

Views from Mount Grace

MOUNT GRACE LAND CONSERVATION TRUST • CONSERVING THE LOCAL LANDSCAPE



WINTER 2018 - 2019
VOLUME 29, NO. 3

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Since 1986 serving:

Ashburnham

Athol

Barre

Bernardston

Erving

Gardner

Gill

Greenfield

Hardwick

Hubbardston

Leyden

Montague

New Salem

Northfield

Orange

Petersham

Phillipston

Royalston

Templeton

Warwick

Wendell

Westminster

Winchendon



Photo by Cameron Schmitz

Will and Shalee Pratt pose with daughters Marlee and Emersen on their farm in Bernardston.

Bernardston's West Gate Farm to be Conserved this Winter

BY JAMIE POTTERN

This winter, Mount Grace will close on its first-ever conservation project in the town of Bernardston—the West Gate Farm located along the scenic Eden Trail. The Farm extends across the town line into Greenfield. This stunning 50-acre property has been a local landmark for over 200 years and even includes a portion of the historic Hale Farm founded by one of Bernardston's early settlers.

West Gate Farm is owned and managed by Will and Shalee Pratt. Will purchased this land from his late father, Bill Pratt, and his mother, Marsha Pratt, and has spent the last 20 years converting overgrown pastures back into productive hay fields. Will recalls that “from the day I was old enough to operate a tractor and chainsaw, I have been committed to stewarding this land. When we purchased the farm from my parents, I knew that conserving it would further ensure that the rich and rewarding practice of agriculture will continue on this land. Maintaining land in this way will help keep our rural character, which is a great American value and tradition.”

Today, there are approximately 30 acres of managed forest and 20 acres of active hay land. The hay is sold to local farming operations, including Sunbrite Dairy Farm just next door and the Northfield Mount Hermon school in Gill.

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Dear Friends,

It takes a village to accomplish many of the meaningful things in life, including protecting a farm, keeping a farm stand going, or operating a local food market. Those in attendance at Mount Grace's 32nd annual meeting held in October at Chimney Hill Farm experienced this first hand.



In the same way that each person is unique, each land project is an amalgamation of a unique set of people, land resources, and funding sources. This keeps things interesting, and a challenge at the same time. For example, Quabbin Harvest runs the food co-op at 12 N. Main Street in Orange, farmers and other producers supply the merchandise, and Mount Grace owns the building. At Chimney Hill Farm, the Hall Family owns the place, Shelley Knapp runs the farm operation, and Mount Grace connected the family with the MA Dept. of Conservation & Recreation, which protects the land with a CR (conservation restriction).

The news has been filled recently with reports on the dramatic reduction of wildlife worldwide. Locally, I've overheard people talking about how many fewer insects seem to be splattered on our windshields in the warm months of the year than before. It may be more convenient for visibility, but what does it indicate about the long-term health of the beautiful local landscape we all love?

I am encouraged by the involvement of volunteers who want to keep places like Eagle Reserve healthy and wild while making it more accessible for all people to enjoy and appreciate; by the enthusiasm of visitors to our table at the Garlic & Arts Festival who were so delighted by the baby Blanding's Turtles; and inspired by the story Sarah Wells shared at the annual meeting laying out a trail that will get us to the goal of conserving 50% of our region - by working together.

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:

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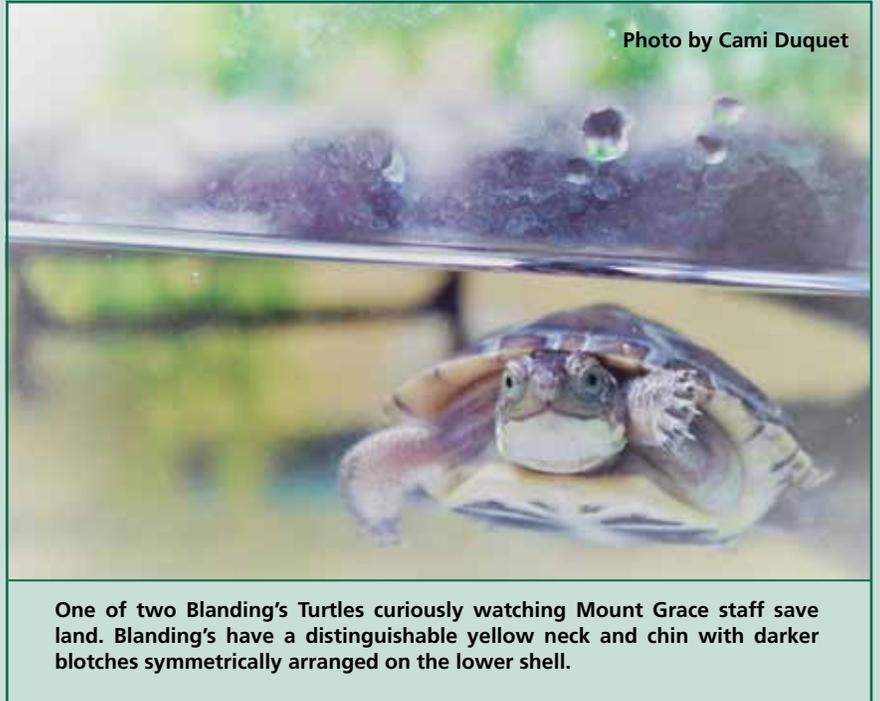
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A Turtle-y Awesome Pair

