

Spring 2008



www.westfordconservationtrust.org



**Annual Town Meeting - Saturday,
May 10th, 10:00 AM Abbot School**

Haystack

*Editor
Diane Duane*

Trust Strongly Opposes Articles to Eliminate the Town's Wetland Protection By-laws *by Marian Harman*

An emergency situation has arisen in Town. It is important all voters respond. Two petition articles on this spring's Annual Town Meeting on May 10th ask the Town to vote to eliminate its own Wetland Protection Bylaws and regulations. Please vote "No" on articles 21 and 22.

Westford instituted its Wetland Protection By-laws in 1989. These by-laws protect our precious water resources by increasing the protection under the State Wetland Protection law. Under the State law, small wetlands can be filled, and there are no required setbacks for work near wetlands. A development can be built right up to the edge of the wetlands. This was the case in Westford before 1989. Now, under the Town's Wetland Protection bylaw, there is a 50 ft. protection around wetlands, which is a non-disturb area.

Under State law, there is no protection for small isolated wetlands such as vernal pools. Vernal pools are protected by the Town's Wetland Protection by-law. We know that vernal pools are essential habitat for many species of frogs, salamanders and turtles.

Most important, perhaps, is that as we protect our wetlands, we protect our drinking water. Rain which falls drains to wetlands and slowly percolates into the groundwater. If there were no wetlands to absorb rain, water would flow directly and swiftly into our rivers and out of Town, depleting our drinking water aquifers.

The majority of Massachusetts towns (194) have adopted Wetlands Bylaws. It is well known that communities such as Westford which protect their natural resources, are deemed to be more desirable places to live and have higher property values than towns which allow themselves to be entirely built out.

Please join me at Town Meeting on Saturday, May 10th, 10 a.m. at the Abbot School and vote "No" on articles 21 and 22.

Trust Pledges \$500 for 'Green' Habitat for Humanity Home

The Trust has pledged \$500 toward the first ever "Green Home" built by Habitat for Humanity here in Westford. The property, designated by the Town of Westford for the construction of affordable housing, is located at 18 Williams Avenue, and will be the site of Habitat's first new home in Westford. According to Habitat, compared to conventional construction, building to certain green standards could "increase the home's energy efficiency by as much as 40 percent and significantly decrease annual energy bills". The joint Trust/Town trails group has also been cleaning up the adjacent Town property and has approached the project manager about putting in some wildlife friendly plantings. Check our website for volunteer opportunities relating to this project.



No Child Left Inside *By William Morton*



There is a growing movement in this country, called *No Child Left Inside*. Parents, pediatricians, and teachers are realizing that children benefit from direct experience with the natural world, and that children are given such opportunities less and less. One of the leaders of this movement is Richard Louv, the author of *Last Child in the Woods*. He has coined the phrase *Nature deficit disorder* which describes a phenomenon that he, and others, have seen in the last 10-15 years. He explains how many children are taught that the natural world is frightening, and uninviting. One child, when asked why he didn't like to play outdoors, said, "I can't find anywhere to plug things in". In addition to his book, Louv has started the *Children and Nature Network* (www.cnaturenet.org) which provides resources such as information about outdoor programs across the country, and scientific research that points to direct contact with nature providing children with increased social skills (such as cooperation and flexibility) and emotional benefits (such as stress reduction, reduced aggression, and increased happiness) in addition to the physical benefits of unstructured, outdoor play.



Louv is quick to point out that outdoor play need not be on a sports team or otherwise organized by adults. Simply spending time playing in a nearby park, or in the child's own backyard, can have enormous benefits. Additionally, many parents are now being advised by medical professionals to begin limiting screentime, both at computers and television, from the earliest ages. In fact, the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends no screentime whatsoever for a child's first two years. They back up their advice with the results of medical research. All this leads to the necessity of open space in our community. Children need the chance to run around and have unstructured play in the outdoors. The benefits of healthy, unstructured, outdoor opportunities for children, which can help them develop emotionally as well as physically, should be in the interest of everyone in the community. As a community we should take every chance we have to preserve undeveloped areas in our town.

