

Views from Mount Grace

MOUNT GRACE LAND CONSERVATION TRUST • CONSERVING THE LOCAL LANDSCAPE



SPRING 2016
VOLUME 27, NO. 1
INSIDE THIS ISSUE

- Supporting Local Conservation Commissions
- Margaret Power-Biggs Society Profile
- Quabbin Harvest Celebrates 30 Years of Farm Conservation with Mount Grace
- Creating a Stewardship Curriculum with Local Teachers
- Spring Events with Mount Grace
- Mount Grace Updates

Since 1986 serving:

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



Eagle Reserve's wetlands, woodlands, open fields, and floating bogs are all visible in this drone footage courtesy of Eric Vickery. See the full video on our Facebook and YouTube pages.

Royalston Eagle Reserve – Fulfilling a Vision

BY PAT WORTH

In the 1960s J. Angelo Solinas, whose family immigrated to Gardner, MA from Italy, stumbled upon a vast, isolated wetland in the heart of a heavily forested part of North Central Massachusetts. He spoke to his children of this land as “God’s green earth.” In the early 1970s, Angelo and some friends purchased three parcels that are now being proposed for permanent conservation as the 147-acre Royalston Eagle Reserve. Their vision was to create a “camp” for hunting, fishing, canoeing and getting back to nature with family and friends.

Forty years later, Angelo’s son Jim found a way to fulfill his father’s vision for future generations by offering the Town an opportunity to partner to create the Royalston Eagle Reserve Recreation Area. Jim spoke of being “Stewards of God’s creation” by protecting this pristine area containing 83 acres of open water, bog, shrub swamp and marsh habitat, 4.5 acres of agricultural fields and 56.5 acres of working forest land. The Reserve is home to bald eagles, among many other species of birds, and otters and beavers call the waters their home.

In January 2016, a Royalston Town Meeting unanimously voted to authorize and accept a LAND Grant for Royalston to purchase a conservation restriction on the land. Mount Grace is now raising money to purchase the land. “The Eagle

> *continued on page 3*

Choosing to Save this Place Since 1986

BY JAY RASKU

When we take a minute and think about it, the peace and tranquility of the local landscape is a big reason why so many of us love it here. We probably owe it more attention. The forested hills, pastures, and tree-lined ponds of our landscape are the backdrop to so many good moments. We are lucky to know the secret of living here – a place of beauty and quiet that we get to enjoy with friends and family.



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Dear Friends,

Growing up along the Connecticut River in Springfield, Massachusetts, I discovered many wonders of nature watching the weekly program, Mutual of Omaha's Wild Kingdom. I remember it crossing my mind that I probably would never see a wild American Bald Eagle during my lifetime – unless I travelled to Alaska. Thanks to MassWildlife's Bald Eagle reintroduction program, based at the Quabbin Reservoir since 1982, many of us see them frequently, including the students at the Royalston Community School.



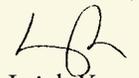
AmeriCorps members, like Jaimee Briggs and Nick Atherton, who serve with the Massachusetts Land Initiative for Tomorrow (MassLIFT), a statewide AmeriCorps Program initiated and managed by Mount Grace since 2010, help make connecting youth with the natural world an integral part of our conservation and stewardship work.

Thirty years ago Keith Ross, Al Morgan, Tim Storrow, Diane Esser, Michael Idoine, Jan Norris, Maggie Striebel, Steve Striebel, and Charlie Thompson incorporated Mount Grace in order to: a) protect our unique rural quality of life, b) demonstrate practical ways to do this, c) assist local governments and citizen groups to practice balanced land use, and d) develop in our area's residents an appreciation of the inter-relationships between people and their shared environment.

How truly fantastic it is to notice the many places in our region that have stayed the same through the building booms of the 80's and the 2000's and to recognize that this is in large part due to the great appreciation area residents and visitors, alike, feel for the woods and fields and waters that surround us. As CR-landowner, Brian Szyndlar, recently said, "There are plenty of places with lots of development. We need Mount Grace so some places can stay rural and wild."

Your support today will make the next generation of conservation and stewardship happen.

Thank You,


Leigh Youngblood

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.

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

Mount Grace Land Conservation Trust

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Royalston Eagle Reserve > continued from page 1

Reserve is a unique place that includes a magnificent pond ringed by mature forest, wetlands, and an esker,” says Aaron Ellison of the Royalston Conservation Commission. “In addition to conserving habitat for bald eagles and other birds, the reserve will provide new opportunities for recreation, including kayaking, canoeing, and hiking.” Mount Grace is now working to raise \$34,000 to complete the project and ensure that this spectacular property will be open to all for hiking, hunting, fishing, kayaking, canoeing and nature study. Mount Grace has also applied for a state grant to create an accessible trail on the land.

