



# LAND TRUST NEWS

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## ***ACT 2001 Annual Meeting***

On February 8, the Acton Conservation Trust held its annual meeting at the New View Common House on Half Moon Hill. After conducting the annual business meeting, it co-sponsored (with OAR, the Organization for the Assabet River) presentation on "**Open Space and Preservation of Wildlife: The Legislative and the Scientific View**". This discussion was led by Pam Resor and Frances Clark and their remarks are summarized below. We enjoyed excellent attendance and all were very pleased and inspired by the program.

During the business meeting officers and board members were elected. The board was expanded and we welcome our new members Peter Lowitt and Bill Brandon. The new officers and the Board are all listed at the end of this newsletter.. The Conservation Restriction Committee reported that since their educational forum on CR's last November, they have received many new inquiries from landowners, and we have been hard at work conservation options.

## **Town Forms Open Space Committee**

At the behest of Selectmen Peter Ashton, the Town has formed an Open Space and Recreation Committee, Its first meeting was on Tuesday, March 13. Members include Peter Ashton, Selectman; Laura Sikalis of the Recreation Committee; Jane Ceraso, Water District staff person, Tom Tidman, Director of Natural Resources, Dick Hatfield, concerned citizen, Linda McElroy, chairperson of the Land Stewardship Committee, Morene Bodner, co-chair of the Open Space and Recreation Committee, co-author of the original Open Space and Recreation Plan and Treas-

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### **What is a Land Trust?**

The Acton Conservation Trust is a non-profit, non-governmental organization that can hold conservation restrictions, accept gifts of land, accept tax deductible gifts to be used for open space preservations and that can purchase land for conservation purposes. It is one of more than 130 such Land Trusts in Massachusetts, and is a member of the Massachusetts Land Trust Alliance. More information is available at [ActonConservationTrust.org](http://ActonConservationTrust.org), or by e-mail to Susan Mitchell-Hardt at [dhardt@earthlink.net](mailto:dhardt@earthlink.net)

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urer of the Acton Conservation Trust, Barbara Smith, co-chair of the Open Space and Recreation Committee and co-author of the original Open Space and Recreation Plan, Bill Mullin, former Selectmen and Board member of ACT, Susan Mitchell-Hardt, President of the Acton Conservation Trust, and one each from the Planning Board, the Historic District Commission or Acton Historical Society (tba), and the Conservation Commission (tba)

One of the goals of this Committee will be to update the '96 Open Space and Recreation Plan. In addition, they will be putting together a town-wide survey on open space issues. This will be your opportunity, along with public meetings, to make your values and concerns known, all of which will help the Committee formulate and prioritize its objectives and goals.

## **Local Land Trusts Share Ideas**

On January 25, the Acton Conservation Trust hosted a first-ever meeting of representatives from area land trusts to explore the ways in which we could help each other achieve our land preservation goals. Twenty-five individuals representing Acton, Boxborough, Carlisle, Concord, Littleton, Stow, and Westford, along with the Sudbury Valley Trustees and Mass. Audubon, gathered to identify common interests and explore ways in which we could share resources

We discussed collaboration to preserve border properties and to address cross-town development. A joint role was envisioned for regional conservation challenges, such as the Littleton train station, golf courses in Acton and Westford, and development stemming from Cisco's arrival. Some suggested that programs begun by one Trust could be enlarged to include surrounding communities; trail connections and tracking programs would benefit from this cooperation.

The largest gain will come from sharing information and experience. Participants were hopeful that local trusts could pool knowledge and expertise about the Community Preservation Act, conservation restrictions, cluster development, and affordable housing. Older land trusts might share basic resources on trust operations, including the hard-won knowledge that comes from experience with taxes and accounting, mailing lists, publicity, insurance, and land stewardship. The meeting ended with a pledge to continue these highly valuable get-togethers, and it has already led to specific issue meetings.

## **BioDiversity in Acton and Surrounding Towns**

At the ACT annual meeting on Feb 8, Francis Clark lectured and presented a slide show on "Biodiversity in the SuAsCo (Sudbury, Assabet, Concord) Watershed". Clark, a botanist and environmental consultant, presented the results of a study designed to empower grass roots organizations, individuals and town governments to "conserve and restore natural biodiversity in the watershed by protecting and managing natural communities and focal species' habitat."

