

Views *from* Mount Grace

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C O N S E R V I N G T H E L O C A L L A N D S C A P E™



PHOTO BY JOANNE MCGEE

Brush Mountain, Northfield

Town of Northfield Believes in Self-Help Residents Rally *to* Conserve Land

BY DAN LAROCHE

In late November, residents in the Town of Northfield went to the ballot box and voted to support the establishment of the Town's very first conservation area. This debt exclusion vote was the final step required to borrow money to purchase the 46-acre Brush Mountain parcel from Mount Grace. This property is part of the Metacomet-Monadnock Trail corridor, and possesses some outstanding conservation values.

The Town took an important first step towards conserving the land in February 2005 when it contacted Mount Grace after it received notice of withdrawal of the property from the Chapter 61B program. A prospective owner planned to develop the land. The Northfield Open Space Planning Committee, Conservation Commission, and the Board of Selectmen all wanted to see the land pro-

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Serving:

- Ashburnham
- Athol
- Barre
- Bernardston
- Erving
- Gardner
- Gill
- Greenfield
- Hardwick
- Hubbardston
- Leyden
- Montague
- New Salem
- Northfield
- Orange
- Petersham
- Phillipston
- Royalston
- Templeton
- Warwick
- Wendell
- Westminster
- Winchendon

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tected, and wanted Mount Grace's assistance in making this happen. Mount Grace crafted a proposal to partner with the Town in the protection of the land.

Mount Grace accepted an assignment of a right of first refusal from the Town and was able to act quickly to purchase the land this past spring. As a partner in the project, the Town applied for a Self-Help grant through the Massachusetts Department of Conservation Services in order to purchase the land from Mount Grace and to become the long-term steward of the land.

In early November, the Town was awarded the Self-Help grant, which

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will reimburse the Town 64% of the purchase cost, but also requires town approval to first borrow and expend the funds. First Town Meeting, and then ballot voters passed the debt exclusion vote for the purchasing of the property from Mount Grace.

Northfield has shown a long term commitment to land conservation by officially adopting its Open Space Plan and establishing an Open Space Committee

to implement the newly created plan. "I'm extremely happy, very excited. This is really starting something ... it's the start of a lot of good things for the town of Northfield," said Joanne McGee, Northfield Open Space Planning Committee Chair and Mount Grace Land Committee member. Joanne spearheaded the Brush Mountain conservation effort and is putting in countless hours organizing and educating people about this important project.

Congratulations to the Town of Northfield which received \$70,400 for the Brush Mountain 1 Project in Northfield.

BRUSH MOUNTAIN 1 — A PLACE OF MANY TREASURES

This 46 acre parcel, complete with a scenic overlook along the Metacomet-Monadnock (M-M) Trail, an unusual Black Gum and Black Spruce Swamp, and condensation gardens (moist lichen habitat), was slated for the bulldozer if the Town of Northfield did not step up to the plate and exercise the right of first refusal on the property as allowed under the Massachusetts Chapter 61B program.

The hour and a half trek from Crag Mountain north to Brush Mountain is an extremely popular section of the M-M Trail, between trailheads, that affords tremendous views of the local landscape. The Berkshire Chapter of the Appalachian Mountain Club (AMC) has committed funds for this project because the AMC supports the long-term protection of the trail corridor and understands the strategic importance of protecting this parcel.

An important historical discovery was revealed during the process of protecting the Brush Mountain parcel. Two intact cellar holes on the property are the remains of the homestead of Calvin T. Swan, an African American carpenter, farmer, mill

owner, and prominent citizen who lived from 1799 to 1875. He worked with master carpenter Calvin Stearns to build many of the fine homes that still exist today along Northfield's Main Street. Swan was also a charter member of the Franklin County Anti-Slavery Society, an organization that was affiliated with a larger movement to abolish slavery in the Commonwealth.

Conserving this land will not only protect valuable natural resources and a widely used trail corridor of regional significance, it will also maintain an important piece of Northfield's long and unique history of American life for future generations. Mount Grace is working to protect several other key parcels in this area of Northfield to ensure the long term viability of the M-M trail, and to create new open space corridors between the existing protected lands of the State Forest.