



Working to preserve open space in Newton for 47 years!

The Newton Conservators

NEWSLETTER

Spring Issue

www.newtonconservators.org

March/April/May 2008

CRYSTAL LAKE PARK IN LIMBO

CONSERVATORS OFFER \$15,000



- *Artist's Rendering Courtesy of Citizens for a Better Lake and Crystal Lake Conservancy*

The fate of the City's proposed acquisition of a second house adjacent to the Crystal Lake bathhouse is undecided. As this newsletter goes to print, the decision is with the Board of Aldermen. Some Aldermen favor the purchase. Others are opposed. A large number are undecided and have indicated that they want to hear from voters. On this more than on any other open space issue facing the city in recent years, voter input is likely to carry strong influence.

The vision of the acquisition's proponents is of a continuous waterfront park at the southwest corner of the lake. For decades, the City has owned the site of the bathhouse and a long stretch of lakefront at Levingston Cove. The two have been separated by two single-family

houses. The City acquired one of these, the Hannon property, in early 2007 by eminent domain, using Community Preservation Act funds to make the purchase. When the second house was put on the market last year, Mayor Cohen proposed that the City acquire it as well, and the City entered into a purchase agreement.

The logic of the proponents is simple: if it made sense to acquire one of the properties to expand the public beach, it makes even better sense to acquire the second, to complete the park. The prices for the two houses – the first of which has since been torn down – are roughly the same. The new park would provide a less cramped open space and an opportunity to upgrade a well-used but deteriorated

facility. Bathhouse users come not only from Newton Highlands but from Auburndale, Newtonville, and Waban, as well.

Much of the opposition is centered on the financial argument – that, at a time when the City is struggling for funds to rebuild Newton North High School and to pay for deferred maintenance at fire houses and elementary schools, it makes no sense to spend nearly \$2 million to expand a park.

Proponents point out, however, that this argument ignores that funds for the acquisition would be Community Preservation Act funds, and these by law cannot be used to pay for Newton North or any other public building upgrades. Avoiding the Lake Avenue purchase, they say, does nothing to ease the situation with the schools.

The distinction may be lost on voters. For many, it appears, it is all “City money,” and the City has no business expanding beaches when other needs are so great. In the present atmosphere, supporting this acquisition is politically difficult. The Conservators note that open space proponents owe a debt of gratitude to those aldermen – Albright, Baker, Brandel, Danberg, Hess-Mahan, Mansfield, and Parker - who already have committed to the acquisition.

The City has proposed a \$50,000 study to plan for the facilities at Crystal Lake. Funds for this study would not come from the CPA. Recognizing that the City is in a difficult financial position, the Conservators have offered help. At the Conservators’ February meeting of the Board of Directors, the Board authorized \$15,000 to defray part of the study’s cost.

The acquisition’s proponents have recently put forward a revision that calls for the City to acquire the house at 230 Lake Avenue; to subdivide from it the lakefront land; and to re-sell the house, to recoup a good portion of the acquisition’s cost.

The Board of Aldermen is scheduled to take up this matter in the week this newsletter goes to print.

The Conservators have communicated with their membership by way of email, as well.

- Eric Reenstierna

PRESIDENT’S LETTER

This letter by Conservators’ President Bill Hagar appeared in January in the Newton Tab.

Subject: Purchase of property at 230 Lake Avenue by the City

We support the purchase by the City of Newton of the house at 230 Lake Avenue in Newton Centre with funding support by the Community Preservation Committee. Acquiring this property would set aside a contiguous section of City owned property from the swimming area to Levingston Cove. This is a wonderful opportunity to provide for future open space improvements in terms of future activities. We applaud the efforts of Newton Highlands Neighborhood Area Council and the Mayor for making an application under the Community Preservation Act to obtain this essential piece of property in the restructuring of Crystal Lake.

The Community Preservation Committee members have judiciously selected numerous properties that provide open space and recreational areas for Newton residents. Addition of this property would set the stage for an eventual belt of lakefront land that could be used for open space viewing along with increased access for lake-based activities. It is these types of decisions that maintain Newton’s commitment to open spaces in all parts of the City.