Biodiversity is defined as the number and types of species living in a particular habitat. Ms Clark addressed the problem of fragmentation of habitat caused by development, which has been documented by scientists to greatly diminish biodiversity over time. This leads to what is known as the 'edge effect'. Edge habitats receive more sun and wind, which impairs pollination and germination. Exposure to predators, toxic substances and spread of invasive, non-native plants is significantly increased. Species that require large tracts of land to survive will migrate or die. To prevent that effect, scientists call for the protection of large tracts of land - 1000 to 5000 acres in size - that are surrounded by "low-impact uses" and connected by wildlife corridors.

In her study Ms. Clark looked for large areas that had something unique to offer. She named forty six biodiversity sites that comprise, 48,000 acres. Of that area 45% has been preserved, and some of the remaining land has de-facto protection - because of wetlands and flood-plain regulations. But efforts are needed to preserve the rest.

Acton sites included in the plan: are Spring Hill / Robbins Mill Pond / Nashoba Brook; Grassy Pond; Will's Hole, Nagog Pond & Brook;

Great Swamp (lies within Acton, Stow and Maynard and contains one of the largest red maple swamps in the watershed); Fort Pond and Heath Hen Meadow.

## **Pam Resor Discusses Community Preservation Act**

After Frances Clark made a plea for preserving contiguous land to prevent fragmentation, we heard from Pam Resor (State Senator and ACT member) who gave us an overview of various open space and conservation related legislation. She also gave us details on the **Community Preservation Act**. This new law allows Towns, by Town Meeting vote to use up to a 3% property tax to create fund to be used for open space protection, affordable housing and historic preservation. Communities are required to set aside a

### **ACTON CLEAN UP DAY MAY 5TH**

The Trust is happy to sponsor the Acton Clean Up day - An annual event for many years now. A wonderful way for you to join with your neighbors and make a real difference in your neighborhoods. There will be supply stations and dumpsters (staffed by friendly volunteers who will fortify you with coffee and donuts!) at selected spots around town. Or you may simply gather your own supplies, family and friends and pick up litter at any spot of your choosing.

minimum of 10 percent each of these categories. Towns that elect this option are then eligible for state matching funds to be taken from a \$26M fund.

The Acton Board of Selectmen have elected not to consider such a proposition this year, as have many other surrounding towns. However, Bedford has already voted in the law and will have early access to the state funds. We hope to encourage a more complete consideration of this Act by the Town next year.

## Wildlife in Acton: Winter Nature Walks

This January, I and a dozen or more residents from Acton, Littleton, and Concord signed up for Winter Nature Walks (through the Recreation Department) with Tom Tidman, Acton's Natural Resources Director. We were treated to five snowy nature walks in the Acton Arboretum, Grassy Pond Conservation Area, Nagog Hill Conservation Area, NARA Park, and for the grand finale a walk on the ice at the Heron Rookery off of Littlefield Road in Boxborough.

The walks were a celebration of biodiversity. In particular, the walks through the Acton Arboretum and the heron rookery were very special. The walk through the Arboretum was especially memorable because Tom was able to point out many different kinds of animal tracks. (We stayed off the beaten path and bushwhacked most of the way. He always went first, in case we were on thin ice!). He pointed out fisher tracks where they had been out searching for rodents - we saw mouse and squirrel tracks; coyote and fox tracks vs. dog tracks. We learned that the fox tracks are always in a straight line because they are on a mission. Dog tracks, on the other hand, go every which way. We saw deer tracks and hoped to see otter tracks where Tom showed us suitable habitat. Tom also pointed out good owl habitat, though we didn't see one.

Our last walk was on the ice at the heron rookery. Tom led us out on the ice, which he had tested earlier in the day for thickness. He said that beaver activity can sometimes make the ice a little tricky in that it can be possible to fall through one layer of ice to a lower layer of ice. (None of that happened, in fact, by a miracle, no one even fell down!) Tom let us walk on top of a beaver lodge and showed us the little air holes on the top for them to breathe.

Every time we looked up we saw about 80 abandoned Great Blue Heron's nests, waiting for their occupants to return late this spring. The big surprise occurred when we scared a Great Horned Owl off her nest! Tom said he was concerned that having a Great Horned Owl nesting in the middle of the rookery would cause the herons to go elsewhere to nest.

Tom offers walks such as these all four seasons either through Community Education or the Recreation Department. It's a great way to experience biodiversity "up close and personal"!

**Susan Mitchell-Hardt**

## Update on Robbins Mill Pond Land Development

On February 26, the Planning Board held a public hearing on the proposed "Robbins Mill Estates" subdivision plan for 78 houses. There are a number of issues with this plan. The Town of Carlisle will not permit an exit from the rear of the development out Log Hill Rd. raising safety concerns. There are some questions about the viability of the resulting "hammer-head lots", and there are some problems with wetlands crossings causing the Planning Board to recommend the applicant look into alternative development in the back area.

