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WORKING IN THE SOUTH-CENTRAL MASSACHUSETTS TOWNS OF BRIMFIELD, BROOKFIELD, CHARLTON, EAST BROOKFIELD, HOLLAND, MONSON, NORTH BROOKFIELD, PALMER, SOUTHBRIDGE, STURBRIDGE, WALES, WARREN & WEST BROOKFIELD.

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## 2,000 BY 2020

*A new president sets ambitious goals.*

I am thrilled and honored to have taken on the responsibility of serving as President of the Opacum Land Trust Board of Directors as of March, 2014. As a founding member of the Land Trust, I have worked with our volunteer board members, land owners and other volunteers over the last 14 years to directly protect 1,052 of land.

Land protection is rewarding but can be a slow and tedious process. Protecting just one parcel can be years in the making, and we could have protected additional acreage over the years, but the Board of Directors has developed a set of criteria to be sure that we are protecting the right land with the limited resources available for this work. Does a piece of land contain habitat for endangered, threatened or rare species? Is it included in BioMap2? What type of access is available? Are there hiking trails on the property? What water resources are present? Does the property connect to or have viable potential to connect to other protected lands?

Ultimately, Opacum's Board of Directors must be confident that it can adequately fulfill its stewardship responsibility for each property or easement that is accepted. Opacum Land Trust is obligated to protect each property it accepts "in perpetuity". This is a significant commitment for the limited resources of the Trust, but it is a promise that cannot be ignored or broken. Consequently, the members of the Land Trust's Board of Directors must carefully scrutinize each proposed acquisition with respect to the Land Trust's conservation goals and managerial abilities.

In 2015 we hope to complete Conservation Restrictions on 8 parcels comprising 682 acres and increasing our conserved lands to 1734 acres. There are other opportunities that our property review

committee is working on, and if we are able to complete these projects Opacum would hit its 2,000 acre goal well before 2020.

But moving a property into protected status is just a first step. Every property must be monitored yearly and some may need several visits per year depending on use and vulnerabilities to outside pressure, such as encroachment by neighbors or over-use of recreation trails.

To help Opacum adequately care for its growing land responsibilities, I am calling for volunteers to help us develop a group of active Property Stewards called the "Stew Club". The Stew (Steward) Club Program will be made up of volunteers with a desire to observe, protect and enhance the open spaces protected through the efforts of the Opacum Land Trust. Members would receive training in property monitoring and documentation and a detailed orientation to the property they volunteer to help steward. Each Steward would be responsible for their site and share questions or concerns with the Land Trust. Stewards would be encouraged to share thoughts and ideas for the improvement of wildlife habitat and passive recreational access at their site.

Please let us know if you wish to be a member of the "Stew Club", to take a lead role in helping to monitor and protect Opacum's conserved lands. Volunteers like you are why Opacum is a successful land conservation organization – please help us fulfill our duties to protect our conservation lands for the public's benefit and for perpetuity. Email me at [hfifejr@aol.com](mailto:hfifejr@aol.com) if you want to find out more. ❖

*Howie*





*from the Executive Director*

## THE POWER OF NATURE

**L**ast Saturday I had the opportunity to witness nature's powerful ability to destroy, and to restore itself. Scott Gerrish, a professional forester and Opacum Land Trust Board of Directors member, led a walk on the property of Frank and Lucy Ruane in Brimfield, which was hit by the June, 2011 tornado. As we hiked from the Ruane's beautifully managed woods into the swath of shattered trees left behind by the tornado, we were all reminded of its power and the devastation of homes and lives that so many people experienced. The June, 2011 tornado knocked down 10,000 acres of forest on its 39 mile path of destruction. But now, just four years later, another force of nature was visible – new life was springing up in the forms of early

successional shrub and tree species – an entirely new natural habitat has been created by the tornado, diversifying the range of plants and animals living there. Nature and its systems are resilient and opportunistic.