This land purchase will serve the Newton community for years to come with a general Crystal Lake open space park for all to enjoy.

Sincerely,
William Hagar
President, Newton Conservators

WHO USES CRYSTAL LAKE?

Who uses the city beach and bathhouse at Crystal Lake? Apparently, everyone. Last summer, more than 26,000 visits were recorded. Season pass holders come from all over the city. (The north side is somewhat under-represented, possibly because residents there can buy passes at the Gath Pool good for both facilities.) By zip code, season pass holders who bought passes at Crystal

Lake break down as follows. The city's largest zip code, Newton Centre/Oak Hill, has the largest share and is nearest Crystal Lake. The Highlands also has high representation. Small-population zip codes at Waban and Upper and Lower Falls naturally rank lower. Interestingly, non-abutting Auburndale accounts for more than 11% of passes sold at Crystal Lake.

Oak Hill and Newton Centre (02459)	34.1%
Newton Highlands (02461)	25.2%
Auburndale (02466)	11.4%
Newtonville (02460)	6.8%
West Newton (02165)	4.8%
Nonantum (02458)	5.4%
Waban (02468)	4.0%
Upper Falls (02464)	3.9%
Chestnut Hill (02467)	2.9%
Lower Falls (02462)	.7%

FERNS IN WINTER

Most ferns are deciduous, and they pretty well dry up, turn brown, and may even blow away by November. But a few of the ferns in Newton's conservation areas are evergreen, and a couple of others remain visible through the winter.

Look for Marginal and Evergreen Wood Ferns and the fertile fronds of Sensitive and Ostrich Fern. The former tend to grow on rocky hillsides; the latter in swamps and damp meadows. Look for Sensitive Fern at Dolan Pond, along the river especially south of Nahanton Park, at Cold Spring Park, at Saw Mill Brook, at Webster Conservation Area, and at Flowed Meadow. Look for the evergreen Wood Ferns at Webster, Cold Spring, and Kennard. Look for Ostrich near the garden at Kennard, by a bridge over the stream at the Newton Cemetery, and behind One Wells Avenue south of Nahanton.

- Don Lubin

NEWTON CONSERVATORS SPRING LECTURE

Wednesday, March 19, 7 pm

Newton Free Library

"North of Quabbin - Lessons in Land Protection"

Speaker: Allen Young - Journalist and Land Protection Advocate

Newton's pure water originates in the Quabbin Reservoir in central Massachusetts. Towns were flooded to create the Quabbin, and land surrounding the Reservoir has been acquired to protect the watershed, producing one of the largest public open spaces in the Commonwealth.

Yet the area around Quabbin is unfamiliar to most of us. Allen Young, land protection advocate and author of *North of Quabbin Revisited: A Guide to Nine Towns North of the Quabbin Reservoir*, will be the featured speaker for the Newton Conservators' Spring Lecture. He will talk about the unique nine-town area known as the North Quabbin as well as the Quabbin Reservoir itself, and about exciting and sometimes difficult land protection and recreational opportunities there. His talk has relevance for the people of Newton who may appreciate the concept of saving the rural parts of the Commonwealth that are under so much development pressure.

Allen Young, journalist and author of 13 books, has lived for nearly 35 years in the North Quabbin Region, one of the most rural areas of Massachusetts. He settled in Royalston (population about 1,000) in 1973 as part of the "back-to-the-land" movement, taking a job as a reporter for the Athol Daily News and later working as the community relations director for the Athol Memorial Hospital. His most recent book is a collection of articles entitled *Make Hay While the Sun Shines: Farms, Forests and People of the North Quabbin*.

This free event is cosponsored by the Newton Free Library (www.newtonfreelibrary.net, 617-796-1360). For more information, contact Ted Kuklinski, 617-969-6222, dolanpond@aol.com, or visit www.newtonconservators.org/lectures.htm.

NATURE NOTES: MOONS GALORE

The Heavens

The spring or vernal equinox occurs on March 21st. This is considered the first day of spring and this year it is also the day of the full moon. The March full moon is called the "Worm Moon" for the earthworm casts that reappear as the ground softens. Alternatively, it is called the "Crow," "Crust," "Sap," or "Paschal Full Moon." The first Sunday following the Paschal full moon is Easter. On April 20th at 6:15 A.M. the so-called "Full Pink Moon" will appear, named for the wild ground phlox which blooms then. Other names include "Sprouting," "Grass," and "Egg" moons. In May the full moon will rise on May 19th at 9:11 P.M. This is the "Corn Planting" or "Milk" Moon.

