

Views *from* Mount Grace



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Burnshirt River Uplands—a Trifecta

BY SARAH WELLS

Leigh Youngblood taught me that a conservation project is truly born when three elements come into alignment: the landowner's goals, the resource values of the land itself, and the funding. For the past year, we've been developing this trifecta for 40 acres off Williamsville Road in Barre.

Nancy Gionet has owned this land for 46 of the 90 years it's been in her family. Nancy is ready to pass the baton of land ownership by selling the property, but it's of utmost importance to her that this special piece of woods stays undeveloped and intact. Her property features a vernal pool and a network of streams and wetlands that drain into the nearby Burnshirt River.

Each time I walk there, I'm struck by how quickly I feel as though I'm miles from the nearest road or house. The old cart roads meander alongside streams and some of the more impressive boulders I've seen (which is really saying something given the terrain of North Central Massachusetts) and, thanks to the thick cushion of trees blanketing the land, it's quiet. Landowner goals and resource values—check.

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Dear Friends,

Spring is best appreciated the first day I can walk outside and realize that the air doesn't hurt. My shoulders drop, my face lifts from my scarf to greet the day without inhibition, and I feel a lightness in my step as I throw open our new energy efficient windows and doors in the office and welcome the out of doors in. Finally.

Spring is a time of nest building on Tully Pond. We watch the geese claim their island tuft of grass and settle in. There are several pairs of wood ducks that return. A collection of songbirds skitters back and forth in a collecting frenzy. They especially appreciate the straw I just pulled off the raised boxes as I prepare them for the growing season.

At Mount Grace there is also a busy hive of activity as the final details are assembled to complete all the diligence associated with the multiple individual parcels being conserved as part of the Greater Gales Brook Conservation Project. The Stewardship team is ramping up this year's monitoring, while also working on improving our recreational trails. Trails are assessed for winter

damage, identifying trail kiosks that require repair and fallen logs to clear.

So, we greet the Spring greening, the leaf buds on the maples, the birth of this year's broods with enthusiasm. Our conservation work at the Skyfields office is further inspired by the newly occupied bird nests we see in the surrounding arboretum. We pore over maps detailing connected and resilient landscapes, but our hearts connect with the new growth in our own back yard.

Join us in celebrating this annual renewal.

Warmly,

Emma G. Ellsworth
Executive Director

Mount Grace Land Conservation Trust protects significant natural, agricultural, and scenic areas and encourages land stewardship in North Central and Western Massachusetts for the benefit of the environment, the economy, and future generations.

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We welcome your articles, photographs, comments, and suggestions. For information about becoming a member or to request a change of address, please contact:

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Gales Brook Funding in Place to Protect 700+ Acres

BY DAVID KOTKER

The Massachusetts Landscape Partnership Grant Program requires land trusts to financially match any grants awarded by it. Mount Grace's collaborative Greater Gales Brook Conservation Project was thus partially funded by this program in 2021 with the expectation that we would raise another \$330,000+ of matching funds by June 2022.

Raising these funds was a tall order, with 700+ acres of projects in Orange, Royalston, and Warwick on the line. Since the award was announced, Mount Grace has worked closely with our key partner, Mass Audubon, on fundraising together.

Early results were encouraging, with Mass Audubon receiving grants from the William Wharton Foundation and Quabbin to Cardigan Initiative while Mount Grace was supported by the Mifflin Memorial Fund. At year-end, Mount Grace was also awarded grants by the Bafflin Foundation and an anonymous foundation. In each case, the grants were the largest individual grants the foundations had ever awarded Mount Grace—totaling \$190,000 towards the goal.

Gifts also came in from families and individuals around Massachusetts, underlining the impact of Gales Brook, which will conserve open lands and riparian habitat along five separate



Hodge Brook is just one of the many cold-water streams that will be protected with the completion of this project.

cold-water streams in the Millers River watershed. Mass Audubon is still fundraising for one recent addition to the project, but with three months to go, all funding for the original participating projects is now in place, leaving staff free to concentrate on an expected bonanza of newly completed projects this summer.

“It’s incredibly inspiring to see how many people and foundations are supporting this effort by the Gales Brook families to protect the land,” said Mount Grace Conservation Director Sarah Wells. “A joint fundraising campaign this size is a lot of work, and we’re thrilled to clear the fundraising hurdle so we can focus on finishing these projects.”

Burnshirt River Uplands *> continued from page 1*

Nancy’s land is also valuable financially. With more than 1,000 feet of flat, developable frontage, we needed to secure grant funding. Thankfully, within months of hearing from Nancy, we heard about a relatively new funding opportunity.

The Army Corps of Engineers is involved in permitting certain projects that impact federally regulated aquatic resources. The permittee is responsible for carrying out any required mitigation after impacts have been avoided and minimized to the extent possible. In 2014, a new option was created in Massachusetts: the Corps could require that permittees alternatively make a payment to a new fund in lieu of carrying out the required mitigation themselves. This aggregated pool of funding—the In-Lieu Fee Program (ILFP)—is managed by the MA Department of Fish and Game (DFG), which in turn facilitates the protection and

restoration of aquatic resources and their supporting landscapes throughout Massachusetts. By doing this, the Corps and DFG are leveraging individual fees into meaningful, and often larger-scale, mitigation projects.