Scott's tour took us into Brimfield State Forest and up Mount Waddaquaduck overlooking the center of Brimfield to the north and east. The swath of damage caused by the tornado was visible for miles, but otherwise, from our high vantage point, little else was visible in our panoramic vista other than the Brimfield Congregational Church steeple, and trees. Lots of trees. One hundred and sixty years ago, just two full lifetimes ago, the landscape of this same vista would have only had about 25% forest cover – as with much of the rest of southern New England - most of the original forests having been cleared for agriculture, pasture and firewood. Since the mid-1800s a rare event in the course of modern human history has transpired – the “re-greening” of a human-cleared forest. As large scale agriculture moved to the American Midwest and technological advances re-shaped the way farming was done, most New England farms shrank and many were abandoned. The forests sprang-back, by the 1970s covering almost 70 percent of the southern New England countryside.

But today the forests of the region are again in retreat, at a rate of roughly 5,000 acres a year in Massachusetts – about half the acreage of trees destroyed by the June, 2011 tornado. But instead of being replaced by farm fields as in the 1700s and 1800s (though there is some of that too – a good thing), our forests, and in some cases high quality agricultural land, are being converted to the permanent, and almost irreversible land use of pavement, buildings, septic systems and other hard infrastructure. And every new construction project and well-traveled road in forested areas fragments the habitat and natural ecosystems that wildlife, air and water quality, outdoor recreation, hunting and fishing rely on.

We all need and want homes, businesses and other built infrastructure in our communities – but we must also work to preserve as much of the large blocks of forested land and natural places that still exist in our region. Nature is re-generating itself in the path of the 2011 tornado, but even nature will be challenged to rebound from the profound changes we today are making to the land. Let's work together to strike a balance that preserves the rural character, working forests, farms and natural beauty and ecology of our region. ❖

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*from long-time leader and friend, Jen Ohop*

## PASSING THE TORCH

A few years back, Opacum volunteer Scott Gerrish carved a very unique walking stick for an auction fundraiser we were having. This work of art, made from a beaver-chewed branch, was embellished with carvings of the words "Opacum Land Trust" along with a marbled salamander (*Ambystoma opacum*, our namesake). I made it a point to win that item and declared it our presidential staff, to be passed along with the presidency. It is my pleasure now to pass the torch on to Howie Fife.

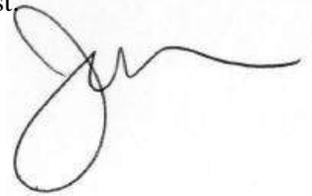
Many of you know Howie as he has been involved with Opacum since our inception in 2000. His interest in land conservation goes even further

back, having worked as a Ranger at Wells State Park and Brimfield State forest for 25 years. I remember working for Howie at Wells, when he and Dan Szumilias (who passed away in 1998) were promoting land conservation on parcels that are now Opacum projects.

Howie has been pivotal in the evolution of Opacum. With help from the Mass Land Trust Coalition, their now retired Executive Director Chuck Knox, the Land Trust Alliance and prominent conservation Attorney Elizabeth Wroblia, Opacum was able to assess and organize and prepare for growth and change. Howie kept this process on track.

Here is Opacum at Fifteen. We have an Executive Director. We have the capacity to move projects forward that have been in the pipeline for years. We have a larger presence in our communities due to increased programming. Opacum Land Trust has reached a milestone and is a million dollar company.

This year is one of change and change isn't a bad thing. Opacum has matured and of that I am proud. While I am passing on the presidential staff, I will remain on the executive board as clerk and continue to volunteer for and support Opacum Land Trust.



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## MARK YOUR CALENDARS NOW

### **Monday evening, June 15th The Publick House Cooks for Opacum Land Trust**

Each Monday the Publick House gives back to the community by hosting a delicious fundraising feast for local organizations. On Monday, June 15, Opacum Land Trust & The Sturbridge Lions Club have been selected to benefit from this event.

An all-you-can-eat Italian buffet includes several pasta options, meatballs, garlic bread, salad & dessert.

Casual Dining, Open Seating, No Reservations. Tickets are \$13.00 for adults, \$5.00 for children 4-12, and can be purchased in advance by calling 508-347-9144 or emailing [info@opacumlt.org](mailto:info@opacumlt.org).