Wildlife

In early March the Mourning Cloak Butterfly, an overwintering species, come out from under tree bark where it has been all winter in "cryo-preservation." Spotted salamanders emerge from the leaf litter to breed, squirrels and red fox are born, Mallards pair off, and Loons return to the lakes from the seas. The Eastern phoebe returns to New England mid March, as do our other early migrants: American Woodcock, Red Winged Blackbird, Common Grackle, Brown Headed Cowbird, and the American Robin. Woodpeckers start hammering out their love notes. In early April the Wild Turkey begins its gobbling and courtship displays and we begin to hear the Spring Peepers and Wood Frogs. By mid April the first Ruby Throated Hummingbirds arrive after spending the winter in Central Mexico and Northern Panama. By the end of April the Yellow-Rumped Warbler, Pine Warbler and Northern Waterthrush have returned as well as the House Wrens, Barn Swallows, and Towhees. By May we see the neotropical migrants, the wonderful warblers, returning after a winter in the Caribbean, Central America, or South America.

Trees and flowers

The skunk cabbage is the first ground plant to flower in the spring. Also look for pussy willows and the beaked hazelnut with its tiny red flowers. The spicebush and tiny woodland wildflowers will begin to bloom in April. By the end of April the oak, birch and beech trees will have flowered. By May there is a riot of blooms in the woodlands before the tree leaves cast shadows on the forest floor.

- Marygrace Barber



CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT RESULTS

Thanks to all who were able to help again with our Annual Christmas count. This year's count was postponed from the previous Sunday due to a severe snowstorm. Some points of interest from the count are the following:

- 1). The good numbers of Hooded Mergansers in the past two years, most of them seen this year on the Charles River since the lakes were frozen;
- 2) The absence of Fish Crows (pictured above);
- 3). Only a single Red-breasted Nuthatch in the past four years They have been visiting feeders at two sites, but we didn't see them on Dec 23;
- 4). The first Bohemian Waxwings ever recorded, not only in Newton, but in the entire Boston Count area! (Thanks to Sam Jaffe);
- 5). Wild Turkeys, known to be present during the winter in several places in the city, actually turned up for the first time during this count;
- 6). No Screech Owls seen or heard this year. We visited ten of the sites where we've encountered them previously with no luck. Had the heavy snowfall earlier in the month, followed by a cover of ice, deprived them of their usual sources of food?

- Cris Criscitiello

SPRING FLOWERS IN NEWTON'S WOODS

The cardinals are singing in the early morning and bulbs are peeping out of the icy ground. Spring is on its way and in the coming months there will be much to rejoice about as you walk in the woods.

Our earliest spring flower, **Skunk Cabbage** (*Symplocarpus foetidus*), called “the hermit of the bog” by Ralph Waldo Emerson, emerges in swampy places, generating enough heat to melt the snow and ice around it. Look for its unusual maroon-striped flowers, with leaf-like spathes or petals surrounding a spadix or club. The spadix is the reproductive part of the flower, and, if you don't mind getting your feet wet, you can smell the skunk-like odor emanating from it. The first flies and gnats of the season are attracted to this smell and pollinate the plant. Later in the season large one- to two-foot-long, heart-shaped leaves will surround the flower. By late summer a small, inconspicuous, egg-shaped fruit will form.

Another early spring flower of wet places is the **Marsh Marigold** (*Caltha palustris*). This swamp blossom resembles a gigantic buttercup, and, with its bright yellow petals, it is a cheerful harbinger of spring. It tends to grow in large masses in marshes, in wet meadows and near streams, and it blooms in April.

A fairly common large shrub, **Spicebush** (*Lindera benzoin*), makes its presence known in April with tiny yellow flowers that bloom before the leaves emerge. Caterpillars of the spicebush swallowtail butterfly feed on the leaves in the summer. The bright red berries, favored by birds in the fall, were used in colonial times as a substitute for allspice. Find this plant in the understory along streams or in bottomlands. Scratch the twigs to smell a spicy aroma.

