



**NEWTON
CONSERVATORS**

WINTER ISSUE

NEWSLETTER

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

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What Does the Newton Conservators Do?



PHOTO: HENRY FINCH

Newton Conservators' Board Meeting at Waban Library

The mission of Newton Conservators can be stated briefly: it is to promote “the protection and preservation of natural areas... for the enjoyment and benefit of the people of Newton for scientific study, education, and recreation.”

Telling you about the ways that the Conservators' board members and volunteers fulfill that mission cannot be so brief because we do so in many ways.

1. The Conservators advocates for and works to preserve critical open spaces in Newton.

Unlike many communities outside Route 128, Newton does not have many hundreds of acres of open space (except for golf courses). The green space that does exist is essential for the health of all the people and wildlife in the city. Concerned members keep track of what is happening with important open-space parcels and work to find ways to protect those that are at risk. Helping the city to acquire the Newton Community Farm was one of those projects.

Preserving Webster Woods, the core of the largest natural area in Newton, has been one of our big projects for the past three years. The Conservators collaborated with the Friends of Webster Woods to make sure that



PHOTO: KEN MALLORY

Children learn about the kind of wildlife that can be found in the vernal pond in Webster Woods.

people throughout the city recognized the environmental importance of the former Congregation Mishkan Tefila land at 300 Hammond Pond Parkway. (The land is now owned by Boston College.) The coalition was delighted to receive the unanimous

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support of the City Councilors and mayoral candidates. One of Mayor Fuller's early acts was to form a Webster Woods Advisory Panel. The Conservators has three board members and two advisors on that fifteen-member panel. The goal is to preserve the woods — by purchase or conservation restriction — by the end of 2019.



Councilor-At-Large, Ward 5, Deb Crossley shows a group of Conservators and friends plans for the Upper Falls Greenway.

not have the permanent protection of a conservation restriction.

Article 97 of the Amendments to the Massachusetts Constitution provides protection for land acquired for natural resources purposes, but that does not apply to all city-owned land, and there have been legal challenges to the law. The best way to protect this land in Newton is with a conservation restriction (CR), a legal agreement about



The path at Bracebridge Road has new owners who are committed to maintaining a public walkway.

what activities are and are not allowed on the land — in perpetuity. By state law, property owners cannot hold conservation restrictions on their own land. They must be held by an independent entity, and the Conservators has taken on that role for the City.

Three city-owned properties — the land next to the bathhouse at Crystal Lake, a small property on Wabasso Street, and Kessler Woods — were purchased with Community Preservation funds and, by state law must be covered by a conservation restriction. Newton Conservators has agreed to hold those CRs and is working with the Newton Law Department to create the CR documents for those properties.

The Conservators also has three board members on a working group (with members of the Parks and Rec and

Law departments) to create a conservation restriction for Nahanton Park. The Conservators will also hold that CR.

The Conservators also looks for innovative ways to help preserve open space. It holds the conservation restriction on 1.5 acres of a beautiful residential property at 15 Bracebridge Road. A path through the property, which we completed last year, is open to the public.

2. The Conservators monitors its Conservation Restrictions.

Each, year a team of volunteers visits each of the properties on which we hold a conservation restriction.

Currently, there are six of those properties owned by the City: Newton Community Farm (Angino Farm), the Crystal Lake Path, Webster Park at Dolan Pond (76



Fall festival at the Newton Newton Community Farm, a property the Newton Conservators helped preserve through the Community Preservation Act.

Webster Park), Elgin Street Conservation Area, Newton Commonwealth Golf Course, and Waban Hill Reservoir.

The task of the volunteers is to make sure that the terms of the restriction

are being followed and that there is no encroachment on the land from abutters. In addition, every three years, the Conservators hires a professional organization — to date, the Audubon Society or the New England Wild Flower Society — to monitor each property professionally. We report any corrections that are needed to the city department responsible for the land (or in the case of privately owned 15 Bracebridge Road, to the owner).

3. The Conservators helps to maintain city-owned open space.

Especially with the great increase of invasive plants, land that is left alone often does not remain a biologically diverse and healthy environment. Invasive plants crowd out native plants as well as the insects, birds, amphibians, and other animals that have evolved to eat them, so it's not sufficient just to let open space exist "naturally."

The City has not been able to allocate sufficient resources to control invasive plants from its parks and conservation land, so — as much as possible — the Conservators helps to provide hardworking volunteers to do the work. The



High school volunteers at the Newton Public Library.

in the spring and fall newsletters, Conservators volunteers remove invasive plants from many of Newton's parks and conservation lands. The season starts with removing garlic mustard from Dolan Pond, Cold Spring Park, and Blue Heron Bridge. Work continues by removing buckthorn, knotweed, and black swallow-wort throughout the city.

Some parts of our city-owned open space have deteriorated so much that they need special attention. Two of those areas are Woodcock Meadow in Nahanton Park and the Red Maple swamp in Cold Spring Park. As you may have read in past issues of this newsletter, the Conservators has an ongoing project in each of these parks.



