

The following excerpt from the Conservation Commission's 2016 Annual Report summarizes some of the work of the Land Stewardship Subcommittee.

Conservation Land Acquisition and Management

In addition to protecting wetlands, the Conservation Commission also helps the Town acquire land by gift or purchase for conservation purposes and manages all land so acquired. Over the years, generous citizens have gifted over 30% of Harvard's approximately 2,000 acres of conservation land to the Town. The Commission has periodic discussions with landowners and with the Harvard Conservation Trust (HCT) about the possibilities of gifts or purchases of land for conservation. Occasionally gifts are monetary, designated for the Conservation Commission's Conservation Fund. The Conservation Fund was established through the Conservation Commission Act, M.G.L. Chapter 40 Section 8C and is dedicated for the specific purpose of purchasing or managing conservation land. The Commission currently receives funding for open space protection through the Town--State partnership enabled by the Community Preservation Act.

Preservation of open space in 2016 included two separate gifts of land and the purchase of another parcel by the Commission. Steven & Deborah Daman, of Bolton, gifted the Town 34.8 acres of land along Brown Road (where it extends SE of Rt. 495), in conjunction with 13.68 acres gifted to the Town of Bolton, for a total of 48.48 acres of open space. This land, bisected by a prominent cliffy ridge and rich with vernal pools, abuts an additional 40 acres of preserved open space, making this a regionally significant wildlife habitat area along the border of the two towns. A second gift of land, donated by former town resident Charles Case, was a 2.02 acre parcel off Bolton Road that abuts and is important to the integrity of the Bare Hill Wildlife Sanctuary. In May the Commission purchased 24.11 acres of land along Massachusetts Avenue, using money from the Conservation Fund and the Community Preservation Fund. This parcel abuts 50 acres of land protected under a conservation restriction, which then abuts an additional 183 acres of open space. This purchase protects important wildlife habitat, wetlands and a scenic natural landscape at the main gateway to town.

In a project spearheaded by the Harvard Conservation Trust, the Commission applied for a grant under the State's Local Acquisitions for Natural Diversity (LAND) program, which reimburses up to 58% of a project's expenses. The site, dubbed *Horse Meadow Knoll*, that the Commission and HCT hoped to preserve along Sherry Road, consisted of approximately 48 acres and ultimately would have cost the Town only \$200,000. A great effort was put forth for the grant application and town support including off-cycle requests and commitments for funding from the Community Preservation Committee and the Capital Improvement and Planning Committee, updating of the Open Space & Recreation Plan and a positive vote at a Special Town Meeting. Unfortunately, in late November the Commission learned the LAND grant had not made the cut, but only by the slimmest of margins in an especially competitive year. The project received highest marks for its conservation value, and the HCT is pursuing alternative means to protect this beautiful site.

Though disappointing, all was not lost when Harvard was not chosen as a recipient of the LAND grant. The information gathered from the 583 respondents of the Open Space & Recreation Plan (OSRP) survey clearly indicated that the residents of Harvard "extremely" value (62%) open space, with an additional 31% "very much" valuing open space in Harvard. Additional survey results showed that 80% of the respondents believed Harvard should fund an Open Space Fund for future land acquisitions. Although the respondents were mixed on the best way to fund land acquisitions, by Community Preservation Funds or appropriation, two-thirds agreed the Town should set aside \geq \$200,000 per year for open space. Providing an adequate and reliable funding stream to obtain and protect open space was one of the Goals detailed with the final draft of the OSRP and will be a focus of the Commission's work in 2017.

The Land Stewardship Subcommittee (LSS) was active and was fortunate to enjoy the participation of a handful of new volunteers at the end of 2016 to help monitor and maintain the town's conservation land. LSS organized public walks at Great Elms via the HCT's Brown land in April and at Dean's and Prospect Hill conservation area in November. Both were much enjoyed and well attended. Improving the trails and signage at each of these walk sites was a focus for trail work. Another big project was improving muddy sections of trail near Clapp

cove by creating drainage and new sections of boardwalk. In December, Phil Knoettner, longtime trail crew leader, passed the baton on to Jim Burns. Phil will continue to participate in trail work and hopes to pass on some of his expertise in wooden sign, bridge and boardwalk construction to new volunteers while he carries on these critical jobs for the town.

Mowing of the fields on Town conservation land went relatively smoothly this year and all fields were hayed or mowed by early October. Research continued on the burgeoning population of Baltimore checkerspot butterflies on the Williams land and the project's Principal Investigator, Elizabeth Crone of Tufts University gave a well-received talk on the project and butterfly ecology in September.

The cycle of work of beavers blocking culverts around town and DPW staff clearing those culverts was broken somewhat this year by the installation of "beaver deceivers" first at Williams Pond on Stow Road and later at several other locations. Harvard Community Gardens flourished on the Coke land off Littleton Road; to request a plot for next year, contact hcgmembership@gmail.org.

The invasive plant control project moved into its fifth year, and controlling black swallowwort was the main focus of treatments this growing season. Both the old orchard at Clapp-Scorgie and the field off Turners Lane were mowed early June toward that end. Spot herbicide treatments were made mid-June at Powell, Murray Lane and Dean's Hill and follow-up treatments on Clapp-Scorgie took place in mid-July.

The conservation field at 100 Shaker Rd. that was given to the Town last year was mowed in early summer to suppress black locust and multiflora rose. It should also be noted that the old sheds and cottage on this site were demolished and the site restored to a safe and scenic condition. Volunteer work included pulling of garlic mustard in early June (this effort may be expanded in April 2017) and pulling and cut stem treatment of glossy buckthorn on various sites, especially Dean's Hill. Due to contractor equipment repairs and weather windows, the clearing of Hermann Orchard was not completed this fall but will resume as soon as feasible next year.

We would like to thank the members of the Land Stewardship Subcommittee: Jim Adelson, Bob Benson, Pam Durrant, Joanne Ward, Phil Knoettner, Jim Burns and Wendy Sisson and note that the LSS welcomes new members and volunteer assistance.