



**Westford Conservation Trust**

**Fall 2024 Newsletter**

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***You're Invited!***

**Westford Conservation Trust Annual Meeting 2024**  
**Introduction to Honeybees: The Honeybee Adventure**  
**Guest Speaker – Mel Gadd, Apiarist and Drumlin Farm**  
**Beekeeper**

**Wednesday, November 13th at 7:00 pm**  
**PCA (Parish Center for the Arts), Westford Center**

Members and friends are invited to join us for our Annual Trust Meeting. We will have a brief Trust business meeting followed by our guest speaker. Light refreshments will be served. Hope you can join us!



Bees perform approximately 80% of all pollination worldwide and bee colonies have declined precipitously over the last few years.

Maintaining a backyard beehive can help increase our local bee population which in turn will foster community pollination and support our local food supplies. Learn about the importance of honeybees and other pollinators with Mel Gadd. He will talk about honeybees and beekeeping stressing the importance of all pollinators including native bees.

For over 20 years, Mel has been involved with the Essex County Beekeepers Association (ECBA). Mel maintains 27 hives: 17 hives at Mass Audubon's Drumlin Farm Wildlife Sanctuary in Lincoln, 2 hives at the Belmont Day School, 2 hives at Nashoba Brooks School, 1 hive at a Jewish nursery school in Lexington, and 1 hive at a community garden in Reading. In addition, Mel mentors a "Therapeutic Beekeeping Program" with 4 hives for veterans who have PTSD at the Bedford VA facility.

Mel uses non-traditional types of hives (top bar, Warre hives, Slovenian & Valkyrie Horizontal hives) as well as the traditional Langstroth hive. As part of his work at Drumlin Farm, Mel has been conducting experiments with natural approaches to the problems of bees and other pollinators. He also runs a Bee School through Mass Audubon, teaching people how to keep bees.

Mel was named the "Beekeeper of the Year" in 2017 by the Massachusetts Beekeepers Association. Mel will bring some honey for a bit of taste testing!

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## The Trust's Summer 2024 Activities

### Invasives Control

Our [Mile-a-Minute](#) control continues to pay dividends. It's not eradicated, but we've been doing our July through September summer hand-pull events for 15 years. There was a lot of rain last year and some of the sites where we found MAM in the past were underwater. This past season was much drier. As a consequence, a dormant MAM seed bank took off along Stony Brook from the Grey Fox conservation land all the way to the bridge that crosses Stony Brook Road near the railroad bridge overpass. A small group of volunteers that included high school students and Westford residents harvested 180 pounds of MAM this season. The entire amount pulled in 2023 was 27 pounds.

### Volunteer Invasive Control Events



In April, a group of volunteers from Westford's Juniper Networks hand-pulled invasive Garlic Mustard that was growing on the property of Westford's J.V. Fletcher Library. In September, the Trust was contacted by Administrative Assistant Sheila Langmeyer of Abbott Vascular, a manufacturer of medical catheters here in Westford. Sheila had a large group of volunteers that wanted to do an outdoor volunteer project that would

benefit the town. Trust Invasives Committee chair Gerry DiBello identified a project that was perfect for a large group on the Conservation Commission land that abuts the Laughton Farm housing development. This site contained large amounts of invasive Japanese Hops and Porcelain Berry. On October 1, a group of more than 40 eager volunteers from Abbott arrived at the site in a bus. Led by one of their supervisors Kevin Hazleton, they hand-pulled and composted the invasive plants. What Gerry had estimated would take the group a full three hours took less than two hours. A smaller group of the Abbott volunteers removed invasive Burning Bush and cleared parts of the lower Tom Paul trails. The Trust owes the volunteers sincere thanks for a job well done!

### Lakeside Meadows Boardwalk Expansion



The Trust's history of supporting Scout conservation projects continues. The [Lakeside Trails](#) are on property owned by the homeowners' association, but with a Conservation Restriction and Trail Easement owned by the town and the Trust. The Trust has

long maintained seasonal protection of grassland bird nesting sites there from May 1 to August 15. The boardwalk north of the association beach needed to be extended on both ends to cover ground that is wet most of the year.



