

the OAK LEAF

A PUBLICATION OF THE WHITE OAK LAND CONSERVATION SOCIETY

Fall/Winter 2008-09

Porcupine Hill Purchased by White Oak!

White Oak reached a major milestone last June: our first-ever property purchase. The 50-acre property, now called Porcupine Hill, was purchased from the Ecotarium (Worcester Natural History Society) for \$155,000 after six months of fundraising. Due to generous donors and many foundation grants, we actually exceeded our \$185,000 campaign goal and were able to allocate a significant amount of money to our Land Stewardship Fund.

How did we do it? Eighty-eight families and individuals responded to our appeal and contributed a total of \$41,000 to the campaign. The Commonwealth of MA awarded us a grant of \$60,000. The rest of the funding (the majority) came from the following foundations: the Fletcher Foundation and the Stoddard Charitable Trust, both of Worcester, the Fields Pond Foundation of Waltham, the Bafflin Foundation of Rhode Island, and the William P. Wharton Trust of



Porcupine habitat along the trail.

Boston. The campaign committee would like to thank all of our donors - your contribution helped conserve this land for the enjoyment of future generations (as well as the current one!) THANK YOU!!

An enthusiastic team of trailblazers has been hard at work creating a network of trails on the property this summer, chopping out mountain laurel and nailing colored disks to trees. The trail system, which will include two trails named by donors (the Peabody and Wilson families), begins at Route 31/Paxton Road a short distance before the town line. The main trail winds up through a mountain laurel plantation into an open forest and finally onto the high ledges which are the property's most dramatic feature. Our land abuts hundreds of acres of true wilderness lands owned by the City of Worcester and MA Dept. of Conservation and Recreation.

Keeping the land in its natural state will help protect the Holden/Worcester drinking water supply, as well as preserving important

wildlife habitat. Wildlife sightings so far have included deer, fox and mole salamanders, as well as evidence of coyote, pileated woodpeckers, owls, and moose. Because the land abuts the enormous reservation surrounding Kendall and Pine Hill Reservoirs, we expect moose and bear to be regular visitors.

Future work to create a small parking area awaits a formal agreement from the state (DCR), which owns the actual frontage on route 31. For now you can access the new trails by parking just off Route 31 (email us or call 829-4829 for directions). We'll keep you posted as to the official opening date, and all members and friends will be invited to the official opening party!

(The land abuts, but does not include, the former site of the Nature Training school buildings. NTS was a summer camp run by WNHS until the 1970s. The site with the camp buildings and the former observatory is being sold separately by the Ecotarium. The existing driveway cannot be used to access our new land.)



Anthony Costello marks a new trail.

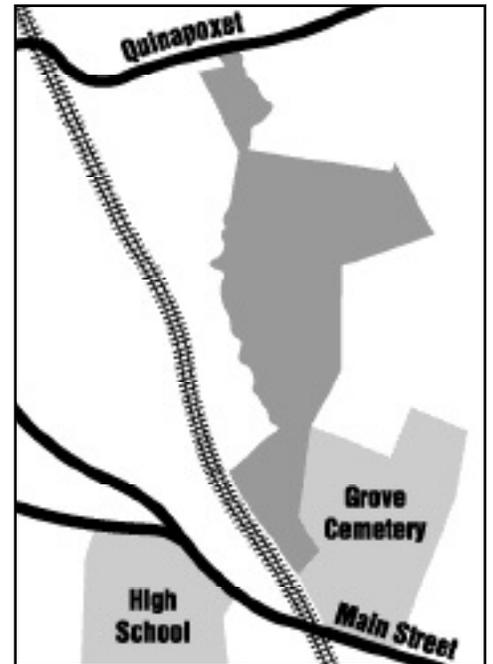


85 acres in Jefferson purchased by Dept. of Conservation and Recreation

Last June, the Department of Conservation and Recreation purchased 85 acres of land between Quinapoxet Street and Grove Cemetery from the Fletcher and Gardner/Dickman families. The majority of the land, 70 acres along Warren Tannery Brook, was purchased from the heirs of Robert Fletcher for \$530,000. Jim French, land acquisition coordinator for DCR, describes the land as “pristine woodlands and wetlands along an important tributary stream within the Wachusett Reservoir watershed” and notes that “the natural and ecological integrity of this brook from Grove Cemetery northward to Quinapoxet Street is now secured”. Warren Tannery Brook (named after the former tannery just south of Main St., next to the railroad tracks) feeds into the Asnebumskit and then into the Quinapoxet

River, one of the major sources of the water in the Wachusett Reservoir. DCR purchases land to protect the MWRA drinking water supply for metropolitan Boston and much of eastern Massachusetts. Additional good news is that the purchase was not paid for with taxpayer dollars, but rather with funds raised from water and sewer users in the MWRA cities and towns. The land had been previously considered for development prior to the sale.

The land can be accessed by a primitive trail which starts at the end of Dorothy Ave, part of the “maze” (see map – Dorothy Ave is just north of Grove Cemetery). Many residents of the Maze already use the land for hiking. All DCR lands are open to the public for many forms of non-motorized recreation.



