



Boxborough
Conservation
Trust

Common Ground

March 2006
Volume 8, Issue 1

Preserving & Protecting Boxborough's Undeveloped Land

Letter from the President

BY RITA GIBES GROSSMAN

To you, who gave generously to the BCTrust in 2005, thank you! Your financial support allows the BCTrust to be poised for action when a parcel becomes available for possible conservation. And, welcome to our new members. Through your membership contribution, you are helping to conserve one of our most valued resources, open land.

Since the last issue, we sponsored a guided hike on Nov. 19. Anne Gardulski, BCTrust board member and professor of geology at Tufts University, enlightened about 45 of us on the geological history of Patch Hill, revealing with enthusiasm the stories told by the various rock formations. Child

What are options for solutions? Dr. Rutberg will address these issues and be available to answer your questions. The BCTrust welcomes everyone in the community to attend. This is a great opportunity to become better informed, as communities like Boxborough deliberate on how to handle this intersection of humans and wildlife.

The BCTrust membership will hold a short business meeting immediately preceding the guest lecture, to vote on board member renewals and to hear the annual report. All active members of the BCTrust are invited to participate. You are an active member if you have contributed to the BCTrust during the year prior to the annual meeting.

We are the most dangerous species of life on the planet, and every other species, even the earth itself, has cause to fear our power to exterminate. But we are also the only species which, when it chooses to do so, will go to great effort to save what it might destroy. — Wallace Stegner (1909-1993)

participants were treated to a treasure hunt, with crystal rock samples provided by Anne as prizes. Patch Hill, whose purchase was enabled by the BCTrust in May of 2002, is one of the largest parcels of conservation land in Boxborough and has an extensive trail system. Since Anne's walk, I have been a more frequent visitor to Patch Hill, and I have a greater appreciation of the formative events in our past, long before Boxborough was habitat for the human species. Thank you Anne!

The BCTrust's Annual Meeting will be on Sunday, April 2, at the Sargent Memorial Library (see back cover for details). The main event features guest speaker Allen Rutberg, Ph.D., Cummings School of Veterinary Medicine, Tufts University, who will give a presentation of special interest to Boxborough residents: "Living with Wildlife: Reviving the Land Ethic in Suburbia." How does our suburban living determine land use? What are the subsequent impacts on wildlife and likewise, their impact on us? What are the consequences for public health and safety?

As this issue of *Common Ground* goes to press, several members of the Board of Selectmen and other leaders in Boxborough are deliberating the pros and cons of bringing the Community Preservation Act (CPA) before Annual Town Meeting for reconsideration. In a nutshell, the CPA allows a community to levy a revocable surcharge (tax increase) to create a fund that would be spent on land acquisition, historic preservation and affordable housing. Although a minimum of 10% must be allocated for each, the remaining 70% of funds can be directed towards whichever of these projects the Town deems appropriate, with the State matching Town dollars. When the CPA became State law in the fall of 2000, the Town voted not to adopt it at the 2001 Annual Town Meeting, primarily out of concern that the State would not come through with the matching funds. To date, the State has fulfilled all of its financial commitments to those communities who've passed the CPA. See the Q&A in this issue to learn more about the CPA. □

Q&A

CPA: Take 2

BY DON WHEELER
MEMBER, BOARD OF SELECTMEN

Q: What has prompted you to revisit the Community Preservation Act (CPA) this year?

A: The success of many towns in the Commonwealth. To date, 103 communities have adopted the act, and there are numerous well-documented successes. Plus, we now have clearer answers to many of the questions posed the last time we discussed it at Town Meeting in 2001. We all need to understand the difference between property taxes and the CPA. Property taxes fund day-to-day operations: safety, health, schools, and roads. The CPA provides a steady source of funding for improving our community's infrastructure.

Q: What are the top three projects that you see the CPA funding?

A: People think the CPA is only about land acquisition and conservation. That's not the case at all. At the very top of my list are repairs and improvements to many Town structures and facilities. We haven't been doing our job in keeping up with basic maintenance. The old portion of Town Hall needs a new floor and paint, and the stage is not compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), making it non-usable. The old library needs to be made ADA-compliant and needs improved access to the basement. The Town cemeteries are in need of repairs to the vaults and walls.

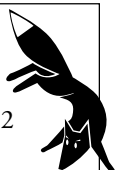
Q: Have any neighboring communities passed the CPA?

A: Acton, Harvard, Stow, and Maynard.

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You're Invited!

Join the BCTrust at the Sargent Memorial Library, Sunday, April 2 to hear special guest speaker Allen T. Rutberg, Ph.D. on "Living with Wildlife: Reviving the Land Ethic in Suburbia." See details on back page.



