land area is town-owned conservation land. In addition, land designated for conservation purposes and owned by the Nature Conservancy, the Sudbury Valley Trustees, the Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife, and the Boxborough Conservation Trust ensures that every home in town lies within a quarter-mile of a conservation area. These properties provide year-round opportunities for recreational activities such as hiking, ice skating, cross-country skiing, horseback riding, picnicking and fishing.

In the spring, take a walk through the Flagg Hill Conservation Area, where you will be treated to a display of rare and not-so-rare wildflowers: pink lady slippers, birds-foot violets, gay wings, columbine, and *wavularia*. Come summer, head to Wolf Swamp, where wild blueberries are available for the picking. There's no need to drive north in the fall to enjoy a dramatic display of foliage; brilliant red maples and the golden glow of black birches are part of the landscape at Rolling Meadows. And the snow-covered trails of the Patch Hill's Birchwoods provide a quiet and scenic area for cross-country skiing in the winter.

A primary objective for conserving land is the protection of native wildlife habitat. Our conservation lands provide a remarkable diversity of habitat types supporting a very large collection of plant and animal species, some common and thriving, others rare and declining. Examples of the different kinds of habitat that can be found on Boxborough's

conservation lands include oak-hickory woodlands, white pine barrens, open meadows, old farm ponds, perennial streams, and a nearly 200-acre shrub and forest swamp. Scattered throughout nearly every conservation parcel are small, often isolated, temporary bodies of water, known as vernal pools; these exist only briefly every spring before drying up, but during that short period of time they provide critical breeding sites for certain reptiles and amphibians. As development in Boxborough advances toward build-out, our conservation lands will doubtlessly become the only safe havens for many species of the Town's native flora and fauna.

SEE MAP ON REVERSE

Our conservation lands also contain areas of historical and educational interest. Henry David Thoreau wrote of his travels through Inches Woods, portions of which lie in the Guggins Brook Land and the Hager Land. The primeval oak forest Thoreau found there he described as "just the most remarkable and memorable thing in Boxboro." The Beaver Valley Preserve, owned by the Nature Conservancy, includes much of the Boxborough Esker, one of the longest straight ridges of gravel and sand deposited by glaciers in Massachusetts. And an old carriage road on the Robinson Land passes near the Boxborough Historical Society's archeological dig, the site of a homestead occupied in the late 1700s by pioneer Phineas Weatherbee.

Conservation land provides other benefits, not the least of which is protection of the water supply. Among the larger wetlands in town are Wolf Swamp, Heath Hen Meadows, Beaver Brook wetlands, and Guggins Brook wetlands. These wetlands play an important role in the ecology of Boxborough, filtering out sediment, nutrients, and other pollutants from rainwater and road runoff, storing water during periods of flooding, and regulating stream flow. Residents



attending the Master Plan Workshop in 2001 ranked water resources and aquifers as the Town's most important resources.

Conservation land is important for ecological, esthetic, and recreational reasons. Although we are fortunate to have many beautiful parcels in town, acquisition of additional conservation land is needed to help protect our water resources, to provide additional trails and corridors that connect existing parcels for use by both humans and wildlife, to preserve wildlife habitat, and to protect the town's heritage and character for current and future residents.

Since 1988, approximately 1000 acres of land in Boxborough (equal to our total current holding of conservation land) has been developed. A land use study done by the Town Planner reveals that in 2001 about half of the land in Boxborough was undeveloped; potential build-out indicates that the amount of undeveloped land could shrink to as little as 14%. We must not let that happen. If you would like to learn more about our existing conservation lands, refer to the sources listed below.

If you would like to support efforts to acquire additional conservation land, stay informed and join the BCT!

SOURCES:

Boxborough Conservation Land and Trail Guide (available at the Sargent Memorial Library and at Town Hall), 1993.

Open Space and Recreation Plan - A Report by the Boxborough Planning Board, the Conservation Commission and the Recreation Commission, (available through the Conservation Commission link on the Town website), May 10, 2002.
<http://www.town.boxborough.ma.us/>

Rohwer, Alan B., "Henry David Thoreau's visits to Boxborough", <http://www.multimgmt.com/BHSociety/Thoreauvisits.html>

Active BCT memberships with donations in the last 12 months, current as of 7/29/04

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Alana & Russ Askey
Jim & Carla Bacharach
JoEllen Baird & Hal Rosenstock
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* = charter member
= non-voting member

If you don't see your name, please join today!

To correct any misspellings, omissions, etc., contact Ruth Zimmerman or write: Treasurer, Boxborough Conservation Trust, 110 Barteau Lane, Boxborough, MA 01719).

Land Preservation Options in a Nutshell

*You may be familiar with the BCT as the organization that publishes a quarterly newsletter and that rallies public support for the purchase of conservation land. But did you know that the BCT also welcomes the opportunity to meet privately with landowners to advise them about various conservation options? The following excerpts are reprinted with permission from **Land Conservation Options - A Guide for Massachusetts Landowners**, published by the Essex County Greenbelt Association and The Trustees of Reservations. We hope this information inspires you to think about how you could save some of your land for conservation purposes.*

“**D**onating land to a private, non-profit conservation organization is the most straightforward method of permanent land conservation. Donating land is to convey the land for no compensation [which] transfers ownership and management responsibilities to the organization, thereby ending the burden of property taxes. It provides maximum income tax and estate tax benefits and avoids the capital gains tax.

One of the best ways to protect property while retaining ownership is to donate a permanent **conservation restriction** to a conservation agency or nonprofit land trust. You retain full

ownership and the ability to sell or convey the property, by deed or by will, through gift or sale, to a family member or anyone else. Such a sale or conveyance will always be subject to the terms of the conservation restriction document. In effect, that document becomes part of the deed to the property. Several types of restrictions are authorized by Massachusetts law. These include agricultural preservation restrictions, watershed preservation restrictions, and historic preservation restrictions.

While selling land at its **fair market value** to a conservation organization may be ideal from the landowner's point of view, funds are rarely available for such a purpose [and] may not be as desirable as it may seem at first glance. Capital gains taxes and transaction costs can cut deeply into revenues, particularly for landowners in higher tax brackets or those selling highly appreciated property.

A **bargain sale** is a sale to a charitable organization or governmental agency at less than fair market value. It increases the chance that a[n] organization can obtain funds for the transaction. [Although it] may produce less financial return than a full-value sale, the difference may be partially offset by tax savings. The difference between the appraised market value and the sale price



is considered a tax-deductible charitable contribution.

In an **installment sale**, the seller accepts a series of payments over time rather than one lump sum. An installment sale may benefit a landowner by spreading income and taxable gain over several years. An installment sale may benefit the purchasing organization by giving it additional time to raise the necessary funds.

These and other options will be discussed in more detail at an informational seminar hosted by the BCT early next year. We hope you will attend. You are always invited to meet privately with one or more of the BCT's Board of Directors, for advice on land preservation options tailored to your personal situation.



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