AGRICULTURAL COMMISSION COMES TOGETHER IN HOLDEN



An adhoc group of Holden residents has begun meeting unofficially to discuss the creation of an AgComm for Holden. The commission, if approved by the selectboard, would represent the interests of the farming and agricultural community in Holden (yes, it does exist!) and act to promote agriculture in general. Benefits to the local community include continued presence of local foods for purchase at Farmer's Markets, and perhaps even an increase in the availability of these foods (think: honey, fresh eggs, fresh berries and vegetables all summer long). Another benefit is greater access to state funds for land conservation. To find out more about the effort, email Brenda Prachniak at brekei@verizon.net.



WHITE OAK LAND
CONSERVATION
SOCIETY

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White Oak is a member of the MA Land Trust Coalition and the Land Trust Alliance.



Our Trip to the State House, May 12, 2008

Special to The Oak Leaf

By: Mrs. Leith's 2007-2008 4th Grade students at Mayo School, Holden

(Last spring, Mayo School teacher Jennifer Leith was given an Excellence in Energy and Environmental Education Award by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts for her many years' leadership in outdoor learning with her students. Mrs. Leith invited her 22 students to accompany her to Boston for the ceremony, which honored several outstanding teachers. This is their report on their experience.)

On May 12, we went to the State House to accept our Environmental Award. The bus ride was great both ways, thanks to one of the parents that donated the cost. As we dove into history, our representative Lew Evangelidis gave us a super spectacular tour of the State House. We were in awe in the Hall of Flags.

Decked out in our Earth Day/Every Day T-shirts, thanks to Casela, the Mayo Rangers were announced in the House of Representatives. We admired the sacred cod, the spectacular stained glass windows, the portraits of our Founding Fathers and Governors. The Mayo Rangers were 4th to receive an Excellence in Energy and Environmental Education Award, plus a \$500 check.

We were very impressed to be among so many other environmentalists. We were PROUD! We went to lunch in the Public Gardens. As we approached the Swan Boats, we shared our lunches with the Public Garden animals, swans, squirrels, fish, ducks and chipmunks. The Make Way for Ducklings statue made way for Mayo Rangers and photo opportunities. Our day was focused on the importance of Environmental Education, sharing our state's history, and being proud to MAKE A DIFFERENCE in the world.

(White Oak volunteers join Mrs. Leith's class, nicknamed The Mayo Forest Rangers, in monthly explorations of the almost 100-acre woods behind the school. Each October, the Grade Four Rangers practice using a compass. Thanks to the Wachusett Regional High School science department, which loans 24 compasses, each student can have a compass in hand and learn to follow



Mrs. Leith in her office

that wiggling needle to find their way in and out of the woods. White Oak welcomes volunteer leaders who'd like to work with an elementary school class in outdoor education. It's great fun. Call Nancy Wilson (508) 829-5739 to hear more about it.)

Land Stewards: Hiking for a Good Cause

Every fall, when the leaves change color, our land stewards can be found out in the woods and fields, visiting our properties and the privately owned lands with conservation restrictions held by White Oak. Each property gets an annual visit – we walk the boundaries where feasible, monitor changes in land use and look for any signs of encroachment by abutters (such as dumping of trash, tree cutting/removal, etc). We also look for signs of rare/unusual plants or animals, which now includes the Asian Long-Horned Beetle.

This summer a group of new stewardship volunteers met at one of the White Oak CR properties for training from Anthony Costello (board member and property owner). Anthony versed us all in how to find hidden pins and pipe markers, where to look for (very small!) drill holes in an old

stone wall, and showed us around a really beautiful property. We looked for signs of construction, excavation, and wetlands alteration among other things, but the process of stewardship feels more like a combination of orienteering, historic treasure hunting, and a great walk in the woods.

The people who volunteer as stewards come from all walks of life and are a diverse and interesting group. We have properties to suit a range of preferences, from strolling through mostly meadow to serious bushwhacking. Stewardship is one way that volunteers can learn about and enjoy the properties conserved by White Oak, and we are always looking for more volunteers, especially as we acquire more (and larger!) properties. You never know what you might see in the woods! If you are interested in becoming a stewardship volunteer, please contact Teresa Wolcott at wolcott51@charter.net.



ANNUAL MEETING TOPIC: ASIAN LONG-HORNED BEETLE

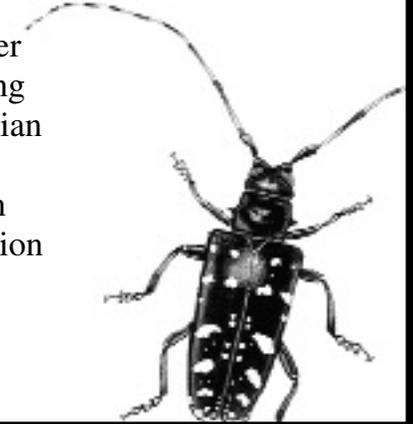
DATE: November 13, 2008

TIME: 7pm

PLACE: Holden Senior Center,
1130 Main Street, Holden

Come and hear Colin Novick of the Greater Worcester Land Trust, who will be speaking about the recent local infestation of the Asian Long-Horned Beetle. His talk will include maps showing affected areas, an update on plans to control the problem, and information on how to find and identify the insects.

A brief meeting and election of officers will precede the presentation.



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