

## Mothers Day "Wild Things Hike"

May 10th, 2 p.m. in Chester

Come and discover ephemeral wild flowers, mushrooms, and whatever (whoever?) else we can find. The hike is led by Darryll Fisk, owner of Moltenbrey's Market and lifetime Hilltown forest prowler.

We'll meet at the Kinne Brook Girl Scout Camp, about 1/4 mile below the Red Bucket Sugar Shack on Kinne Brook Road in Worthington. The hike is uphill and not an easy stroll . . . but it is not too arduous either! **Note: Wear high boots! We have to cross Kinne Brook.**

**Directions from Huntington:** go up Skyline Trail; bear right onto East River Road; go downhill 2+ miles; at the bottom is a right turn onto Kinne Brook Road; go left across the bridge and past Littleville Fair Grounds; the Scout camp is about 2 miles up, and the last mile is dirt. There will be signs.

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## THE HILLTOWN LAND TRUST MISSION STATEMENT:

- To conserve active farmland and other 'working' properties;
- To save native plant and wildlife habitats;
- To protect watersheds;
- To preserve the scenic and rural character of the Hilltowns.

*The Hilltown Land Trust recognizes that our towns must balance their need to create new housing and jobs with their need to preserve critical natural resources and their rural character. We're committed to being an important participant in this endeavor.*

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# NEWS

CHESTERFIELD, CUMMINGTON, GOSHEN, HUNTINGTON, MIDDLEFIELD, PLAINFIELD, WESTHAMPTON, WILLIAMSBURG, AND WORTHINGTON

## Music in and for the Hilltowns *by Katharine Baker*

On a rainy Sunday afternoon at the end of March, more than 75 people (many of them children) flocked to the cozy West Cummington Church to enjoy a delightful concert. The performers were five young musicians who attend Cummington's Junior Greenwood Music Camp during the summer.

Neighbors, friends, Land Trust supporters, and family members were welcomed by HLT president, Wil Hastings, and then treated to a beautiful introductory poem about Greenwood musicians written by Steve Philbrick, minister of the church.

The musical program started with a movement from Mozart's *Oboe Concerto in C Major* with eighth grader and Florence resident Andrew Cooper on oboe, and Andrew's mother, Cathy Kay, providing the concerto's orchestral part on the piano. Andrew gave a beautiful performance of Mozart's lovely melodies with his soaring tone.

Another eighth grader and Florence resident, Sequoia Grettenberg, then performed the first movement of Bach's *Third Suite for Solo Cello*. He played this difficult piece with great poise and serenity all by himself



Hannah Cohen, Sequoia Grettenberg, and Andrew Cooper



Abby and Harry Adams

on the stage, giving the music a mood of calm gentle reflection combined with rich sound.

The next two pieces were performed by eleven-year-old Hannah Cohen from Lee, MA, who gave a flashy rendition of *Bolero* by Hubay and *Sarabande* by Bohm. With her pigtails flying and maintaining a dancer's forthright posture, Hannah played with dashing Spanish flair.

At this point in the program,

all three musicians joined each other to play two movements of a lovely *Trio Sonata* by Handel. They created a warm sense of connection with each other and the audience, while playing with excellent intonation and vigorous energy.

The concert ended with a group of spirited fiddle medleys cheerfully and confidently performed by Harry and Abby Adams, fifth and eighth graders from the Campus School in Northampton. The Adams kids competed to see who could play the fastest, and the audience began to stamp its feet in delight. As he announced the fiddle pieces, Harry said, "I hope you enjoy this," and we certainly

did. There was a standing ovation at the end for all these wonderful young people, who have practiced long and hard to learn to play so well and give such enjoyment. We know they love the hilltowns where Greenwood is located, and we are particularly grateful that they helped us raise \$825 for land preservation.

The afternoon concluded with cider, cookies, muffins, and lots of good cheer. ♦

## Clear-cutting for Wildlife: An HLT Case Study in Biodiversity

by Lincoln Fish

Eleven years ago, Paul Strsburg donated a Conservation Restriction to HLT on 165 acres in Worthington. He hired wildlife biologist Molly Hale to do a wildlife plan, and me to do a forestry plan for the forested acreage. A striking area of agreement in both our plans: create a clear-cut in the aspen stand. Our reasons had nothing to do with selling the harvested trees, creating a mess, or annoying the neighbors, but everything to do with the early-successional (brushy) habitat that would explode into existence within a growing season after the clearing. This brushy habitat would include grasses, a host of flowering plants including goldenrods and asters, blackberries, native shrubs such as winterberry, and stump-sprouts of aspen and other tree species. Our combined reasons for recommending the clear-cut included:

**Wildlife.** Our fastest-declining group of wildlife species is that which depends on early-successional (brushy) habitat for all or part of their habitat needs. This group of species includes numerous birds such as brown thrasher, rose-breasted grosbeak, woodcock, ruffed grouse, indigo bunting, whip-poor-will; many snakes, bats, and wood turtles as well as native bee and butterfly species.

**Preserving tree species.** Molly correctly pointed out that as Massachusetts forests age, aspen is disappearing from them. If left alone, aspen will die off and be replaced with other tree species. Clear-cutting is the best way to perpetuate the aspen forest type, as it will sprout vigorously in full sunlight.

