



ASHFIELD	CHESTER	CHESTERFIELD	CONWAY	CUMMINGTON
GOSHEN	HUNTINGTON	MIDDLEFIELD	PLAINFIELD	
WESTHAMPTON	WILLIAMSBURG	WINDSOR	WORTHINGTON	

Affiliation In Action

Last fall, Sally Naser and Michael Madole from The Trustees joined our TerraCorps members Brigid and Susan, and HLT employee Katie on a hike at our Stevens property to retrieve our wildlife camera. Sally, Michael, and Julie Richburg (also from The Trustees) had helped us set up the camera on a beaver pond the previous summer.

This hike inspired Brigid to organize a wildlife camera workshop for the public this winter, led by Sally Naser, Julie, and Michael. Participants, including Brigid, learned about the different types of cameras available and how to optimally place them to get great pictures.

Thanks to our affiliation with The Trustees, we are able to offer public events led by wildlife camera experts and to benefit from their expertise ourselves. Just look how much our pictures have improved from the first time we set up our wildlife camera two years ago (moose ears) to now (waving porcupine)!



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Great Egret, photo by Matthew Watson

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Are you a visual artist, photographer, or writer whose work is inspired by the landscape of the Hilltowns? Are you interested in having your work featured in our social media or newsletter? We want to hear from you! Contact Katie Carr, HLT Development & Communications Coordinator, at kcarr@thetrustees.org or (413) 628-4485, ext. 5.

The Beaver Effect

By Drew Johnson, Hilltown Land Trust volunteer

In the Hilltowns, almost any open water you will see is either man-made or the work of beavers. The open ponds and marshy habitats beaver create provide security for their lodges and plenty of soft, leafy waterplants to eat in summer, as well as access to water-loving tree species.

But those open waters also bring in wildlife that would otherwise pass the Hilltowns by. Wading birds, migratory flocks of every variety, otter, moose, and even bear benefit from the plants, fish, and other life that thrive in beaver ponds and below beaver dams.



Beaver lodge and dam at Stevens, photo by Drew Johnson

Beaver habitat amounts to a literal wildlife oasis, a remembered hot spot on all manner of mysterious animal maps

Last year, I hiked to the remarkable beaver dams at the Hilltown Land Trust Stevens property in Huntington. Because beavers will continuously occupy one lodge and pond as long as possible, property that HLT conserves that either is or becomes beaver habitat amounts to a literal wildlife oasis, a remembered hot spot on all manner of mysterious animal maps.

Beaver dams also help retain water—not just in the ponds themselves but in the aquifers below, which in turn can help ponds and marshes keep cooler, even in times of comparative drought. This cooling effect helps create ideal habitat for native fish



Photo by Elizabeth Kulik

species; one study demonstrates that beaver ponds have five times the fish-friendly invertebrates of running water.

Early European settlers trapped beavers out of all but the northernmost parts of New England by about 1700. Beaver were reintroduced in the early 20th century and rapidly reclaimed much of their former habitat—although we will probably never really be able to imagine the degree of their former impact on the landscape or the extent to which every tributary of the Connecticut was as much a low moving series of dams as what we think of as rivers.

continued next column

No animal besides man alters the landscape and their environment as profoundly as beavers.

No animal besides man alters the landscape and their environment as profoundly as beavers. And it’s that perceived threat that keeps trapping in the mix in the negotiation for control of this landscape. Understanding the enormous benefits of beavers will hopefully continue to give these large, industrious rodents more of a free hand to enrich our watersheds on a scale to which we ourselves can only still aspire.

(Some of the facts above come from Ben Goldfarb’s excellent *Eager: The Surprising, Secret Life of Beavers and Why They Matter*, which is recently out in paperback.)

Donation of 67-Acre CR Helps Conserve Over 1,000 Acres



Patricia Lewis on her Westhampton property

In 1977, Patricia Lewis moved, with her children, from a comfortable place in Northampton to an uninsulated hunting cabin in Westhampton with no running water or electricity. To access fresh water, she would trek through the woods to a spring two miles away and haul it back.

In the ensuing years, Patricia turned her rustic hunting cabin into a modest hillside home with a splendid view of the Pioneer Valley and the Holyoke range. She now runs writers retreats out of her home.

“The gift of my land was like a little lever to allow other land to be conserved.”

When Patricia approached Hilltown Land Trust about conserving her land, HLT Executive Director Sally Loomis invited her to be part of a bigger project to conserve a large piece of connected land on multiple properties. Patricia was eager, even though she knew it would be more complicated.

“Knowing that the gift of my land would be matched kept me going. It was like a little lever to allow other land to be conserved,” said Patricia.

Connected blocks of natural, undeveloped land provide crucial habitat corridors for native wildlife and plant species. These corridors ensure safe, unobstructed movement between microclimates, something vital in our changing climate.

