

the OAK LEAF

a publication of the white oak land conservation society

Spring/Summer 2004

Letter from the President

White Oak has reached a milestone this year. For the first time we have our own office (thanks to the generosity of Jack Namiotka!) and funds to hire our first staff person (see article on Greater Worcester Community Foundation grant). Combined, these represent a quantum leap in effectiveness for us: after years of operating out of someone's house, we'll now be able to operate more reliably and predictably. Someone will be there to answer the phone, to produce newsletters and mailings, and to help with all those routine matters that keep us running. The board's time will be freed up to work on what really matters the most – **helping**

landowners to conserve their land.

In this issue we also take a look at something new – **Baseline Documentation**. Like many land trusts, White Oak has started to create permanent data files on each of our properties, including detailed photos and maps of what the land was like at the time we acquired the parcel or conservation restriction. Nationally, the land trust community is moving towards adopting formal operating standards, and baseline documentation is one of them. If the land's conservation status is challenged in the future, we must be able to defend it; hence, documentation is essential. We're looking for more volunteers to help with the outdoor part of

this work. Call us if you want to help with this exciting, demanding project.

Land projects in the pipeline: we can't give out any details yet, but four projects totaling over 350 acres are in the works this spring! Two of these involve our partners, the Trust for Public Land and the City of Worcester Water Dept. If all goes as planned, two of these projects will be completed before the next **Oakleaf** comes out. We'll try to get full reports into *The Landmark* as soon as negotiations are finalized, so stay tuned!

Judy Haram

Live Owl Show a Great Success

On Tuesday, April 27th, 150 people were delighted and amazed to meet Marcia Wilson of Eyes on Owls, who brought 6 of her disabled "ambassador" owls to Holden for a 2-hour presentation. At least 50 excited kids were eager participants in the hooting lessons, and were thrilled to meet a snowy owl, a great horned owl, and a Eurasian eagle owl at a distance of a few feet. The crowd was equally enchanted by the 4 ounce saw-whet owl, and its slightly larger companion, an Eastern screech owl, as Marcia walked through the room holding them on her gloved hands. At times it seemed the entire room was filled with smiles (and flashing digital cameras) as people took advantage of this chance to interact with these rarely-seen creatures of the forest and tundra. This great



wildlife encounter, jointly funded by White Oak and the Holden Cultural Council, was so successful that we hope to repeat it in 2006. If you were there and took any great photos, please send us a copy at info@whiteoaktrust.org.

THANK YOU

Thanks go out to **Jack Namiotka** of Holden Discount Oil, for donating office space in the "red building" at 1215 Main Street in the center of town. (Jack plans to refurbish the building, which contains additional great unused space. Contact him at 829-9585 if you might be interested in renting some!) We're also grateful to **Ron Thompson of the USDA** office on Boyden Road for donating several filing cabinets, chairs and a lamp; **Brandon Kibbe of Sudbury Valley Trustees** for donating 2 large book-cases; **Colin Novick of The Greater Worcester Land Trust** for donating a conference table, the **Dresser family** for donating several items from their extensive basement furniture collection; **Bill and Karin Green** for donating a comfortable armchair, **Susan Marsh Designs** for donating design work on our new signs, and **Anne Gillespie** for donating her time and talent as a carpet cleaner!



Notes From the Fields and Thickets

By: Anthony Costello

In the last two years, after tracking stone walls which mysteriously vanish in thickets of mountain laurel, or disappear into a frozen swamp, or trying to take a compass bearing in dense forest, I have acquired much empathy with surveyors. Like many land trusts, White Oak has been working recently on creating “baseline documentation” for our conservation lands. Finding and documenting boundaries is a critical part of this project. Being the “map person”, I pulled together the available topo, aerial and state maps, compared them to assessors’ maps, and was horrified to see how frequently they all disagreed.

A web search turned up a program called Deed Mapper, which turns the mysterious language of 18th century deeds into neat little maps. This made it clear that assessor’s maps are only an ingenious attempt to reconcile the irreconcilable. When the corner of a lot is described as “by a pile of stones”, or “by Silas Jude’s land” and a line is described as “in a Westerly direction, 300 rods or thereabouts”, mapping is difficult. Tracking down Silas Jude’s 18th century deed is likely to lead deeper into the morass of uncertainty.



George and Caleb Dresser examine a likely property boundary with the help of Anthony Costello

I’m lucky enough to have a consumer-style GPS unit, a handy device that picks up signals from satellites and tells me where I am in longitude/latitude. (Professional ones require one to wear an aerial on one’s head!)

