

# the OAK LEAF

a publication of the white oak land conservation society

Winter/Spring 2005

## Muschopauge Brook Project Gets a \$400,000 Boost from Congress

For the past two years, White Oak and the Trust for Public Land have been collaborating with the City of Worcester to find a way to protect approximately 200 acres along the Muschopauge Brook, which runs near the Rutland-Holden town line. This wild area, which abuts the Holbrook swamp, has little evidence of human activity and harbors wildlife including moose, otter, beaver and fisher. The first piece of the puzzle fell into place when Rep. Jim McGovern announced that the U.S. Congress had approved a \$400,000 Forest Legacy grant for the project. The City of Worcester will be a major financial contributor. Additional funds are being sought from the State Executive Office of Environmental Affairs through the Drinking Water



Judy Haran, Chris LaPointe of TPL, Christy Edwards from MA Environmental Affairs, and Phil Guerin from Worcester DPW brave the snow to visit Muschopauge Brook

Protection program. The brook drains directly into the Quinapoxet Reservoir, which provides drinking water to residents of Worcester and Holden, before eventually entering the Boston water supply system. The completion of this project will represent the first success of the new TPL-Worcester Watershed partnership; other land acquisitions are in various stages of completion, including one in Holden on Tatnuck Brook. The partnership, brokered by White Oak, is featured on the TPL website, [www.tpl.org/massachusetts](http://www.tpl.org/massachusetts). Thanks to Rep. McGovern and Senators Kennedy and Kerry, as well as to our many members who wrote letters of support for this critical project! Stay tuned this spring for more info as the first acquisition nears completion.

## Harold Henrickson Donates 10 Acres

White Oak is proud to be the recipient of a very generous donation of approximately 10 acres of land from Mr. Harold Henrickson of Chapin Road. Mr. Henrickson's parents, originally from Finland, settled on lower Chapin Road in 1911, and raised a family of 6 children. Harold grew up there and lived there until his recent move to Worcester; his two sisters still reside on the street. He and his brother Alfred enjoyed hunting, and spent much time in the woods, both here and in southern Vermont. He is the proud uncle of many nieces and nephews. The land includes part of Tatnuck Brook, as well as love-

ly open fields and woodland. Mr. Henrickson wanted his land to be permanently preserved in its natural state, and hopes that his gift will inspire similar generosity from other Holden landowners. Current plans for the land include yearly mowing of the open fields to ensure preservation of this important habitat for birds. The size of the parcel is ideal for a neighborhood wildlife preserve, especially as it abuts preserved "common land" in the Fox Hill subdivision.

Harold Henrickson and his sister Mary Eaton, and granddaughter Leah Franklin





## First Paid Staffer Joins The Team

**W**e decided a year ago we needed staff," White Oak President Judy Haran said. "We knew it was time to grow: now or never."

With the help of member donations and a grant from the Greater Worcester Community Foundation, White Oak and two other land trusts (Grafton and Sterling) have hired Richard Muehlke as their first paid staff person.

As Land Trust coordinator, Rick is responsible for pulling together resources, coordinating volunteers, and helping with day-to-day tasks such as newsletter and membership mailings. He's at the 1217 Main Street office on Wednesdays and Thursdays, and spends the rest of week in Grafton and Sterling. Rick comes to the job with lots of experience, having been volun-



*Rick Muehlke hard at work saving land*

teer president of the Groton Conservation Trust for the past five years; he also has been involved in the conservation of his

family's land in New Hampshire. His life experience also includes a stint in the US Navy and several years working for Verizon in sales. He and his family live in Groton.

"We have about a decade left in which to determine what Holden will look like forever", said president Judy Haran. "We can best use that time by launching an all-out effort to preserve the best of what's left in Holden. Rick will be a big part of that all-out effort."

If you'd like to help determine what Holden will look like in the future, either by donating time or conserving your own land, give Rick a call at (508) 612-4057. We're looking for volunteers to help with both indoor and outdoor tasks, including newsletter production, mailings, events, and land stewardship.

