



Newton Conservators E-Bulletin

Saturday, December 17, 2011

... Newton's land trust working to preserve open space since 1961



Happy Holidays!

Happy Holidays to all! At least the weather has turned slightly more seasonal but it is still a great time to get out and about in Newton's open spaces. We wanted to alert any birders out there that this Sunday is the annual Newton Christmas Bird Count (CBC). See details below if you would like to participate. We also wanted to let you know about an upcoming Newton Conservators lecture event on Houghton Garden taking place on Tuesday, January 10. Our winter newsletter (December 2011) has been mailed and some of the content you will find here, e.g., a very important article by Alderman Ruthanne Fuller on the state of expenditures on maintenance for our conservation areas. Just a reminder that the Newton Conservators trail guide and almanac make great gifts for your Newton nature lovers.

Newton Christmas Bird Count Sunday, December 18, 7 am - 1 pm

The annual Christmas Bird Count is citizen science in action. Amazingly this is the 112th annual count, an event where tens of thousands of volunteers throughout the Americas take part in an adventure that has become a family tradition among generations. Families and students, birders and scientists, armed with binoculars, bird guides and checklists go out on an annual mission - often before dawn. For over one hundred years, the desire to both make a difference and to experience the beauty of nature has driven dedicated people to leave the comfort of a warm house during the Holiday season.

Each of the citizen scientists who annually braves snow, wind, or rain, to take part in the Christmas Bird Count makes an enormous contribution to conservation. Audubon and other organizations use data collected in this longest-running wildlife census to assess the health of bird populations - and to



help guide conservation action.

From feeder-watchers and field observers to count compilers and regional editors, everyone who takes part in the Christmas Bird Count does it for love of birds and the excitement of friendly competition -- and with the knowledge that their efforts are making a difference for science and bird conservation. Please see <http://birds.audubon.org/christmas-bird-count#> for more information on the history and details of this event.

You too can participate right here in Newton tomorrow. The Newton section of the greater Boston Christmas Bird Count is set for this coming Sunday, the 18th! The most recent forecast for that day is good -- expected to be sunny, with temperatures in the high 20's / low 30's.

If you are interested, please meet at the home of Cris Criscitiello, our local coordinator, at 2 Raeburn Terrace, Newton Highlands at 7:00 AM. The participants will divide up into groups of 4 to 7 birders and head out to designated areas throughout Newton, generally our parks and open spaces. For the early birders who might like to help count owls, meet at the same location ready to leave at 5 am. They will return in time to warm up a bit and to join those who arrive at 7:00 am. Most groups finish by noontime or earlier. There will be hot drinks and snacks available when you get back.

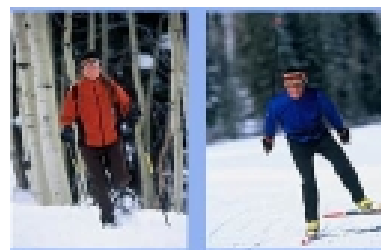
If you have birding friends who might like to participate in the count, please invite them to join us. One doesn't have to be an expert to participate. Extra pairs of eyes and ears help. There is a five dollar fee per participant, mainly to cover the cost of publication and mailing of the Nationwide Count Report which each participant will receive later in 2012. There is no fee for those under the age of 18 who might like to join for the count. Feeder reports would also be welcome especially if you have any very unusual visitors. If you have any questions, or need directions to our house, please call Cris Criscitiello at 617 244 6397.

Winter Trails Day Saturday, January 7, 2012

Winter Trails Day is a national event each January to introduce people to the great fun of getting outside in the winter on cross-country skis or snowshoes. The event will run locally at the Weston Ski Track from 9am-2pm. Visit <http://www.skiboston.com/skitrack/events/wintertrails.php> for details.