Wild Sarsaparilla (*Aralia nudicaulis*) is identifiable in early May by its conspicuous, tall leaf stem divided into three parts, each bearing a compound leaf of five leaflets. Tiny white flowers in ball-shaped clusters appear in early summer and turn into dark berries later in the year. The root of this plant has been used as a flavoring for root beer. This plant is abundant in the rich, moist woods of Newton's conservation areas.

In May, a member of the lily family named **Bellwort**, often called **Wild Oats** or **Merrybells** (*Uvularia sessilifolia*), greets you along woodland trails with its slender stem, clasping lance-shaped leaves and one or two pale yellow bell-shaped flowers. Though rarely found in large numbers, this 12- to 16-inch tall wildflower spreads to form dainty colonies.

- Sue Avery



Marsh Marigold

CHEESECAKE BROOK GREENWAY DESIGN IS UNDER WAY!

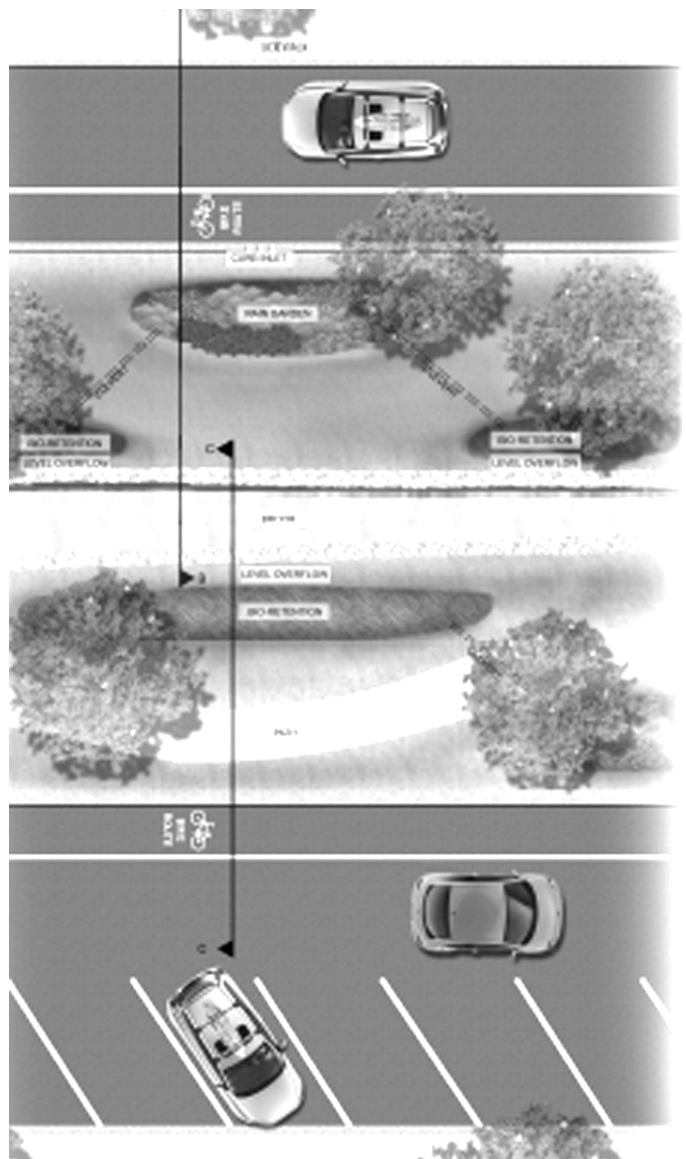
On February 7th, the design team of Weston & Sampson met with members of the community to discuss the future of Albemarle Road and Cheesecake Brook. This corridor connects residential neighborhoods, recreational facilities, parks, schools, and the Charles River pathway. Over 50 enthusiastic citizens attended the meeting, endorsed the designers' proposals, and made a number of specific suggestions.