Advanced tickets are not necessary. Opacum benefits from all guests at these designated seatings.

**Seating One: 4:30 - 6:15pm**  
**Seating Two: 6:30 - 7:30pm**

### **Saturday, June 20th, 2:00 to 3:30 Tantiusques Reservation, a hike and tour of the historic Sturbridge Leadmine**

Join with members of the Trustees of Reservations, and the Opacum Land Trust for a tour of one of the oldest historic mine sites in North America – the Sturbridge Leadmine.

The tour will be led by Ed Hood, an archaeologist, Corporate Trustee, and the Executive Director of the Opacum Land Trust, based in Sturbridge. The first part of the walk is easy and less than a mile round trip to the parking area (this will include some important components of the mine.) The remainder of the walk will be moderately strenuous, with some steep, rough spots to pass over, including some off-trail walking. Meet at the parking lot for the Tantiusques Reservation (park carefully along Leadmine Road, if needed).

**For more information, call 508-347-9144, or email [info@opacumlt.org](mailto:info@opacumlt.org).**

**WE NEED  
YOUR HELP  
TO PROTECT  
OPACUM'S  
CONSERVATION  
LANDS  
IN MONSON.**



Over the last five years Opacum Land Trust, in close partnership with the Town of Monson, has permanently conserved (almost 400) 396 acres of land in Monson, including the 165 acre Flynt Quarry Lands and the 135 acre Quinlan Memorial Conservation Area. Working together with the Town of Monson, over \$750,368 have been used to acquire and protect these conservation lands for the benefit of the public. More than half a million dollars of these funds came from State grants, private foundations and

our generous donors, with the remaining funds coming from Monson Community Preservation Act funds – the expenditure of which have been overwhelmingly supported by the Monson community.

But our work to protect these 396 acres in Monson is not yet complete. Opacum Land Trust still needs to raise \$60,000 to permanently protect these Monson projects and to work with the town to assure that they are accessible for public use – and we need your help!

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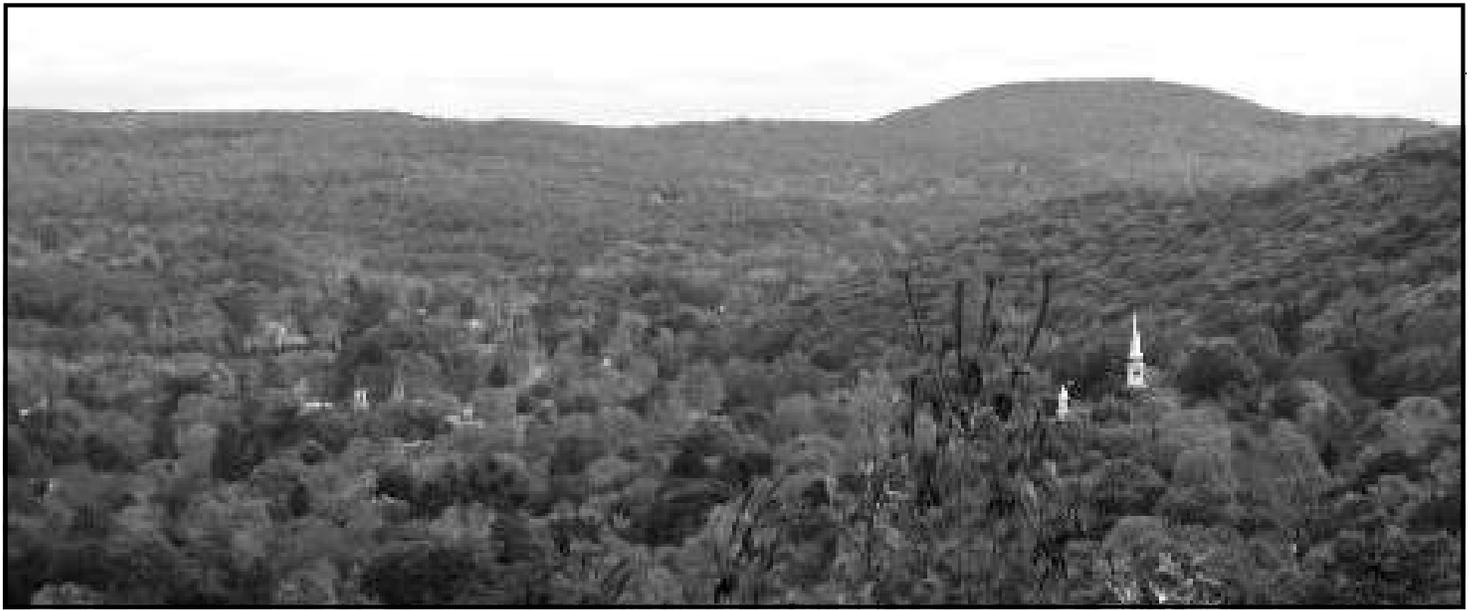
**MONSON SAVINGS BANK PLEDGES ITS SUPPORT FOR  
OPACUM LAND TRUST'S WORK IN MONSON  
WITH A \$10,000 GIFT!**

