

## OPACUM GOES TO RALLY

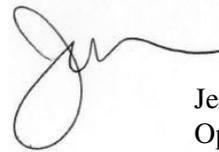
**A**s I write, summer’s heat and humidity have arrived. Deerflies swarmed my hat as I walked outdoors (they do have beautiful eyes - grab one and look at them in the sunlight with their iridescent, rainbow pattern) and they won. I am inside writing.

For many years the directors of Opacum Land Trust have attended the Massachusetts Land Conservation Conference. This annual event brings hundreds of volunteers, staff and dedicated, interested individuals together to learn from and share with each other. I liken it to an outing with the MA Butterfly Club (who, by the way, have a table at the conference each year) where greenhorns can mingle and learn from rusty old salts. This conference is, in a way, a family reunion where we shake hands, give hugs, pats on the pack and, of course, exchange war stories! I truly have learned so much from attending.

This year, we have a different opportunity that is bigger than Massachusetts, ironically, in Rhode Island. Leslie, Howie, Al, Ed and I are heading to **the national Land Trust Alliance Rally** in Providence this September. None of us have ever been to Rally before and we are very much looking forward to it, especially since Ed, our new executive director, will be with us. We are excited to share the experience of hiring our first paid staff person with colleagues all across the country who might also be contemplating this first step towards becoming a stronger organization.

Rally is all about inspiration and collaboration. One entity cannot protect it all; however, land trusts all over the state and the country connect like a patchwork quilt. Collaboration is important to me. Through Opacum and my work at the Norcross Wildlife Sanctuary I have been able to help establish and foster the growth of the MassConn Sustainable Forest Partnership. MassConn is a Regional Conservation Partnership modeled after Harvard Forest’s Wildlands and Woodlands vision. It encompasses 38 towns in Massachusetts and Connecticut and has over 30 public and private entities committed to working together to increase the pace of conservation in our region. During Rally, I will be participating in a panel discussion which focuses on lessons learned through collaboration and partnerships like MassConn.

We would like to thank the Mass Land Trust Coalition and the Fields Pond Foundation for their generous financial support in making not only our attendance possible, but for providing aid to the many small land trusts in the Commonwealth so that they, too, can go to Rally.



Jennifer Ohop, President  
Opacum Land Trust

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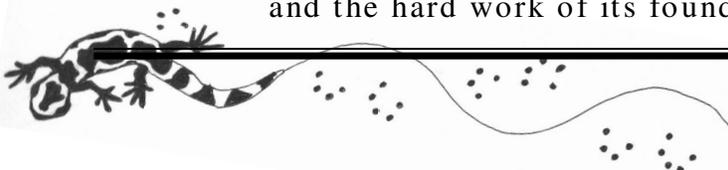
### 2014 - THE YEAR OF THE SALAMANDER

The organization *Partners in Amphibian and Reptile Conservation* has designated 2014 as the year of the salamander

([www.parcplace.org/news-a-events/html](http://www.parcplace.org/news-a-events/html)),

and so it is fitting for us to recall the origins of the Opacum Land Trust and the hard work of its founders. See “*Why Opacum*” on page 5.

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*from the*  
**EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

Over 1,000 acres of land conserved by the work of volunteers. That is the current legacy of the board, members, volunteers and donors of the Opacum Land Trust. Land that is open to the public and protected for future generations to use and enjoy. Sensitive ecosystems, endangered species, vital wildlife habitat, unique historic sites, watershed and drinking water aquifers – all protected by the Opacum Land Trust. Protected by you, our members and supporters – thank you!

As the new, and first paid, executive director of Opacum Land Trust, I am privileged to join such an active and hard working group of volunteers. Coming from a large organization, Old Sturbridge Village, I am very impressed at the level of organization and sophistication that the board of Opacum has in managing the stewardship of so much land, and still actively looking to conserve more. The decision by the board of directors to hire an executive director grew out of a deliberate organizational assessment and strategic planning effort over the last year. Looking to the future, the Opacum board has set the primary goals of

- ◆ Protecting more land
- ◆ Being better stewards our properties
- ◆ Building more efficient and sustainable management of the organization
- ◆ Becoming financially self-sustaining
- ◆ Raising community and regional awareness of Opacum’s work to further accomplish its other goals.

**7/21 arj SECOND BULLET OF our properties??**

These goals are my marching orders – and I am very pleased to have the opportunity to work with the board, and more importantly, to work with all of you. Together, we can improve the quality of life in our communities by protecting important lands for all of us to benefit from, for our children, families and friends to enjoy, and for the benefit of future generations.