In the next few weeks, the designers will return with a "Master Plan" which can be implemented in phases. Recommendations will include pedestrian and bicycle paths, environmentally sound drainage and storm water systems featuring native plantings, and expanded opportunities for "passive recreation". A first section of the corridor, near Eddy St, recently received similar improvements and offers a hint of the potential of the completed corridor. The next phase, continuing to North Street and the Charles River, is expected to start in the summer of 2009 in conjunction with a major MWRA project through the area.

Cheesecake Brook runs from its headwaters near the Brae Burn Country Club to the Charles River at the end of Albemarle Road, where it meets up with the Charles River pathway system at the Blue Heron Bridge.

For more information, contact Curtis Betts (617-965-1799) or Margaret Albright (617-969-0497) or email info@friendsofalbemarle.org.

- Curtis Betts

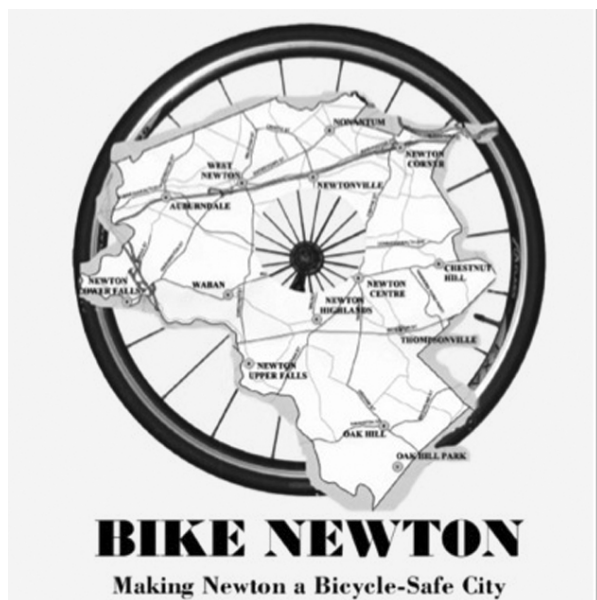


COMING EVENTS



NewtonSERVES - Sunday, April 13, 2008

NewtonSERVES is a day in April when over 1000 volunteers throughout the city join together to work at over 50 project sites, helping to beautify schools, non-profit organizations, and parks. For more information on the event in general, visit the event website at <http://www.ci.newton.ma.us/newtonservices/> or contact Beverly Droz, Volunteer coordinator for Newton (617-796-1290, bdroz@newtonma.gov).



Bike Newton – Sunday, May 18, 2008, 12:00 PM
Newton City Hall/War Memorial Steps

Bike Newton is “a grassroots effort to promote safe bicycling in our city.” A rally will be held outdoors at City Hall, with speakers, entertainment, demonstrations, food, safety instruction, and items for sale. At 1:30 is a Family Bike Ride. The event is co-sponsored by Green Decade Coalition, the Newton Conservators, and Dynamic Bicycles. For information, go to www.bikenewton.org.

Environmental Speaker Series – March 24, 7:00 PM
Getting a Grip: Our Food and Our Small Planet
Speaker: Frances Moore Lappe
Newton Free Library

Frances Moore Lappé is the author of seventeen books including the groundbreaking *Diet For A Small Planet* and, most recently, *Getting A Grip: Clarity, Creativity, & Courage in a World Gone Mad*.

We all know that “you are what you eat.” But do you know how your food is produced and how this process affects land use, oil consumption, air and water quality, or nutrition and food safety? Our speaker will discuss these issues and offer ideas on how to address them.

This Green Decade event is co-sponsored by the Newton Conservators and others. For information, go to www.greendecade.org.



March 25, 2008, 7:30 PM
Ultimate Green Lawns: Save Time, Money, and Reduce Water Use
Speaker: Jason Madnick, environmental expert
Newton Free Library

Protect your children, animals and your health by never using toxic pesticides or fertilizers on your lawn again, and still have a beautiful green lawn. Learn everything you need to know about growing a very low maintenance, environmentally safe, lush green lawn. This workshop will teach you about the organic lawn care program, featuring a new deep root ecological grass called ECO-LAWN that requires no watering, no fertilizer and no regular cutting. A question and answer session will follow the speaker's presentation.

