

News

and

Views

Fall 2002
Editor, Kathy Deschenes



Join us for the Trust's Annual Meeting

When: Thursday, November 7th at 7:30 pm
Where: Parish Center for the Arts, Westford Common



Speaker

John McCarter (pictured at left) has been tracking wildlife for more than twenty years and is among the region's leading authorities on animal tracks and signs. John is also a senior staff instructor for Paul Rezendes, author and photographer of the acclaimed *Tracking & the Art of Seeing: How to Read Animal Tracks and Sign*. John will have slides and stories about his tracking experiences that are sure to keep you fascinated. You will also have the opportunity to sign up for a tracking class with John sometime this winter.

Conservation Person of the Year

Every year the Trust presents an award to a person who exemplifies the spirit of Conservation in the town. This year's recipient is Dick Emmet. Dick has always been in the forefront of conservation and volunteerism in town and we are honored

that he has accepted this award.

Business

Since this is our biggest meeting of the year, the Trust also conducts a little business as well. Reports will be presented by the Treasurer, Secretary, and the Land/Trail Stewardship Committee. Our bylaws state that elections for Directors, Associate Directors, Clerk, and Treasurer be held at the annual meeting as well.

Fun

There will be refreshments provided. At the end of the evening we hope you'll stay and mingle with fellow Conservation enthusiasts.

A Call to Action

The following letter was written by Marian Harman, President of the WCT, to Commissioner Lauren Liss at 1 Winter St., 2nd floor Boston, MA 02108. We ask that our members write as well to protest this proposed regulation.

The Westford Conservation Trust, Inc. opposes any effort to weaken the regulations on percolation rates in the State. As we understand it, Acting Governor Jane Swift has proposed a change from the current 30 mins./inch regulation to 60 minutes. The effect of this change would be devastating to the town of Westford, and to most towns in the Commonwealth. This relaxation of regulations would open up many more acres to development, which would have the effect of putting great strain on our town infrastructure. Many more schools, roads, and other town services would have to be provided to the resulting increase in population. Our property taxes would skyrocket even higher than they already have in the past few years. Westford has had to build three new schools this year alone, due to the influx of large developments. We are strained to the limit both financially and in providing basic town services.

At the same time, Westford has been proactive in passing the CPA legislation, in purchasing open space, and in attempting to increase our affordable housing stock through the passage of a creative new Flexible Development by-law, which provides incentives for developers to include affordable units in every new development, and through the passage of a Mill Conversion by-law which has resulted in three new mill condominium and apartment projects which will substantially increase our stock of affordable housing. The Swift administration has led the way in implementing the CPA act, and in encouraging creative affordable housing efforts. Please don't undermine these efforts by drastically weakening our development regulations. The very quality of life in Massachusetts is threatened by this proposal.

Education Initiatives

The Trust has always been huge supporters of education in Westford. So many children have never had their eyes opened to the wonders of nature and how much more interesting it is than their Game Boys. Once they have, their natural curiosity takes over and Voila! a new generation of Trust members!!!

The teaching staff in Westford public schools is always looking for new ways to bring the outdoors into the classroom. And we are always available to help them make it happen. Here are just a few of the educational programs the Trust is supporting.

Classroom feeder watch - Trust members work with Westford school librarians to implement, instruct, and monitor a Cornell program where fourth-graders use bird feeders outside their school to learn more about science and nature.

Nature walks - Trust members lead its annual Spring walks in May and June and focused on things such as wildflowers, wetlands inhabitants, and birds. Trust members and other local naturalists also lead nature walks for Westford fourth-graders on some of Westford's trails.

Living Lab contribution - The Trust Board of Directors voted in September to donate funds to the Living Lab project being lead by teachers from the Day School. The scope of the project is wide and includes the building of a lab at Reed Brook. In this lab, school children of all ages will measure the effects of various factors on the environment.

Town Meeting - November 12, 2002

The Westford Conservation Trust opposes the CPA Committee's suggested allocation of funds for 2002. We understand that the committee members made a valiant effort to please all petitioners, and we feel that all the proposals are worthy. But alternative sources of funding can be found for these needs. The use of CPA funds to build structures such as tennis courts and gym equipment on land already owned by the Town, is a dangerous precedent to set. We feel CPA funds should primarily be allocated towards the purchase of open space, taking large parcels of land out of the development stream.

When we voted last May for a 3% surcharge on our taxes for the CPA fund, we did so because we thought this would keep our property taxes from skyrocketing due to new development. In the past, if we had been able to afford to buy the large parcels of Greystone and Lakeside Meadows, we would not be building three new schools this year with the resultant huge increase in our property taxes. No large parcels of land are available to buy this year, but there are 46 parcels of 20 acres or more, and 20 parcels of 50 acres or more which remain unprotected in Westford. One of these parcels is bound to come on the market suddenly in the next few years. If we have saved prudently we will be in a position to purchase such large parcels of land which have previously been unaffordable.

For these reasons, the Westford Conservation Trust Directors recently voted unanimously to support an alternative allocation of funds at the Special Town Meeting on November 12: 10% to affordable housing, 10% to historic preservation, and the remaining 80% to be banked for the future purchase of open space and recreation land. We will be able to enjoy the land we purchase with CPA funds for passive and active recreation, and preserve the rural character of our town, while keeping our property taxes in control.

WE ASK OUR MEMBERS TO ATTEND TOWN MEETING AND SUPPORT THE TRUST'S STAND ON THIS IMPORTANT ISSUE.

Trails Report

Several land maintenance projects were undertaken by land/trail stewards this summer. A new trail was built along Stony Brook near the Stone Arch Bridge. This beautiful loop trail, named the Stone Arch Bridge Trail, is on land owned by the Town and administered by the Conservation Commission. Another new trail was built on land owned by the Conservation Trust near Kennedy Pond. This trail runs from Preservation Way, through the Wilson Wildlife Sanctuary, and connects to Audubon and Town-owned conservation land. A third trail project was a new trail on the town-owned Day parcel, connecting Coldspring Road to the Tom Paul Trail. This trail will serve as a detour around a large beaver dam which has been blocking the trail near Evergreen Circle. Signage was placed at all of these trails.

Some new signage was also erected at the Trust's Acker Conservation Land on Depot St., the Trust's Francis Hill Wildlife Sanctuary on Lowell Rd., and at Lakeside Estates trail head. Ongoing projects include boundary marking at three Trust properties. The purchase of signs has been made possible by a generous donation to the Trust from the Newcomers Club. The Land/Trail Stewardship Committee is always in need of new stewards for Town and Trust trails and properties. Please contact Tom Spuhler at tspuhler@yahoo.com if you are interested in volunteering.

Check out our new website!

The Trust has a new website. Check it out and let us know what you think!

www.westfordconservationtrust.org

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 organizations. Please help us update our database by sending your email address to:

MarianHarman@aol.com

New Land/Trail Stewardship Committee member

Peter Ewing has stepped down as the Trust's representative in the Land/Trail Stewardship Committee. Peter has done some great work and will continue to be involved in conservation issues in town. Peter is being replaced by Tom Spuhler who has been heading up the Boundary Marking Committee for the Trust. We wish both Peter and Tom the best of luck.



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