

# Views *from* Mount Grace

Volume 17, No. 1 • Spring 2006

C O N S E R V I N G T H E L O C A L L A N D S C A P E™



PHOTO BY JOANNE MCGEE

Brush Mountain, Northfield

## Town of Northfield Believes in Self-Help Residents Rally *to* Conserve Land

BY DAN LAROCHE

In late November, residents in the Town of Northfield went to the ballot box and voted to support the establishment of the Town's very first conservation area. This debt exclusion vote was the final step required to borrow money to purchase the 46-acre Brush Mountain parcel from Mount Grace. This property is part of the Metacomet-Monadnock Trail corridor, and possesses some outstanding conservation values.

The Town took an important first step towards conserving the land in February 2005 when it contacted Mount Grace after it received notice of withdrawal of the property from the Chapter 61B program. A prospective owner planned to develop the land. The Northfield Open Space Planning Committee, Conservation Commission, and the Board of Selectmen all wanted to see the land pro-

*(continued on page 3)*



Serving:

- Ashburnham
- Athol
- Barre
- Bernardston
- Erving
- Gardner
- Gill
- Greenfield
- Hardwick
- Hubbardston
- Leyden
- Montague
- New Salem
- Northfield
- Orange
- Petersham
- Phillipston
- Royalston
- Templeton
- Warwick
- Wendell
- Westminster
- Winchendon

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**A Place of Many Treasures • Athol and Orange Support Local Farms • Report From NQRLP Quabbin to Cardigan Meeting Updates • Special Thanks • Skyfields Stewardship Upcoming 2006 Events**





## Dear Friends,

2006 marks Mount Grace's 20th anniversary, and a new era of expansion. Recently, a foundation provided Mount Grace the opportunity to design an optimal business plan and then awarded us significant support toward

realizing that plan. We were fortunate again in finding a consultant to work with, Barbara Wagner, who had experience managing a similar transformation at the Vermont Land Trust 10 years ago. Another foundation is helping us expand the collaborative work of the North Quabbin Regional Landscape Partnership.

Many will recall that in 2001 Mount Grace doubled its staff from two to four for the two-year Tully Initiative. Since then, thanks to the commitment of our many supporters we've steadily grown to the level of 4 full-time and 3 part-time employees. Together with volunteers, interns, and an engaged Board, this size still means many good projects have to be put on hold or not done at all.

In order to more fully serve our 23-town region, we are expanding in two phases. We're hiring a full-time land protection specialist to complete the 20-landowner Forest Legacy project; a full-time Coordinator of the North Quabbin Regional Landscape Partnership to increase collaborative projects region-wide; and a full-time Operations Manager to improve and manage our internal systems. Our Membership Coordinator position will be full-time rather than 1/4 time. And after six months of devoting half of my time to affordable farmland projects at the organization Equity Trust, Inc., I have returned to Mount Grace full-time.

The intent of this expansion is to do more of the kinds of projects Mount Grace has always done. A broader base of membership support is essential to balance the foundation support. Look for more details on our anniversary year and expanded programs in the next issue.

Thank you for your support.

Very truly,

Leigh Youngblood  
Executive Director

## Views from Mount Grace

**Mount Grace Land Conservation Trust** protects significant natural, agricultural and scenic areas and encourages land stewardship in North Central and Western Massachusetts for the benefit of the environment, the economy and future generations.

We welcome your articles, photographs, comments and suggestions. For information about becoming a member or to request a change of address, please contact our office at:

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*Development Director*

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*Stewardship Coordinator (PIT)*

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Colleen Sculley	Montague
Robert Wetmore	Barre

### Views from Mount Grace Editor

Susan LaScala

### Views from Mount Grace Design and Layout

Michael Ruocco

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tected, and wanted Mount Grace's assistance in making this happen. Mount Grace crafted a proposal to partner with the Town in the protection of the land.

Mount Grace accepted an assignment of a right of first refusal from the Town and was able to act quickly to purchase the land this past spring. As a partner in the project, the Town applied for a Self-Help grant through the Massachusetts Department of Conservation Services in order to purchase the land from Mount Grace and to become the long-term steward of the land.

In early November, the Town was awarded the Self-Help grant, which

Northfield applied for a Self-Help Grant through the Massachusetts Department of Conservation Services in order to purchase the land from Mount Grace and to become the long term Steward of the land.

will reimburse the Town 64% of the purchase cost, but also requires town approval to first borrow and expend the funds. First Town Meeting, and then ballot voters passed the debt exclusion vote for the purchasing of the property from Mount Grace.

