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News staff photo by SAM BONACCI

Ecological tracker David Brown talks to a group about the signs of an animal's presence during a Mount Grace Land Conservation Trust event in Westminster, Sunday.

The wildlife of Westminster

Mount Grace Land Conservation Trust holds tracking adventure

By SAM BONACCI
NEWS STAFF WRITER

WESTMINSTER — Moving through a wooded area Sunday, it only took a group on a tracking excursion with the Mount Grace Land Conservation Trust minutes to come across their first sign of wildlife.

Sitting in the middle of the trail was a dropping, or scat, from a large meat eater. A closer examination by naturalist and tracker David Brown was enough to conclude that a large coyote had left the very visible mark.

"Basically what we are looking at today, because of lack of snow, is other signs," said Mr. Brown, who participates in ecological tracking using the signs he finds to examine the area as

well as evaluating what animals are present. "A lot of it is what is here and what isn't."

There are numerous signs that can point to an animal's presence other than tracks, he said. On the walk, these included white pine being aided in its growth by the presence of deer eating down other tree species as well as a log that had been rolled around by a bear in the spring.

"It's a fun family thing," said Dawn Marshall, from Lunenburg, who attended with her husband and two sons. "They are both scouts, so it's a good experience for them."

The programs by the land trust are designed to help engage people with their natural surroundings, said David Kotker, the membership coord-

inator for the trust. In the last year, the trust held 25 activities to mark its 25th anniversary.

"We want to make sure people are aware of the full range of what is out there and how irreplaceable it is," said Mr. Kotker.

Large stretches of natural land particularly serve those species such as bear that roam throughout the year, said Mr. Brown. At different points in the year, these animals use different food sources and need a wide space in which to travel between.

"You have to have a large enough area near their home range that it can cover all the habitats that they need," said Dee Robbins, the MassLIFT program manager for the trust.

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Mount Grace holds tracking adventure in Westminster for group

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Conservation of natural resources benefits the area and residents on many levels and having programs that bring people out into nature will only help to stress its value.

"I think that love of nature is hard to develop unless you are in it," said Ms. Robbins. "There's nothing like being out in it."

More information on the trust is available at www.mount-grace.org.

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