

Winter 2004



Westford Conservation Trust Newsletter

www.westfordconservationtrust.org

Annual Meeting Recap



Editor - Diane Duane

Our recent annual meeting was indeed an enjoyable and informative event! Hopefully, we have all come away from guest speaker **Tom Teller's** presentation just a bit more ecologically aware and environmentally educated. Tom's 1200 mile journey by kayak through the Gulf of Maine was made primarily as an "educational and fact finding" journey. The goal of this trip was "to raise awareness and caring about the ecology and cultural legacy of this vast international watershed and to demonstrate low impact coastal recreational practices".

Holding public talks in 23 towns along the way, documenting diverse plant and animal species as well as natural ecological features, Tom and his group recorded their observations through film, journals, personal logs and photography. They observed issues such as overdevelopment and erosion effects near Plymouth, Ma. Coastal development and coastal access in southern Ma., habitat preservation at Plum Island, and sewerage treatment issues around Boston Harbor, just to name a few. You can explore these issues further and read more about Tom and his group's observations, journals and adventures at www.GOMExpedition.org.



Conservation Trustee of the Year



This year's recipient was **Christie Williams**. As a member of the Conservation Commission (CC), Christie was active in arranging for the Town to acquire many parcels of conservation land, such as the Day pumpkin field and the woodland nearby on Coldspring Rd. Having recently retired from the CC after serving as a commissioner for 8 years, Christie still serves on the Conservation Commission Committee for Open Space Acquisition. In the past, Christie has served on the Master Plan Committee, the Highway Garage Land Study Committee, the Land Use Priorities Committee, the Open Space Report Committee, and was a founding member of the Land/Trail Stewardship Committee. The Land/Trail Committee, composed of members of the Westford Conservation Trust and of the Westford Conservation Commission, arranges for the marking and maintenance of conservation lands and trails in town, and coordinates the activities of our many land and trail stewards.

On the stewardship committee, Christie was the person responsible for acquiring the beautiful routed wooden signs which have been erected at several Town and Trust conservation lands. Christie also spear-headed the extremely important project to construct the salt-storage shed at the Westford Highway Garage after having learned that salt stored outside was leaching into the groundwater at the garage site. Christie is a founding member and Director of the Westford Land Preservation Foundation, Inc. This new group will purchase parcels on which limited development is appropriate, while protecting a large percentage of the land. Christie Williams has contributed a great deal to the preservation of open space in Westford and we wish to acknowledge her many years of work and dedication on town conservation issues.

WCT Annual Summary by William Harman, Clerk

During the past year, the Trust has been engaged in a large number of activities. These are mainly continuations of programs that have been developing over a number of years, and are generally expanding. In the following listing, the year's activities are summarized in three groups, land stewardship, education, and community affairs.

Land Stewardship and Trails

The Trust owns several conservation land areas, and also administers many Conservation Restrictions.

Boundary Surveys and Marking - The Trust has come to realize that it is very important to survey, mark, and monitor the boundaries of conservation land. We have identified a number of land incursions and are increasingly concerned about the loss of conservation land, which is ironic given the major efforts that have been expended to acquire it.

This year, we completed the boundary survey and marking of the Frances Hill conservation land (off Lowell Rd.). We also completed the land swap project on Drews Crossing, which was undertaken to correct a boundary incursion. The major project this year was to survey the property line of the Wilson conservation land near Preservation Way. In doing this, we received help from a professional surveyor, Jonathan Bollen, a trust member. We found that there is a boundary incursion, and are currently discussing this with the abutter. For this project, the Trust purchased software to enable computerized maps and aerial photos to be overlaid and registered.

Conservation Restrictions - In our role of administering Conservation Restrictions, we received several requests for activities on conservation land. One request was to fill in a swale (a low lying or depressed and often wet stretch of land) near Nabnasset Lake. After study, this was not approved. Another request was to plant a row of trees on conservation land. This was approved, but limited to certain native species.

Trails Booklet - The Trust has continued to update the Trails Booklet regularly and make it available through the Roubenbush Community Center. Note that contributions are welcome. Everyone should feel free to submit maps and/or trail descriptions for the next addition.

Education

The directors of the Trust have come to believe that education is probably our most important activity. After years of development we are now interacting regularly with the Westford 4th grade classes.

Project Feeder Watch - In coordination with the 4th grade teachers, principals, and librarians, we have installed bird feeders at the Day School, Abbot School, and Crisafulli School. This is a curriculum developed by the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology, and the Trust provides the fees for this program, which includes a web based database, to which the students contribute their observation data. Birds frequent the feeders at Day and Abbot, but none were seen at Crisafulli until May. The Trust installed a 2nd feeder there, nearer to tree cover. We are also arranging to install shrubs near the Abbot feeder to provide more cover there, and are in the process of setting up an new "bird sanctuary" area at Abbot School.

Spring Walks - This year the Trust organized spring walks and June walks at the time of the Massachusetts "Biodiversity Days" project. These included a Bird walk in May at the Nashoba Pond area, a Wildflower walk in May off Tenney Road, Stream critters walk in June at Vine Brook, a Bird walk in June at Forge Pond, and a Ponding walk in June, off Concord Road.

Tracker Walks - The Trust arranged for a professional tracker, John McCarter, to lead winter walks, in January and in February. The walks covered a substantial territory, from Vine Brook, the Wilson Conservation Land, and the Emmet conservation land.

Girl Scouts—As in previous years, the Trust provided nature walks for Girl Scouts (along Boutwell Brook near Robinson School) and Brownies (in the Frances Hill conservation land).