I am starting to set up events and work days for our membership to come together in our shared interest in protecting land and being outdoors. Please do not hesitate to contact me directly if you have ideas or suggestions for me and for the board. Your support of Opacum through membership, volunteering and donations has made all of our work to date possible, and will continue to be the core of what makes our Land Trust work. I look forward to meeting you.

Ed Hood, Executive Director  
ehood@opacumlt.org

**Over 1,000  
acres of land  
CONSERVED  
by the work  
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**2014 - 2015 Volunteer Directors & Officers**

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

7/21 arj I am not sure the paragraph hi-lighted below says what (I think) Leslie wants it to say..... Is she saying 1) we need to MATCH FUNDS and 2) people's volunteer time COUNTS as matching funds? I think this could be re-worked a little to clarify?

# AN UPDATE ON THE FLYNT QUARRY LANDS

FROM LESLIE DUTHIE, OPACUM VICE PRESIDENT

The Flynt Quarry Lands link the three Monson public schools to several neighborhoods to the north and also contain most of the Monson High School cross-country course. Opacum provided \$35,000 through grants it wrote to help the town purchase this 165 acre parcel in 2010, and you, our members and supporters, provided another \$10,000 towards this project. This was an important purchase for Monson, providing acres of public open space for its residents, visitors and its schools to use.

Opacum Land Trust and the Town of Monson recently received a \$10,400 Division of Conservation and Recreation Trails Grant for trail construction at the Flynt Quarry Lands. This grant means that now we again need your help to make these trails a reality, to mark them and increase safety on the trails at the Flynt Quarry Lands. We have a trail work day scheduled for **Sunday, September 21st** from 9:00 am until 1:00 pm. Come for an hour, come for the whole time! This generous grant requires that we provide a match so your time is very valuable to us not only in terms of your contribution of that time, but in the value of that time toward our grant match.

The grant money will also allow us to create a trail map, and establish a trail head and kiosk showing the trails of the Flynt Quarry Lands. We hope to investigate the possibility of creating a handicap accessible trail at the site. Although creation of that trail could be farther into the future, the town and the land trust feel there is an opportunity to provide a local trail for all. The money can be used to hire a consultant to examine our opportunities here.

Opacum has already held two trail work days at the Flynt Quarry Lands. Last fall we had a great turn-out with many people helping to clear debris from the storms of 2011 on the trails. We also began marking two trails. The "blue" trail will be the 5K loop that is the cross country race course which was expanded with the help of Jon Harris and Tim Dannay, Monson High School track and cross-country coaches. The "yellow" trail will create a longer loop through much of the property to allow people to enjoy more of this property. The yellow trail is almost complete, but more work needs to be done. Finally, we are looking into a trail around the quarry which will include some of the old stone piles and allow people to see some of the artifacts of the former quarry works.

**We have a trail work day  
scheduled for Sunday,  
September 21st from  
9:00 am -1:00 pm.  
Come for an hour,  
come for the whole time!**

In the future, we may? install some informational signs about the history of the quarry.

We are looking forward to working with both the boys and girls cross country teams to help them improve part of the "blue" trail and install signage to make the course easy to follow and permanently marked for

runners. There is a section of trail that is covered twice, so "loop 1" and "loop 2" signs will be purchased to help guide those unfamiliar with the trail. Opacum is planning to develop an annual trail run at the Flynt Quarry Lands – we will keep you updated as we get closer to a plan and a date for this event.

Opacum holds a Conservation Restriction (CR) on the property to ensure that it will remain as public open space in perpetuity. Now Opacum is proud to help establish several new trails on the property. The Flynt Quarry Lands are loaded with trails which meander through this beautiful property affording fabulous views of the town of Monson to the south and views of Chicopee Mountain and Palmer to the north. With this grant we hope to provide additional trails that will help to feature some of these views as well as some of the historic features of the Quarry.

Holding a CR also means that Opacum is responsible for making sure that the uses of the property remain what we all intended. The cross country race trail and the numerous walking trails will need to be kept for passive recreation – feet, bicycles and horses will be allowed. The town and the land trust will also be responsible for keeping the trails maintained and safe for people to use. To provide the long-term funding needed for maintaining these trails, for providing trail maps and programs, Opacum is seeking several grants, and this fall will again seek your help to provide the needed funding for us to serve Monson and the surrounding communities at the Flynt Quarry Lands and other properties Opacum maintains in the town.



7/21 arj Please see RED TEXT bottom col 2; I inserted "we may" - Is this correct?



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# CHANGES TO THE LAND AND LOSING GROUND – A CALL TO ACTION FOR OPACUM LAND TRUST

FROM ED HOOD, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Two Studies published just this year highlight the critical importance of land in the Opacum Land Trust towns.