Thanks to ILFP funding, we are buying Nancy’s land this spring. We’ll then convey a Watershed Preservation Restriction to the MA Department of Conservation and Recreation-Division of Water Supply Protection. This means that the property will benefit from a dual layer of protection, keeping the quality and integrity of the aquatic resources as the top stewardship priority. We are proud to be working with the Gionet family and our state agency partners to conserve these 40 acres, soon to be known as the Burnshirt River Uplands.

The Importance of Protecting Land from the Point of View of a Musher

BY JENN ALBERTINE

There is nothing more serene than standing on the runners of my sled being pulled through the wilderness by my trusted companions, my working Siberian Huskies, hearing nothing but the sounds of their breathing and the sled runners gliding across the snow. None of this would be possible without conserved land that protects and creates miles of uninterrupted forestland. The joint efforts of landowners, foresters, rangers, snowmobilers, and hiking clubs work together to create and maintain the multi-use trails that we love.

Dog sledding is threatened by climate change. Winter precipitation is shifting to more rain/ice and less snow, so I must head farther north to find snow. Dale Monette had his own dog team here in central Massachusetts from 1971-85 and has observed the sport changing over the last 50 years. He was able to run in local races, including a championship race in Gardner. I now travel 4+ hours to find a race. He recalled a race held at Lake Chocorua, New Hampshire, that would consistently have 3+ ft of snow and very cold temperatures, but since I have been in the sport, this race has been canceled every year due to lack of snow and warm temperatures. This weekend at a race that has been running in Laconia, New Hampshire for 93 years, participants faced 48°F weather and wet slush puddles.

Climate change is also impacting dogs' health. Warmer temperatures favor disease-transmitting insects. Heartworm, transmitted by mosquitos, and tick-borne diseases were rarely heard of in the 70's. However, today we need to be vigilant about these diseases and use preventative medicines.



Climate & Land Justice Specialist and musher Jenn Albertine with her Siberian Husky dog team.

The sport is adapting to the changing weather. We are having more races in which the dog teams pull wheeled carts, called dryland rigs. But even this is impacted by warmer temperatures which make it dangerous to run my Siberian Huskies as temperatures over 50°F and 50% humidity will cause them to overheat.

Protecting our forests is one of the strongest tools we have to slow down climate change. There is no future for this sport in New England without land conservation.

New Re-routed Trail for Benjamin Hill

BY WILL DURKIN

Whitney Memorial Forest (located on Winchendon's Benjamin Hill) was graciously donated by Adelaide Whitney and her family to Mount Grace in 2003 to be "preserved in its natural state, for the enjoyment of the citizens of Winchendon and others." Only a few minutes away from the center of Winchendon, the 80-acre undeveloped Conservation Area has large hardwood trees with historic stone walls and rushing

intermittent streams throughout the property. The land provides an important buffer for water quality in the region, with the Millers River directly downhill from the property.

Whitney Memorial Forest and its trails can be accessed from a small parking area from the western side of Benjamin Street off Route 202. The trails are well-used by many but unfortunately began to erode heavily in the past few years due to their initial design. The Stewardship Team at Mount Grace saw re-routing

A Field-to-Table Food Drive, via the Freezer

BY CATHY STANTON

Quabbin Harvest is part of a broad effort to rebuild robust links in our area's food system. But foods produced and sold at a small scale—including from farms like those protected by Mount Grace—tend to cost more than food from huge industrial supply chains, putting local products out of reach for many people.

Over this past winter holiday season, we experimented with one solution to this dilemma. We held a food drive to collect not the usual industrially produced non-perishable cans and jars, but locally sourced produce, supplying healthy foods and benefitting growers, distributors, and eaters alike.

How did we do that given that the growing season was over and fresh produce doesn't keep for very long at any time of the year?

What made it possible was the freezer. We focused on flash-frozen, Connecticut-Valley-sourced

fruits and vegetables sold by Valley Veggies at the Western Massachusetts Food Processing Center in Greenfield. Donors contributed to the purchase of bags of frozen blueberries, squash, broccoli, and other good things to be donated to the Orange Food Pantry—325 bags in all. We bought them through Deerfield-based distributor Marty's Local, a vital link in the regional supply chain. And the food pantry stored this colorful, locally grown bounty in its freezers for holiday meals or post-holiday healthy eating.

Rebuilding local and regional supply chains takes time and effort, especially with large-scale production still very much the dominant force in the US food system. But in our area, we're blessed with many forward-looking people and projects that make it increasingly possible for those across the socioeconomic spectrum to access foods from closer to home. Mount Grace's farmland conservation efforts are a part of this mosaic, helping to ensure that as more pieces are created and connected, the farms that everything rests on will still be there!



Evan Manning, coordinator of the Orange Food Pantry, takes delivery of Valley Veggies from Quabbin Harvest store manager Julie Davis. Photo courtesy of Quabbin Harvest

the trail as a necessary opportunity to safeguard the recreational and ecological resources of this valued piece of land.