Take a Hike with the BCTrust



Flagg Hill

Saturday,
May 13

1:00-3:30 PM

Meet at Windemere
Drive parking lot.

Flagg Hill Conservation Area, jointly managed by the conservation commissions of Boxborough and Stow, comprises a total of 286 acres. Of the 80 acres located in Boxborough, 27 acres are conservation land, including 8 acres for the pond at the base of the hill on the southern side. The remaining 57 acres are designated municipal land. The property was acquired by the Town in 1998 for \$1.4 million and abuts the 206 acres of conservation land acquired by the Town of Stow at the same time. Trail access at Windemere Road connects with a network of trails in the Stow conservation area.

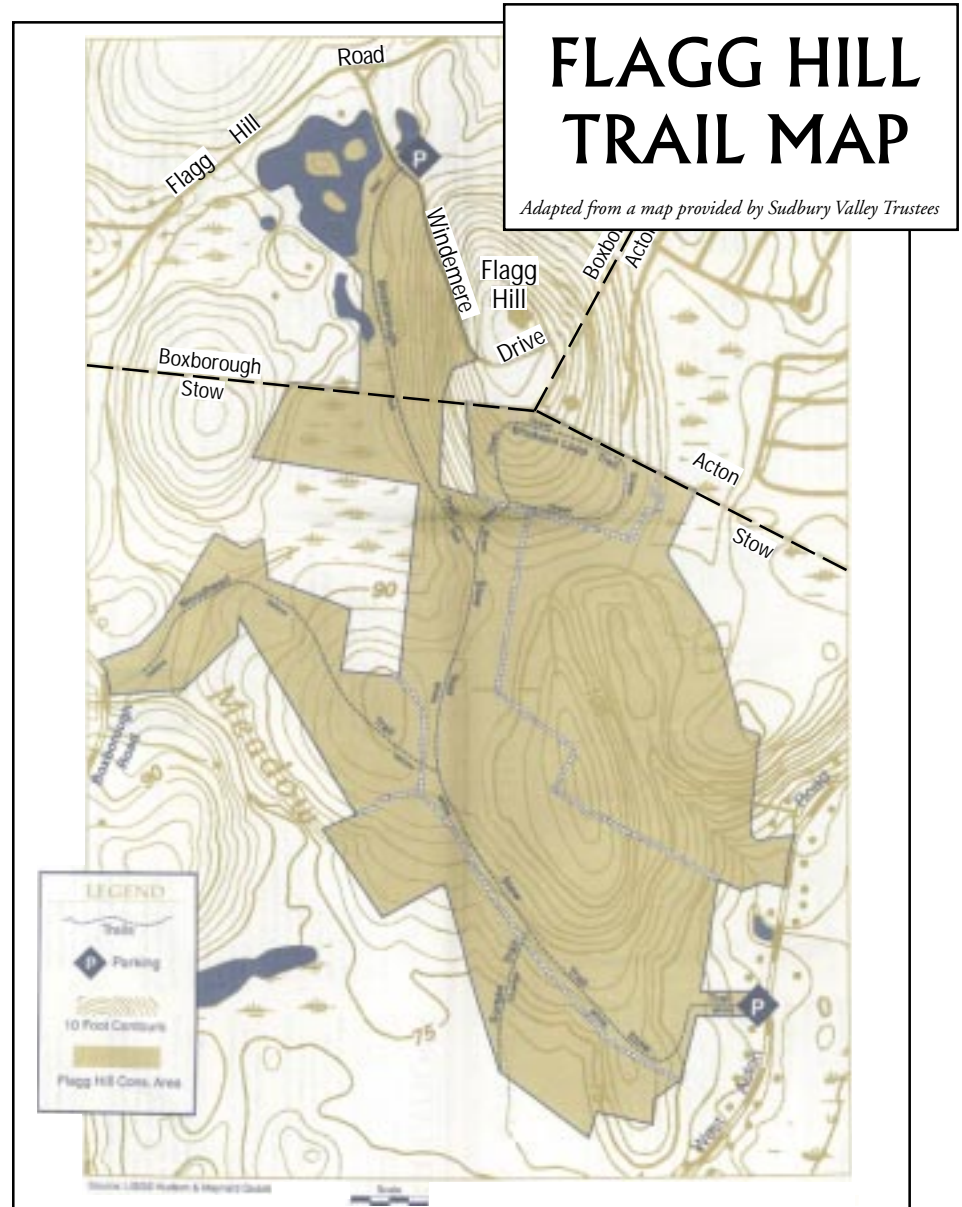
Flagg Hill is a glacial drumlin—a hill formation similar to the Patch Hill Conservation Area—and is believed to be the highest point in Boxborough, at 466 feet. Unlike Patch Hill, however, Flagg Hill has a relatively “young” forest. Up until 35 years ago, much of the land was cleared for differing uses, including a small commercial ski slope that operated in the 1960s and ’70s. It’s said that when there were fewer trees, a beautiful view to the west was possible, including a clear sight of Mount Wachusett. Today, much of the forest is “early succession,” consisting of pines, poplars, and aspens typical of early growth. Still, there are some areas with older growth pine and hardwood mixes.