*Losing Ground, Planning for Resilience: Patterns of Development and their Impact on the Nature of Massachusetts, 5th edition.* Mass Audubon, June 2014. The report is available at [www.massaudubon.org/losingground/](http://www.massaudubon.org/losingground/)

*Changes to the Land: Four Scenarios for the Future of the Massachusetts Landscape.* Published by Harvard Forest, 2014. The report is available at <http://harvardforest.fas.harvard.edu/changes-to-the-land>

Both of these studies are based on rigorous analyses of Massachusetts land use using sophisticated Geographic Information Systems with multiple layers of data. They provide a highly detailed look at land use patterns in the state, and *Losing Ground* does an amazing job micro-detailing, at the town level, changes in land use (i.e., the conversion of forest land to developed land). *Changes to the Land* provides several scenarios for future land use in the state, stretching out to 2060, highlighting how the trajectory of development, land use and forestry practices, and public policy regarding land use will impact the state 50 years from now. The differences in the way Massachusetts will look just a generation from now in these four scenarios are stark, and in many cases irreversible due to the nature of modern human development of land — creating hard, water-impermeable surfaces and structures that permanently alter the ecosystems in which they lie.

What is of particular interest to the Opacum towns is the documentation both studies provide of high priority land for conservation in the state. This is land that has several key characteristics, such as critical habitat for species of concern, high-quality aquatic and wetland habitats, and large blocks of intact natural and woodland habitat. A second factor defining high priority lands are their resilience, a measure developed by the Nature Conservancy that identifies blocks of landscape that hold diverse surficial features and diverse ecosystems that together provide plant and animal species greater flexibility to adapt to changing environmental and climate conditions. Another key element for identifying priority lands for conservation are those blocks of forest and natural land that are largest, connected to other blocks, and removed from the edge of sprawling development which fragments ecosystems and diminishes the ecological quality of adjacent undeveloped lands. Lastly, of critical

importance to region-wide conservation efforts are large blocks of undeveloped land that are unprotected by either outright ownership by state or conservation organizations, or which lack conservation restrictions.

*On all counts, the towns of the Opacum Land Trust are at a critical juncture.* The metro-Boston sprawl zone has reached the eastern towns, including Charlton and Sturbridge, and pressure from development from metro-Springfield/Hartford is evident in the western half of Opacum, particularly Monson and Brimfield. In the period 2005 to 2013 (marked by the Great Recession and downturn in new development), Brimfield had 5 to 8 acres of land per square mile converted to development, and, along with Monson, was among the top 20 towns statewide with the greatest area of forest land converted to development. A simple look at any large scale map of the region shows the Opacum towns squeezed between these zones of intense suburban expansion.

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**Brimfield ... along with Monson, was among the top 20 towns statewide with the greatest area of forest land converted to development.**

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*Losing Ground* (pp 14-15) identifies two critical regions statewide holding the largest tracts of undeveloped and unprotected lands with the highest resiliency rating. One of these is almost the entirety of the Opacum Towns, which are part of the large green swath connecting the **Quabbin reservoir** to Connecticut / The Last Green Valley ([www.thelastgreenvalley.org](http://www.thelastgreenvalley.org)), and lands surrounding and on north of the Quabbin. *Figure 8* in the *Changes to the Land* report graphically documents that **the Opacum Land Trust area is one of the most critical Priority Habitat zones needing increased conservation work in the state.**

(Continued on page 5)

**Ed, can you please re-read this sentence and see if it works for you? Arj 7/21**

**Quabbin Reservoir—capital R ??? Arj 7/21  
Please check also: “and on north...”**

If you read nothing else from these reports, look at Figure 8 on page 24 of *Changes to the Land*. The state-wide and regional priority of conserving land in the Opacum Towns is clear, as is the impending threat of the development and fragmentation of these priority habitats.

These studies point out the importance of private land ownership of, and active forestry on, large percentages of the new lands that should be conserved. These lands must support our human communities in addition to providing resilient wildlife habitat and all of the other benefits to humans that undeveloped lands, particularly forests, provide. Another important study on regional use that just came out is *New England Forests: The Path to Sustainability*, a report by New England Forestry Foundation (available through the NEFF website, and specifically at <http://newenglandforestry.org/our-initiatives/forestry-report>.) It highlights the economic and ecological benefits of increasing and improving timber harvesting and related industry in New England. Effective land conservation is not about denying access to land for economic use, but is instead about using our very limited resources wisely for the larger economic, social and ecological benefit of the region.

Our task as a Land Trust is to both work to improve the quality of life and the environment in our local communities, while understanding that our work is a vital part of a regional, and even global effort to keep the earth a livable place. I encourage you to read these two reports online and to pass the links on to your friends, colleagues, town and state officials.