Northfield has shown a long term commitment to land conservation by officially adopting its Open Space Plan and establishing an Open Space Committee

to implement the newly created plan. "I'm extremely happy, very excited. This is really starting something ... it's the start of a lot of good things for the town of Northfield," said Joanne McGee, Northfield Open Space Planning Committee Chair and Mount Grace Land Committee member. Joanne spearheaded the Brush Mountain conservation effort and is putting in countless hours organizing and educating people about this important project.

***Congratulations to the Town of Northfield which received \$70,400 for the Brush Mountain 1 Project in Northfield.***

## BRUSH MOUNTAIN 1 — A PLACE OF MANY TREASURES

**T**his 46 acre parcel, complete with a scenic overlook along the Metacomet-Monadnock (M-M) Trail, an unusual Black Gum and Black Spruce Swamp, and condensation gardens (moist lichen habitat), was slated for the bulldozer if the Town of Northfield did not step up to the plate and exercise the right of first refusal on the property as allowed under the Massachusetts Chapter 61B program.

The hour and a half trek from Crag Mountain north to Brush Mountain is an extremely popular section of the M-M Trail, between trailheads, that affords tremendous views of the local landscape. The Berkshire Chapter of the Appalachian Mountain Club (AMC) has committed funds for this project because the AMC supports the long-term protection of the trail corridor and understands the strategic importance of protecting this parcel.

An important historical discovery was revealed during the process of protecting the Brush Mountain parcel. Two intact cellar holes on the property are the remains of the homestead of Calvin T. Swan, an African American carpenter, farmer, mill

owner, and prominent citizen who lived from 1799 to 1875. He worked with master carpenter Calvin Stearns to build many of the fine homes that still exist today along Northfield's Main Street. Swan was also a charter member of the Franklin County Anti-Slavery Society, an organization that was affiliated with a larger movement to abolish slavery in the Commonwealth.

Conserving this land will not only protect valuable natural resources and a widely used trail corridor of regional significance, it will also maintain an important piece of Northfield's long and unique history of American life for future generations. Mount Grace is working to protect several other key parcels in this area of Northfield to ensure the long term viability of the M-M trail, and to create new open space corridors between the existing protected lands of the State Forest.

# Athol and Orange Support Local Farms

## Two Towns Join Effort *to* Conserve Waslaske Farm

B Y B R E N D A B H A T T I

**I**n the Fall 2004 edition of the Mount Grace newsletter, we reported on changes to the state's Agricultural Preservation Restriction (APR) program. Within the past year, we have seen these changes take effect and have been involved with incorporating some of the changes into our own projects.

The APR program creates a restriction on an existing working farm property that ensures the land be kept in commercial agricultural production, available for that purpose in perpetuity. A fair market value is paid to the landowner for putting this restriction on the land. Formerly, any project applying to the program for funding had to meet a series of thresholds and then it basically entered a queue and moved up in an orderly fashion until it reached the top of the stack. Then it received funding. With recent changes to the APR program, funding is more competitive and is based on additional criteria, including the community in which the farm property lies' commitment to Smart Growth principles. This commitment is demonstrated through submitting both a Commonwealth Capital application to the MA Office of Commonwealth Development, and an APR-municipal ("APR-muni") application to the MA Department of Agricultural Resources. The APR-muni application outlines the manners in which a municipality currently supports, and plans to support, active agricultural enterprises within its borders. Mount Grace is currently assisting in the effort to conserve the Waslaske farm through an

APR. The farm straddles the Orange and Athol town line. Both towns have recently supported protection of the farm with the submittal of respective APR-muni applications, with assistance from Mount Grace, other municipal staff, and members of the agricultural community. Mount Grace formally requested the two municipalities complete these APR-muni applications because they were necessary to access funds for this project, as well as other Athol and Orange farm preservation efforts through the APR program within the coming year. We appreciate the support of the project by town leaders and the local farm community, and wish to thank them for their hard work and dedication to agricultural open space preservation.



PHOTO BY BRENDA BHATTI

View of the Waslaske Farm on the Athol/Orange Line

# The North Quabbin Regional Partnership

## A Report from *the* North Quabbin

B Y B I L L L A B I C H

*The North Quabbin Regional Landscape Partnership is an informal coalition of conservation groups and agencies whose mission is "to identify, protect, and enhance strategic ecological, cultural, and historic open space within the rural landscape of the North Quabbin Region."*

Over the past several years, I have had the pleasure of Co-chairing the North Quabbin Regional Landscape Partnership Executive Committee with Leigh Youngblood. The informal partnership, started in 1997, has engaged many people to collaborate in the conservation of landscape-scale natural and cultural resources. Partners represent state agencies, municipalities, regional and statewide land trusts and conservation organizations, regional planning agencies and watershed groups.