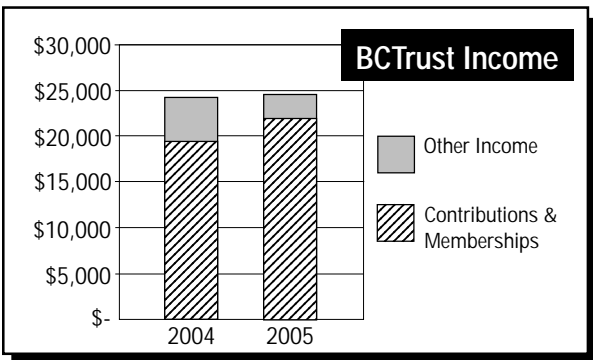
Despite its relative “youth,” the conservation value of Flagg Hill is clear. The setting is an important bird and wildlife habitat, supporting many different species. The area provides habitat for a variety of birds, white-tailed deer, eastern coyote, red fox, raccoon, fisher, mink, and weasel. The steep sloped areas overlooking the excavated pond at the base of Windemere Drive are home to owls, hawks, and other birds of prey that like to nest on the hillside, where they have a good view of the pond to watch and listen for frogs, turtles, voles, water snakes,

and fish. Several vernal pools—temporary bodies of water that fill in the spring, allowing reptiles and amphibians to breed—exist on the land, including one that’s a certified vernal pool, registered with the Commonwealth, because it is home to the Blue Spotted Salamander, which is on the Massachusetts rare species list.

Recreational Uses -Walking, nature study, jogging, ice skating, cross-country skiing, snow-shoeing, fishing and canoeing. Sledding along the quarter-mile-long hill next to Windemere Drive is very good. The fall foliage view from Windemere Drive can be spectacular.

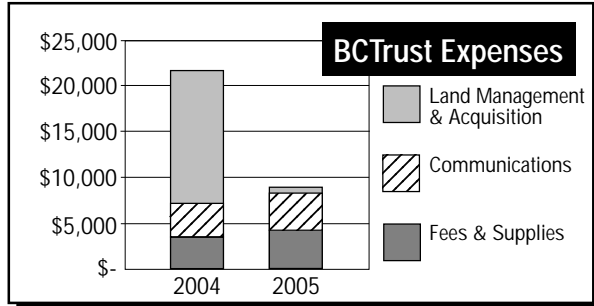
Trails -There are several well-maintained trails on this property with two access points, both with parking: one on Windemere Drive in Boxborough and the other on West Acton Road in Stow. At the Boxborough access area, near the pond and the kiosk, the red trail connects to the trail network in Stow. After .5 mile, the red trail intersects with the Erickson Loop Trail (green blaze, .5 mile) and the Stow Trail (white blaze, .8 mile), which leads to West Acton Road in Stow. From the Stow Trail, you can also access the Woodhead Trail (yellow blaze, .5 mile), which ends at Boxborough Road in Stow. On the east side of Windemere Drive, you’ll find a second, shorter set of trails. A detailed
(continued on next page)





BCTrust Depends on Your Support

Where Your Dollars Go



Q&A *(continued from front page)*

Q: What have they done with their CPA funds?

A: One example: Acton approved 10 CPA-funded projects in fiscal year 2005: four for historic preservation, three for affordable housing, two for recreation, and one for open space.

Q: Are there any statewide results on the impact of the CPA?

A: To date, approximately \$115 million in CPA projects have been approved. Of that number, 41% of the appropriations have been for affordable housing development, 36% for land protection, 17% for historic preservation, and 6% for public recreation. Projects completed or underway include 618 units of affordable housing, approximately 4,020 acres of open space acquisitions, and more than 150 historic sites purchased or preserved with CPA funds. There are descriptions of all projects approved to date, by year, town/city, or project area on communitypreservation.org.

Q: What's your perspective on why the Town voted down the CPA in 2001?