Snowshoeing - For 2012, all snowshoe events will be free and do not require pre-registration. Everyone will receive a free snowshoeing trail pass, there will be free snowshoe demos, and we will be leading a number of free guided tours. There will be a limited number of demo snowshoes available; those who want to use snowshoes for more than 15-20 minutes can rent them from us at the regular rate. XC Skiing -

Free ski lessons will be available with pre-registration and the purchase of a trail pass (and rental if needed). Free ski lessons are only available with pre-registration and payment.



Newton Conservators Winter Lecture
Discovering Houghton: Views of Newton's Secret Garden
Tuesday, January 10, 7- 8:30 pm
Newton Free Library - Druker Auditorium



Discover Houghton Garden, one of Newton's little-known gems! Located in Chestnut Hill, this sanctuary in the middle of the city has half a mile of trails that meander around ponds and streams adorned with azalea and rhododendron, as well as an alpine rock garden that was one of the first of its kind. The evening will include:

- The story of Houghton's acquisition and renovation as told by Michele Hanss, head of Friends of Houghton Garden
- A brief talk about the context of the garden's design by Jane Roy Brown of the Library of American Landscape History
- A slide show of contemporary images of the garden by photographer Daniel Jackson.
- Reflections on looking at the garden through photographs by Sarah Luria, Professor of English at Holy Cross

This program came about from a literary and photographic piece by Daniel Jackson and Sarah Luria in the new literary journal *The Common: a Modern Sense of Place* - www.thecommononline.org which is cosponsoring this program. The program is also cosponsored by the Friends of Houghton Garden and the Newton Free Library.



Walking in a Winter Wonderland *
Saturday, February 11th, 9:30 am to 11:30 am.

Come and join as Marc Welch, Newton's official arborist takes folks on a

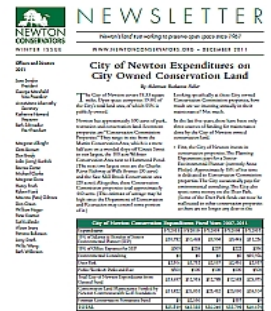


guided winter tree walk. The walk will begin at Newton Community Farm and head over to Nahanton Park before returning to the farm. The walk will focus on identifying local tree species during the winter months and how the Farm has played a role in the 'treescape' we see today as well as thinking about how our own personal choices today may impact this aspect of our natural environment in the future. A fun activity to be enjoyed by all during the winter months. Please register for this event by visiting our website at; www.newtoncommunityfarm.org/education/classes. \$5 per person \$12 per Family (max 4)

Please note that in the event of inclement weather on the day of the class or if there is too much accumulated snow the class will be re*scheduled for March. Please check the farm website before attending for an update. The route and content of the class may be altered at the discretion of the instructor to reflect the conditions on that day. Being a winter outdoor activity it is the responsibility of all participants to be dressed and prepared appropriately.

Newton Conservators Winter Newsletter - December 2011

The December, 2011 newsletter is now posted on our website at www.newtonconservators.org/newsletters/dec11.pdf, so please take a look - it's really great! Many thanks to Beth Wilkinson on her inaugural issue as newsletter editor, as well as to Pat Robinson for her ever beautiful graphic design and layout work. Thanks very much to Eric Reenstierna for his many years of talented newsletter editing. You can find past issues as well on the website at www.newtonconservators.org/newsletters. Below are some of the articles contained therein. Check the link above for additional articles with updates from the Newton Tree Conservancy and the Crystal Lake Conservancy.



President's Message

As 2011, our 50th anniversary year, comes to a close, we wish you and your families a wonderful holiday season and happy New Year. This year flew by but was busy and productive for us.

This newsletter covers a variety of issues relating to Newton's parks and conservation areas. Alderman Ruthanne Fuller sets the stage, writing about the dismally small amount of money the City spends to maintain its conservation land. Gloria Gavriss writes about the proposal to spend significant money to build a floating boardwalk and other structures at Hammond Pond so that people can enjoy the beauty of the Pond while putting on the back burner the fact that the Pond is, in fact, significantly stressed by storm-water runoff, a condition which could be mitigated by an expenditure of some of that money. Mike Clarke writes about the Community Preservation Committee's first ten years, its important role in protecting land, and its upcoming neighborhood meetings. I have written about the Nahanton Park management study and our plans for working on issues at that beautiful park.