Monson Savings Bank president Steven Lowell presents Opacum Vice President Leslie Duthie, and OLT Executive Director Ed Hood with a check for \$2,500 to sponsor the new Flynt Quarry Lands trail guide – which will be available at the Opacum Land Trust booth at Monson Summer Fest on July 4th. The remainder of Monson Savings' Bank pledge will go to Opacum's "Stewardship Fund", for the long-term care and protection of the 396 acres of land it protects in Monson. ❖



**Monson Savings**  
**Your Bank Forever**

**Thank you, Monson Savings Bank!**



We are off to a great start in this effort! The Monson Savings Bank has pledged \$10,000 towards this fundraising goal, moving us a significant part of the way towards completing this important effort. In honor of this donation we have made Monson Savings Bank the sponsor of our new, upcoming Flynt Quarry Trail map. Please make a tax-deductible gift to support Opacum's work to protect these 396 acres of conservation land in Monson forever, and to help Opacum to continue to pursue new projects in Monson.

*Opacum Land Trust still needs to raise \$60,000 to permanently protect these Monson projects...*

Gifts can be made online at [www.opacumlt.org](http://www.opacumlt.org), or by mailing a donation, along with your contact information, to Opacum Land Trust, P.O. Box 233, Sturbridge, MA 01566. Please be sure to note that this gift is for the "Monson Campaign." ❖



Our new Flynt Quarry Lands trail guides will be available at Monson Summer Fest on July 4th.

## **July 4th Monson Summerfest!**

Come visit Opacum Land Trust's booth on July 4th at Monson's Summer Fest – a community celebration in its 36th year. Our new Flynt Quarry Lands trail guide will be free and available.

**[www.monsonsummerfestinc.com](http://www.monsonsummerfestinc.com)**





## Tornado: Before, and four years later ...



Frank and Lucy  
Ruane's woods before  
the 2011 tornado.  
(Lucy Grant-Ruane  
and her sister Susan  
Grant pictured here)

Same location as above (note the  
tree and rock pile to the left of  
Lucy Grant-Ruane and her sister  
Susan Grant) after the tornado.





Scott Gerrish points out details of Brimfield landscape and damage from the 2011 tornado in Brimfield State Forest.



## **Our May 16th “Tornado Hike”**

More than 20 folks joined us for a guided walk through tornado-damaged land, led by Scott Gerrish, on the property of Frank and Lucy Ruane and Brimfield State Forest.

See Ed Hood’s comments on “the power of nature” on page 2.

Thank you to all who joined us for this fascinating event!

**Become a Member  
of Opacum  
Land Trust.**

[www.opacumlt.org](http://www.opacumlt.org).

**Donate Now**

Secure donations through  
Network for Good

Opacum Land Trust is a member of the  
Mass Land Trust Coalition, the Land Trust  
Alliance and The MassConn Sustainable  
Forest Partnership.

**Opacum Land Trust programs are free and  
open to the public unless otherwise noted.**

**Bring your friends and  
spread the word!**

**Donations are always  
welcome so that we can  
continue to offer  
outstanding events!**

*It's spring! Go for a walk!*



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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.