

Views *from* Mount Grace



FALL 2025
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Looking northwest across newly conserved land in Ashby toward New Hampshire.

Mount Grace & Department of Fish and Game Partner to Protect 39.5 Acres in Ashby

BY KOLYA PARTAN

ASHBY—Mount Grace Land Conservation Trust, in collaboration with the Massachusetts Department of Fish and Game (DFG) and its Division of Fisheries and Wildlife (MassWildlife), have successfully conserved 39.5 acres of forest and fields along the New Hampshire border in Ashby.

The newly protected land expands MassWildlife's Ashby Wildlife Management Area (WMA) to 1,176 acres and completes a critical link in a regional wildlife corridor. This corridor connects the Ashby WMA with the 330-acre Mount Watatic Reservation, MassWildlife's 228-acre Watatic Mountain Sanctuary, the Department of Conservation and Recreation's 2,200-acre Ashburnham State Forest, and conservation land to the north.

"This project exemplifies the kind of collaboration needed to reach the Commonwealth's goal of protecting 30% of Massachusetts by 2030," said Emma G. Ellsworth, Executive Director of Mount Grace. "By combining MassWildlife and DFG's resources and expertise with Mount Grace's local agility, we were able to move quickly to protect land that might otherwise have been lost to development."

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Dear Friends,

In a blink, the hummingbirds are gone, no more swallows darting over the field. With autumn approaching, the cool mornings bring new sounds and scents to the woods. My dogs dash about with fresh energy, yet I still feel a familiar slump in my shoulders, recalling the childhood dread of long school days and the farewell to peaches and river swims.

That said, it's hard to dwell on the end of summer at Mount Grace — there's simply too much going on! Like the late-season abundance of tomatoes to can and potatoes to store, we are overflowing with conservation and land management projects. Every day I am greeted with fresh enthusiasm from families reaching out to protect their land and add their parcel to the hundreds of acres we are working to protect in Ashburnham, Royalston, Montague and across the region. Since our last newsletter, new staff have joined Mount Grace with fresh perspectives and ideas. Helen brings more than 20 years of experience protecting farms and forests across New England. Isaac is eager to help Mount Grace incorporate housing projects with conservation. Jack pairs years as a land steward with a background in graphic design. And Ite works to engage Nipmuc

youth in seeing hunting and fishing as both cultural practices and conservation.

We are growing, bustling, and making conservation happen—and it's a joy to be part of it!

Warmly,

Emma

Mount Grace conserves and cares for our forests, farms, and waterways to promote healthy communities in climate-resilient, biodiverse landscapes.

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28 Acres Protected in Leyden, Linking a Corridor of Conserved Land

BY KOLYA PARTAN

After decades of championing land conservation in Leyden, Warren Facey found himself thinking: why stop now? This year, in partnership with Mount Grace, Warren successfully protected 28 additional acres of woodland just north of his farm. It's the final piece of a landscape-scale puzzle, completing a continuous corridor of protected land stretching from central Leyden to the Vermont border.

For Warren, it's another meaningful chapter in his lifelong commitment to conservation.

"When we started Bree-Z-Knoll Farm, there were sixteen dairy farms in town," he recalls. "Today, we're the last one. I've watched the land where my grandfather grew up get developed and turn into houses. That transformation is part of the reason I got involved in conservation to start with."

Warren grew up in Greenfield but spent much of his time on his grandfather's dairy farm in the heart of Leyden's farming country. In 1968, Warren and his wife Sandie started Bree-Z-Knoll Farm, purchasing their first two cows for their three children. Since then, Warren has not only protected the farmland, but also led a town-wide movement to conserve the broader landscape.

Warren and his brother Bill each purchased farmland—Warren in Leyden, Bill in Wendell—and both organized multi-landowner conservation projects in their communities. Warren's efforts began in 2012, protecting over 700 acres of forests, farms, and fields. "It wasn't much of a challenge at all," he says. "It's something I was very passionate about."



At Bree-Z-Knoll Farm — Leyden's last remaining dairy farm.

Today, Randy and Angie Facey run Bree-Z-Knoll. They currently milk 120 cows with Lely robots, and the farm also has 20 dry cows and 100 replacement heifers. The family uses rotational grazing in the spring, summer, and fall, and grows its own winter feed.

The 28 new acres stitch together previously conserved land. The property lies within a 1,198-acre unfragmented habitat block and contains the headwaters of Hibbard Brook, a Coldwater Fishery Resource and key part of the Green River watershed. "It fills in the gaps of land that we've protected in the past," says Emma Ellsworth, Mount Grace's Executive Director. "The project creates a bridge from one island of protected land to another."

Mount Grace & Department of Fish and Game *> continued from page 1*

Mount Grace pre-purchased the land in June and transferred it to DFG once funding was secured. The property includes grey birch, open fields, and a mix of pine, oak, and maple forest that provide essential habitat for wildlife such as black bear, New England cottontail, ruffed grouse, moose, and whip-poor-will. It also bridges a gap between northern and southern parcels of the Ashby WMA, supporting climate resilience and species migration.

