

WESTFORD Conservation Trust

April 2001
Editor, Kathy Deschenes



The Westford Conservation Trust supports the adoption of the CPA and urges its members to vote in favor of this program on May 1st.

The Town of Westford is considering an important initiative in an upcoming Town Meeting and Town Election. The Community Preservation Act (CPA) provides an opportunity to save money for the future and receive matching state funds on revenues collected. It all starts with a three percent surcharge on the town's local property tax that was approved at Special Town Meeting on March 24.

There are several exemptions to the CPA:

- * The first 100k of assessed residential property is exempt
- * If property owner/occupant qualifies for low-income housing they are exempt
- * If property owner/occupant is 60+ years of age and qualifies for low- or moderate-income housing they are exempt
- * Chapter 59 exemptions are not surcharged; Chapter 59 abatements are proportionately surcharged

The CPA in a nutshell:

- * Special Town Meeting does not make the CPA law. IT MUST WIN A MAJORITY VOTE ON MAY 1ST DURING TOWN ELECTIONS.
- * 30% of the monies collected are divided equally between affordable housing, historic preservation, and open space. The remaining 70% is distributed at the direction of Town Meeting into the same three categories.
- * The state has created a Trust Fund from new fees charged by the Registry of Deeds. This Fund will be used to provide matching grants (anywhere from 5 to 100 percent) to towns that adopted the CPA.
- * If the CPA is voted in on the May 1st town election, then Town Meeting on May 5th will be tasked with adopting a bylaw to establish a Community Preservation Committee. This committee will make recommendations to Town Meeting for the use of the monies collected for the CPA Fund.

Here's an example of how much tax will be incurred by a resident having only the first \$100k of property assessment as an exemption:

<i>Assesed Value:</i>	<i>2001 Tax Bill:</i>	<i>3% CPA Surcharge:</i>
\$100,000	\$1,732	\$ 0.00
\$200,000	\$3,464	\$ 51.96
\$300,000	\$5,196	\$103.92
\$400,000	\$6,928	\$155.88

INTERESTING OPPORTUNITY

Are you interested in tracking wildlife? Westford, in conjunction with the Boxboro and Littleton Conservation Trusts, is putting together a wildlife tracking team. We will be trained by master tracker Susan Morse in two 3-day sessions in Jerico, Vt. and in our own home areas. After training, we will monitor several areas of open space in our towns for the presence of large mammals such as fisher, otter, fox, coyote and bobcat.

The information from this monitoring will help with management decisions on these lands. If you would like more information on this program please call Marian Harman at 692-3907, or e-mail her at MarianHarman@aol.com.

Send us your email addresses!!!

In order for the Trust to contact you when there is an important issue, we could do so more efficiently by email. Our policy is to not supply our member lists to outside organization. Please help us update our database by sending your email address to:

MarianHarman@aol.com

THANKS!

CALL FOR SUPPORT

The Trust has recently received assistance from an organization that has done so in a very generous manner. The organization is The Trustees of Reservations. They are a non-profit group whose goal is to preserve "landscapes of exceptional scenic, historic, and ecological value in Massachusetts."

You can help this worthy cause by becoming a member and/or contributing your time. For more information, you can visit their website at www.thetrustees.org. Or call them at (978)921-1944.

They are headquartered in Beverly but have a local site in Leominster. The Trust would like to work with them on any future projects that may affect Westford and we ask our members to support them in any way they can.



And you thought it would snow forever.....

Spring is here and the Trust offers the following announcement as proof!

SPRING WALKS

Bird Walk (AS13-BW)

Saturday, May 12, 7 - 9 AM

Join Westford's foremost birder, Dick Emmet, for a bird walk on Audubon and Town Conservation land. Walk is mostly flat but rocky, about 2 miles. Wear appropriate footgear and socks for poison ivy protection. Bring binoculars but not dogs! This walk is limited to a maximum of 30 people. Meet at Audubon parking lot on Concord Rd. across from Banbury Drive.