Westford Boy Scout Nic Lokuta (pictured) found this need ideal for his Eagle Scout project. Late in 2023, he presented his proposal to the Lakeside Meadows Association, the town and the Trust. The Trust was impressed with his design and preparation, and approved the proposal as well as contributed to the funding. Over the next several months, Nic secured a *Notice of Intent* with the Westford Conservation Commission, used the Trust's tax exemption to save on material costs, organized Scout troop members to transport and assemble the boardwalk sections, got final approval of his work from all three authorizing parties, and received the

Certificate of Compliance which officially says he did what he said he would do. In true Scout spirit, he returned excess funds to all donors. America's future is in good hands!

### **Ongoing Trail Maintenance**

Volunteers continue to keep Westford's more than 75 miles of hiking trails clear of vegetation and downed trees. More than 545 trees have been removed since we started keeping records in late 2018. Even more trees are scheduled to be cut before the end of this year. This year, thanks to our generous donors, we used Trust funds to purchase a chain saw and accessories for use by the volunteers. Thanks to our volunteers: Lenny Palmer, Steve Wyke, and Larry Willard.

In July, Abby Bond from Juniper Networks contacted the Trust about a trail maintenance project. Trust member Gerry DiBello led the Juniper Networks on a Peace Trail cleanup. We thank Abby and her group of volunteers for their help.

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## **Bill Harman - Hero of the Westford Conservation Trust by Rose O'Donnell**



Bill Harman has been at the heart of the Westford Conservation Trust since its inception. In the early 80's, Bill and Marian Harman owned horses that they rode on unofficial trails across Westford. As they watched new subdivisions displace those trails, they began working to establish a Trails Preservation Group. In a happy coincidence, there were others initiating similar efforts. Tom Paul was working on an Open Space plan. Liz Maguire was leading an Agricultural

Preservation group. They were soon joined by the late Dick Emmet, who suggested creating the Westford Conservation Trust as a 501(c)(3) charitable organization and who raised the initial funding. Thus, in 1984, the Trust was off and running, with Bill as its first president. The picture shows the trails group in 2009.

Bill grew up in Philadelphia, attended the University of Delaware, the University of Michigan and MIT, where he earned his PhD in Electrical Engineering. He and Marian have been married for almost 60 years and have two children and six grandchildren. They moved to Westford in 1973, to a large house (with a barn, of course) on Chamberlain Road. Bill spent most of his working career at MIT Lincoln Laboratory where, although now officially retired, he still goes in occasionally. When he and Marian moved (after the last horse died), they donated about 15 acres on Lowell Road to the Sudbury Valley Trustees and to the Conservation Trust, wanting the land to be doubly protected by multiple organizations.

After serving his term as the Trust's president for 4 years, Bill (and Marian) served continuously on the Trust's Board of Directors until they recently retired and were named Honorary Directors. Over the years Bill has also lent his talents to other Westford boards, including the Planning Board, the Conservation Commission, the Tax Possession Disposition Committee and the Healthy Westford Committee.

Bill is best known to many of us as the leader of the Trail Stewards, a group with fealty to both the Trust and the ConsComm, whose charter is to mark, clear and improve the more than 75 miles of trails in town. Every weekend without fail Bill would send an email to the team (whose members number more than 60), telling us where to show up on Tuesday morning, where to park, what tools to bring, and usually, the conditions of the trail. The weather didn't often diminish his dedication. He would call us to join him in rain, snow, and even real New England cold.