"Given its prime location for connecting surrounding protected lands, this special spot has been a high conservation priority for us for many years," said Emily Myron, MassWildlife Assistant Director of Land and Habitat Conservation. "We are grateful for the dedicated partnership of Mount Grace to help us act quickly to conserve this important habitat for wildlife and outdoor recreation."

The Fruits of our Labor

BY MATT DIBONA

For a land manager, there may be no greater compliment than seeing plants and wildlife respond to your management work. At Mount Grace, most of our stewardship work is focused on improving forest health and diversity or otherwise enhancing habitat for wildlife. But increasingly, we are challenging ourselves to answer the question: Is our management actually achieving the results we intend? Thankfully, with the support of dedicated volunteers and powerful new tools, we're beginning to answer that question with greater clarity and confidence.

Back in early 2024, Mount Grace completed a bird-friendly forestry project at the Guiney Memorial Forest in Royalston, that involved creating a 3-acre forest opening and conducting forest thinning on another nine acres. The goal was to inject some age and species diversity into the forest to support a broader array of birds and other wildlife. Since then, we have used eBird (an online database for bird observation data managed by Cornell Lab of Ornithology) and a group of dedicated volunteer birdwatchers to survey the area to monitor what birds are using the forest, especially during the breeding season. To date, we've observed 56 species, including 7 of Massachusetts' Species of Greatest Conservation Need. It's thrilling to be able to go for a walk through the woods and find everything from Eastern Towhees to Black throated blue warblers to Black throated green warblers. Each of these species depends on different parts of the forest, and their presence in our management area indicates that we're maintaining a healthy variety of habitats that support a wide range of wildlife.

At the opposite end of the spectrum, sometimes we want to know what happens when we keep wildlife out of the woods. In this case, I'm referring specifically to white-tailed deer—and to an ongoing experiment at Song Memorial Forest in Warwick.

Overabundant deer populations are capable of seriously impacting forest regeneration and composition. In 2023, Mount Grace completed a 7-acre slash wall composed of tree crowns and other unmerchantable timber associated with a 13-acre harvest conducted at the same time. The wall – measuring 8-feet tall – effectively keeps deer out of the area, allowing tree species, such as oak, birch, beech, and hemlock to regenerate. Repeated site visits have shown no evidence of deer activity inside the wall. In fact, the only wildlife tracks we have found so far are porcupines which love



Yellow-bellied sapsucker darts up a tree at Guiney Memorial Forest

PHOTO CREDIT: JEFF BLANCHARD

denning in the slash wall! We expect to see noticeable differences in forest regeneration inside and outside the wall in coming years. But sometimes we don't have to wait years to see the benefits of our good work. In June, MG volunteers and staff spent a rainy Saturday morning planting 250 native shrubs and wildflowers to create our new pollinator garden at our headquarters in Athol. Not even two months later and we have an assortment of moths, butterflies, bees and flies visiting our garden for nectar and pollen. Using another great online tool, iNaturalist, staff and visitors can take pictures with their phone and use the iNaturalist app to ID plant and insect species.

If you would like to be a citizen science volunteer with Mount Grace or want to learn how you can visit any of the habitat projects described above, visit mountgrace.org.

Introducing the Nooswetamooonk Framework

BY JENN ALBERTINE

Nooswetamooonk Sokkommoosoooonat Nishnoh Pasuk in the Nipmuc dialect of southern New England Algonkian translates to “Our duty/agreement to nourish/care for each other, the land and all beings on the land.” Abbreviated to Nooswetamooonk, this language was shared by Nipmuc/k partners, Pam Ellis (Chagwas Cultural Resource Consulting) and Andre Strongbearheart Gaines, Jr (No Loose Braids) to build a shared framework for our collaboration to harmonize western and Indigenous scientific methods to improve land care and stewardship.

This Nipmuc/k-centered framework was created to support a collaboration between Chagwas, No Loose Braids (NLB), Mount Grace, Mass Audubon, and the Town of Monson to develop a co-management plan for the restoration of the Atlantic white cedar (AWC) swamp in Monson, MA. The Nipmuc/k partners shared on the cultural significance and importance of the Atlantic white cedars. Scientists from the UMass-Amherst, Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program, Opacum Land Trust, and Norcross Wildlife Foundation are also project partners.

The Nooswetamooonk Framework centers the traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) of Indigenous communities and reflects a complex process that grows from established relationships with Indigenous land/cultural stewards. Successful projects center the leadership and principles of Indigenous partners within the project team. Co-management projects between a deed holder and Indigenous communities require reciprocal relationships between the stewarding parties and the land itself. Nooswetamooonk is not an add-on but a framework to drive the creation of new pathways and methodologies. This framework also requires participants to identify and address where the existing regulatory structures create barriers to this type of collaborative work.