This event is sponsored by the Newton Department of Public Works. Photographs by the Conservators' Dan Brody, who maintains our Web site, are part of the lecture. For information, contact Maria Rose at the Newton DPW at 617-796-1056 or Jackson Madnick at 508-653-0800.

EDITORIAL

To do the work we do, the Conservators take on risk. When we lead a canoe trip, when we lead a bike trip, or when we do something as simple as to own land, we run the risk, however small, that injuries may occur. And where injuries occur, lawsuits can follow.

A responsible land trust takes measures to minimize risk. By law, non-profits are provided with protections against lawsuits, with the exception of cases of truly gross negligence. Beyond that, we carry insurance as additional protection. Most important, we guard against accidents in the first place. We require that canoe riders wear life vests and take safety precautions. We require that bike riders wear helmets. We inform trip participants of the level of strenuousness they are likely to experience. We monitor the land we own for unsafe conditions. No one can assure that a tree won't fall. In fact, with certainty, at some point every one will. That doesn't mean that we want to engage in wholesale tree-cutting. We take precautions, but we seldom take down trees.

The only sure way to avoid all risk is to stop doing what we do, whether that be leading canoe trips or owning land. If we stop doing those things, we stop being a land trust. Being a land trust means taking on some measure of risk. The level of risk in being a land trust is something less than the risk of running a sky diving school or even, in this era, of being a teacher. It is likely something more than being a stamp collector. On the risk spectrum, we are somewhere in between.

When we join a land trust in a position of responsibility, we are saying, the risk is worth it. The risk is a small price to pay for what we accomplish. It is wise to take precautions. But we can never become so cautious that we stop serving our mission.

The day we join is the day we say, it is worth the risk.



In this and other issues of The Newton Conservators' Newsletter, readers will find contributions from the Conservators' Land Management Committee. The Committee has surveyed Newton's various open spaces, making a detailed record of the "flora and fauna" (Bill Hagar's term) found in each. Now, the team has begun

work on a book, *Nature's Almanac*, taking the reader month by month through the seasons to show us what's out there – where to find it, and how it lives. The writing is lively and informative. It makes us want to head off in search of a skunk cabbage or marsh marigold. Which is exactly the point of the Almanac. We are pleased to be able to "pre-print" contributions to the Almanac here in our newsletter.

MISSION Newton Conservators, Inc.

The Newton Conservators promotes the protection and preservation of natural areas, including parks, playgrounds, forests and streams, which are open or may be converted to open space for the enjoyment and benefit of the people of Newton. It further aims to disseminate information about these and other environmental matters.

A primary goal is to foster the acquisition of land, buildings and other facilities to be used for the encouragement of scientific, educational, recreational, literary and other public pursuits that will promote good citizenship and the general welfare of the people of our community.

The Newton Conservators was formed as a not-for-profit organization 47 years ago in June 1961.

The Newton Conservators Newsletter© has been published five times each year by the Newton Conservators, Inc. This year, we have moved to a four-issue schedule. Issues will be published in June, September, December, and March. Deadlines for these issues are the fifth of each month in which an issue is scheduled to be published.

We welcome material related to our mission from any source. Send proposed articles or letters by email in MS Word or rich text format to ericreen@tiac.net. Digitized photographs, maps and diagrams are also welcome.

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**If you have not done so already, use this form to pay your dues.
And consider a tax-deductible gift to support our work!**



*Celebrating 47 years
of open space advocacy
in Newton*

Newton Conservators Membership Form

PO Box 590011, Newton Centre, MA 02459 • www.newtonconservators.org

YES, I'd like to start/renew my one-year membership with the Newton Conservators to help preserve open space in Newton. I'll receive informative newsletters and emails and be invited to participate in guided tours of local conservation areas, lectures, and other programs and activities.

I'd like to make an additional tax-deductible contribution to support the work of the Newton Conservators: \$_____

Please do not share my name and address with other groups.

MEMBERSHIP OPTIONS

Individual member	\$25
Family member	\$35
Sustaining member	\$50
Donor	\$75
Patron	\$100

All amounts are tax deductible

NAME _____

STREET _____ VILLAGE _____ ZIP _____

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March/April/May 2008 Newsletter



The Newton Conservators **NEWSLETTER**

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