Bill knows all the trails in Westford well: their names, their history (how and when they were acquired), their boundaries, what organization had care and custody and just about anything else you could ask about a trail or the plants and trees encountered. Interestingly, Bill always hiked in rubber Wellingtons, mystifying those of us in hiking boots. Every week he organized the team for a scenic picture and then told us a joke! (mostly "dad" jokes, but that itself was laughter we shared with him.) And Bill brought his prodigious musical talent to the trails. He would hum a song, mostly from the American songbook and invite everyone to name that tune and sing along. It wasn't just work, it was fun! The picture shows one of the last trails groups led by Bill.

The Trail Stewards have fondly and accurately called Bill Harman "Our Fearless Leader" and we have followed him everywhere. Of course, he has been much more than that. He is an inspiration to each of us to protect and care for open space in Westford. His love of nature, woods, fields, marshes and hills is obvious and contagious. Recently Bill announced his retirement from leadership of the Trail Stewards (and has been replaced by a team of three!), though he still joins us in the work on Tuesday mornings. Open space is an obvious and crucial contributor to what makes Westford such a wonderful community. Bill Harman has been a prime mover and a special hero in giving us that gift. It is impossible to thank him enough, but **MANY THANKS, BILL!**

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## **Tuesday Morning Trail Projects by Bill Harman**

Every Tuesday morning a crew of volunteers assembles for a trail trimming project at a different Westford location each week. This event has been a Tuesday happening for many years. A group of trail enthusiasts show up, equipped with tools such as loppers, hand-held clippers,

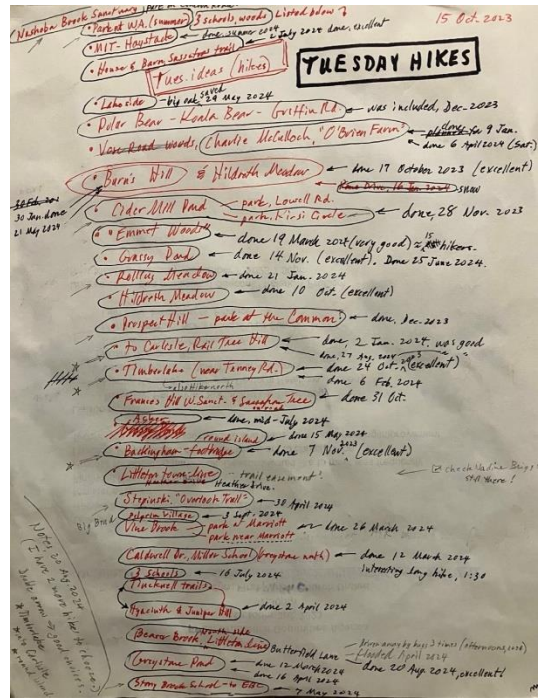
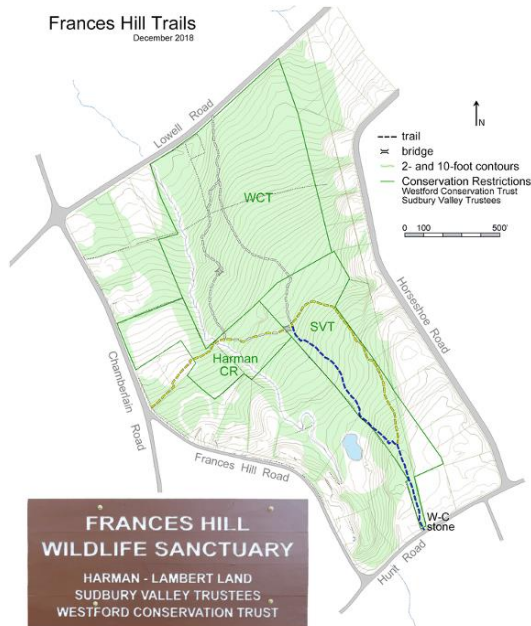
and/or pocket saws. The enthusiasts know that Westford is blessed with many interesting trails, and also know that they need regular trimming. I started this continuing project many years ago. This year I retired as group leader, but I'm continuing as a regular hiker. The Tuesday hikes are currently led by Tom Jrolf and Mike Woesner.