These articles shed light on the challenges we face in protecting and expanding the precious and beautiful spots that people enjoy throughout Newton and that provide important wildlife habitats. More time, effort, and funds are needed to ensure that what looks beautiful actually is as healthy and protected from environmental stresses as it can be. We will be working hard in the coming months to focus on these issues and to solve some of the problems we face. We hope you have received our membership renewal letter and will support us as you have done in the past. We very much look forward to seeing and working with you in 2012!

- Jane Sender - President

City of Newton Expenditures on City Owned Conservation Land

by Alderman Ruthanne Fuller

The City of Newton covers 18.33 square miles. Open space comprises 19.6% of the City's total land area, of which 55% is publicly owned.

Newton has approximately 590 acres of park, recreation, and conservation land. Seventeen properties are "Conservation Commission Properties." They range in size from the Martin Conservation Area, which is a mere half acre on a wooded slope off Circuit Street to our largest, the 100 acre Webster Conservation Area next to Hammond Pond. (The next two largest ones are the Charles River Pathway at Wells Avenue (30 acres) and the Saw Mill Brook Conservation area (20 acres). Altogether, these Conservation Commission properties total approximately 440 acres. (This estimate of acreage may be high since the Department of Conservation and Recreation may control some portion of it.)



Looking specifically at these City-owned Conservation Commission properties, how much are we investing annually in their maintenance? Not much.

In the last five years, there have been only three sources of funding for maintenance done by the City of Newton owned conservation land.

* First, the City of Newton invests in conservation properties. The Planning Department pays for a Senior Environmental Planner (currently Anne Phelps). Approximately 15% of her time is dedicated to Conservation Commission properties. The City occasionally pays for environmental consulting. The City also spent some money on the Deer Park. (Some of the Deer Park funds can now be reallocated to other conservation properties as there are no longer any deer in the park.) Finally, in times of dire need, the Department of Public Works has removed materials dumped in the conservation areas and the Department of Parks and Recreation has sent its tree contractor in to remove trees when it was absolutely necessary and no conservation funds were available.

* Second, the City also spends money on a landscape contractor for conservation land maintenance. The sole funding source for this is a \$25,000 annual contribution from the Newton Commonwealth Golf Foundation. (When the City bought the golf course from the Chestnut Hill Country Club in 1981, the Commonwealth Golf Course agreed to pay the City \$25,000 annually to maintain conservation land and another \$25,000 for support of recreation.) If the full \$25,000 is not spent in one fiscal year, the remainder carries forward to the next year.

* Third, the City also has access to the income from a \$25,000 gift from the Fireman Family. In this economic environment with low interest rates, the income may be as little as \$200 a year. What does this add up to? Looking back over the past five fiscal years, the most we ever have invested in maintenance in one year has been a mere \$60,179 (in FY2007). On average in the last five years, we have spent \$40,006. In FY2011, the City of Newton only spent \$25,519 on city owned conservation