Science Fair - The Trust supported the Science Fair at Day School in March by providing judges for the exhibits.

Envirothon - The Trust is very supportive of the state's Envirothon project for high school students. The Trust contributed \$1000 to this year's project.

Scholarships - As in past years, the Trust offered a scholarship to graduating Westford Academy students and to previous scholarship winners. This was a good year. We received several excellent applications. Three scholarships were awarded, totaling \$2500.

Community Affairs

Newsletter - Conservation news is sent to members in the form of a newsletter, currently edited by Diane Duane. The previous editor was Kathy Deschenes, who served until the spring of 2003.

Wildlife Watch - The Westford Eagle prints a monthly column called **Westford Wildlife Watch**, which is written by Marian Harman and includes numerous wildlife sightings contributed by many observers throughout town.

Web Site - Mike D'Antuono has expanded and beautified the Trust's web site, providing lots of updated information about the trust's activities, protected land, trails and more! Many of Mike's attractive outdoor photographs can also be seen there.

Eagle Scouts - The Trust is continuing to work with Boy Scouts in developing Eagle Scout projects.

Town Meetings - The Trust studies the issues of each town meeting, while strictly observing the limits for non-profit organizations. For the May town meeting, the Trust had some concerns that a proposed new bypass road might have adverse effects on wetlands. Trust members were active in determining that two wetlands near the proposed road are, in fact, vernal pools, and subsequently submitted certification papers with the state. The Trust became heavily involved in the discussions prior to Town Meeting, attempting to shape the road project in a way that would minimize adverse effects on the environment.

For the Fall Town Meeting, the Trust has studied several of the issues in detail, and has taken a vote to support: (a) maintaining the CPA contributions at 3%, (b) the concept of the Growth Management Bylaw, and (c) the CPA funding and Water Department funding for purchase of the Stepinski land.

Septic System Standards - The Trust joined a coalition of groups supporting a MEPA review of proposed changes to the septic system standards for new construction projects.

Riverways - The Trust sent a letter advocating the continuation of the state's Riverways program.

Coordination with Other Organizations - We have found that the Westford Conservation Trust is sometimes confused with the town's Conservation Commission. The Trust is a private organization, totally separate from town government. We do, however, follow many affairs of town government, and endeavor to complement the activities of other organizations. For example, the town's Land stewardship and trails committee is a joint project of the Conservation Commission and the Trust. In another example, the Commission and the Trust jointly administer several conservation restrictions, and are currently working together to correct a number of violations near Nabnasset Lake. Acquisition of conservation land is another area in which the Trust is actively helping the Commission, this year by working with two potential sellers in town.. The Trust also submitted suggestions for using some of the funds that were donated by Mass Electric to the town for conservation purposes.

This year the Trust made a donation of \$500 to **East Boston Camps**, at a time when they were engaged in fund raising for the current year's program.

The Trust is a supporting member of the **Bay Circuit Alliance**, which is sponsoring the Bay Circuit Trail. This long-distance, circumferential trail extends from Newburyport to Duxbury, and passes through Westford.

The Trust is a regular member of the **Massachusetts Land Trust Coalition**, from which we have received valuable legal advice from time to time. The Trust is also a regular member of the nationwide **Land Trust Exchange**. Among other things, this organization has been useful in providing suggested standards for operation of land trusts, and is an insurance provider for the Trust.

In summary, 2003 has been a productive year and an interesting period. In spite of the many changes in Westford over past years, we believe that many important steps are yet to be taken, and we are pleased to be contributing to the preservation of some of the town's most valuable treasures.

Annual Meeting - Elections

We elected the following **Directors** for three year terms: Richard Emmet, Ron Deschenes and William Harman.

The following **Associate Directors** were elected for one year terms: Shelagh Brady, Mike D'Antuono, Rose Marie Koester, Diane Duane, Leonard Palmer, Edward Thomas and Bill Morton.

The following **Officers** were elected: Clerk- William Harman, and Treasurer- Mark Tincknell. President - Marian Harman and Vice President - Richard Emmet were elected by the Board of Directors at the December meeting.

Annual Meeting - Treasurers Report

Mark Tincknell summarized the financial status of the Trust. "The current balance is slightly over \$51,000. The expenditures of 2003 to date were about \$8500, and the receipts are about \$4400. Normally a substantial number of receipts are received in November and December when annual memberships are renewed." An additional \$4000 in receipts had come in as of the January meeting.

Massachusetts Envirothon by Liz McGuire

In just three months over 300 high school students will be gathering at Lake Cochituate State Park in Natick for the 2004 Massachusetts Envirothon, an environmental program designed to stimulate an awareness of the interdependence of natural resources within the environment. Student teams will represent their school or organization at the statewide competition on April 29th, testing their knowledge of aquatics, soils, wildlife, habitat management, agriculture and a current issue. This year the current issue topic is "**Natural Resource Management in the Urban Environment**". After assessing urban activities in their community a team will choose one area for in-depth investigation and will propose steps their community can take to address the issue. Westford Academy has a long history of competing in the Envirothon. Their team projects have focused on open space protection, storm water management, community waste disposal systems and biodiversity within Westford. The Trust's helps with sponsorship of the MA Envirothon. If you would like more information on the program, or would like to help prepare high school students of today to become environmentally aware decision makers of the future, please contact Liz McGuire at 978-692-9395.

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Phone (optional)/
Email _____

Check here if interested in volunteering for trail maintenance



Check here if interested in volunteering for educational efforts



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Westford, Ma. 01886

Or join online at www.westfordconservationtrust.org

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___ \$500+ Supporter

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