This project continues the work Mount Grace has been doing under the leadership of Andre to address the declining health of AWC stands across Nipmuc/k homelands for the past 4 years. It is also part of a broader effort supported by a Land Trust Alliance Land and Climate Grant, which seeks to develop best practices for co-creating Forest Stewardship Plans that braid Indigenous knowledge with long-term land trust stewardship.



Recent land walk in the Monson Atlantic white cedar stand with members of the Monson Cedar Swamp Collaborative to discuss and co-create a forest stewardship plan to restore health to the AWC stand.

Margaret Power Biggs Society

Profile: Cindie Moore

Cindie Moore's family has been coming to Northfield since her great-grandfather, Reverend William Jay Peck attended the 1890 summer conference convened by evangelist Dwight L. Moody at his Northfield Seminary for Young Ladies. After Rev. Peck started a family, he, his wife, and their children—including Cindie's grandmother, Helen Peck Moore—spent each summer living in a tent on the seminary campus, which later became part of Northfield Mount Hermon School.

The school is in Gill now, but Cindie's family members are still near the campus on Rustic Ridge, where Rev. Peck built a permanent cottage in 1916. "Having a cottage meant not only that they were tired of sleeping in tents, but also that they were planting roots so future generations could enjoy Northfield and all the quiet natural beauty around it," says Cindie.

The family has also been supporting Mount Grace for decades. Cindie's parents, Edgar and G. L. Moore, began the tradition by getting involved in townwide efforts to protect Brush Mountain. As Cindie explains, "because of our legacy in Northfield, we wholeheartedly support Mount Grace's mission to protect the forests, farms, and waterways so that everyone can enjoy them."

Making sure everyone could experience the outdoors was the inspiration for the Alderbrook Meadows project, in which Mount Grace worked with the Town of Northfield, the Ames family, and MassTrails to create the Gunnery Sergeant Jeffrey S. Ames Trail—an accessible loop trail down to a viewing platform at a scenic beaver pond. When the trail opened in 2018, the Moore family was there.



On the Gunnery Sergeant Jeffrey S. Ames Trail with (from left) Cindie's cousins Stuart and Barbara Elliot of Gill, Cindie, and the Elliot's dog Carina. PHOTO CREDIT: BOB ZIEGENHAGEN

"My favorite Mount Grace event was when Alderbrook Meadows was opened," Cindie remembers. "I walked the trail with my 91-year-old mother. We brought a wheelchair, but we just used it to carry our purses. You never get too old to enjoy Mount Grace. I hope everyone will realize how important it is for people who have mobility issues to have these trails accessible to them."

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

Fall 2025 Upcoming Events - Join Us!

Step into the Outdoors:

Discover Local Trails with Mount Grace

Athol Public Library, 568 Main Street, Athol
Monday, October 6th
6:00 PM – 7:00 PM

Eagle Reserve Exploration

Eagle Reserve Conservation Area, Royalston
Sunday, October 12th
10 AM -12 PM

Woodsy Walkabout at the Famous Triple Oak Tree

Cutthroat Brook Tree Farm
Sunday, November 9th
10 AM -12 PM

Visit mountgrace.org/events to learn more about these and other events.

Thank You To Our Supporters

Grants Received

Anonymous Foundation.....	\$150,000
Purpose: Capacity expansion	
MA Conservation Assistance Program	\$26,820
Purpose: CR Acquisition	
Lillian Lincoln Foundation	\$25,000
Purpose: Operating	
Community Foundation of North Central Massachusetts	\$11,400
Purpose: Marchmont Project	
LifePath.....	\$3,000
Purpose: Accessible Trail Improvements	

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Stone Cow Brewery & Carter and Stevens Farm
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Max Feldman
Carol Hillman
Mount Grace’s work with the Nipmuck people
Kolya Partan
David Small

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George Northrop
Paul O’Neil
Charles S. Plotkin
Edith Potter
Patricia Russell
Alfie Siano
Jim Tedford
Margaret Urquhart
Wendy C. Warner
Speddie, beloved Corgi



Welcome Helen and Jack to the Mount Grace Team!



Helen grew up in the Monadnock region, where a childhood surrounded by protected land sparked her lifelong connection to nature. That passion shaped her 27-year career with the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, helping protect farms, forests, and wildlife habitats across Massachusetts and New Hampshire. Now, she brings her deep experience to Mount Grace, expanding on the legacy our supporters have helped build.



We’re also thrilled to welcome Jack Monahan, our new Conservation Associate, who joins us from Kestrel Land Trust after completing a TerraCorps service term. With a background in digital design, Jack brings a love of nature and a strong commitment to land conservation that will support our growing stewardship and land protection work across the region.

Special Thanks *from* Mount Grace to:

Kristine Ashton-Magnuson
Jeff Blanchard
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Janelle Coste
Bill & Sarah Corey and Family
Christine Copeland
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event.

Tuesday, December 2 | 5:30–8:00 PM