BY CAMI DUQUET

Two small but mighty creatures have made their way to our Skyfields Arboretum office, and this time they are not mice! Since September, a pair of Blanding's Turtles have called Mount Grace home, much to the delight of staff and visitors. As an endangered species in Massachusetts, the hatchlings are part of a population recovery effort through the US Fish and Wildlife Service known as a Headstart Program. Born in captivity in the eastern part of the state, these hatchlings are among a hundred or so others who get a head-start on life by spending the winter indoors and well-fed at host organizations. When summer arrives, the turtles will have grown big enough to be released back in the wild, strong and ready to fend for themselves.

Through the Headstart Program, Mount Grace's Youth Education Initiative is teaching students about endangered species and the threats to wildlife, including climate change and habitat loss. Local classrooms are learning about these turtles and the role that land trusts can play in protecting their remaining habitat and creating safe passageways. As Jess Tierney, TerraCorps Youth Education Coordinator at Mount Grace, exclaims, "This is a great opportunity to start a discussion with youth on bigger environmental threats and raising awareness using a hands-on example that grabs their attention every time!"



Mount Grace is excited to be part of this statewide wildlife conservation effort to teach and engage the youth of our region around these important issues. We welcome visitors to stop by and meet our ~ temporary ~ friends!

Bernardston's West Gate Farm > *continued from page 1*

The Pratts recently built a three-story barn with timber harvested from the land and milled on site with the help and expertise of their friend Ken Griswold, and are currently building a farmhouse on the property where they plan to raise their two young girls, Marlee and Emersen. The Pratts are donating a conservation restriction (CR) on the land to Mount Grace. In this case, The CR will keep the house and barn connected to the land, keeping the most critical elements of a working farm together in perpetuity.

The location of this farm makes it a particularly appealing project as it abuts 200 acres of conservation land located to the south, notably the Noyes APR (Agricultural Preservation Restriction) in Greenfield. Bridging together larger parcels of conserved farmland helps support the agricultural economy, and in this instance is helping to protect the drinking water supply for the residents of both Greenfield and Bernardston. Additionally, according to Mount Grace's 2015 Farmland Inventory, 90% of farmland in Bernardston is unprotected. With the protection of West Gate Farm, the Pratts are taking an important step in preserving the agricultural heritage of the community.

Mount Grace is honored to help Will and Shalee realize their conservation goals for their farm and their family.

LEGACY SOCIETY FOUNDERS CIRCLE MEMBER PROFILE: Ann Meilus

BY DAVID KOTKER

Ann Meilus is deeply rooted in Barre. Her parents, Dot and John, raised 3 children there while running Hancock Farm, their 400-acre dairy farm. She has seen firsthand the difference Mount Grace has made in her town and in the region.

“Growing up Barre was rural—farms for the most part. If you weren’t a farmer you were a teacher, or sometimes you were both,” she says. “Later, a lot of land started getting sold. My parents sold some of the land in order to send me to college.”

After college, Ann joined her sister Susan Landry at the law offices of Landry & Meilus, LLP. Her work gives her plenty of opportunities to hear what people would like to see happen to their land and their community.

Hoping to protect open space, Ann joined Mount Grace’s Board of Directors at the start of the organization’s first big expansion. “Back then the Board was meeting in a little house in New Salem for spaghetti dinners and homemade wine. We were considering the Tully Initiative, which involved almost 10,000 acres. There was a lot of discussion ‘should we do this?’ ‘Will we be able to handle it?’ I was always one of the ones saying ‘Yes! Go for it.’”

“Go for it” was the decision, and the Tully Initiative helped more than 100 families permanently protect their land. “Not every family owns land they can protect,” says Ann. “One way people



without land can protect the places we care about is by making a bequest, and as an estate lawyer I can tell you it’s timely. The Massachusetts estate tax is still in effect, and bequests make a big difference in controlling where your property goes and, potentially, how much estate tax you will pay.”