When the funding from the state was ample, the efforts of strong partners like Mount Grace, the Massachusetts Executive Office of Environmental Affairs, The Trustees of Reservations, New England Forestry Foundation, and the National Park Service, created the spectacular Tully Trail and the unprecedented land protection marvel, the Tully Initiative, which protected 9,100 acres in two years. As state funding has fallen off, the partners have focused on other resources including the United States Forest Service's Forest Legacy Program, private fundraising, and the promise of the Quabbin to Cardigan Conservation Collaborative among other recent initiatives. Mount Grace has continued to play a significant leadership role in the partnership, and as the collaboration's one regional land trust, I think it is a good investment in and for the future.

Our collective vision for the Partnership has always included outreach to the municipalities in our region: our membership includes representatives from area towns' Planning Boards and Conservation Commissions; we developed a way for citizens to propose land protection projects to partners for endorsement; and we have invited all town officials to our plenary meetings. But there is much, much more that the Partnership could be doing. Imagine every community in the region collaborating to conserve their shared cherished landscape-scale resources like large corridors of unfragmented forest, rare species habitats, and recreational trail networks in advance of impending degradation from haphazard development.

We believe the NQRLP Coordinator will help provide the capacity for the Partnership to reach its true potential, as a clearing house for land protection information and expertise, as a conduit for technical assistance from a myriad of experts in the region to rural and urban communities, and as a facilitator for the protection of many more critical lands. We are all striving for our communities to be places where ecosystems thrive. For this to happen, we will all need to be partners.

### QUABBIN TO CARDIGAN PUBLIC MEETINGS

**Q<sub>2</sub>C** The Quabbin to Cardigan (Q2C) Collaborative held two informational meetings within Mount Grace's region. The first was a joint meeting for the towns of Northfield and Warwick, the second for Royalston and Orange. Paul Doscher of the Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests gave a slide presentation and unveiled Q2C strategic conservation maps which were the result of two years of detailed environmental analysis. Mount Grace's Director of Land

Protection Dan Laroche was also present to help answer questions from the audience. Residents from both meetings were excited to see the significance of area forests, and wanted to know how they could receive their own map copies in order to help with local land protection efforts.

## Grants Received

**U****S Forest Service** — \$2.5 million for landowners towards the protection of 2,100 acres in Athol, Barre, Petersham and Phillipston.

**A****nonymous Foundation** — \$110,000 for the North Quabbin Regional Landscape Partnership Project for collaborative projects, including a small grants program.

**L****and Trust Alliance (LTA)** — \$2,000 for scholarships for three Mount Grace staff to attend National LTA Rally.

**A****doobe** — \$1,800 worth of Adobe Acrobat software programs for office use.

**C****ommunity Foundation of Western Massachusetts** — \$10,000 for the Brush Mountain II Project.

**G****reater Worcester Community Foundation** — \$15,000 for Quabbin Corridor Forest Legacy Project.

## Special Thanks *from* Mount Grace *to*:

**Justin Kelley** of Northfield for volunteering once a week for 6 months as a project assistant for Mount Grace.

**Joanne McGee** for writing Northfield's MA Self-Help grant and for her leadership in the protection of Brush Mountain I in Northfield.

**Allen Young, Paul Doscher,** and the **Royalston Ladies Benevolent Society** for their efforts in making recent Mount Grace events a success.

Outgoing Board Members **Allen Young, Diane Beers, Ann Marie Kittredge,** and **Micky McKinley** for their many contributions to Mount Grace. We wish them the best.

**Cynthia Nims** of Greenfield for hosting Mount Grace's 2005 Annual Meeting.

**The following individuals and merchants** who supported our 2005 Annual Meeting at the Old Nims Farm. It could not have been possible without their donations:

- Big Kitchen Café and Catering, Northfield
- Dean's Beans, Orange
- Delta Organic Farm, Amherst
- Diemand Egg Farm, Wendell
- First Parish Unitarian Church, Petersham
- Foster's Super Market, Greenfield
- Green Fields Market, Greenfield
- Greenfield Farmers Cooperative Exchange, Greenfield
- Hannaford Supermarket, Athol
- Harvard Forest, Petersham
- Highland Press, Athol
- Justin Kelley, Intern
- Mamashoe Organic Farm, Petersham

- Many Hands Organic Farm, Barre
- Mark Fellows of Chase Hill Farm, Warwick
- Mike Ruocco, Graphic Designer, Orange
- New Salem Preserves, New Salem
- Amanda Nims, Greenfield
- Zeke and Amber Nims, South Hadley
- Our Family Farms of Western Massachusetts, Greenfield
- Red Apple Farm, Phillipston
- Scott Smith, Warwick
- Seeds of Solidarity, Orange
- Smith's Country Cheese, Winchendon
- Upinngil Farm, Gill
- Webb's Farm, Greenfield
- Bob Wolanske, Greenfield