The nearby Royalston Community School plans to enhance its longstanding environmental education program at the Eagle Reserve. The program includes instilling the desire to protect this rare natural area that provides habitat for many species targeted by the Commonwealth for protection. Teacher Brian Snell talks about the eagles watching the children play as they fly over the schoolyard. Brian welcomes the opportunity to expand his “nature’s classroom” which teaches environmental issues and connects student to nature.



You can support the Eagle Reserve project online at mountgrace.org/protecting-where-eagles-soar.

Choosing to Save this Place > continued from page 1

But drive east on Route 2 and the land changes. It starts disappearing under the hard cover of subdivisions, malls, and parking lots.

Even here, in our region, the land is changing. Every year another pasture or stretch of woods disappears. Right now, it’s not a dramatic change. But small changes add up. John Hanson Mitchell’s essay *The Fate of All Fields?* described this slow decline: “This is the way the wild world dies. Not by cataclysm... but by bits and pieces, with the simple shuffling of papers, an acre here, a hayfield here, until no one remembers what it once was like.”

Right now, we have the ability to save the places we love the most before they are gone. There is a way to keep the farm in the hands of farmers, forever. There is a way to keep the woodlot forever open for hunting and fishing, to keep the trail forever free and open for all.



The Richardson-Zlogar Cabin, on the New England National Scenic Trail in Northfield, offers rustic shelter in a breathtaking natural setting.

Over the past 30 years, the members of Mount Grace have done remarkable things to save many special and beloved places. Yet, the vast amount of land we love is not protected. To keep our quality of life for the next 30 years we need thousands of people to join together. We need your help to keep our area beautiful, quiet, and free to enjoy. We might have different points of view, but one thing we can all agree on is the land we share. We need to come together now so that this place will be here forever.

For the past 30 years, Mount Grace has been working in your town, and the entire region we love. But now we need your help more than ever. Join Mount Grace. Volunteer a few hours. Boost your support. Be part of our Board. So we can save what we love about this place: The Land.

MARGARET POWER-BIGGS SOCIETY

MEMBER PROFILE:

Steve and Kathy Rawson

BY DAVID KOTKER

From moose in the driveway to bobcats at the swing set to fishers hanging on the bird feeders, Steve and Kathy Rawson have seen the full spectrum of local wildlife on their 18 acres since first moving next to Winchendon's Nineteenth Hill in 1981. "When we started building the house we would camp up here on weekends before we had power or water," says Steve, who built the house together with his father. "When we moved in, in 1983, we still had unfinished floors and no doors," adds Kathy.

Steve and Kathy got to know Mount Grace during the local campaign to protect Nineteenth Hill, a 490-acre parcel that was part of one of the largest unprotected undeveloped areas in the state. "If you walk out the back door, you can go six miles to Gardner before you cross a paved road," says Steve. "That property was proposed as a site for an airport, and for a landfill," adds Kathy, who chaired the Winchendon Conservation Commission during the campaign, "it was great that the town saw it was important enough to work together to protect that land. We put our efforts into something that will last for hundreds of years and benefit our children and grandchildren."



Kathy and Steve Rawson

"Large pieces of land like this are so rare and so important," Steve explains. "Getting more people to see the value and the beauty of what we have here is the challenge." As a Mount Grace Board member who serves on the Executive Committee, Facilities Committee, and Development Committee, Steve is always looking for ways to inspire more people to join and support Mount Grace. This year, the Rawson's Spring Appeal gift will be part of the challenge pool encouraging new gifts to Mount Grace on Valley Gives Day, Tuesday, May 3.

You can meet the Rawson's Valley Gives Day challenge online at mountgrace.org/valley-gives-2016 today through May 3. If you would like information about joining the Margaret Power-Biggs Society, please contact Major Gifts and Grants Manager David Kotker at 978-248-2055 x19 or kotker@mountgrace.org

Connecting with Local Stewards: Conservation Commissioners

BY JAIMEE BRIGGS

Conservation Commissions are key players in the world of conservation. They are the official local agency specifically charged with the protection of their community's natural resources. Many conservation projects that the North Quabbin Regional Landscape Partnership assists with would be impossible without the involvement of conservation commissions. In return, we want to continue supporting our local partners. To make sure we're providing useful support, we recently crafted a stewardship questionnaire designed to enable these partners to let us know exactly what they do (and don't!) want assistance with.

So far, the partnership has met with the conservation commissions of Athol, Orange, Phillipston, Northfield, Wendell,

Warwick, and Royalston. Based on these conversations, we are now helping towns with a variety of tasks, including mapping town-owned lands and trails, collecting deed and property information, thinking about future public outreach activities, planning stewardship workshops, and connecting towns with land management resources.