My first challenge is finding the “pile of stones” mentioned in the deed; with luck a previous owner left a blaze on a tree or a stake in a wall. These markers are known in the trade as monuments. When I first came across this term I had visions of mossy statues deep in the woods; in reality it might be only an old tin can lid nailed to a tree. By

telling the GPS the position of the corners marked on the assessor’s plan, one can steer to about the right place; after that, it is a matter of scrambling through mountain laurel for anything that might be a monument.

With the help of Nick Holland, a consultant from Mass Audubon, we’ve been defining boundaries on a large parcel off Route 31 (a current conservation project). All boundary corners and “monuments” must be photographed and recorded with the GPS location, together with pictures of the interior, in order to provide a record of the land’s condition to help us defend it in the future from intrusions or misuse. We are accumulating a substantial album of pictures of trees! We’ll also record evidence of wildlife and other natural features such as vernal pools. Over the next two years we’ll be creating such records for all our properties. Does this sound like fun to you? Imagine combining detective skills, history, botany and zoology, hiking in the woods, with some light math and photography – if this sounds like something you’d like to help with, let us know! We can be reached at info@whiteoaktrust.org.

New Endangered Salamander Habitat Found in Jefferson!

While exploring a newly reported vernal pool on the northern edge of Trout Brook recently, Steve Genatossio of the Vernal Pool SWAT Team was thrilled to discover a four-toed salamander under a clump of moss (it’s on the state list of endangered species). “I’ve probably turned up a thousand pieces of moss, and this is the first time I’ve found one of these guys!”, he said. Fortunately, Steve King of The Landmark was there to record the event. We plan to report this finding to the Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program very soon - it’s the first such finding in Jefferson!



Education Committee Notes

The education of children and their families to the beauty and importance of the natural world around us has always been a White Oak priority. Grants given by the White Oak Education Committee have supported Holden’s teachers’ efforts to bring nature and environmental education to classrooms and schoolyards. A total of \$2,100.00 has been awarded for the current school year to fund grants submitted by teachers from Dawson, Davis Hill, Mayo and Mountview Schools to get children outside and connect them with their natural environment.

Teachers and their fifth grade students at Dawson School will be exploring the vernal pools on the school property as a unique wetland ecosystem. Another group of teachers will be helping their students upgrade the existing nature trail at the school so that it can be better enjoyed by the whole school community.

Davis Hill kindergarteners and their fifth grade Buddies have been studying ‘nature in their backyard’ at the school and will be building bird houses together later this month.

Massachusetts Audubon education specialist Doug Kimball presented a program describing the abundance of nature in our own backyards.

At the Mayo School, a school-wide effort to build an Appreciation Garden highlighting the studies of erosion, soils and the water cycle is being partially funded by a grant from White Oak. A photography project at Mountview Middle School will encourage students to use their observation skills as they document food chains, energy pyramids and symbiotic relationships.

The Education Committee will be honoring our teachers with a Tea on June 3, 2004 at 3:30 in the Town Hall.



Community Preservation Act – Pay Now or Pay Later?

By: George Dresser

Recent publicity on the CPA has focused on it being a “tax on a tax”. Read this essay by White Oak’s founder before you decide, and see why a “yes” vote by Holden will save us money over the long haul, for as little as 82 cents/day per household.

Holden’s open space lovers must get out and vote on May 10th . Our remaining farms and forests are disappearing fast. Within a generation, whatever we have not protected will be developed. Time is short, and money to buy land is hard to come by. The Romney administration has slashed funding for state land acquisition, even for the Wachusett watershed program which has protected so much land in Holden. White Oak, despite its recent successes, does not have “deep pockets” – we rely on the generosity and conservation ethic of landowners who donate conservation restrictions for the common good.

Many people would like to see their land preserved but cannot afford to do so. They need to sell their land, usually to a developer. The CPA would provide the town **with a regular source of revenue for land conservation**. When significant parcels of land come on the market, the Town would then be able to consider buying them for conservation.

The CPA would provide funds to the Town from two sources: a property tax surcharge (about **\$30 per year for an average house**), and a state-wide fee on real estate transactions. We all pay this fee whenever we buy or refinance real estate. Money



Sample of unprotected open space in Jefferson


raised by this fee goes into a secure fund and is spent **ONLY** in the towns that have adopted the CPA (65 so far). If we adopt the act, locally-raised funds will be matched by this protected source of money. The ballot proposal calls for a surcharge of 1.5% of real estate taxes, with the first \$100,000 of assessed value exempt. This will cost the average household about \$30.00 per year, and will generate about \$360,000, including the state match, giving Holden a predictable revenue stream for land conservation, historic preservation, and affordable housing.

