

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



At their May 21st meeting, Opacum’s Board of Directors approved the hiring of Ed Hood, of Hardwick, MA, as their first paid Executive Director. Hood left Old Sturbridge Village where he was Vice President, and where he served for 21 years, starting as a curator and then moving into administration and fund raising. Opacum’s Treasurer, Jennifer Morrison of Sturbridge, noted that Opacum chose Hood because of his administrative and fund raising experience, in addition to his familiarity with the Opacum towns and his knowledge of New England’s historic landscape.

Founded in 2000, the Opacum Land Trust is a non-profit land conservation organization serving thirteen communities in southern, central Massachusetts. Working with towns and local land owners, the volunteers of Opacum have conserved over 1,000 acres of land and created outdoor walking trails on several of their properties – all of which are open to the public. Opacum Land Trust serves the towns of Brimfield, Brookfield, Charlton, East Brookfield, Holland, Monson, North Brookfield, Palmer, Southbridge, Sturbridge, Wales, Warren and West Brookfield.

Mr. Hood has a well-established professional network in the region, as well as colleagues who will support his work to grow Opacum’s long-term stability and impact. He is very excited about this opportunity to bring his skill sets to bear on the pressing needs of land conservation and preserving and improving quality of life issues in the thirteen communities that Opacum serves. Ed’s relationship with Opacum Land Trust extends back to its early days in 2000, when he assisted the organization by providing historical advice on the Gaumond property on New Boston Road, today the 30 acre Herve & Mary Jane Gaumond Memorial Sanctuary, and the adjacent Opacum Woods property.

The President of Opacum’s Board of Directors, Jennifer Ohop, a naturalist at Norcross Wildlife Sanctuary, noted that “...in order to protect more land, to increase the pace of conservation in this region, and to continue to provide educational events...Opacum Land Trust is hiring a part-time executive director.” This will be the first paid staff person in the Organization’s 14 year history, and denotes a major step forward in the organization’s efforts. The volunteer Board of Directors, and all the volunteers and members who make the work of Opacum possible will continue to be central to the organization’s successful operation.

A recent study published by Mass Audubon documents that between 1999 and 2005, 30,000 acres of forest land and 10,000 acres of agricultural land in Massachusetts were lost to development – that is an average of 22 acres every single day. This study indicates that the eastern portion of the Opacum towns (Charlton, Southbridge and Sturbridge) are in the metro-Boston urban sprawl frontier, and that Charlton was among the top 20 towns in the state with the most agricultural land converted to development. In addition to the net loss

of open land and habitat, sprawling development can fragment the ecosystems that a wide range of plant and animal life depend on. Mass Audubon's 2013 *State of the Birds* report notes that this loss of agricultural land is contributing to documented declines in such bird species as the American Kestrel and the Red-Winged Blackbird.

Land Conservation benefits communities in many ways. Opacum Land Trust emphasizes the importance of several types of land – working agricultural and woodlands that support local farmers and land owners, undeveloped land for protecting air and water quality, passive recreation and wildlife habitat preservation, preserving critical habitat areas, and also preserving the local character and history of each community. Opacum's very first conservation project, First Acres, in Sturbridge, preserves 27 acres of wetland and swamp, protecting the watershed of Walker Pond.

A recent study by the Trust for Public Land documents the economic value of natural goods and services from lands conserved across Massachusetts between 1998 and 2011 as providing four dollars in economic benefits for every dollar invested in land conservation. In addition to such economic benefits, having open space conserved in each town improves the overall character and quality of life for residents of these communities.

Among several current projects, Opacum Board Vice President Leslie Duthie of Monson is directing the implementation of a \$10,400 grant from the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation to improve the public hiking trails at the Flynt Quarry Lands in Monson, Massachusetts. Other Opacum properties with well-developed public access trails include the Opacum Woods reservation off of New Boston Road in Sturbridge, the Thompson Family Forever Wild Preserve on Route 198 in Southbridge and the Claire Birtz Wildlife Sanctuary in Southbridge.

Opacum Land Trust is a non-profit organization that relies on the work of its volunteers, its members, and on gifts and donations in order to pursue its mission of land conservation. New members and gifts to support Opacum's work are welcome. For more information please go to Opacum's web site at www.opacumlt.org, email at info@opacumlt.org, or phone 508-347-9144.