*Above: Mount Grace Staff at Land Trust Alliance Rally in Madison, Wisconsin in October 2005*



*Above: Annual Meeting Keynote Speaker Mark Fellows of Chase Hill Farm, Warwick*

*We welcome our new Board members, elected at 2005's Annual Meeting: William Ames, Northfield, Celt Grant, Royalston, Lynn Harper, Athol, Howard Mathison, Warwick, Colleen Sculley, Montague.*

# Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) Funds Skyfields Stewardship

B Y A L A I N P E T E R O Y

Last spring Mount Grace was awarded a \$3,017 cost-share grant through the USDA's Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program. WHIP is a voluntary program for landowners who want to create and improve wildlife habitat primarily on private land. In Mount Grace's case, these funds are being spent at Skyfields Arboretum, home of our headquarters in Athol. Over 6.4 acres of the open fields were mowed by Bruce Scherer of Orange who recently started his own business HERITAGE- specializing in the restoration and maintenance of open fields. Open fields and meadows, a dwindling natural resource across Massachusetts, support grassland bird nesting, butterfly and moth nectaring, and contain significant food resources for many other wildlife species.

This is a multi-year grant that supports the initial mowing and significant clearing of invading trees, and mowing every three years until 2013. Following grant guidelines to protect field nesting birds, Scherer began mowing after the first of August. For more information on this program visit [www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/whip/](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/whip/) or call your county's USDA Service Center. Bruce can be reached at 978-544-328.



PHOTO BY ALAIN PETEROY

Bruce Shearer Mowing Skyfields Arboretum

## Upcoming Spring 2006 Events

**Maple Sugaring Tour**  
**Johnson's Farm**  
 210 Wheeler Road  
 Orange, MA  
 Saturday, March 25  
 9:30am to 11:30am

Steve and DeeDee Johnson protected their family farm in 2002 as part of the historic Tully Initiative. Steve will describe their maple sugaring process from forest to sugar house to products for sale at their restaurant and store. Please call Mount Grace to register.

**Deer Habits and Habitat**  
**Lawton State Forest**  
 Townsend Road, Athol  
 Saturday, April 8  
 9am to noon

In Mount Grace's first project in 1986 the Lawton Tree Farm became the Lawton State Forest when the Town of Athol assigned us its Chapter 61 right of first refusal. Wildlife biologist Sara Griesemer will lead a hike while explaining a recent state deer study. Meet at Skyfields parking lot. Call Mount Grace to register.

**Royalston Falls Hike**  
**with Tully Initiative Visionary**  
**Bob Durand**  
 Tully Trail  
 Saturday, May 6  
 9am to noon

Former MA Secretary of the Environment Bob Durand, an avid outdoorsman, will lead this hike through several Tully Initiative projects and past spectacular Royalston Falls. Optional bring your own lunch picnic at the Jacob's Hill overlook (transportation by carpool.) Call Mount Grace to register.



Non-profit Organization

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**M O U N T G R A C E L A N D T R U S T M E M B E R S H I P F O R M**

# Think Globally, Donate Locally!™

*Please join Mount Grace Land Conservation Trust. Thanks to our members, Mount Grace is one of the most active land conservation organizations in Massachusetts, saving over 19,000 acres in the local region.*

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_ Town \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone (H) \_\_\_\_\_ (W) \_\_\_\_\_ (email) \_\_\_\_\_

**MEMBERSHIP FORM—Please check all which apply:**

\_\_\_\_\_ I would like to renew / start my membership with a tax-deductible contribution of:

\_\_\_\_\_ \$25 \_\_\_\_\_ \$50 \_\_\_\_\_ \$100 \_\_\_\_\_ \$250 \_\_\_\_\_ \$500 \_\_\_\_\_ \$1,000 \_\_\_\_\_ other

\_\_\_\_\_ I would like to pledge \$\_\_\_\_\_ per quarter to Mount Grace Land Conservation Trust.

\_\_\_\_\_ I would like more information about how to protect a piece of land that is special to me.

\_\_\_\_\_ I would like to include Mount Grace in my will or as part of my estate. Please send me more information.

\_\_\_\_\_ I am interested in learning more about volunteer opportunities at Mount Grace.

\_\_\_\_\_ Please do not use my name in your lists of contributors.

\_\_\_\_\_ Please do not share my name with other organizations.

**Please forward to Mount Grace Land Conservation Trust, 1461 Old Keene Road, Athol, MA 01331-9689. Thank you!**

SPRING 2006