Patricia’s donation of a Conservation Restriction on 67 acres kicked off the HLT-led Brewer Brook Forest Conservation project, an effort to permanently protect 1,000 acres that brought together the towns of Westhampton, Williamsburg, Chesterfield, and Northampton, Hilltown and Kestrel Land Trusts, and the MA Department of Fish & Wildlife.

Patricia was instrumental in convincing her neighbors Pandora and Melissa Redwin to join the project. Though eager to protect their land someday, they were not sure the timing was right for them. Patricia’s encouragement and the prospect of protecting an expansive area of valuable habitat helped convince the Redwins to conserve 128 acres of their land in Westhampton.

Much of this land and properties protected by our partners will be open to the public

Through the Brewer Brook project, HLT protected 342 acres on 3 properties. Much of this land and properties protected by our partners will be open to the public, including a hiking trail on the Redwin property and a 146-acre property on North Road in Westhampton now owned by HLT.

Working with landowners like Patricia and the Redwins, who care about the long-term health of the Hilltowns, makes the work of land conservation a joy. Community members and native species will have open space to enjoy thanks to these landowners and the work of all the partners involved in the Brewer Brook project!



Redwin Property Woods, photo by Carol Wasserloos

Building a Conservation Community

Land conservation and stewardship is the core work of Hilltown Land Trust. But those aren’t familiar terms to most people (nor is the term land trust!), and they often aren’t visible aspects of our work.



Enjoying the trail on a recent HLT hike

But even if someone doesn’t know what land stewardship or conservation is, they can have a positive, inspiring experience outdoors. Through public events, HLT seeks to create opportunities for people to experience the benefits of being in and learning about the natural world.

One of our goals with HLT programs is to make the outdoors accessible to more people. We strive to create a variety of events to appeal to a broad section of the community we serve, with programs that encompass everything from hikes to photo contests, draft animal demonstrations to readings by local authors and everything in between. As much as possible, we charge little to no fee to attend, because we want everyone to be able to participate.

These relationships are crucial to ensuring we all have a community that cares about protecting the natural world for generations to come.

HLT events are organized mainly by our TerraCorps (AmeriCorps) members, who serve an 11-month position with HLT. Our TerraCorps members coordinate with HLT staff and our Outreach Committee to organize at least one event each month during their term of service. Each TerraCorps member that serves with HLT brings new ideas and connections, further expanding the variety of programs HLT offers.

TerraCorps members also help us partner with other local organizations so we can offer larger-scale events for more people. This March, our TerraCorps member

Susan partnered with the Westhampton Public Library and Kestrel Land Trust for a reading by local children’s book authors Jane Yolen and Heidi Stemple. In April, our TerraCorps member Brigid coordinated with the Wild & Scenic Westfield River Committee to create a multi-day vernal pool workshop for local residents. These partnerships mean more people can learn about the wonders of the hilltown landscape and how conservation plays a role in keeping that landscape healthy.

Engaging the people in and near our service area with events deepens relationships: between people and the natural world, between HLT and our community, and between HLT and our partner organizations. These relationships are crucial to ensuring we all have a community that cares about protecting the natural world for generations to come.

Transforming a Log into Magic

By Susan Schroder, HLT TerraCorps Community Engagement Coordinator

The idea to make HLT’s first donation container sprouted when I visited Earthdance last December. Inside their main building was a slice of a tree trunk standing on its side. The center had been hollowed out by carpenter ants which created a fascinating design of hills and valleys. It was now filled with money. I was mesmerized and inspired. It was magnetic, clever, and a perfect concept for a donation container for HLT.

My eagerness to act on my inspiration was tempered by the realization that I had to find a recently downed, hollow tree in the snow. However, much to my pleasure, I quickly discovered the stump of a cherry tree cut down last fall as part of a repaving project. The stump had a hollow center that had housed ants, but it was on a steep rise, and with the snow, it was too slippery to safely cut. I would wait for warmer weather.

Meanwhile, in my search for a carpenter who was willing to volunteer for this project, a friend of mine, Ray Homstead, committed himself, his brother Neil’s well-equipped workshop, and possibly Neil’s expertise in fine carpentry. Once the snow had melted, I cut approximately six inches off the cherry tree stump and we were ready.



Susan with the freshly cut wood

The Homstead brothers examined the green log that I brought them, compared it to the photographs of Earthdance’s container, then went to work. To transform the log, the brothers used more than eleven tools including multiple saws and sanders, a drill gun, air hose, router, joiner, w and planer. Four hours after arriving, I walked out of Neil’s workshop with the new container. All that was left was for me to screw the plexiglass and plaque into place and “magic.” It is magnetic!

In addition to thanking the Homstead brothers’ for their contribution in making this awesome container, I want to thank Dan Olaynk of D & D Custom Solutions Laser Engraving Services for donating his design work and the metal plaque, as well as Greenfield Glass Company for donating the plexiglass. Finally, I want to thank Earthdance and the artistry of the ants.



Ray and Neil Homstead working on the container