

2019 OPEN SPACE COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT

The past year was a very active and rewarding year for the committee in a number of areas as highlighted below. Hubbardston is fortunate to have wonderful resources for enjoyment of the outdoors by hikers, hunters, skiers, cyders, bird watchers, and equestrians especially with the current pandemic restrictions. This spring we have noted an increase in activity in our conservation areas and hope that the efforts of the committee will add to the use and enjoyment of these resources by Hubbardston residents and visitors to our town. We welcome input and participation of the community at our meetings and activities.

Events

Work on the Malone Conservation "accessible" trail, initiated in the fall of 2018, was completed with the addition of a geo- textile foundation under a gravel surface which provides a level, dry surface. This trail preparation makes it easier for people with disabilities to navigate, particularly with the use of the GRIT Freedom Chair (<https://www.gogrit.us/>), an all-terrain, self-propelled wheel chair. The completion of this project was celebrated with its inauguration by regional disabled Veterans groups. This event, jointly sponsored by the North Quabbin Trail Association and the Open Space Committee, hosted disabled veterans and family members for a hike on this new trail loop and up to Dottie Rock vista, followed by a picnic at Mt. Jefferson.

Hubbardston Girl Scout Troop 11809, working with committee member Susan Worth, began work on a project to create a Monarch butterfly "Way Station" at the wild-flower/pollinator garden next to the Malone Road Conservation Area parking lot. This project, led by scout leaders Katie Young and Deb Kaijala, required applying for a grant and certification from Monarch Watch (<https://www.monarchwatch.org>) that would provide the Monarch's favorite source of nutrition, milkweed plants to support them on their annual migrations. The scouts were awarded the grant and the milkweed plugs were planted in May. The requirements of the program include monitoring and reporting activity at the site. Also, at the garden during this past year, the girl scouts assisted in planting several varieties of native wild-flowers favored by pollinating species of insects and birds.

The Baystate Trail Riders equestrian organization held their annual fall trail ride on Mt. Jefferson and Malone Road Conservation trails. The ride, attended by dozens of riders culminated with a picnic at the Mt. Jefferson trailhead.

Administration & Planning

A major goal was reached during the past month with the approval of a Conservation Restriction (CR) on the Malone Road Conservation Area protecting the property for the enjoyment of town residents and visitors for outdoor activities. The area was created in 2008 using funds from the Hubbardston Community Preservation Fund. One of the state legal requirements for this type of funding was that a Conservation Restriction be created and placed on the property to protect it in

perpetuity from development and misuse. Our committee's Mark Kresge created the required Baseline Document required for the CR, mapping the area, supervising its boundary marking, and working with the North County Land Trust's Jassy Bratko to draft the CR. The document then required approval from the Conservation Commission, the Board of Selectman, and, finally, the state Division of

Conservation Services.

The town's Open Space Plan, which is a document required by the state, was updated by the committee in 2018 and submitted to the Division of Conservation Services for their review and comment. Edits and additions, they required were completed early in 2019 and the Plan was approved this past fall by the Conservation Commission and Board of Selectmen. This important document details the current inventory and state of the town's open space and creates a plan for its future management. It allows the potential for receiving grants for improvements and maintenance of Hubbardston's open space.

The existing hayfield mowing contract expired at the end of 2018 and the committee, working with Ryan McLane, updated the contract language and solicited bids for this work. We also created a process for improved tracking of the work and monitoring payments on the contract by the successful bidder. The proceeds from this contract are put into the Hubbardston Preservation Fund, overseen by the Parks Commission and used to help maintain Hubbardston open space and other community projects. The contract for the coming five years was awarded to Lance Laine of Templeton, keeping alive a tradition that Lance's father, Paul, started many years ago.

The committee created a rolling Project List to plan and track committee projects and updated the public use policy for the town's conservation area. We also welcomed new member Todd Livdahl to the committee. Todd is participating in the town's Municipal Vulnerability Planning process.

With respect to the committee's use of funds, expenditures for the year were limited to \$2,124.02 which covered the cost of required boundary marking tags for the Malone Road Conservation Area, materials for creating the accessible trail at Malone, and repair of the beaver deceiver on the Canesto Brook Trail.

Maintenance

One of the primary functions of the committee is management of the town's conservation areas and open spaces. As part of this function, the committee is fortunate to have member Mark Kresge specially groom cross-country ski trails at the Malone Road Conservation area following fall and winter snow storms. Unfortunately, the weather this past winter did not cooperate by providing significant snowfall to allow much of this activity. One particularly treasured resource is the view of Mt. Wachusett and Natty Pond from Dottie's Rock which can be reached from the

Dottie Rock Trail at the Malone Road Conservation area. The committee cleared brush and trees from the area around Dottie's Rock to enhance this vista.

With the help of Travis Brown and his Hubbardston Public Works department, the committee held a clean-up day at Malone Road Conservation area to remove old materials and trash that had been dumped on the property in years past. Travis' crew also adds to the beauty of our conservation areas by mowing the meadow trails around the Malone Road fields and maintenance of its parking area and by mowing at the Mt. Jefferson Conservation Area trailhead. This crew also mows a nice wide section of the Gates Hill trail that runs all along the lower portion of the Gates field from where it enters the woods in the northwest corner of the field- all the way back to the magnificent beech tree at the Mt Jeff parking area.

Other maintenance activities during the year involved the supervision of the hayfield mowing at Mt. Jefferson and Malone Road, brush clearing on some of the Mt. Jefferson Conservation area trails, re-marking some of the areas' trails, and the monitoring and repair of the solarpowered "beaver deceiver" at the junction of the Canesto Brook and Cross Road Trails that helps prevent the flooding of these trails from the beaver activity in this area. To help mitigate the illegal use of our conservation trails by ATVs and dirt bikes which damage trail treads and cause increased erosion, we posted motorized vehicle restriction signs supplied by the state Department of Conservation and Recreation at all trailheads and access ways to our trails. We hope these restrictions will be observed by all.

Projects planned for the coming year include expanding the accessible trail at Malone by installing geo-synthetics on wet and muddy portions of the trail surrounding the east field, brush clearing around the old farmhouse foundation and beech tree at Mt. Jefferson Conservation Area, and repairing the stone culvert on the Canesto Brook Trail.

Education and Outreach

Committee members attended the 2019 Massachusetts Open Space Conference to expand our knowledge of policies and practices, learn of grant opportunities and other funding resources, and establish relationships with other state and town conservation organizations. We invited representatives from regional land trusts to our meetings to help with our education on funding methods and enhance our relationships with these organizations. In particular, the North County Land Trust and the East Quabbin Land Trust are both responsible for overseeing conservation areas here in Hubbardston - the new Underwood Road Conservation Area and the Henry's Grove Conservation Area on Lombard Road. As part of this association, committee members attended North County Land Trust strategic planning process workshops. We have also been attending a number of educational webinars, necessitated by the pandemic restrictions, on topics such as stewarding town land, land protection, farmland protection, the Community Preservation Act, Agroforestry, Silviculture, and invasive plant species,

Growth

One of the exciting new additions to Hubbardston's open space resources is the Geordie Lane property. Of particular note to anyone venturing onto this new land, is a beautiful esker, a long narrow ridge caused by glaciers millions of years ago. The esker is near the central eastern part of the land for those that go searching for it. Committee members have explored the entire area and marked its boundaries. Mark Kresge has drafted the required Land Management plan, mapping the area and supervising its boundary marking. We will be exploring grant opportunities during the coming year to help fund the creation of a trail network on the property.