| City of Newton Conservation Expenditures Fiscal Years 2007-2011 | | | | | |
|---|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Expenditures | FY2011 | FY2010 | FY2009 | FY2008 | FY2007 |
| 15% of Salaries & Benefits of Senior Environmental Planner (SEP) | \$10,782 | \$10,468 | \$9,994 | \$9,445 | \$11,236 |
| 15% of Office Expenses for SEP | \$309 | \$235 | \$237 | \$222 | \$396 |
| Environmental Consulting | \$0 | \$0 | \$0 | \$0 | \$10,926 |
| Deer Park | \$2,106 | \$1,712 | \$2,057 | \$2,416 | \$2,017 |
| Public Works & Parks and Rec | \$500 | \$500 | \$500 | \$500 | \$500 |
| Total City of Newton Expenditures from General Fund | \$13,697 | \$12,915 | \$12,788 | \$12,583 | \$25,075 |
| Conservation Land Maintenance Funded by Newton Commonwealth Golf Foundation | \$11,822 | \$26,831 | \$23,452 | \$23,050 | \$35,104 |
| Fireman Conservation Permanent Fund | \$0 | \$2,556 | \$0 | \$157 | \$0 |
| TOTAL | \$25,519 | \$42,302 | \$36,240 | \$35,790 | \$60,179 |

land.

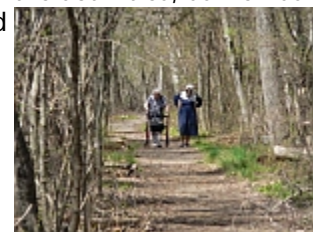
Data supplied by David Wilkinson, Comptroller, City of Newton and Anne Phelps, Senior Environmental Planner, City of Newton

Nahanton Park - Study done, now it's time to work by Jane Sender, President

Last year the Conservators, along with the Friends of Nahanton Park and the City of Newton Parks & Recreation Department, formed a joint committee and hired Massachusetts Audubon's Ecological Extension Service (EES) to do a natural-resources inventory and management plan for Nahanton Park. We did this in part as a way to respond thoughtfully to Newton Community Farm's proposal to expand their farming into the park. The report, just published last month, gives us a rich blueprint for understanding the needs of this beautiful fifty-five-acre parcel and can be read on our website, www.newtonconservators.org We are very appreciative of the efforts of the Parks & Recreation



Department, particularly the support of Commissioner DeRubeis and the work of Carol Schein, who led the committee. Now the real challenge is to make sure the recommendations are implemented. Lots of activities go on at Nahanton Park, from community gardening to soccer, birding to dog walking, canoeing to children's programs at the Nature Center. The goal of the study was to gain knowledge of how various activities affect the park. We wanted to know how to balance all the activities, as well as the proposed farming, and still to maintain a high-quality wildlife habitat and a pleasant overall park experience. Happily, the report tells us how, answering our questions and giving us expert guidance and recommendations about specifically what needs to be done.



These detailed and specific recommendations broadly involve (1) improving community gardening management and continuing to discuss farming at the Park along with wildlife habitat protection; (2) improving the Winchester Street entrance to improve the overall feel of the park; (3) maintaining and expanding wildlife habitat through removal of invasive species, pruning vegetation, investigating storm water discharge, and curtailing snow dumping; and (4) supporting passive recreation by renovating trails, continuing the canoe and kayak rental, managing dog walking and improving the overflow parking lot off Nahanton street.

There's a lot of work to be done here. In the coming months, the committee will be recommending next steps to the Parks & Recreation Commission. We will need volunteer help and some financial support to clear invasive plants, to restore some habitat and to renovate the Winchester Street entrance and some trails. It is immensely gratifying and exciting that we are thinking about the park as a whole, not simply as a list of activities supported by different interested groups, and working to ensure its health. We hope you share this excitement and that we can count on your support!

The full report is available online - find a link to *Natural Resources Inventory and Management Plan for Nahanton Park (October 2011)* at <http://www.newtonconservators.org/nahantonmanagementplan.htm>

Hammond Pond "Access Enhancements" Chestnut Hill Association requests that work on Hammond Pond proceed more slowly

by Gloria Gavrís, Chestnut Hill Association

The Hammond Pond and the adjacent conservation area is an extremely valuable and unique natural resource to the City of Newton and particularly to the Village of Chestnut Hill. Our neighborhood sits in the midst of housing, shopping malls and major commuter routes. As such, Hammond Pond is a lovely spot for walking trails, hiking, rock climbing and reflection. It is a peaceful oasis easily accessible to our neighborhood and is treasured by the residents of Chestnut Hill.

