



PO Box 233
Sturbridge, MA 01566
508-347-9144
www.opacumlt.org
info@opacumlt.org

**December
2013**

from Jennifer's kitchen table...

I'll admit it. I often don't pay attention to Opacum's annual appeal when it arrives. This year when I opened my mailbox I made my usual note as to what day the appeal arrived. I brought in some wood, got the fire going, fed the cat, put on my jammies and, eventually, opened my mail. Don't get me wrong; this isn't because Opacum Land Trust isn't near and dear. It is due to the fact that the appeal is toiled over, drafted, re-written, edited, re-edited and eventually goes to print. By the time I get it in my mailbox I've read through it no less than 100 times!

This year, however, I felt different as I opened that envelope. Stewardship was our theme this year and after Howie wrote, Leslie re-wrote, Anne rearranged and I made final tweaks, we felt that we had put one of the most important, yet least understood, aspects of owning conservation land into a single word: **stewardship.**

What struck me the most was not the letter itself (I had read it so many times!) but the autumn-colored insert that Anne designed which summed up what stewardship is. I love it so much that it's hanging on my fridge! Opacum takes very seriously the role that stewardship plays with the land—the land that you helped us to protect. And you are the stewards of Opacum.

If you haven't yet, please take a second look at the annual appeal we sent you last month, and please give generously so that we may continue to be good stewards. Remember that you can log on to www.opacumlt.org and use *Network for Good* to make a secure contribution online.

To those of you who have already sent your year-end gift, thank you for your generosity and stewardship of Opacum Land Trust.

Stewardship provides a pathway to maintaining and improving habitat. It also provides a pathway, literally, for you. Think about the trails at Opacum Woods or the Thompson Preserve. Left alone, the trails become overgrown and eventually, impassable. Unless they are maintained the trails are lost. Where, then, will you walk in the woods?

Stewardship

establishes breeding territory this winter, maybe calling to us on an owl prowl.

***Your generosity enables Opacum to keep our trails open and safe for all to use.
Thank you for your stewardship of Opacum Land Trust.***

Your generosity may protect an old hemlock along a wooded path where a barred owl calls "Who-cooks-for-you?" as it



IT'S YOUR LAND TRUST. WHAT'S ITS FUTURE?

FROM OPACUM DIRECTORS JEN OHOP AND HOWIE FIFE

As Opacum is poised to begin its 14th year we have been grappling with, for lack of a better word, growing pains. The land trust has protected over 1,000 acres and relies on a core group of volunteers to maintain these fourteen properties and easements. These volunteers make sure each phone call is returned whether it is for a prospective conservation project or a question about invasive species. They plan events, go to meetings, invite people to support Opacum and write articles for the newsletter. In addition, the land trust is a business and there are obligations that must be met such as filing taxes, paying bills, monitoring our investments and making sure we have adequate insurance coverage.

How can a volunteer land trust do all of that while at the same time proactively protect more land? Do we need more volunteers? Yes. Do we need staff? This is something we should work towards. What do we need to do to move forward?

Opacum has always wanted to be the best land trust it could be, the little land trust that could. The past fourteen years have been a tremendous learning experience for everyone who has been involved and it has not been easy or perfect. At times it is overwhelming! Opacum has always continued to move forward. As with all businesses there forks in the road from time to time and the road taken can greatly affect the future.

Earlier this year, Chuck Knox, Executive Director at the Mass Land Trust Coalition (MLTC, www.massland.org), contacted Opacum to inform us about a pilot program

designed to assist small land trusts. With help from the Land Trust Alliance (LTA, www.LTA.org), the goal was to look at the nuts and bolts of this organization and assist it in taking a leap forward toward long-term effectiveness and sustainability. Over several months, Chuck and prominent conservation attorney Elizabeth Wroblika worked with Opacum to cover everything from policies to procedures to programs.

This was a great opportunity to identify what Opacum does well and where we need improvement. Chuck and Elizabeth are now guiding the board so that Opacum can be a better land trust and provide a framework for growth and stability. We are dedicated to moving this land trust forward. This will require extra time and effort from Opacum's directors and we welcome input from our membership on how to be a better land trust. As always, we welcome those who have time, talent or treasure to share with us as well!

Thanks to MLTC and LTA, in particular Chuck and Elizabeth, for the opportunity to set this ship on a course that keeps Opacum Land Trust at the forefront in our South-Central Massachusetts region.