About the “pay later” part: if we choose to let the free market take its course, almost

all of the remaining land will be developed. Within one generation, the population of Holden will increase by 5000-6000 people (possibly more). We’ll have to build at least two more elementary schools. We’ll have to hire more town employees to take care of all the new roads as well as the public safety needs of these new neighborhoods. Study after study has shown that revenue from new development will not cover these costs. **Much of the cost of providing services/education for new homes will be paid for by all of us in the form of higher property taxes.** And the experience of living and raising kids here will be changed forever - Holden after “buildout” will have a lot **LESS** open space for wildlife and recreation, and a lot **MORE** traffic congestion. (Sort of like living close to Boston, without the advantage of the shorter commute.)

We can protect our quality of life here in Holden. We can keep our historic properties intact, preserve some of the open land we have left, and provide diverse housing stock so that people who grow up here can afford to stay here. It’s all about keeping Holden a good place to live.

Vote YES on Ballot Question #1 on May 10.

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 Jo-Anne Crystoff
 Susan Durham
 David Sabourin
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 White Oak is a member of the MA Land Trust Coalition and the Land Trust Alliance.

Vernal Pool Discoveries

What a great spring this has been for Vernal Pool explorers! After the Landmark published the notice of the VP SWAT Team, lots of you called in to report the location of your local vernal pools, 80% of which were uncertified and unknown to us previously. (Several folks from the Flagler Drive and Highland Ave area called in about the same pool complex, which was certified some time ago by an unknown benefactor.) We now have



One of the younger members of the vernal pool team gets his feet wet

data and photo documentation on at least 10 new pools, and we’re not done yet! If you haven’t called in yet to report yours, do so ASAP (hint - quacking sounds coming from wooded areas in the evening a few weeks ago indicates a vernal pool) so we can get out there and photograph “evidence” such as salamander and wood frog egg masses. Please try to find out who owns the land, and ask them if it’s OK for us to explore – we avoid trespassing as much as possible!



No place like home



Our new office at 1215 Main Street

\$12,500 Grant Announced from Greater Worcester Community Foundation

The Greater Worcester Community Foundation has given a “thumbs up” to a **collaborative project** submitted by White Oak in association with the Grafton Land Trust and the Sterling Land Trust. When added to other anticipated funding, the grant will allow us to hire a Development Coordinator to be shared among the 3 organizations. This person will help increase revenue, membership, major donors, volunteers and visibility, and will work from 3-5 days/week, depending on the

results of other pending grant applications. Activities for White Oak and Sterling Land Trust will be based in the new White Oak office at 1215 Main Street, Holden. The ultimate expected result? An **accelerated pace** of land conservation in Central Massachusetts, and the **synergy** of three land trust sharing ideas, energy, and resources! Let us know if you know of anyone who might be just right for this new position!

New Members in 2004

We're happy to welcome these individuals and families who've joined recently:

Betsy & Steven Alspach
Steven & Caroline Ayres
Mary Ballard
Cynthia Bazinet
Mr. & Mrs. Henry Beth
Renee & Stephen Brodeur
Mr. & Mrs. William Carrick
Mr. & Mrs. Thomas Caruso
Richard & Sarah Claytor
Mary Dunker
Mr. & Mrs. Steve Genatossio
Dee Anne Grebinar
Marge Grosberg
Susan Hall
Kathy Hancock & Mark Hecox

Richard Harris (Grafton)
Mr. & Mrs. Edward Hayes (Rutland)
Judith & Olympio Jeon-Chapman
Mr. & Mrs. Gerald Kristoff (Rutland)
Dr. & Mrs. David Lyons
Janet Meymaris
Mr. & Mrs. Herbert Pope
Dr. & Mrs. Arthur Powell
Kathy Price
Catherine Roberts
Susan Sedgwick
Pam & Chris Sheldon
Mr. & Mrs. Matthew Stevens
Mr. & Mrs. Jeff Summit
Sharon Taubert
Brenda & Ed Weathersbee
(Our apologies if we missed anyone!)

White Oak Reaches Out to the Younger Fit



David Sabourin and his little league friends show off our new sign at Chaffins Field



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