We were made aware of the Rudyak's family's generous contribution to the City of Newton and their desire to memorialize their son at such a lovely location several months ago through the local press. We sympathize with their loss and are confident that we can come together to find a mutually beneficial solution for all of our goals. The foremost concern of the Chestnut Hill Association (CHA) is that the process of implementing a floating walkway slow down until a plan for improving the health of the pond is created. More specifically, we hope that the following issues are studied in depth and potential solutions developed:



- o Enhancing the ecological function of the pond and shoreline
- o Remediating the water quality
- o Identifying options for stormwater management
- o Reducing sediment accumulation
- o Reversing eutrophication
- o Developing fore bays with berms
- o Removing selectively water lilies
- o Increasing water depth by dredging
- o Enhancing ground water and surface water influxes

Moving ahead with a floating walkway and interior trails before having a plan to deal with the health of the pond is premature. We are disappointed that the focus and energy has been on the design and construction of the Floating Walkway instead of on the health of this special and unique natural resource in our City. We are concerned that installing a walkway may even limit the potential solutions to the pond's health. The CHA believes that the Rudyak donation (and those monies contributed by the DCR Partnership Matching Fund and the \$150,000 in reserve from WS Development, Inc.) be used in part or in full to restore and to ensure the health of the pond, its water quality, ecosystems and the maintenance of such. We understand the jurisdictional complications with Hammond Pond and implore the City of Newton, the MA Conservation Commission, the DCR and WS Development, Inc., to make this natural resource one of its top priorities.

Snow removal and storage, storm drainage, runoff from Rt. 9 and parking lots, and pedestrian debris all threaten the health of this unique kettle pond. We understand it is not a simple task to coordinate

all of the entities that have a vested interest, abut or have title to land surrounding Hammond Pond. We know these issues are complicated and require more time to address in a comprehensive and coordinated plan and implemented in a cohesive fashion with all concerned parties.

It is our understanding that there was a feasibility study commissioned by the Rudyak Family by their consultant Kathy Bradford. In Ms. Bradford's own words, "the ecosystem of Hammond Pond is in slow decline, and the water quality needs improvement," Bradford said. "Any design here needs to have sustainability in mind and encourage repairs to the ecosystem." Consequently, it seems premature to make any decisions as to a memorial structure, floating walkway and interior trails of any kind until this study is fully understood.

In summary, the CHA respectfully requests that the process slow down until a rigorous environmental review of and potential solutions to Hammond Pond's water quality and ecosystems is complete to the satisfaction of all interested and vested parties. The Floating Walkway and interior trails proposed in two phases appears quite large in scope. The Chestnut Hill Association hopes that no final decision be made about the floating walkway until the design specifications are confirmed; its impact on the environment and water quality are understood; and a future maintenance plan is addressed.

10 Years of Community Preservation in Newton

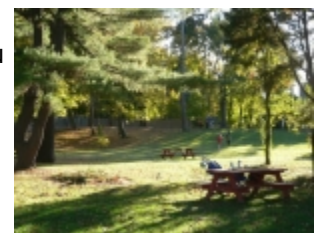
by Mike Clarke

Newton was one of the first communities in the Commonwealth to adopt the Community Preservation Act (CPA), and this year marks its 10th anniversary. Newton has used CPA funds to acquire about thirty acres of open space and recreation land. Without the CPA, Newton's high land costs would make it impossible to acquire and improve open space for both recreation and conservation, to create affordable housing and to save historic structures and landscapes, such as the 1732 Durant Homestead. Open-space acquisitions alone include Kessler Woods, the Angino Farm, parkland on Crystal Lake, and conservation land around Dolan Pond—all for only about \$60/year for a midrange single-family house in Newton.