Ann Meilus is a founding member of our Legacy Circle, Mount Grace members who hope their bequests will both protect the land and inspire the community.

If you would like information about planned gifts and bequests to Mount Grace, please contact Major Gifts and Grants Manager David Kotker at 978-248-2055 x19 or kotker@mountgrace.org.

Native Trees for Native Birds

BY KIMLYNN NGUYEN

The next time you visit Eagle Reserve Conservation Area in Royalston to walk along the ridge of a glacial esker and take in the beauty of the vast wetland, something out-of-place may catch your eye: eight-foot tall fencing along the shoreline.

The fencing is connected to a project funded by the Hollis Declan Leverett Memorial Fund.

Eagle Reserve is a great place for those who love bird-watching, hiking, nature photography, and exploring the natural world. Many bird species depend on food produced by native shrubs

like Common Winterberry and Speckled Alder. These nutritious native plants were getting squeezed out by an invasive plant known as Glossy Buckthorn. So the Mount Grace Stewardship team, along with volunteers, began implementing strategies to improve native bird habitat by removing invasive plants and introducing native ones.

First, in partnership with Vegetation Control Service, 4 acres of Glossy Buckthorn were removed without the use of herbicides—instead chainsaws, mowers, and weed wrenches were used.

Food for All At Quabbin Harvest

BY CATHY STANTON

Part of Quabbin Harvest’s mission is “to provide healthy food at an affordable price”. Supporting a food store that could connect farmers in the area with community members at all economic levels was one of the things that motivated Mount Grace to partner with the co-op five years ago. There are some big challenges at the heart of this mission, which Quabbin Harvest has been tackling through its Food for All program.

Food from small producers is simply more expensive than food from giant agribusinesses with huge economies of scale, so making healthy and local foods more accessible to all households requires some form of subsidy. Quabbin Harvest can’t lower its own prices further but we can enlist a range of resources and use them to support purchases by our low-income neighbors and shoppers.

Over the past year and a half, the state-run Healthy Incentives Program (HIP) has provided 100% reimbursement for fresh fruit and vegetable purchases by SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) recipients. Quabbin Harvest has been a top enroller in the entire state for the program. HIP has been having some growing pains, though, and its ups and downs have left gaps in what we can offer our SNAP customers.

Once the removal was complete, we carefully chose four areas to build the “exclosures,” visible from the trail. Each exclosure protects roughly 200 square feet of land with 8 feet tall plastic grid fencing to prevent deer from hopping inside for a snack, with a layer of metal fencing along the bottom to block hungry Beavers.

With the help of twenty-five members of the TerraCorps team, hundreds of native shrubs and trees acquired from New England Wetland Plants in Amherst were planted inside the fencing. The exclosures will be maintained for the next seven years to greatly increase the chances of these shrubs and trees reaching maturity. Once they do, they will provide food for birds and other wildlife, as well as for the occasional student from nearby Royalston Community School looking for a treat.



Photo by Cathy Stanton

Weekly vegetable shares, distributed by Quabbin Harvest Board Member and Volunteer Mary Ellen Kennedy, are a central part of the co-op’s offerings

To fill those gaps and build a stronger foundation for our food access work, the co-op’s board has begun fundraising and grant writing for our Food for All program, which provides sponsored co-op memberships, gift cards (including some distributed by area doctors as “food prescriptions”), and subsidies for some purchases of fruits, vegetables, and basic pantry items. It takes a lot of coordination to make all the pieces of this program work together, but when they do, there are benefits to our customers, the store, and the farmers we source from!



Photo by KimLynn Nguyen

The TerraCorps class of 2018-19 spent a service day volunteering at Eagle Reserve where they planted trees and shrubs in the exclosures and built a wooden bridge along the trail.

Annual Meeting Highlights

What makes for a successful annual meeting? Goats, beer, and great company! Because pictures are worth a thousand words, enjoy a few shots from our 32nd Annual Meeting at beautiful Chimney Hill Farm in Petersham, celebrating 4,100 acres conserved from the Quabbin Reservoir to Wachusett Mountain!

Photos by Norm Eggert



"If we want to protect half of our region, then we have another roughly 36,000 acres to protect. That's about what Mount Grace has protected since 1986. 36,000 acres. Or – another way to think about that number – 9 more Quabbin to Wachusett initiatives.