2013 - 2014 Directors & Officers

Jennifer Ohop *President*
Leslie A. Duthie *Vice President*
Jennifer V. Morrison *Treasurer*
Kathleen Hunt *Clerk*
Howie Fife *Director, Stewardship & Properties*
Larry Lowenthal *Director*
Alan F. Smith *Director, Nominating Chair*
Scott Gerrish *Director*

STEWARDSHIP..... FOR THE BIRDS

Earlier this year Mass Audubon released *State of the Birds 2013* (available online at massaudubon.org) which delves into the status of the birds which breed here. Based on years of observation and study this report reveals the avian winners and losers in our landscape.

Some birds, like the Barred Owl and Wild Turkey, are doing well and have increased in numbers and also expanded their distribution in the state. Others, like the Brown Thrasher and Eastern Towhee, are declining. In fact, if you look through the report you will notice that many of the species that are dwindling have something in common: they depend on meadows and shrublands.

As you know, trees grow really well here. If a meadow is not maintained by occasional mowing it starts to get very brushy and shrubby. This is called succession, a natural process. Eventually the trees will return and the meadow is no more; it has become woods. The species that depend on habitats that are in earlier stages of succession would have relied on natural disturbance such as storms and beaver activity to open up new patches of habitat. With humans in the picture, however, this balance is a bit off kilter with our superior control of the landscape. Why then, not take this ability and give the losers a hand?

THIS IS WHERE STEWARDSHIP COMES IN.



At Opacum Woods, there is (was) a sandy, scrubby area at the north end of the property. It was used while the Mass Pike was under construction. While it was a staging area for material associated with that project, it actually turned

out to be a nice patch of early successional habitat. Opacum directors have been discussing this site as it is turning into woods, and we would like to keep its shrubby qualities.

Of course this will cost money. In addition to bolstering our stewardship funds to do a project such as this there are other options out there, not only for Opacum but also available to anyone who might want to improve wildlife habitat on their land. The Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program (WHIP) is available through the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and can provide technical

assistance and up to 75 percent cost-share to establish and improve fish and wildlife habitat. We are currently looking at our options for this site and WHIP is a great opportunity.

If you are interested in learning more about WHIP for your own benefit, please contact Fletcher Clark at the MA Department of Conservation and recreation via e-mail: fletcher.clark@state.ma.us or by phone at 413-262-2367.

And, if you love the birds, please consider making a donation to our stewardship fund.

FELLOW OPACUMS... WHAT DO YOU WANT?

A NOTE FROM THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

We hope that you, as a member/supporter of Opacum Land Trust, have enjoyed attending one of our many programs or events over the years. We aim to educate, excite, and intrigue you with our offerings! However, sometimes it's good to ask, "What do you want?" So, that's what we're doing.

Fellow Opacums ... what do you want? We want to hear from you! Drop us a note or send us an email and let us know what interests and excites you. We want our programming to reflect your concerns, interests and passions. Do you want to see more walks/talks, hands-on trail days, history discussions, "just fun" fundraising events, or something else? Our planning is already underway for this coming spring, summer and fall, so let us know, and we'll get right to it!

INVESTMENT IN LAND CONSERVATION PAYS DIVIDENDS FOURFOLD

FROM OPACUM DIRECTOR ALAN F. SMITH

Linda Orel of the Trust for Public Land (TPL) recently wrote a fifty-two page report called "The Return on Investment in Parks and Open Space in Massachusetts"

TPL conducted an economic analysis of the return on Massachusetts' investment in land conservation through a variety of state funding programs and found that every dollar invested in conservation returned four dollars in natural goods and services to the Commonwealth's economy.

TPL cites the rich history of land conservation in Massachusetts that began in 1898 when the legislature established the Mount Greylock State Reservation. This was the first land acquired by the Commonwealth for forest preservation and by 2012 over one million two hundred fifty thousand acres of land have been permanently protected.

The key benefits include water quality protection, air pollution removal, and stormwater management. The report states that the watershed conservation surrounding the Quabbin and Wachusett Reservoirs has saved Massachusetts Water Resource Authority ratepayers an estimated two hundred million dollars in filtration plant construction and annual operating costs.