**Regeneration.** As a forester I saw that the stand occupied an abandoned pasture and was dominated by low-quality stems. Since the stand would produce few useful forest products in the future, the regeneration would result in a productive forest sooner than leaving it alone.

Our 9-acre clear-cut was completed in September of 2002. None of the trees cut were removed from the site, as their value was less than the cost of hauling them away. Instead, we piled the slash to create additional wildlife habitat structures (brush piles). Initially, the change was shocking, especially the large brush piles. Since clearing, the site has grown up to dense herbaceous, blackberry and aspen cover. In the summer, it's a vibrant place with intense bird and insect activity. Paul maintains a mown path through the middle of the clearing to facilitate wildlife observation.

A UMass team studying the use of wildlife clearings by birds used the site for research. They found the usual early-successional nesting birds, but were surprised by the high number of forest-nesting birds that used the clearing after their young had fledged. Apparently brushy habitat, with its great abundance of insects and fruits and dense cover, is an appealing place for bird parents to bring their young during that critical time when they are out of the nest but still need to be fed constantly. It is easy to imagine how this can give birds a competitive advantage.

In summary, this wildlife clearing has increased biodiversity by providing habitat for declining birds and other wildlife. If a little is good,

would a lot be better? Not necessarily. Many wildlife species require a mature forest habitat and would not benefit if their habitat were dramatically changed. Research indicates that, in a large landscape of several thousand acres, the ideal level of early successional habitat is in the range of 5-15%. If the percentage of brushy habitat around your property is already that high, more might not be beneficial at this time. (State-wide, our percentage is somewhere around 3%.) Wildlife clearings are best located in areas where other habitat values and forestry values would not be compromised, such as abandoned pastures, red pine plantations, and beech stands heavily infested with beech bark disease.

In the northern hardwoods stand adjacent to this wildlife clearing, Paul has allowed another research project to simulate the characteristics of an old-growth forest. Small gaps were created to let in additional light, as when a large tree dies. Much of the wood generated from cutting these gaps was left in place, as old growth forests tend to have more coarse woody debris on the ground than younger forests.

Statewide, our forest habitat is largely mature forest 50 to 100 years old. Lacking are the forest habitats at the extremes: younger than 10 years or older than 100. As Paul has shown, interest in and management for one habitat type does not preclude management for the other!

For more on managing woodland for wildlife: *Landowner's Guide to Wildlife Habitat*, Richard M. DeGraaf et al; University of Vermont Press; 2005. ♦

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## What Monitors Do *by Caroline Raisler*

For the past 2 1/2 years, I have enjoyed being the Hilltown Land Trust's contract conservation restriction (CR) monitor. Monitoring CRs is very important for any organization that holds conservation



restrictions, and HLT realized this sooner than most groups. In March, Wil Hastings, the president of the board, and I, presented a workshop at the Massachusetts Land Conservation Conference entitled "Fundamentals of Monitoring Conservation Restrictions."

At that workshop, we stressed to other land conservation volunteers and professionals that monitoring CRs is not like being a hall monitor or a policeman. Rather, it involves building a long-term, collaborative partnership between the land trust and its landowners.

Each year, board members and other volunteers and I have gone out to monitor each of HLT's CRs. We monitor half of them in the spring and half in the fall—it is easiest to monitor when there are no leaves on the trees and there is no snow on the ground. When we go out, we look for natural and man-made

changes to the property. This year, we found a lot of ice storm damage. We also try to visit with the landowner or caretaker of the property. We had a lot of friendly visits this spring, including a few with landowners I had not met before.

I take photographs of the property and use a Geographic Positioning Unit (GPS) to record where on the property we walk. When I come back to my office, I write up a monitoring report, which all of the monitors sign. The report is filed in two separate locations so that HLT has a secure record of what has changed on the property it has pledged to protect in perpetuity.

This was my last monitoring season with the Hilltown Land Trust, as I am heading off to take a full-time position with the state, monitoring CRs. I will miss walking HLT's beautiful CRs, but even more than that I will miss all of the landowners and board members I have met—the ones who gave me coffee, the ones who ate my granola bars, the ones who shared their stories, the ones who walked with me through the woods, and the ones who did none of those things.

I don't intend to disappear entirely, though, so I hope to see you all at future HLT events. ♦

## Wildflower Id Answers

These are called "Ephemeral" flowers because they only flower for a short period every spring before the trees leaf out and block their sun. Some are around all summer as plants on the forest floor and many just disappear for almost a year.

The flowers are very small and delicate and scattered—they do not usually make a flashy display. They seem to live near rocky outcroppings because the minerals leaching from the rocks make the soil less acid.

To see some of these (and others) face to face, join us on May 10th at 2 p.m. to look for ephemerals, ferns and possibly mushrooms in Chester. See page 4 for details.

- 1 Painted Trillium
- 2 Trout Lilies
- 3 Spring Beauties
- 4 Showy Orchid
- 5 Cucumber Root
- 6 Hepatica
- 7 Foam Flower
- 8 Star Flower
- 9 Golden Thread
- 10 Wood Anemone

## JOIN US

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