

THE

Oak Leaf

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WINTER 2018

Holbrook Forest Extension

by
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In 1902, two developers seized the opportunity to develop a piece of farmland right on the northern edge of Worcester, in what had once been called Worcester North. They christened the development Tory Fort Heights--so-named for the group of loyalists in Worcester who retreated to Stone House Hill, just north of the farmland, at the time of the revolution. The developers projected an extension of Dawson Road across Olean Street, and registered a plan with 220 house lots. Of these they sold eighty-six, though no roads had been laid out and so far as we know the lots had not even been surveyed.

Not surprisingly, the development failed without a single house or road in place. The developers had raised money by mortgaging the land, and eventually Walter Holbrook, the mortgagor, foreclosed. Holbrook's holdings eventually passed to the next generation, who then decided to make more use of the land--most of which had reverted to forest. The family decided to sell some for development, but the 1902 project had left a large area with uncertain title.

Since the late 1990s, White Oak and Greater Worcester Land Trust had sought to create a conservation corridor along the Worcester/Holden boundary. GWLT had

Photo by Anthony Costello



Photo by Jacqueline Lynn

already purchased, with help from White Oak, a large piece of the Girls Inc. land known as Camp Kinneywood in 2008--and that land abutted the Holbrook land. White Oak was also exploring the possibility of acquiring land left over from the Oak Hill cluster development on the other side of Salisbury St. In 2013, the White Oak board decided to purchase the Holbrook

land with poor title in order to extend the corridor; and as the family's remaining land was destined for more restricted development, White Oak expressed an interest in purchasing a lot that would enable access from Salisbury Street.

The owners generously agreed to design the five lots they planned so that one would be suitable for the land trust,

“Laughter is the sun that drives winter from the human face.”

—Victor Hugo

Climate Change on the Coast

White Oak's annual meeting on Thursday, November 30th featured a compelling presentation by Dr. Julie Simpson from MIT's D-Lab. Dr. Simpson, a coastal aquatic ecologist, gave a broad overview of climate change, and then delved into the shifts we are already seeing, predictions for the future, and what we can do. Dr. Simpson paid particular attention to New England, which is already seeing faster sea level rise than the global average--and where the number of five-year, two-day weather events (those extreme two-day storms that typically happen only once every five years) have increased by 92% over the past 50 years. Her talk was especially prescient given the coastal flooding we saw this winter.

Literature, too, can tell us something about climate change: Dr. Simpson discussed the work of biologist Richard B. Primack of Boston University, who has used Henry David Thoreau's careful observations in Walden to determine what a warming climate has wrought in the intervening 163



Dr. Julie Simpson

years since the book's publication. Thoreau meticulously recorded the first flowerings of hundreds of species of plants, the return of migratory birds, the breakup of ice on Walden Pond, and the first bursts of leaves on trees. Primack and his students discovered that, although the ice breaks up on Walden Pond 18 days earlier than in Thoreau's time, and flowers and leaves appear two weeks earlier, migratory birds still return at the same time--meaning that they miss the chance to eat the food

they need to produce a clutch of eggs. And twenty-five percent of the plants that Thoreau documented are completely gone now.

Despite the grim reality of her subject matter, Dr. Simpson ended on a hopeful note: the work of mitigation, adaptation, and prevention is ours to tackle. We will experience the effects of climate change as communities, so we should plan for them as communities. We can make a real difference by:

- Reducing food waste
- driving and flying less
- improving public transportation
- increasing under-road culvert size
- planting more heat-tolerant species
- replacing impervious surfaces with permeable ones
- putting pressure on local, state, and federal government to comply with the Paris Accords
- and preserving open space! 🌿

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Photo by Jacqueline Lynn

including some interesting wetland and a connection with Salisbury Street. White Oak offered the appraised value of the lot, but was not able to raise enough grant support to make the purchase. Colin Novick of GWLT suggested that the Town of Holden might acquire the land with the help of the Land and Water Conservation Fund, and after a lengthy application process, the town was given a grant for half of the appraised value. White Oak and GWLT have raised the other half, and so this year the town will acquire the land. This purchase will provide improved access to Holbrook Forest, and will extend the area conserved by the land trusts to a total of over 140 acres. 🌿



WHITE OAK

LAND CONSERVATION SOCIETY

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



UPCOMING EVENTS – FREE & OPEN TO ALL!

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 15th

Join us on Thursday, February 15th at 6:30pm at Mountview Middle School for an evening with natural historian and wildlife tracker Sue Morse (keepingtrack.org). Ms. Morse's engaging programs cover everything from identifying wildlife tracks in order to monitor local species, to youth programs that bring the natural sciences to life. She will be presenting a talk titled "The Cougar Returns to the East;" copies of her books and photographs will be available for sale (cash or check only). Ms. Morse recently returned from an expedition to the Canadian High Arctic, and she has some thrilling tales to tell!



SATURDAY, APRIL 7th

On Saturday, April 7th, we are delighted to be bringing Wildlife Encounters back for an encore visit! Please join us at 10:30am at Mayo Elementary School for this exciting program. Many of you will recall the event from last March, which brought hundreds of attendees of all ages. Our friends from Wildlife Encounters Ecology Center will be on-site with more animal friends for participants to meet and greet. It's sure to be an event filled with fun, fur, fins, and feathers; you won't want to miss it!





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P.O. BOX 346

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Volunteering is Where It's At

Want to help White Oak conserve and protect open space, but don't know where to start?

We hold regular volunteer work parties at a variety of properties, usually on Saturday mornings. No experience or special equipment is necessary—though we wouldn't say no if you brought your own gloves and/or loppers—and there's no ongoing commitment. In the winter, the work slows down, but when the weather warms up, we'll be back out there on the trails and looking for some volunteers who want to get some fresh air and exercise!

Information about the work parties is typically announced via our e-newsletter, the Acorn.

To sign up for the Acorn, visit bit.ly/WOAcorn and enter your contact information.

Looking to get even more involved?

We are actively seeking new board members.

Contact info@whiteoaktrust.org for more information about joining.