In Athol, we helped the Conservation Commission amend their forest management plan and submit a proposal to the first-ever round of MassWildlife's Habitat Management Grant Program, with a goal of creating a patch of early successional habitat in their 950-acre Bearsden Conservation Area. The commission received the full \$24,610 grant award for their proposal and will

Sharing Memberships to Promote Local Food

BY DAVID KOTKER

Quabbin Harvest, the local food co-op in the building Mount Grace purchased at 12 North Main Street, Orange, is helping celebrate Mount Grace's 30th Anniversary by offering a special incentive for Mount Grace members who join the Co-op.

During April, Mount Grace and Quabbin Harvest are collaborating on a membership drive. Mount Grace members who join the Quabbin Harvest Food Coop as a member/owner for the standard \$120 equity investment (a one-time fee, not an annual fee) will receive an exclusive package of four discount coupons: one 5%, two 10%, and one 20% off of your total purchases at the store, and a special edition T-Shirt!

If your Mount Grace membership has lapsed, you can rejoin to get the same deal, which includes the extra discount. Nearly a dozen of the farms Mount Grace has helped protect supply food for Quabbin Harvest, and the co-op's expansion helps increase the marketing opportunities for local farmers.

"We see this as a great way to encourage more people to come in the door and support local farms with their shopping dollars,"

complete the project this spring – providing ideal habitat for songbirds such as mourning warblers and whippoorwills.

Conservation is a team effort, and the North Quabbin Regional Landscape Partnership is helping to strengthen its fellow teammates. If you would like to learn more about how you or your town could engage with the stewardship questionnaire contact Jaimee Briggs at conservationist_ameri corps@mountgrace.org.

Jaimee Briggs is serving as MassLIFT AmeriCorps Regional Conservation Coordinator with the North Quabbin Regional Landscape Partnership.

SPRING! into our
Membership Drive

JOIN NOW OR
REFER A NEW MEMBER UNTIL
APRIL 30TH AND RECEIVE OVER
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TUES - FRI 8AM-6:30, SAT 8AM-4

Quabbin Harvest
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says Nalini Goordial, Store Manager at Quabbin Harvest. "More shoppers means more purchasing power for us, which helps us make local organic food more affordable for the community."

Adding a member-supported food co-op storefront to downtown Orange has already led to increased sales for local produce. Stop by Quabbin Harvest to see the local farm economy in action!



MassLIFT AmeriCorps members Jaimee Briggs and Kathleen Doherty working on a site assessment for the LeBlanc property – now part of the South Athol Town Forest.

Creating Curricula with, and for, Teachers

BY NICK ATHERTON



Mahar teachers Jen Scotland and Victoria Flood examine a snag with Antioch Students Jay Degregorio and Caitlin Holden.

There is a lot of energy at Mahar Regional Middle and High School being channeled into cutting-edge curriculum development. At a meeting facilitated by Mount Grace on February 22, the science curriculum coordinator, science teachers and graduate students from Antioch University New England got together to develop science curricula based on local ecosystems.

To make things more exciting, the resulting curriculum will adhere to the newest Massachusetts Science and Technology/Engineering Standards, passed on January 2016. The lesson plans, and activities that come out of this joint effort mean that there will be no lag for the students and teachers in the transition between old and new standards.

Through our partnership with schools we are highlighting conservation and stewardship of our local natural resources. Mount Grace is encouraging a real connection between young people and their environment by focusing on real-time issues affecting the lands they love, highlighting the many special places protected so far and the many more that still need protecting.

Most of all, Mount Grace provides a space for discovery of the amazing nature just outside the classroom door. Field trips to Mount Grace's conservation areas are scheduled for next Fall and Spring. If you would like to support these efforts please consider donating money to pay for buses and field trip expenses online at mountgace.org.

Nick Atherton serves as MassLIFT AmeriCorps Service Learning Coordinator with Mount Grace Land Conservation Trust.

SPRING 2016 UPCOMING EVENTS *Join Us!*

Valley Gives Day

The Pioneer Valley
Tuesday, May 3

ALL DAY

Support Mount Grace with Valley Gives on 5/3/16, the fourth annual day of giving for the Pioneer Valley! Valley Gives is a 24-hour celebration of generosity. During Valley Gives, Massachusetts nonprofits collaborate with the goal of helping thousands of people support their favorite nonprofits. By participating, donors will help charities become eligible for special prizes totaling \$200,000. This year, your support will help many of the innovative projects Mount Grace is currently working on. Visit mountgace.org to learn more.