I used to send out an email invitation every Sunday for the upcoming Tuesday hike. To select the location I used a hand-made list (picture below) of the many Westford trails, generally trying to avoid repeating any one trail too often. There are 29 trails on my list, and I'm impressed now to realize that our town has so many interesting trails.



My background for doing this is simply that I love trails, and I'm familiar with all of Westford's many trails. In a few cases, there are trails that I created myself, specifically of the [Frances Hill Wildlife Sanctuary](#). Much of that area was woods that were part of

our house-lot on Chamberlain Road which my wife (Marian) and I bought in 1970. Our house-lot (in the winter photo) included 19 acres of land. I remember when we first tried to walk into the woods it was covered with dense pricker bushes, and almost impossible to hike into. We tried walking on top of a stone wall to be able to walk at all. Things are different now: there are two nice trails going uphill to Hunt Road and two heading downhill to Lowell Road (see trail map below). I created all of those trails. It's fun for me now to try to remember, while I'm hiking along, what it was like when I was first chose these trail routes.



## Trust mentors four Westford Academy Capstone Students by Rich Strazdas

This article tells the rest of the story of “Anatomy of a Boardwalk” from the Spring newsletter. Westford Academy runs a Capstone program every spring for senior students, who may choose to intern at a local business or perform community service. This is the second time the Trust has utilized this program to apply local talent (some may say manpower) for conservation projects. Of course, we also mentor the students on techniques, procedures and regulations. More on that later.

It began with an inquiry from one senior. Then he told a friend, and he told a friend ... Matthew, Sam, Edward and Kyle (pictured below top left) were my "Kapstone Kids" who together could lift ten times what I could do alone. The boardwalk for the Burns Hill Link at the Trust's Hildreth Meadow property was a natural choice for this group to accomplish something permanent in a five-week window.

Although they thought they were out of the classroom, the kid's time with the Trust started with learning about wetland regulations and the preliminary work done to secure a boardwalk construction permit from the town and state. Only then could they translate the design into a parts list, purchase the materials, cut them off site, transport them to the trailhead, and assemble the boardwalk sections. A corporate volunteer group last year had made five 8-foot sections, and we made six more.

It was early May and the trail segment needing the boardwalk would still be wet until late June. All eleven sections were carefully set atop supports in the mud and anchored to each other. It was challenging, it was dirty, but it was fun.

It was also much faster than I could have imagined. Matt Salem, Westford's Conservation Resource Planner, (pictured below right talking to the group) reviewed the final product, had them jump on the boardwalk to prove its stability, and scheduled a Conservation Commission hearing to request a Certificate of Compliance. He also graciously explained what his position entailed and the education and training it took to get there. A few weeks later, the students attended the hearing at which the Commission unanimously approved the execution of the project. Where else can a high schooler get their work judged and approved by a governmental body?!

What did they do with the other three weeks? Well, plenty. The Trust's nearby Pageant Field had invasive garlic mustard and burning bush. Gone. It also needed a sign installed farther from the small parking lot. Done.

The MacDougall Trail from Blakes Hill Road to Boston Road was practically abandoned for a decade and needed rehabilitation. It was re-cleared, re-blazed, and had a simple bridge installed across a seasonal streamlet. This involved more learning, and instant application in the field.

With so much dedicated manpower and time, the Trust's backlog of property monitoring was a natural fit. The Kapstone kids learned how a Conservation Restriction is written and recorded, and how it governs the monitoring process. Eleven properties were monitored, and eleven reports were documented with pictures and descriptions. The students were eager to accomplish whatever tasks were thrown at them.

But it wasn't all work. The last day dawned clear, and we enjoyed a picnic atop Bluebird Hill (aka the old town dump) where we reminisced about what was learned, what went well, and what could have been easier. They all even volunteered to march with the Trust in the Apple Blossom Parade. It was a big commitment for mentoring, but so much was accomplished.





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The Westford Conservation Trust Newsletter is published bi-yearly in the spring and fall



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