TPL's report found that lands conserved in Massachusetts for parks and natural areas were critical to the state and

local tourism industries. Sixty one percent of Massachusetts residents participate in outdoor recreation each year which generates ten billion dollars in annual consumer spending. That spending benefits the state and municipalities through greater sales tax revenues to the tune of seven hundred thirty nine million dollars annually. Outdoor recreation spending also helps local businesses that hire approximately ninety thousand Massachusetts residents that account for three and a half billion in wages and salaries. A lot of that earned income is spent in the local municipalities which further magnifies the economic impact of outdoor recreation.

Also, natural goods from agriculture, forestry, and the commercial fishing industries that depend on maintaining farms, forests, and water quality contributed thirteen billion in revenues and one hundred thousand jobs in Massachusetts.

The Boston Globe ran an excellent article on this report, which can be downloaded at www.tpl.org/massachusetts.

Natural and cultural resources protected by open space and park investments paid dividends to Massachusetts !!!



on the trail...

'TIS THE SEASON — THESE WEBSITES MAY HELP!

- Grand Trunk Trail Blazers www.grandtrunktrailblazers.org
- Brimfield's web site: www.BrimfieldTrail.org
- French River www.frenchriverconnection.org/greenway.html
- Holland http://town.holland.ma.us/Pages/HollandMA_Trail/index
- Southbridge www.ci.southbridge.ma.us/trails.asp
- Sturbridge www.town.sturbridge.ma.us/Public_Documents/SturbridgeMA_RegionalTrails/index

OLT PARTICIPATING IN THE MASSACHUSETTS LAND TRUST COALITION'S NEW GUIDED ASSESSMENT PROGRAM

Across Massachusetts and beyond, many land trusts wish to improve their organizational capacity, while enhancing their conservation operations in order to achieve their land conservation goals. Small land trusts with few or no staff face particular challenges. Recognizing this, the Massachusetts Land Trust Coalition (MLTC) has begun providing assistance through a special program.

Guided Self-assessments

This new MLTC program, funded with a grant from the Land Trust Alliance (LTA), involves MLTC reaching out to land trusts statewide in a "circuit-rider" assistance program to encourage land trusts to undertake a self-assessment of their operations and organizational capacities, using LTA's Standards and Practices as the basis of such assessments. Recognizing that this guided self-assessment process will likely reveal some degree of deficiencies, needs, and organizational challenges, MLTC is serving land trusts by helping them make progress toward identifying and addressing their needs.

Opacum Selected to Participate

MLTC kicked off its new program this past spring by inviting small, all-volunteer land trusts across the state to participate in the program. Opacum Land Trust chose to apply for taking part in the program, and MLTC was happy to select OLT as one of five initial participants.

Process Progressing Positively

Under the guidance of MLTC executive director Chuck Knox and environmental consultant Elizabeth Wroblicka, Opacum Land Trust's board members have been actively reviewing OLT's policies and procedures, along with many other elements of the organization. "This is an all-encompassing process," noted Chuck, "one that has demonstrated the diligence and hard work of OLT's board members. It's been a valuable adventure in self-discovery, exploring all facets of the organization. From reviewing OLT's mission, to its financial management, to its board procedures, to the ways it goes about conserving land, this has been a thorough very process. By determining organizational strengths, along with areas that could use improvement, the end result will assuredly prove to be beneficial to Opacum's growth and success as a land

conservation organization. We have been extremely pleased with the strong commitment of Opacum's board members to this process, and Opacum Land Trust no doubt will continue to grow in its remarkable conservation work throughout its service area."

In this assessment process, once a report is completed that identifies the strengths and further challenges that need to be addressed, a plan of action is developed. The report serves as a guide for the land trust, steering it down a course that will ultimately elevate its capacity to further its conservation mission.

Knox noted that Opacum Land Trust is one of the first land trusts that the Massachusetts Land Trust Coalition is helping this year under this new program. MLTC anticipates continuing the guided assessment program with additional land trusts in 2014. "It's anticipated that this assistance will result in more effective, more sustainable land trusts," he said, "and we very much welcome interest from other land trusts. Our experience with Opacum Land Trust has been very positive, and we look forward to OLT's continued progress in the future."

The Massachusetts Land Trust Coalition is pleased to be conducting this land trust assistance program. Based in Sudbury, MLTC covers the entire state. It has a membership base of over 100 land trusts, it produces an E-news twice each month, and it conducts the state's largest annual conservation conference annually. For more information on MLTC, please visit its web site at www.massland.org.