## 120-Acre Bovenzi Park Opens on Holden/Worcester Line

**A**fter eleven years of work, the Greater Worcester Land Trust and Massachusetts Audubon Society announced that 120 acres in northern Worcester, just south of the Holden line, are being permanently preserved as a park. Leominster developer Peter Bovenzi donated 80 of the acres, and another 40 acres have been acquired. The land runs from the end of Nelson Street in Holden down to the Ridgewood Road area, off Ararat Street in Worcester. The eastern boundary is near route 190, while part of the land's western edge borders Brattle Street. The land had once been slated for development of as many as 532 housing units. After Mr. Bovenzi acquired the land, only 40 dwellings were built, and the rest was conserved. The parcel contains one of the last remaining undeveloped hilltops in Worcester, Laurel Mountain, as well as part of Weasel Brook and several vernal pools; it's 80% upland and 20% wetland. After years of working with the Greater Worcester Land Trust and MA Audubon's Broad Meadow Brook, Mr. Bovenzi went on to found the Leominster Land Trust to



preserve open space in Leominster and Fitchburg; he is currently working on a 100-acre project which will leave 75 acres of open space. GWLT will own the parcel, while MA Audubon will hold a conservation restriction on it. Congratulations to our Worcester colleagues on a job well done! (Thanks to the Telegram and Gazette for providing details on this great story; see the full report on page B1 in the January 16,

2005 issue.) Check out Greater Worcester Land Trust's website at [www.gwlt.org](http://www.gwlt.org) for details about the park.

### THANK YOU:

**Richard Johnson**, for sharing his wildlife photos at the Annual Meeting

**Jack Namiotka**, for providing free office space, not to mention heat and electricity!

**Jed Mannis** of the Shelter Island Fund for ongoing consultation

**Joe Gauthier** of PLACES Site Consultants for land survey work

**Henry Beth** of Mountain, Dearborn & Whiting, for consultation

**Carron Mentzer** at the Holden Assessor's Office for helping with names and addresses

**Greater Worcester Community Foundation** for grant for collaborative staff project

**Greater Worcester Land Trust** and **Mass Audubon** for ongoing project support



## Formation of New Partnership

The Wachusett Working Landscapes Partnership (WWLP) was officially launched at a meeting on November 18, 2004. Among its charter members are White Oak and Wachusett Greenways. Based out of the Mass. Watershed Coalition office in Leominster, the partnership will focus on protecting drinking water supplies through land conservation and smart growth. The focus area includes Holden, Hubbardston, Leominster, Paxton, Princeton, Rutland, Sterling, and West Boylston. Coordinator Ed Himlan notes that WWLP will support and coordinate the work of local conservation groups such as White Oak. "Private-public partnerships are essential if we're going to protect drinking water supplies, recreational opportunities, wildlife habitat, working forests and farmland, and the rural character of central Massachusetts", he notes. For more information, call Ed at 978-534-0379.

### WANTED:

- Small office-size copier
- Business sponsor to underwrite future newsletters
- Laptop computer
- Underwriter for property signs



### WHITE OAK LAND CONSERVATION SOCIETY

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Richard Harris

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

## New Board Members



Richard Harris and Nancy Wilson  
join the board for 2005

Nancy Wilson and Richard Harris (who happen to be married to each other) have agreed to serve on the board for 2005. Nancy, a former board member who resides in Holden and Grafton, continues to feel passionately about land conservation. She heads the education committee, which distributes small grants to elementary school teachers. Her husband Richard, who lives in Grafton, is a retired executive with extensive non-profit administrative experience. Together, they bring a combination of enthusiasm and practicality which is hard to beat!

## Get Out and Do Something!

Like to get out on the land and away from the television? You might want to consider volunteering for a land stewardship position. No experience is necessary. One of our priorities for 2005 is to document the current status of our properties. The formal term for this is "base line documentation". Such documentation can be very formal, professional (and expensive!). Or it can be done by lay people like

us, as part of enjoying a few hours outdoors on our wonderful properties. Two outdoor workshops will be set up for February, where we will learn the basics of baseline documentation; we hope you will be able to make at least one of them. Past volunteers are being contacted directly. If you would like to be included, please email us at [info@whiteoaktrust.org](mailto:info@whiteoaktrust.org)