Eagle Reserve Celebration and Fundraiser

Royalston Community School
96 Winchendon Road
Saturday, May 14

2-4pm

Mount Grace is partnering with the Town of Royalston to conserve the Eagle Reserve Recreation Area, home to rare wildlife habitats and nesting bald eagles. This 147-acre natural treasure will provide an exceptional natural classroom and laboratory for students and canoeing, hiking, fishing, and photographic opportunities for all generations to enjoy.

This celebration will kick off public fundraising for the project and features food and beverages donated by sponsors, original music, family nature activities, projects displayed by RCS students, and a parade to see the land. The event is free. Donations of \$10 or more will enter you in a drawing to win a kayak!

Community Storytelling

Montague Congregational Church
4 North Street

Friday, May 27

6:30-8:30pm

Join MC Michael Humphries and new and veteran storytellers for an evening of storytelling celebrating our local farms and the New England countryside! Featured storytellers include: Michael Humphries; Haley Norris, of Red Fire Farm and more!

THANK YOU TO OUR SUPPORTERS

Grants Received:

Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy & Environmental Affairs	\$125,760	Eagle Reserve Project
Bromley Charitable Trust	\$100,000	Unrestricted Challenge Grant
Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy & Environmental Affairs	\$85,000	Sugarbush Farm Project
Massachusetts DCR Recreational Trails Program	\$49,725	Alderbrook Meadows Sanctuary
Boynton Foundation	\$25,000	Community Engagement Program
FRCOG/ Scenic Byways	\$10,000	Alderbrook Meadows Project
Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy & Environmental Affairs	\$2,587	Downs Project

Gifts were received *In Memory of*: Hank Cramer, Mason Phelps, Michael Solfiell, and Senator Robert D. Wetmore, Sr.

Special Thanks *from* Mount Grace to ~

Greg Cormier for social media advice and assistance

Anne Cervantes, Cyndy Cetto, and Pat Worth for office support

Dan Bolton, Chef Alain Bressac, David Brown, David Christianson, Nick and Margot Fleck, Mary Gianetti, Roberta Gillette and Paul Yarmoluk, Desiree Hamelin of the Freedom's Way National Heritage Area, Travis Knetchel and the Town of Athol, Mike Mauri, Kees and Paul Overgaag, Doug Plavin, Nancy Regan and the Mount Wachusett Community College Mountaineers Hiking and Recreation Club, Dave Small, Paul Wanta, and Tom Wyatt for helping to host, lead, and coordinate Mount Grace events.

Senator Steve Brewer, Larry Buell, Karen DiFranza, Joseph Duhamel, Ann Meilus, Linda Spink, Linda Tomasi, and Stephanie Young for sharing their stories, time, and expertise to help make our Barre Storytelling Evening a success!

Thanks to all the volunteers representing the 23 towns we serve on Mount Grace's 30th Anniversary Celebration Working Group! And thanks to all of our members, supporters, and partners for making 30 years of land conservation and stewardship possible. We hope you will join us this year and next to help celebrate our shared success!

mountgrace.org
[@MountGraceLCT](https://www.instagram.com/MountGraceLCT)



Mount Grace is profoundly honored to have been selected by the Wetmore family to receive memorial gifts in honor of lifelong conservationist, Senator Robert D. Wetmore, Sr., who passed away on January 15, 2016. Senator Wetmore's 1970 Amendment to the Massachusetts Constitution, Article 97, established that public conservation land cannot be stripped of its protection without supermajority votes in both the Massachusetts House and Senate.

To honor Senator Robert Wetmore's passion for the outdoors and resolute support for land conservation and stewardship, Mount Grace is establishing The Senator Robert D. Wetmore, Sr. Memorial Fishing Hole, in collaboration with the Wetmore and Gifford families. The Fishing Hole will be located within Mount Grace's 33-acre Gifford Memorial Forest, on Tully Road in Orange.



Cart roads and a fishing trail lead to the West Branch of the Tully River, a high-quality cold water fishery, providing a scenic wilderness loop trail for anglers and others. The fishing hole is at the northern property line where a magnificent, 200-foot long former mill dam has helped create a diverse floodplain forest with oxbows and numerous deep vernal pools.



MOUNT GRACE LAND CONSERVATION TRUST
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You don't have to live in the Valley to support Mount Grace on **Valley Gives Day!**



Tuesday, May 3 will be the 4th Annual Valley Gives Day—an opportunity to join thousands of people in supporting their favorite nonprofits serving Western Massachusetts.

Starting April 3, you can use our Valley Gives page to schedule a gift to Mount Grace in advance by:

- Visiting our Valley Gives page at mountgrace.org/valley-gives-2016
- Creating your own secure account
- Making a gift to Mount Grace to support local land conservation

**Join hundreds of Mount Grace supporters in the Valley and beyond
for a day of giving to kick off our 30th Anniversary Year!**