Wildflower Walk (AS13-WFW)

Sunday, May 20, 1 - 2:30 PM

Elana Schreiber will lead us on a hike up Prospect Hill to explore the Conservation Trust's newest Wildlife Sanctuary. Elana is Westford's foremost wildflower expert and we should find many flowers in bloom. Wear long pants and socks (there's that poison ivy warning again). Walk is short but steep. Meet at Roudenbush parking lot. For the whole family - even the dog (as long as he/she is on leash).

Stream Critters (AS13-SC)

Saturday, June 2, 9 - 11 AM

Meet at the Audubon parking lot on Concord Rd. across from Banbury Drive. Join wetlands biologist, Peter Severance, for a look at what's living in Vine Brook. Wear sneakers and pants that can get wet. We will wade into the brook to find the critters. Great fun for the whole family (even with more poison ivy to warn you about!).

All walks are FREE. Please call Roudenbush to register (692-5511) and reference the corresponding code for the walk. If you want further information, call Marian Harman at 692-3907 or email her at MarianHarman@aol.com

SEE YOU THERE!!!!

WANT TO GET MORE INVOLVED???

We are always happy to welcome members who want to contribute their time and energy to the conservation of open space in Westford. How much of a contribution is entirely up to you. We meet the first Thursday of every month (except July and August) at 7:30pm at the Emerson Hospital Health Center on Rte. 110 in Westford. You can also find out more about us by visiting our website at <http://townonline.koz.com/visit/WestfordConservationTrust>. You can also contact Marian Harman at 692-3907 or email her at MarianHarman@aol.com.

IN YOUR OWN BACKYARD

by Kathy Deschenes



Wolves are misunderstood. That's the lesson I took home with me after visiting Wolf Hollow in Ipswich, MA. In what is perhaps the only place where you will see wolves in Massachusetts, there are many lessons to be learned.

Wolf Hollow is a non-profit organization that was founded in 1988. Its charter was to educate visitors in hopes that the public would be inspired to preserve the species in the wild. All the wolves in the pack were raised in captivity. This does not mean that they are tame.

When you visit Wolf Hollow, you are instantly overcome by their beauty. The only thing separating you from the wolves is a large reinforced chain-link fence so you are allowed a close look. You learn quickly that you are not in any danger. Wolves are naturally fearful of man - and for good reason. The wolf population is at or near extinction in many parts of the country due to man's systematic elimination of the species. Respect was replaced by fear and hysteria. This is the case with many of nature's creatures with whom we share our planet.

There is a one-hour educational lecture that is given while you watch the wolves. You will learn about how they live as a family, how they interact with other species, their history with man, and preservation initiatives. During the course of your one-hour stay, you will begin to see how these pack animals have much to teach humans - the ultimate pack animals. You will howl with these amazing creatures as you prepare to leave them and feel more connected to their fight for survival.

For more information, contact Wolf Hollow at: 114 Essex Road, Ipswich, MA 01938
Phone: (978)356-0216 or visit their website: <http://www.wolfhollowipswich.com>

The Changing of the Guard

The Land Stewards Steering Committee has gone through some recent changes. The Trust would like to welcome new committee members Peter Ewing, Kate Hollister, and Peter Mahler.

This committee is comprised entirely of volunteers who dedicate their energy, talents, and free time to the upkeep and guardianship of town conservation land. Members are from the Westford Conservation Trust and the Westford Conservation Commission.

We thank all previous committee members for their good work and dedication to the cause. Our most recent, retiring members are John Piekos, Christy Williams, and Mike Killoran.

If you would like to volunteer your time and become a land or trail steward, please contact Peter Ewing at ewingpn@earthlink.net or call him at 392-0135.