## Learning about Working Forests

Several hardy people, age 5 to 70, learned about forestry recently on conservation land owned by Chris and Sue Durham. The Durhams donated a conservation restriction on this 90-acre parcel in 2001. Like most private conservation land, this parcel is in Chapter 61, which requires a timber harvest once per decade. Forester Roger Plourde explained to the group how he had chosen which trees to harvest, according to the principles of sustainable yield forestry. The key, in this case, is the regeneration of red oak, the most valuable species of tree on the property (not only for logs, but also the most valuable for wildlife). Timber will be harvested differently on different parts of the parcel, depending on how existing oak saplings are expected to respond to the new conditions. The parcel remains in Chapter 61 status, (and on the tax



Members and friends learn about forestry from Roger Plourde

rolls!) and the owners are required by statute to harvest timber once per decade. Interesting sightings during the hike included fox tracks in the snow, and tree markings left by previous logging operations.



## Nature's Classroom

**W**hite Oak's nature education program is aiming for more muddy feet in 2005. Kids today don't spend much time in the woods. Reasons include the diminishing amount of undeveloped land, safety concerns and more structured after-school activities. If the learning and confidence that children once gained in the woods are not to be lost, it may be that schools should provide class time outdoors with resulting muddy feet.

Holden's schools are blessed with lots of adjacent open land: 15 acres at both Davis Hill School and Dawson (plus hundreds of feet of shoreline on Dawson Pond); 27 acres next to Mountview; and 72 acres of town forest between Mayo School and Malden St.

White Oak is offering grants to teachers interested in introducing their students to places "where the wild things are." Few classes make use of these natural classrooms. How can one teacher supervise and protect 25 kids in the woods? How can teachers with limited outdoor experience design lessons for students? And what about preparing kids for MCAS and other standardized tests?

White Oak's nature education committee is looking for answers to these questions from teachers, hoping to help them become outdoor as well as indoor leaders. If this education component of White Oak's mission interests you, leave your name and number at the office (508) 829-8083.

## Progress In and Under Eagle Lake

**T**he long tale of the deterioration of Eagle Lake began in the 1930's (see [www.whiteoaktrust.org](http://www.whiteoaktrust.org) for the full story). When we raised money for dam repair in 1993, everyone hoped the weed growth would dwindle, but surveys showed no change. We then decided on a draw-down, necessitating a lengthy permitting procedure; this was finally achieved last winter. In August 2004 biologist Robert Bertin surveyed plant growth again, sampling 17 open water locations and 13 shoreline spots. The change was dramatic. In the open water points weed cover had fallen from 30% to 2%. Areas that had 50% or more cover now showed open water. The median width of cover along the shoreline dropped from 42 feet to 30 feet, and the percentage cover of the shoreline areas from 40% to 20%.

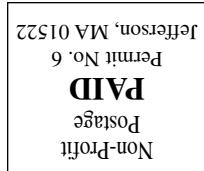
Some species of plants were more affected than others - variable milfoil and bladderwort, which are submerged, declined most; water lily, pickerel weed, pond weed, floating bur weed and wild celery, which grow mostly along the margins, showed little change. Floating bur weed is the least common species in the lake, and on the state watch list, so it is gratifying that it remained healthy. The most common species appear to have been most affected. Stump Pond, on the far side of Causeway Street, is only connected by a culvert to Eagle Lake, so it is not affected.

Last year the draw-down was managed by pulling up some of the stop logs at the dam with ropes. This year DPW devised an elegant winch. The drop of 2 feet has not had any known impact on fish and other animals, though this is harder to assess. A larger drop in level might reduce weeds further, but might also harm fish and amphibians. We may decide to vary the frequency, not drawing down every year, depending on future results.

### Winter Carnival Arrives February 6th!

**T**ROUT Brook Conservation Area on Manning Street will once again be the location for the annual Winter Carnival, an event that dates back to White Oak's early days in the late 1970s. Come and join members and friends for both indoor and outdoor events – music, hot chili, nature exhibits, tractor-drawn hayrides, guided nature walks, snowshoeing and cross-country skiing (weather permitting). The fun begins at 11am and wraps up around 3pm. Admission is free, and there is a nominal charge for food. It's a great event for families, and a fun way to spend a Sunday afternoon!

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