REPLACEMENT FOOTBRIDGE AT OPACUM WOODS

LOGAN MELICAN, LIFE SCOUT, STURBRIDGE BOY SCOUT TROOP 161

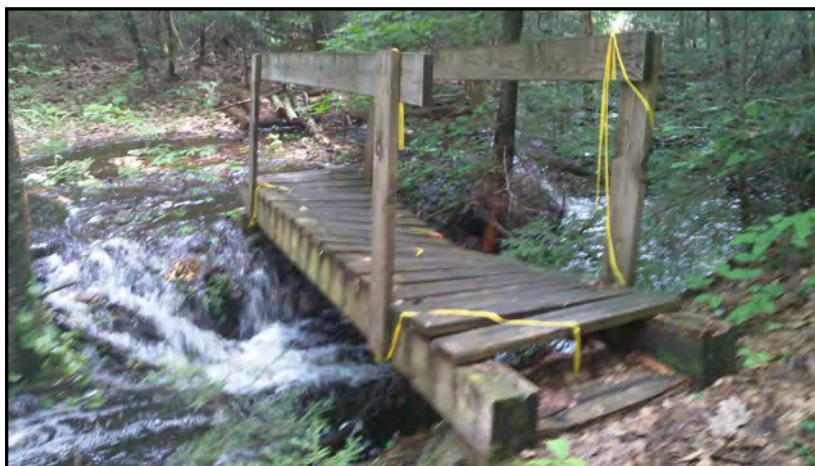
Hello, my name is Logan Melican. I am a Life Scout from Boy Scout Troop 161 in Sturbridge, and a sophomore at Tantasqua Regional High School. As you may already know, the footbridge crossing Honey Brook at Opacum Woods is in disrepair and needs to be replaced. I have been working with the Opacum Land Trust to reconstruct the footbridge crossing Honey Brook at Opacum Woods. We have a tentative bridge design that would be stronger and more durable.

I have been involved in the Scouting program since 2005 as a Cub Scout, and a member of my Boy Scout Troop since 2009. As a Boy Scout, I have been involved in several community service projects including four Eagle Scout projects originating from Troop 161. I believe the projects I have participated in have prepared me to develop and lead my own service project.

Replacing the footbridge crossing Honey Brook would allow me to fulfill one of the requirements necessary for attaining the rank of Eagle Scout. For me, becoming an Eagle Scout is a personal goal because it is the highest rank possible in Boy Scouts and requires commitment.

The new bridge is going to span the same length as the old one, and would be constructed at the same site. This new design is wider than the original bridge. We plan to make the bridge stronger by using long-lasting lumber, improve the safety of the railing design, and increase the expected service life of the footbridge. Construction of this new bridge would allow safe access to the property on the east side of Opacum Woods so more people can enjoy nature there.

We plan to remove the existing bridge and start working on the new bridge this fall. Construction of the new bridge will continue into next year. Donations and volunteering toward this project would be helpful and much appreciated. This is a great time to get involved in a project that will benefit the community, interact with other volunteers, and both see and use the finished product of our efforts. This is also an opportunity to visit Opacum Woods and explore the trails there.



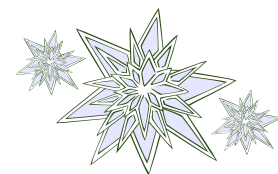
WOODLAND AMBASSADOR EVENT FOR DOGS AND HUMANS

FROM OPACUM DIRECTOR ALAN F. SMITH

The MassConn Sustainable Forest Partnership (of which Opacum is a partner) held a nature walk in the woods in September at the pet-friendly Restful Paws Inn (Holland, MA). It was rainy in the early morning which may have kept the crowd down, but cleared and was sunny for the walk. Our hosts were Raymond, Barbara and Maria Korny who are certified Tree Farmers.

Raymond led the hike along the trails, stopping at rest areas that his family created complete with benches for those who wish to take a pause or sit longer contemplating or reading. One of our first stops was a beautiful scenic view of a New England pond/swamp with floating water lily pads (*Nymphaeaceae*), sweet pepper bush (*Clethra alnifolia*), larger blue flag iris (*Iris versicolor*), and winterberry with its densely packed fall red drupes (*Ilex verticillata*). Our host explained how his family created and maintained the trails including discussions on forest maintenance, conservation, and long term land preservation with the nature walk participants.

After the hike our hosts provided refreshments, good conversation, and showed us their indoor facilities for dogs and humans. We would like to thank all of the Woodland Ambassadors who have invited us to their woods this past year, including Jane and John Freeman, Stan & Barbara Martowski and Jim DeMaio. More events will come this spring!