TOWN MEETING, MAY 5th

10 am, Abbot School

Peter Ewing, Contributor

Many important articles related to Land Use and Acquisition and Zoning Amendments will be debated and voted upon at Town Meeting starting at 10:00 a.m. Saturday, May 5th at the Abbot School. With a total of 30 Articles before Town Meeting business is likely to stretch into the following week-day evenings. The Westford Conservation Trust has not taken an official position on any of these articles, but we urge you to attend to hear the discussions on them.

The first article which will affect open space is article 7 - Conservation Expendable Trust. This article asks the Town to transfer an amount of \$50,000 into the Conservation Commission's Expendable Fund. This money is used for small land purchases, survey work, etc.

The first Land Use Article begins with Article 15 and the final Zoning Amendment is Article 30. Many of the Land Use articles have to do with the transfer and conveyance of land to the Conservation Commission. For example, Article 15 would transfer 7 acres of Recreation Commission land near Kennedy Pond to the Conservation Commission. Article 16 would accept a gift of 44 acres at Beaver Brook Estates. Article 20, by petition, would transfer 17 acres known as the "Gateway to Westford" to the Conservation Commission. Abutters authored this article. Article 23, relates to the Community Preservation Act and, assuming it wins at the ballot box on May 1st, establishes the makeup of the 9 voting CPA committee members, their duties and various rules.

One Zoning Ordinance authored by the Conservation Commission is Article 28 - Wetland and Edge Zone Amendment. This is a housekeeping measure to remove zone designations that became obsolete when the Town adopted the Non-zoning Wetlands Bylaw. In the past assessors maps were used to delineate wetlands based on aerial photographs taken in 1973. Experience has shown that the margin of error can sometimes vary by up to 50 feet or more. In comparison the Non-zoning Wetlands Bylaw delineates wetlands by precise, scientific identification of wetland locations on the ground and proper depiction of those locations on construction plans submitted for approval.

Finally, Article 30, by petition, is an amendment to the Zoning Bylaws, replacing the existing Growth Management Bylaw. This Article was authored by Selectman Bob McCusker and resident Dennis Galvin. If this article passes it would reduce the number of houses that can be built annually from the existing maximum of 125 to 30.

One year ago, at the May 2000 Town Meeting voters supported a tax override to Proposition 2 1/2 to fund new schools resulting from Westford's rapid growth. In addition to the high cost of development, another voter complaint often heard these days is the dramatic increase in traffic in the Town. In a roundabout way, voters in Town are beginning to see the virtue of purchasing open space for conservation purposes. Maybe they should thank the hard working members of the Conservation Commission, the Conservation Trust and its supportive members for having preserved many hundreds of acres in Westford from development. Undoubtedly, the property tax rate in Westford would be higher than it is now if this land had been developed.

In the end, open space isn't only about a walk along the beautiful Beaver or Stony Brooks, it's also about clean drinking water, reduced taxes, less traffic and a better community to live in. Your attendance at Town Meeting is critical, as well as your vote at the ballot box for the Community Preservation Act on May 1st to preserve open space, to gain affordable housing and to protect our historical resources.

**Strawberry Festival
June 16th, 10 - 4**

The Conservation Trust is looking for volunteers to help us during Westford's annual Strawberry Festival. It is scheduled for Saturday, June 16th (rain date June 17th) and runs from 10 to 4. We need help covering the booth and leading folks on short trail walks down the nearby Tom Paul Trail. Any amount of time you can contribute would be appreciated. If interested, call Marian Harman at 692-3907 or email her at MarianHarman@aol.com.

**Biodiversity Days
June 8 - 10**

Once a year, the State of Massachusetts sponsors Biodiversity Days. One of the objectives of this event is to collect flora and fauna reports around the state. For our part, we would like to encourage our members to participate by venturing out into town (even just your own back yards) and note plants, birds, and animals that you see during June 8th through the 10th. All you need to report is what you saw (species), where you saw it (address), and when you saw it (date). It's that simple. Please send your reports to Marian Harman via email to MarianHarman@aol.com or mail them to her at 10 Chamberlain Road, Westford.



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