This view of Mt. Monadnock is from the New England National Scenic Trail. Securing a permanent route for the Trail, which draws thousands of hikers each year, has been one of many benefits of the Metacomet-Monadnock Forest Legacy Project.

Northfield Mount Hermon School Protects Scenic Trail

BY DAVID KOTKER

Just west of Crag Mountain, New England’s National Scenic Trail heads east toward the Warwick town line and nearby Mt. Grace.

Northfield Mount Hermon School has now protected this section of the trail, selling 117-acres of land, including _miles of trail, to Mount Grace Land Conservation Trust as part of the Metacomet-Monadnock Forest Legacy Project.

“Northfield Mount Hermon School and Mount Grace have been collaborating on this effort for over five years,” explained Bob Macomber (NMH ’60), a former trustee of the school who helped negotiate the

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sale. “It became clear that this land could be a central piece to the Northfield section of the National Scenic Trail because it provides a more direct and more attractive hiking connection for adjacent sections of the Trail. With the opportunity to participate in both a healthy recreational use and a long term conservation effort, the NMH Board readily approved this conveyance.”

Mount Grace will transfer the property to the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) in 2012, when it will be added to the Northfield State Forest.

“We have a truly awe-inspiring wetland system and wilderness back there,” said Mount Grace Conservation Director David Graham Wolf. “The property is part of a nearly 8,000-acre roadless area, making it a very significant biodiversity hot spot for our region. This is a big win for land conservation.”

This is the seventh property protected through the Metacomet-Monadnock Forest Legacy Project. Partners in the project include local towns, Mount Grace, the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation, the Greater Northfield Watershed Association, and the USDA Forest Service, which provided a $1,645,000 grant to conserve the land. Northfield Mount Hermon’s decision to join in the Forest Legacy application was a major factor that played into the award of the grant. Mount Grace has conserved more than 4,000 acres in Franklin and Worcester Counties through the Forest Legacy program.

“Mount Grace has done an exceptional job of securing parcels that exemplify the natural beauty of the region in order to protect it for future generations,” said Congressman John Olver. “This acreage is located in the heart of a region with strong economic ties to forestry, recreation, and tourism. Conserving this land protects not only this unique economic asset but also critical habitat for forest interior species and the viewshed for the New England National Scenic Trail.”

Other grants in support of the project were provided by the Bafflin Foundation, the Community Foundation of Western Massachusetts, and the Fieldstone Foundation.

HUPPERT GIFT IS NEWEST MOUNT GRACE CONSERVATION AREA

BY DAVID KOTKER

Among the projects completed at the close of 2011 was a gift of nineteen mostly wooded acres donated by Mick and Louise Huppert of Petersham. The property, which contains a level bog draining into the Quabbin Reservoir, becomes Mount Grace’s newest Conservation Area. The East Quabbin Land Trust will hold a conservation restriction on the property.

Protecting the woods and wetlands further buffers a critical habitat for a wide variety of birds and other species. Mount Grace helped conserve 230 nearby acres in 2008 as part of the Quabbin Corridor Connection (QCC) Forest Legacy Project. The Hupperts have longstanding connections to Mount Grace, and Mick served as President during the QCC project.

The donation was one of the first to qualify for the new Massachusetts Conservation Land Tax Credit Program, which offers refundable state income tax credits in exchange for donations of land or conservation easements. “Besides helping to expand the wildlife corridor around the Phillipston Wildlife Management Area, being able to make it as a charitable donation with the potential for a tax deduction and credit was attractive. We would urge others who have land to consider investigating this option of conservation for their land,” stated Mick. Louise added, “We feel grateful that this program gives us an opportunity to return the land to stewardship for the common good.”

Mount Grace Executive Director Leigh Youngblood also focused on the importance of the tax credit for future conservation. “In 2012 the program will operate on a first-come, first-served basis. Mount Grace is actively encouraging interested landowners to participate. If your land qualifies for the program, you can receive half the appraised value of the land, up to $50,000, as a tax credit which is mailed to you in the form of a check, even if you don’t usually need to file a Massachusetts tax return.”

If you are interested in conserving your land in partnership with the Conservation Land Tax Credit Program, please contact Land Conservation Associate Jen Smith at 978-248-2055 x22 or smith@mountgrace.org.