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The National Wildlife Federation recommends that parents give their kids a **"Green Hour" every day**, a time for unstructured play and interaction with the natural world. This can take place in a garden, a backyard, the park down the street, or any place that provides safe and accessible green spaces where children can learn and play.
www.greenhour.org

Trail Stewardship Update



The "Tuesday Trampers", a group of local trail stewards and hikers, took on trails at **Kissacook Hill**. These trails connect the Day School with Orchard Street in Forge Village, and include the **John Gagnon Nature Walk**.

With clippers in-hand, the Tuesday group improved the trailhead on Orchard Street, the trailhead in the parking lot at the school, and also installed some new signs and restored the yellow blazes on trees. The signs are intended to make it clear how the trails interconnect. Subsequently it became evident from footprints in the snow that the trails are now being used more frequently. This is a beautiful area, which includes some interesting changes of forest types. It's nice, also, to have a well marked footpath connection to the school, making it possible for some students to use their own foot power for school transportation.



-Bill Harman

Spring Walks



Bird Walk (RCC-E4343)

Saturday, May 10, 7:00-9:00 AM



Join Trust members Lenny Palmer, Dot Mooney and Marian Harman for an early morning ramble at Westford's birding "hot spot". We will search Nashoba Pond, and wetland areas on town and Audubon conservation lands, for returning migrants and nesting resident birds. Bring binoculars and wear sturdy shoes. NO dogs please. Park in town parking lot at end of Trailside Way, off Powers Rd. FREE but please register with Roudenbush (RCC).

Wildflower Walk (RCC-E4345)

Sunday, May 18, 1:00 pm-2:30 pm



Westford's top wildflower expert, Elana Schreiber, will lead us on a pleasant walk through Tad-muck Swamp conservation area. We will move slowly as we search for plants over glacial eskers on trails where we hope to find a good variety of spring wildflowers. Young children and dogs on leash are welcome, but will find the pace is slow. Park on the cul-de-sac at end of Dana Drive extension, off Fairview Drive. FREE - but please register with Roudenbush.

"Stream Critters" Walk (RCC-E4347)

Saturday, May 31, 9:00-11:00 AM



Wetlands biologist, Peter Severance, will lead an investigation of the critters which live in a stream. This popular walk is fun for all ages. Be prepared to wade right into the stream to catch the 'critters'. You can wear old boots or sneakers. NO dogs please. Meet on Trailside Way (off Powers Rd.) at the bridge which spans Nashoba Brook.. FREE - Call Roudenbush to register.

Ponding (RCC- E4349)

Sunday, June 1, 9:00-11:00 AM



Netting creatures in a pond is fun for the whole family. Leader and Wetlands biologist Peter Severance will help us find and identify many different sorts of critters from those found in a brook. You can participate in both the Ponding and Stream Critters activity. Wade right in with boots or old sneakers. Park on Concord Rd., right across from 224 Concord Rd., and proceed across the hay field to the pond. FREE but please register with Roudenbush..

All walks are FREE. Please Call Roudenbush Community Center to register at 978-692-5511 or online at www.roudenbush.org

WATER QUALITY MONITORING UPDATE

We are entering our third full year of water quality monitoring. Based on our sampling, there is some concern that runoff is elevating levels of nutrients in all of our brooks but especially in Nashoba Brook. This is probably excess use of fertilizers (such as that used for lawn care). The Town also has a new study of our watersheds, the **Westford Watershed Assessment and Action Plan** which is being incorporated into the new Comprehensive Master Plan. Residents can find a copy available at the Fletcher Library.



We need Volunteers to help with sample collections. We collect once a month in the early morning hours. Training will begin in early May. Volunteers who would like to assist with monitoring can email us at info@westfordconservationtrust.org or call Diane at 978-692-3298.

Join the Trust

Name _____

Address _____

Phone (optional)/Email _____

Check here if interested in volunteering for trail maintenance

Check here if interested in volunteering for educational efforts

Please make tax deductible check payable to : **Westford Conservation Trust**

Please mail to : **Westford Conservation Trust P.O. Box 255**

Westford, Ma. 01886

Or join online at www.westfordconservationtrust.org

- \$25 Individual
- \$40 Family
- \$100-500 Friend
- \$500-1000 Patron
- \$1000 Supporter
- Other



Westford Conservation Trust
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Westford, Massachusetts 01886

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Go to our website to listen to the
songs of one of our returning
spring birds.....