For hikers, I'm told there's a 4,000-footers club, with 67 summits in New England for hikers to climb. Today, let's start our own 4,000-club – the 4,000 acres club – and we can check this Quabbin initiative off as our first climb. One down, 9 to go."

– Sarah Wells, Keynote Speaker at the Annual Meeting



WINTER 2018 - 2019 UPCOMING EVENTS – *Join Us!*

Greater Quabbin Food Alliance

December 7th, 2018
8:30am – 1pm
Orange Innovation Center

Join us for the Winter Gathering of the Greater Quabbin Food Alliance. Sponsored by Mount Grace, this network meets twice a year to connect people and resources towards the goal of a healthy and sustainable food system. Contact kowalski@mountgrace.org for details.

Mindfulness and Meditation Walk

December 15th, 2018
Location and Time TBD

Stay tuned for a special end of year outdoors meditation event coming to a conservation area near you! While surrounded by nature, reflect on 2018 and look forward to a new and successful year in 2019. Event details will be posted on our website and social media pages. Contact Cami Duquet at 978-248-2055 x13 or duquet@mountgrace.org for more details.

Lunar Eclipse Moonlight Stroll

January 21st, 2019
Location and Time TBD

While most of us will be sleeping on January 21st, a total lunar eclipse will be visible from our region. To commemorate this impressive phenomenon, we are hosting a moonlight stroll to talk all things astronomy. Event details will be posted on our website and social media pages. Contact Cami Duquet at 978-248-2055 x13 or duquet@mountgrace.org for more details.

THANK YOU TO OUR SUPPORTERS

Grants Received:

The Tortuga Foundation - \$55,000

Gifts were Received:

In Memory of Elizabeth Farnsworth and Tom Peterson

Special Thanks from Mount Grace to ~

The Hall and Knapp Families for hosting the Annual Meeting;

Fred Heyes, Orange Chrysler Dodge Jeep, Westminster Pharmacy & Wine Shop, Chimney Hill Farm LLC, IC Federal Credit Union, Brookside Equipment Sales Inc, King Phillip Restaurant, The Petersham Country Store, Brekka & Brekka Law Office, Hubbardston Veterinary Clinic, and Rose 32 for sponsoring the Annual Meeting;

Gardner Ale House, Gail Oswald, Quabbin Sky Vineyard, Starbucks, Wachusett Brewing Company, Red Apple Farm, Our Family Farms, Diemand Farm, Quabbin Harvest, Artisan Beverage Cooperative, Smith's Cheese, Earthlands, Hardwick Farm Co-op, Rose 32, Staples, Lis McLoughlin, and Ellen Anderson for contributing to donations and other gifts towards the Annual Meeting;

Mimi Hellen Jones, Steve Rawson, Nancy Allen, Pam Hanold, Bryan Long, Ingrid Schatz, Anne Cutler-Russo, Laurel and Bill Facey, Bethany Webster, William Fellows, and Pascale Duquet for volunteering at the Annual Meeting;

Clare Green, Don Flye, Lis McLoughlin, Gail Oswald, and Trail Head Outfitter and General Store for volunteering and contributing to the Mount Grace tent at the Garlic and Arts Festival;

The Corey Family, Paul Montero, and Blue Leather Dog for sponsoring our Blanding's Turtle Headstart Project at Skyfields;

John Sisco, Mimi Hellen Jones, Dave Malysa, Barbara Metzger, Will Lane, Gay Roberts, Bren Carey, Mark and Francia Wisniewski, Darlene and Johanna Lawlor Moore, Kyle Cormier, Christine Duerring, and Laurie Reid for monitoring our conservation restrictions;

Kris Gunderman, Jim Herbert, and Laurel Facey for their volunteer work at our Skyfields office;

Rich Halloran for clearing a parking area for the new Accessible Nature Trail at Eagle Reserve Conservation Area, Steve Rawson, Nick Diamond, Jim Diamond, Clare Green, Danny Monette, JoAnne McGee, Jerry Wagener, the TerraCorps class of 2018-19, Porter Transportation, and W.J Graves for donating time and materials for the Eagle Reserve Accessible Nature Trail project, and also Dick O'Brien from Conservation Works and Walker Korby from Terramor for managing trail construction;

Steve Roberto for leaf blowing the Gunnery Sergeant Jeff Ames Wheelchair-Accessible Nature Trail in Northfield, and Bill and Joanne McGee for having hanging tree limbs removed!

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Photo by David Kotker

Mount Grace's Youth Education Program hosts classes from the Royalston Community School on the new trails at our Eagle Reserve Conservation Area. Mount Grace offers multiple educational programs for students in Worcester and Franklin counties. Check out our annual appeal to see how you can help!