A: There was a lack of support by two key committees, Finance and Conservation. They felt a need for clarification on a number of key questions, especially how the CPA would work.

Q: How exactly does the CPA work, and who would control the CPA here in Boxborough?

A: The CPA allows communities to create a local Community Preservation Fund by applying a surcharge of up to 3% of the real estate tax levy. The act also creates a state matching fund of more than \$25 million annually. The funds are to be spent in three areas: open space, historic preservation, and low and moderate income housing. A Community Preservation Committee composed of 5 to 9 members representing various boards in the community would recommend to Town Meeting how to spend the funds.

Q: If Boxborough had voted in the CPA in 2001, what differences would we see today?

A: We would see a reduction in our tax rate, not huge, but a reduction just the same. More important, we would have matching funds from state for the land purchases we made in 2002 for the Howe/Panek and Richards parcels (totaling \$630K) and for funding the affordable housing condo exchange program (\$200K). Instead, we paid the full amount ourselves by taking out a 20-year bond, and we continue to incur an interest expense that we could have avoided. □

Visit these websites to learn more about the CPA:
<http://www.communitypreservation.org>
<http://commpres.env.state.ma.us/content/cpa.asp>

Boxborough Conservation Trust Board of Directors

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For email contact information, go to www.bctrust.org/DirectorsBylaws.html

Common Ground is mailed quarterly to all Boxborough residents, free of charge.

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 Tara Zantow, special projects
 Glynis Hamel, staff writer
 Catherine Christensen, design
 Hugh Fortmiller, Board liaison

Flagg Hill

(continued from previous page)

map of the Stow and Boxborough trails may be available at the kiosk. If you want to be sure you have a map for your hike, download it from www.sudburyvalleytrustees.org before you head out, since maps aren't always in stock at the kiosk.

Parking - Parking is available on Windemere Drive at the pond and at the top of the hill. Parking in Stow is off West Acton Road.

History - This area was used by Native Americans before the arrival of Europeans. The main trail, according to the Boxborough website, "follows a carriage road of the 18th and early 19th century that extended at least to the town of Groton. Parallel stone walls and an old well site located west of the Stow Trail, as well as several cellar holes and stone structures, indicate that people once lived on Flagg Hill." Evidence indicates that in the 20th century, some of the property was used as pasture. After the small commercial ski slope closed in the early 1970s, the area was broken up into separate parcels. Different land owners used their properties in different ways, and the varied habitats today reflect those diverse uses. □

Sources: Dave Bull, Dave Koonce, Town of Boxborough website, Sudbury Valley Trustees website.

Volunteer Your Graphic Design Talents

The BCTrust is looking for a graphic designer to lay out this quarterly newsletter. Time commitment is approximately 6-8 hours per issue. Experience with a current page layout software package (such as Quark Xpress or MS Publisher) is required. Internet access with up-to-date browser is also a must. Please send letter of inquiry along with samples in PDF format to the editor at lynnstahlberg@comcast.net.

Welcome, New Members!

The BCTrust received contributions from these new members since the last issue of *Common Ground*. Thank you!

Loretta Grushecky
Ann and Peter Houston
Nick Krol
Nancy and Elliot Lilien
Claudia and Al Murphy
Musto Family
Seger Family
Janet and Matt Tyndall
Wilfert Family
Willis Family
Anonymous

www.bctrust.org

Take a look at our redesigned website:

- Color photos of Boxborough's conservation lands
- Back issues of *Common Ground*
- Links to a variety of conservation websites
- New member registration

Take a Hike with the BCTrust

*Flagg Hill
Conservation Area*



*Saturday,
May 13*

1:00-3:30 PM

Meet at Windemere
Drive parking lot.

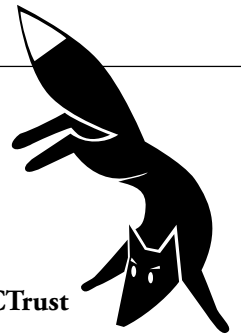
For more details,
see page two.

BCTrust Annual Meeting

Sunday, April 2, 2006

Sargent Memorial Library, 427 Mass. Ave., Boxborough

- 4:00 PM **Annual Meeting of BCTrust Membership**
You're a member if you contributed to the BCTrust during the year prior to this meeting.
- 4:30 PM **Public Presentation: All are welcome!**
"Living with Wildlife: Reviving the Land Ethic in Suburbia."
Allen T. Rutberg, Ph.D., Research Assistant Professor
Environmental and Population Health
Cummings School of Veterinary Medicine, Tufts University
- 5:30 PM **Refreshments: All are welcome!**



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