

# Massachusetts Land Trust Coalition's 28<sup>th</sup> Annual Conservation Conference

On Saturday, March 24, four members of the board — Beth Wilkinson, Ken Mallory, Ellen Gibson-Kennedy, and I — attended the Massachusetts Land Trust Coalition's 28th Annual Conservation Conference. The conference is the longest running, and in fact the first, conference of its kind in the country.

This year's theme was "Leading Locally in a Changing World." There were three sessions during the day as well as a plenary session with a keynote speaker. Each session had 12 simultaneous workshops to choose from, so there was something of interest for everyone. Between each session we had plenty of time to network and explore the various vendor tables. Summaries of the most inspiring and useful sessions follow.

For the first session, Ken and I both attended Russ Cohen's talk on edible native species. Russ talked about his work



*Handout from Russ Cohen's Edible Native Species talk*

encouraging people to interact with the land through their taste buds, and even brought in several treats he had cooked for us: native and nonnative edibles including Autumn Olive fruit leather and cookies made with shagbark hickory nuts and black walnuts. He introduced about 30 native species that can be either found or grown in Massachusetts. The following website is Russ's compilation of more than 150 edible wild plants native to the Northeast: <https://bit.ly/2shqAJZ> We are hoping to invite Russ to evaluate our own Cold Spring Park and advise us on planting certain edible native plants in our open spaces.

After lunch Ellen attended a session run by Nature Groupie, "an online community for outdoor enthusiasts who want to volunteer for nature." Nature Groupie is run by the University of New Hampshire Cooperative Extension and is geared to stewardship and citizen science. Organizations can post their events on the website, and volunteers can look at the bulletin and sign up to volunteer outdoors. We will be posting select events like our invasives pulls on their website

to connect to new people and volunteers throughout New England via the online calendar and registration system. See their website for more information: <https://bit.ly/2siIlba>

A session Ken went to entitled "Tackling Invasive Plants: A Guide for Land Stewards" featured Chris Polatin of Land Stewardship, Inc., and Jennifer Forman Orth of the Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources. Strategies for identifying and controlling invasive plants such as mile-a-minute vine, kudzu, giant hogweed, and stiltgrass among others were identified, and management practices for their control included non-chemical and chemical options. The board will discuss if some of these techniques may be useful in controlling the plants that are invading our open spaces in Newton.

In the final session, Beth learned about using wildlife cameras to inspire land conservation. Three staff members from the Nature Conservancy and the Trustees of Reservations showed incredible footage from their wildlife cameras. They explained how those photos are being used to do citizen science, especially in the Berkshires. Beth was inspired to make plans to set up her own wildlife camera in Jolly's Hollow (see our spring 2018 newsletter) and hopefully share the resulting pictures on our social media sites. Find out more about using wildlife cameras from the Nature Conservancy: <https://bit.ly/2lyIKk6>

Ken, our resident drone enthusiast, enjoyed the session about using drones to protect resources. The Wellesley Conservation Council in Wellesley, Massachusetts maintains ten sanctuaries totaling 44 acres, and they use a DJI drone to monitor their properties in Wellesley and adjacent communities. The discussion with three members of the Council focused in particular on Cold Spring Brook Sanctuary that runs along Route 9 between Oak and School Streets in Wellesley. Abutting neighbors to the property had over time encroached on the sanctuary, and the Council used drone photos and GIS (Geographic Information System) to contest this violation of protected land. Some questions that the board could consider are whether encroachment is a problem in Newton, and what the effectiveness of using a drone is compared to going out on foot.

The four of us had a great time and came back energized and full of ideas to promote and protect our open spaces in Newton. ♦

✿ Nyssa Patten