## WHY OPACUM?

FROM ED HOOD

As I have let my friends and colleagues know about my new role with the Opacum Land Trust, I have been consistently asked “what is Opacum” (actually, I had the same question myself). “Opacum” is the species designation for the salamander *Ambystoma opacum*, the rare marbled salamander (I’ve never seen one, but hope to soon!). Back in 2000, the founder of our land trust, Carol Childress, was investigating damage done to her property by a large construction project going on nearby. Beneath a rock she happened to kick over she discovered a

beautiful dark colored salamander with light colored cross-stripping. Within hours her friend Alan Smith, a naturalist, geologist and archaeologist with encyclopedic knowledge and boundless energy, was on-site to see what she found. He went on to document many examples of the *Ambystoma opacum*, and the habitats critical to their survival, on the nearby



land scheduled for development as a golf course. Alan and Carol worked tirelessly to change the development plans, ultimately leading to a compromise that resulted in an expansive residential development and the conservation of 276 acres of important habitat for the *Ambystoma opacum*, and many other species. This conserved land is today the Opacum Woods conservation area, open to the public for passive recreation with over 2.5 miles of hiking trails.

Alan Smith continues to serve as an energetic board member of the Trust, and I personally thank him and Carol for making what we do today possible.

### I want to join Opacum Land Trust. My check is enclosed.

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Individual Membership \$25 per year | <input type="checkbox"/> Senior Membership \$20 per year         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Family Membership \$40 per year     | <input type="checkbox"/> Junior/Student Membership \$20 per year |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Business Membership \$60 per year   | <input type="checkbox"/> PAWS Pet Membership \$30 per year       |

Enclosed is an additional gift of \$ \_\_\_\_\_

- To support Opacum’s work in my favorite property or town \_\_\_\_\_
- To be used by Opacum where it is most needed
- Please contact me for work days and other special projects needing volunteer assistance.

NAME \_\_\_\_\_ PHONE \_\_\_\_\_ E-MAIL \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS, CITY, STATE, ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

Please make checks payable to Opacum Land Trust, or donate securely online at [www.opacumlt.org](http://www.opacumlt.org). Checks can be mailed to P.O. Box 233, Sturbridge, MA 01566. Opacum Land Trust, Inc. is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization, Federal Tax ID #043-50-1184. Your contribution is tax deductible. See your tax advisor for full details. A receipt will be sent for your records.

# UPCOMING EVENTS & PROGRAMS

## ALL ARE WELCOME!

A DONATION TO OPACUM LAND TRUST, EVEN \$5.00, WOULD BE GREATLY APPRECIATED TO HELP US PROVIDE THESE PROGRAMS.

### NIGHTHAWK WALK

**Thursday, Aug. 21, 7:00pm (raindate Aug. 28)**

Led by Opacum Board President Jennifer Ohop and our friend at The Bird Store & More, Bill Cormier. Meet at 7:00pm in the parking lot behind the Thai Place (just off Rt. 20 and Stallion Hill Road, before the entrance to Old Sturbridge Village) and we will take a stroll down the Village access road to view the southward migration of this once common species.

### FLYNT QUARRY LANDS TRAIL WORK DAY

**Sunday Sept. 21, 10:00am to 2:00pm.**

Meet at the trail head on Margaret Street / Upper Palmer Rd. Check our website for more information closer to the date.



### OPACUM WOODS TRAIL WALK - MEET OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

**Saturday Oct. 4, 10:00am to noon.**

Led by Board Member Howie Fife. Get out into the woods on a fall day, and meet our new Executive Director, Ed Hood, and other members of the OLT board of directors. We will be there starting at 9:30 with coffee, cider and doughnuts, and the walk will begin at 10:00.

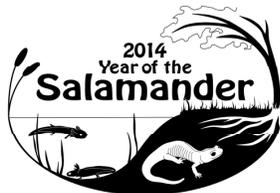
### GUIDED WALKING TOUR: GRAND TRUNK RAILROAD/RAIL TRAIL

**Saturday Nov. 1, 10:00am to noon**

Join Opacum member and historian Larry Lowenthal for a guided tour of Opacum's section of the Grand Trunk Railroad multi-use trail in Southbridge. Larry is the author of *Titanic Railroad: The Southern New England*, and an authority on regional history, and particularly of the local rail roads. Meet at the Westville Dam recreation area parking lot, and look for the Opacum LT sign and staff at the head of the trail just east of the parking area.



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Anne Renaud-Jones  
18 Fiske Hill Road  
Sturbridge, MA 01566

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.