The public hearing for the alternative plan: a Planned Conservation Residential Community (PCRC) subdivision plan for 115 single family condominiums for the site will be held on Monday, April 9 at 8:30 PM in Town Hall, Room 204. The Planning Board will again review the standard subdivision plan on 4/23 at 8:30 PM in Town Hall, Room 204.

## Massachusetts Biodiversity Days: Species Surveys in Acton

**Save the date: June 8 - 10, 2001**

Last year, as part of Biodiversity Day, dozens of Acton citizens, amateur and professional naturalists alike, enjoyed the chance to do birding & botanical surveys as well as surveys of streams and wetlands for turtles, and amphibians. The final tally of 319 species found and recorded put Acton in the top 10 in Middlesex County. And this was just a start.

The Acton Conservation Trust and The Acton Conservation Commission will again sponsor a series of walks and biological surveys in the upcoming biodiversity days. If you would like to help - either with planning or with leading walks, please contact Karen O'Neill at (koneill@tiac.net) or home phone 635-0237.



**SIGN UP FOR FYI:  
MEETINGS OF INTEREST**  
If you want to be on our e-mail list for meetings in the area related to land preservation and conservation, send your e-mail address to  
Susan Mitchell-Hardt  
dhardt@earthlink.net  
You'll be glad you did!

# Wetlands Protection Bylaw Upcoming Town Meeting Vote

(Submitted by Matthew Liebman, Chair of the Acton Conservation Commission and ACT member)

The Acton Conservation Commission has been working in the past year to revise its Wetland Protection Bylaws. Based on comments received at its first public hearing in February, the Commission has finalized a Warrant Article for Annual Town Meeting approval. The main purpose of these proposed revisions is to provide consistency with the Commonwealth of Massachusetts Wetlands Protection Act (WPA) by incorporating a new resource area under its local jurisdiction: "the Riverfront Area". The Riverfront Area is already under our jurisdiction through the Act, but not under our Bylaw. In 1997, the Rivers Protection Act passed and amended the Wetlands Protection Act to include this new Resource Area. Since then, many Town Conservation Commissions have been catching up to the Commonwealth by incorporating the Riverfront Area into their Bylaws, so as to make town bylaws as protective as the Wetlands Protection Act.

There are differences between the Town Bylaw and the Act that make it difficult for the Commission to implement its authority. This warrant article provides consistency with the Act in matters of regulatory jurisdiction and identification of wetland re-

source areas. Most of the proposed article is a revision or addition of definitions. For example, the Commission has defined in its bylaws a new term: "resource area". A resource area is an area subject to protection under the Bylaw with specific protected interests and defines the Commission's jurisdiction. The following are resource areas: wetlands, banks, vernal pools, lands subject to flooding, buffer zones and the riverfront area. (This concept of a resource area with specific protected interests is consistent with the Wetlands Protection Act.)

The Commission will be considering increasing its performance standards (i.e. setbacks) in its bylaws for a future town meeting vote

**Town Meeting Begins Monday April 2.**  
**Please come to debate this and other important issues on this year's warrant.**

## ACTON CONSERVATION TRUST BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Susan Mitchell-Hardt, President	369-9264	dhardt@earthlink.net
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Call or e-mail any time with your questions or comments.

Acton Conservation Trust  
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# Membership Application

Join with the many other Townspeople who support our efforts to preserve open space in Acton.

***(If you are already a member  
please pass this form onto a friend.)***

Our base of funds has been critical to funding land appraisals, working with owners on conservation restrictions and purchasing relevant publications.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

Please indicate the level of your tax deductible annual giving:

\$20 Individual       \$50 Family  
 \$100 Friend       \$500 Protector  
 \$500 Supporter       \$1,000 Patron  
Other \_\_\_\_\_

Make your check payable to the Acton Conservation Trust. An acknowledgement of your gift will be mailed to you.  
(Gifts of \$50 or more will be acknowledged with an ACT t-shirt as well)

Please contact me about how I can get more involved

I would like to receive e-mail notices of "Meetings of interest"

***"Buy Land - they're not making it anymore"***

## T-SHIRTS FOR SALE

You can wear our shirts with pride and show your support of land conservation. They cost only \$10 and have Mark Twain's well known statement printed in green on a tan shirt.

(Thanks again to Tom Tidman for designing our wonderful logo).

To order call Susan Mitchell Hardt at 369-9264 or send a check with your order to our PO Box.