PLANTS FOR YOUR HOME GARDEN

ASTERS AND GOLDENROD

FROM OPACUM DIRECTOR LESLIE DUTHIE

Even though we have our eyes set on holidays and a new year, it was not so very long ago that a great abundance of Asters and Goldenrods were lighting up our meadows and roadsides. As you snuggle in a warm room this winter, planning your gardening projects for next year, remember that these gems could make a wonderful addition to our own gardens. There are almost 100 different species of Asters that grow in the northeast and approximately 40 different types of Goldenrod! That is a lot of diversity for two plant species. There are more asters and goldenrods than there are any other one species of wildflower in New England.

Asters come in a wide variety of flower sizes and colors ranging from white to blue to pink and various shades of each. Some flowers are large and showy while others are smaller, but bloom in profusion making a spectacular show. Some of the showiest species we have here in New England include the showy aster and the New England aster, which ranges in color from deep, rich purple to a rose pink color. Bristly aster grows well in sandy soils, is low growing and has a beautiful light purple color. Small white aster, wood aster, and many flowered asters are also common along roadsides and stand out with their bright white flowers.

Goldenrods often get a bad reputation for causing “hay fever”. It is not the goldenrod plant that causes you to sneeze, but the inconspicuous green ragweed that usually blooms among the goldenrod. Ragweed, not goldenrod, produces HUGE amounts of pollen and cause many people to suffer with runny noses, itchy eyes, and sneezing! Some species can be aggressive, but many of our goldenrods produce fabulous color on a nice plant for a great fall show. Zig Zag goldenrod, gray goldenrod and showy goldenrod make great garden plants and Sweet Goldenrod is very aromatic and can be used for tea.

Asters and goldenrods provide important food for migrating birds. We often see flocks of song sparrows gathering to feed on these seeds. The seeds are rich and oily and provide good food for birds that have to travel south for the winter. Goldenrods, in particular, have interesting shapes and provide winter interest if left standing in the garden. These plants also act as host plants for eggs and larvae of many other beneficial insects.



Showy Aster
(*Aster novae angliae*)



Goldenrod (*Solidago*) and Purple Cone Flower (*Echinacea*)

UPCOMING EVENTS

(CONTINUED)

Saturday, March 29, 2014, 9:30 am **Opacum's 14th Annual Meeting!**

Join us for coffee and refreshments at Hitchcock Academy in Brimfield. Watch for more details.

Thursday, April 10, 2014

***Murder on the Diamond!* - a murder mystery event at Veritas Restaurant, Sturbridge**

Murder on the Diamond, a murder mystery theatre event, is set in Palmer and ties to the railroad history of the town. Join us for a fun evening of intrigue and laughter. Watch for information about ticket sales!

Tuesday, May 6, 2014, 7:00 am

Spring Warbler Bird Walk with Bill Cormier

Join us and our great friend and supporter Bill Cormier for an early spring morning walk. We'll tap Bill's extensive knowledge of the warblers that pass through on their seasonal migration. Meet at The Bird Store and More, 4 Cedar Street, Sturbridge.

UPCOMING EVENTS

For more information on any of these events, or to let us know you plan to attend, please call 508-347-9144 or e-mail us at info@opacumlt.org.

Friday late afternoon, January 10, 4:30 to 6:30 pm
Twilight Family Owl Prowl with Bill Cormier and Jen Ohop

Meet us in the bright warm The Bird Store and More, 4 Cedar Street in Sturbridge, and learn about the owls in our area. Then join us for a prowling in the Opacum Woods off of New Boston Road to see if we can arouse some local owls. Dress for the weather, and bring flashlights. Members free, non-members \$5 per person.

Saturday late afternoon, February 8, 4:00 to 6:00 pm
Snowshoe Winter Wonders Hike

Join Opacum board members Kay Hunt and Scott Gerrish for a snowshoe hike through Opacum Woods to identify tracks and signs left by our wild neighbors. Meet at the Opacum Woods Trail Head at 4:00 pm. Foul weather may cancel, please call or email to sign up. Members free, non-members \$5 per person.

Opacum Land Trust is a non-profit conservation organization. Founded in 2000, our mission is to conserve, protect and preserve, in their natural condition, the lands and waters of South Central Massachusetts for the benefit of present and future generations. All donations are fully tax deductible, annual memberships start at \$25.

For more information, please visit our website:
www.opacumlt.org

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