

Eagle Lake Dam

Eagle Lake is an approximately 100-acre pond located to the south of Main Street and west of Kendall Road in Holden, Massachusetts. Eagle Lake exists as an open water body only by virtue of a substantial dam located at the extreme north end. The pond was originally constructed to provide hydropower to run the mill located below the dam, but has not been utilized for that purpose in many years. A small section of the water body known as “the mill pond” is located just above the dam and is owned by White Oak Land Conservation Society (WOLCS) while the larger portion of the pond is owned by the Town of Holden. The Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation, Office of Dam Safety (“ODS”) lists the owners of various portions of the dam structure as: WOLCS, Mill Pond Realty Trust, and CB Sundin Rentals, LLC.

The dam is listed as a high hazard dam, which is defined as “Dams located where failure will likely cause loss of life and serious damage to home(s), industrial or commercial facilities, important public utilities, main highway(s) or railroad(s)”. Furthermore, the dam has been downgraded and deemed to be “structurally deficient” in “poor” condition. As such, WOLCS must take steps outlined by the ODS.

WOLCS has previously funded limited masonry repairs, however recent maintenance of the dam has been limited, consisting of the removal of woody vegetation and mowing of the dam by WOLCS volunteers. The other dam owners have either done little to no maintenance or stated that they do not own any portion of the dam and therefore have no dam obligations. The DCR ODS has notified all three listed owners of their determination that the dam is “structurally deficient” and “in poor condition.” In response to this determination from ODS, WOLCS is filing a Notice of Intent with the Holden Conservation Commission



proposing the lowering of the water elevation of Eagle Lake. The goals of this work are to:

- reduce the volume of water impounded upstream of the dam and thereby lower the risk to downstream persons and properties;
- allow WOLCS to repair the concrete spalling on the portion of the dam owned by WOLCS; and
- allow other owners the opportunity to complete maintenance tasks on their respective portions of the dam.

WOLCS does not have the funds to completely remove the dam at this time, nor does WOLCS have the funds to indefinitely conduct the necessary maintenance and ongoing inspections required to occur every other year. As a result, WOLCS deems it necessary to take all steps to comply with the DCR ODS requirements and limit risk associated with the significant volume of water within the impoundment above the dam. 🌿

“An optimist is the human personification of spring.”

—Susan J. Bissonette

“Wild Encounters” Brings Wild Enthusiasm

White Oak was fortunate to host a presentation from a group called “Wild Encounters” on Saturday, March 11. Billed as an opportunity to “Take a break from hectic modern life and get the family back in touch with nature,” the program featured a hands-on “meet and greet” with several friendly animals.

The event, which was free and open to the public—like all of White Oak’s programs—attracted well over 325 attendees, ranging in age from preschoolers to adults. The audience was treated to a fascinating presentation about wild animals, the highlight being the alligator, frog, bunny, Gila monster, and several other animals, which the audience was welcome to meet.

White Oak board member Jennifer Leith, who organized the event, expressed enthusiasm for the results. “Not only was the program wonderful, but we had a great turnout, thanks to lots of local media support. I hope future programs are as successful as this.” 🌿



“Wild Encounters” show enthusiastic audience members some of their most fascinating animals.

Photos by Jennifer Leith



“Wild Encounters” speak with a diverse group of more than 350 participants ranging from preschoolers to adults.

Photo by Jennifer Leith



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



Springtime = Vernal Pools

Spring peepers have already begun their distinct calls throughout the commonwealth, in large part because their favorite habitat has reappeared: the vernal pool. Vernal means “of the spring.” These pools appear seasonally with spring rains and usually disappear sometime in the summer. Because they are not permanent bodies of water, fish and other predators of amphibians and their eggs are not able to reside in vernal pools, making them safe breeding grounds. Vertebrate vernal pool residents usually spend the winter buried under leaf cover nearby, and return to the pool on a rainy night in March.

The Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife has a process by which vernal pools can be certified, which affords these pools added protection, and, in turn, protects the wildlife that depend on them. Suspect you have a vernal pool on your property? Consider certifying it, and know that you are helping your local ecosystem. Visit this website for more details: <http://www.mass.gov/eea/agencies/dfg/dfw/natural-heritage/vernal-pools/vernal-pool-certification.html> 🌿



Photo Credit: Paul McManus

Earth Day Everyday – 5 Easy Ways You Can Help the Earth

Earth Day took place on Saturday, April 22, but as a White Oak supporter, you probably are concerned about conservation the other 364 days, as well. Here are five easy ways you can do your part.

1. ENCOURAGE POLLINATORS.

Bees, butterflies, and hummingbirds are the most commonly known, although there are other native pollinators. By planting pollinator-friendly plants, such as milkweed, goldenrod, and bee balm, and not spraying chemicals on your yard, you'll encourage these beneficial critters.

Bonus: If you have a backyard garden, it will likely be more bountiful.

2. COMPOST. Composting does not have to be complicated. Just keep a small pail in your sink for vegetable scraps and put the scraps in a pile outside each day. Even if you do not use the compost, those nutrients will be going back to the earth instead of into a landfill.

Bonus: You use fewer trash bags.

3. BUY LOCALLY GROWN FOOD.

Locally grown food is likely to be fresher, and it uses less vehicle emissions to get it to your plate.

Bonus: You'll be supporting a local farmer, which in turn supports open land use over development.

4. DON'T WASTE FOOD. Whether or not you buy locally, each time you throw away edible food it costs the environment, as well. The resources that went into growing and processing your food are all wasted if you do not eat it.

Bonus: It saves you money, too.

5. SUPPORT LAND CONSERVATION.

Well, that's an obvious one, and hopefully you're already supporting White Oak, your local land trust. Support does not always require financial donations. Volunteering your time is another way to help the environment, whether through organized cleanups, serving on a volunteer board, or working as a trail steward. The possibilities are endless.

Bonus: It gets you outside and keeps you active!



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Nancy Wilson's White Oak

Our last issue of the *Oak Leaf* announced we were naming the largest white oak on White Oak property after longtime board member Nancy Wilson. The mailing was sent out only days before Nancy's death on November 3. We want to again acknowledge her importance to White Oak by printing here the announcement we sent out at the time:

With heavy hearts, we report the passing of longtime board member Nancy Wilson. We recently honored Nancy by naming the largest white oak on White Oak property after her, a 240-year-old tree found at our Waterman property, on Salisbury Street.

Nancy was devoted to many causes, including White Oak, where she spent over 30 years as a board member. We would not be the organization we are today without her hard work. Her legacy lives on.

White Oak will be building a trail to this special white oak and a memorial bench for Nancy so that others will be able to appreciate her legacy, as well.