The Community Preservation Committee (CPC) wants to know what residents feel is important to their villages in terms of open space, historic preservation and affordable housing in the future. Are there important green spaces near your home that might be preserved either by acquisition or a conservation restriction?

Are there historic landscapes that could be preserved? Is the place where you take your contemplative walks possibly threatened by loss of access or development? The CPC needs to hear from you, either at one of the neighborhood meetings or through their online survey site.



The CPC is celebrating the CPA's 10th anniversary by holding neighborhood meetings to provide input for determining funding priorities for the next 10 years. The first meeting for Wards 1-2 was held on November 15 at Newton North High. Times and places for the gatherings for other wards are given below.

Tuesday, January 24, 2012, 7-9 pm
For **West Newton, Auburndale, Lower Falls** (Wards 3 & 4)
Warren House, 1600 Washington Street, West Newton

Tuesday, March 20, 2012
For **Waban, Newton Upper Falls, & Newton Highlands** (Ward 5)
Location TBA

Tuesday, May 15, 2012
For **Newton Centre, Thompsonville, Chestnut Hill** (Wards 6 & 7)

Location TBA

Tuesday, September 11, 2012

For the South Side, including Oak Hill & Oak Hill Park (Ward 8)

Location TBA

You are invited to take the CPC's 8 question online survey (4 are multiple choice!) at www.newtonma.gov/cpa or directly at www.surveymonkey.com/s/NYFZCDH

Newton's Community Preservation Committee now requires a pre-proposal before it will accept a full funding proposal for any project. The last possible date to submit a pre-proposal for the next funding round will be July 1, 2012, but the sooner you submit your pre-proposal, the better for your project. The Committee accepts pre-proposals on a rolling basis and discusses them at any of its regular public meetings. These discussions provide constructive feedback and an opportunity to ask if the CPC will accept a full proposal "off-cycle," before (or after) the next regular funding round.

Please direct any questions on the CPA to Alice Ingerson, Community Preservation Program Manager (617-796-1144 or aingerson@newtonma.gov).

Free Energy Audits Available

We pass on this note from Dan Worth, Executive Director, National Association of Environmental Law Societies (NAELS), originally from Newton, NNHS grad, who is working with Newton non-profit Green Decade Coalition on a project to weatherize Newton's housing stock. With the high cost of energy, a free energy audit could be a wise investment in saving you money in the long run and helping the environment.

Did you know you can sign up for a free energy audit, the first step in weatherizing your home. The audit is a 1-2 hour process where auditors come to your home, provide free, energy efficient light bulbs, seal any obvious air leaks, and provide a report on steps you can take to weatherize your home - including cost, rebates, tax breaks, and projected payback. If you are interested in an energy audit, all I need is a phone number where the energy audit folks can reach you to sign you up. If you prefer, there is an online sign-up page at: <http://nextsteplivinginc.com/newton-eco-team-project/?program=Newton>. The project was recently featured on the Huffingtonpost: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/dan-worth/energy-efficiency-homes-newton_b_1024006.html

Newton Conservators Sponsors

The Newton Conservators appreciate the generous contributions of "Gold" and "Silver" Sponsors on the occasion of our Annual Dinner. We are indebted for their contributions, which will help to defray land acquisition and other costs.



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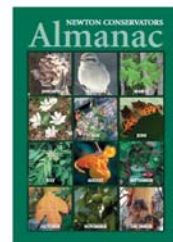
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Newton Conservators e-Bulletin

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Did you know that you can Join the Newton Conservators online. And consider a gift membership for a conservation-minded friend (new members get a trail guide as well)! Visit <http://www.newtonconservators.org/membership.htm> for details on membership options. Did you know that you can register and pay for membership, events, buy a copy of our Almanac or newly revised Trail Guide, or make a donation to the Newton Conservators online?



Mission: *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 organization was formed as a not-for-profit 50 years ago in June 1961.

- E-Bulletin Editor Ted Kuklinski, Newton Conservators (dolanpond@aol.com)



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