With the help of grants from the Community Foundation of North Central Massachusetts and the Robinson Broadhurst Foundation, Mount Grace is excited to announce the re-opening and restoration of the trails in Whitney Memorial Forest. MassWildlife, which holds a Conservation Restriction on the property, gave Mount Grace their support for the re-

route plans. The new trail will follow sections of the historic stonewalls and the natural slope of the hills—offering new interior views of the property while avoiding sensitive wildlife and wetland habitats. The trail work was a community effort and made possible by volunteer support from our members and a local scout-troop in Winchendon.

Please join us for a celebratory trail opening hike on Earth Day, April 22nd. Visit mountgrace.org for more information.

MARGARET POWER BIGGS SOCIETY

Member Profile: Larry Bandolin

BY DAVID KOTKER



Expert angler Larry Bandolin with his catch!

Larry Bandolin didn't write the book on public outreach for land conservation, but he did teach the class. His ten rules on preparing for large-scale conservation—learned during his job establishing the Silvio O. Conte National Fish & Wildlife Refuge—were taught as part of US Fish and Wildlife Service training classes after the refuge was established.

“My first rule is: always be honest and consistent,” he explains. “That’s also the last rule. You have to be trustworthy or you’ll get nowhere.” Creating the refuge meant identifying and protecting the most important habitat in the four-state Connecticut River watershed. “Conservation planning should be on a large scale,” he says. “It should be all about securing habitat corridors and connectivity. In the long run, population pressures are fragmenting habitat. What’s really going to count is the permanent protection of the land.”

Larry’s connection to Mount Grace predates the refuge. It even predates the trust, going back to 1974 when Dan Leahy, who would later be President of the Mount Grace Board, came into Larry’s office at the Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection looking for work. “I had no funding then,” says Larry, “so I talked him into volunteering. Eventually I found funding to pay him. In 2021, Dan introduced me to Emma Ellsworth. Fishing and shooting with her inspired me to support Mount Grace’s Margaret Power Biggs Society.”

“Most of the things we do in this life aren’t necessarily altruistic,” he adds, “but people who give to land protection are truly altruistic. I’d say most people who give to Mount Grace don’t expect to see the full results in their own lifetime. They’re thinking of the next generation, or of our grandchildren.”

If you would like information about joining the Margaret Power Biggs Society, please contact David Kotker at 978-541-1767 or kotker@mountgrace.org.

Spring 2022 Upcoming Events ~ Join Us!

Pasture Management Workshop Series
Saturday, April 9th and April 23rd
Various locations – RSVP Required

Give Back to the Land Day
Saturday, April 16th – Friday, April 22nd
Join us for this online fundraising event at
www.givebacktotheland.org!

Signs of Photography Workshop Series
Sunday, April 24th and Saturday, April 30th
Various locations – RSVP Required

Visit our website at mountgrace.org/events for more information.

Thank You To Our Supporters

Grants Received

\$100,000	Anonymous Foundation
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\$15,000	Hollis Declan Leverett Memorial Fund, Bank of America, N.A., Co-Trustee
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\$5,000	The Bemis Foundation
\$1,000	Petersham Cultural Council

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Norm Eggert and Christine Regan Davi for taking photos of Mount Grace merchandise for the online store;

Michaela Short for creating the Fern Glenn Conservation Area video; Al Rose and the Red Apple Farm crew for hosting our Giving Tuesday fundraiser event;

Todd Fuller, Dale Monette, and Stephen DeStefano for giving a great presentation at our Giving Tuesday event;

Sharon A. Harmon and bg Thurston for leading the Nature Writing Workshop;

Joelle Vautour and William VanDoren for leading the Forest Carbon, Native Species and Climate Resilience: Skyfields to Lawton Tree Farm Walk;

Paul Wanta for leading the Winter Tracking Workshop;

Fletcher Harrington for leading the MassMapper trainings;

Christian Hains and Sarah Wells for plowing the parking area of the Fern Glenn Conservation Area and Eagle Reserve Conservation Area;

Fred Heyes and Tom Chalmers for helping with the design for the new Conservation Barn;

Tom Ellsworth for helping with the move out preparations for the renovations at the Mount Grace office;

Warren Facey for assisting with the farmland inventory;

Steve Roberto for clearing the trails at Alderbrook Meadows;

Brian Hall for monitoring conservation properties;

And all of our dedicated committee members for assisting our staff in moving our mission forward!

Gifts were Received *In Memory of*

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Jim Wilbur

“Protecting the uniqueness of this place takes a lot of resources. That is why we made the decision to include Mount Grace in our will. We have a special opportunity to truly shape our region’s landscapes. We hope you will join us.”
– JULIA RABIN



To learn how you can help create a legacy with Mount Grace, please contact: David Kotker, Major Gifts and Grants Manager at (978) 541-1767 or kotker@mountgrace.org



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Landscape scale conservation projects like the Greater Gales Brook Partnership Initiative help protect large acreage for the benefit of our wildlife, clean air and water, and our communities. Look out for our Spring Appeal to support Mount Grace's next landscape-scale conservation project! **Photo Credit: Kate Buttolph, Mass Audubon**

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