Newton Conservators lead trips into Woodcock Meadow to remove invasive plants like buckthorn and black locust.

In Nahanton Park, advisor Jon Regosin, the new Deputy Superintendent of the Mass. Division of Fisheries & Wildlife, helped us to develop a plan to save the meadow habitat for American Woodcocks and migratory songbirds, wildflowers, bees and other pollinators, and many butterflies. (See <https://bit.ly/2Ow9W1k> for an article.) This work is particularly critical since meadow habitat is under severe threat throughout the state.

In Cold Spring Park, the understory of the red maple swamp is so thick with invasive Eurasian buckthorn, which suppresses the growth of the trees' seedlings, that no new trees are growing to ensure the succession of the forest. With the help of ecologist Eric Olson, horticulturist Bruce Wenning and a dedicated group of volunteers,

volunteer crews, despite valiant efforts, cannot keep up with removal of invasive plants, so we need to find additional ways to address the problem.

In the meantime, as you will see



Bullough's Pond

the Conservators has established two test plots in hopes of identifying the best way to remove the problematic buckthorn. (See <https://bit.ly/2SSan9K>.)

4. The Conservators advocates for trails.

The mission of the Conservators includes ensuring that open space is accessible to the public. Part of that work is advocating for new trails and helping to make sure that already established trails are kept clear and well marked.

For the past year, the Conservators has worked with the Riverside Greenway Working Group (a coalition of Bike Newton, the Conservators, the Lawrence and Lillian Solomon Foundation, and members of the neighborhoods of Newton Lower Falls and Auburndale) to develop a trail network that will close the gap between the Blue Heron Trail at Lyons Park in Auburndale and the Riverside MBTA station, Newton Lower Falls and beyond.

5. The Conservators works to educate the public about open space.

One of the most rewarding and fun parts of our work is sharing information about the benefits of open space and helping the creatures that live in it.

The Conservators' website (www.NewtonConservators.org) contains a wealth of information and history of Newton's open spaces and the Conservators' work since it was formed in 1961. This quarterly newsletter and our frequent E-bulletin bring regular updates and in-depth looks to your in-box or mailbox. Knowledgeable board members and advisors lead our popular walks every spring and fall. They are listed on the website and in the spring and fall newsletters.

Every year, the Conservators co-sponsors lectures at the Newton Free Library. The Conservators Annual Meeting



Dolan Pond Conservation Area Signage

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and dinner on Wednesday, May 9, will feature John Maguranis, Animal Control Officer in Belmont and representative of Project Coyote. In recent years, our speakers have included Arnold Arboretum Director Ned Friedman, Professor Douglas Tallamy from Delaware, and — last year — naturalist/author Peter Alden.



Boston University biologist Richard Primack leads a tour of the Hammond Pond Reservation.

You also can find members of the NC board at a table at the Elm Street and Cold Spring Park Farmers Markets. Next summer, stop by the booth to learn about the benefits of planting milkweed for monarch butterflies — and get some milkweed seeds.

We love working with students at all levels. We work to remove invasives with classes from both Newton high schools — and Needham High School. We're honored to have had the chance to talk to students from biology classes at both Newton North and Newton South. Annually, we give a grant to the summer Environmental Science Program, which helps students to learn about the environment, and we also give grants to environmentally oriented student projects in the Newton Schools. Those grants recently included funding for Brooks Mathewson's salamander project at Cabot Woods with Newton North students, an indoor planting project at Newton South, and an outdoor gardening project at Peirce Elementary School.

6. And more...

In one article, it is impossible to list all that the Conservators does. There are so many more small and large ways that members of the organization work to preserve open space.

The Conservators' board is grateful for the Friends groups that support specific parcels of open space in Newton. Recently, we became the fiscal sponsor for the new Friends of Cold Spring Park. (See Cold Spring article later in this newsletter)

The Conservators had official representatives to the Needham Street Area Vision Plan Engagement Group and the City's Workshop on Climate Resiliency Planning.

The Conservators also owns three small properties in Newton and not only monitors them but also pays for their maintenance. This fall, the board hired a member of the conservation staff at New England Wildflower Society to do an evaluation of Dexter Woods and to suggest ways to make it a better wildlife habitat. That will be an ongoing project over the next year.

What does the Conservators need most to continue all of our work? Your involvement!

Please join us at the annual meeting on May 8, or attend one of our popular spring walks or an invasive-plant pull, a monitoring team, or at the farmers markets. All events (except the annual meeting, which includes a dinner) are free. Bring a friend or young person, and encourage your neighbors to join.

Your membership is very important to us. All of the organization's work is funded by membership fees and donations. (The Conservators is an all-volunteer organization with no paid employees.) Having a large membership helps to give the Conservators a larger voice in its advocacy work. ♦

— Beth Wilkinson

Winter's coming. Take a hike!

*Shop online at www.newtonconservators.org/books.htm to purchase Newton Conservators' publications. *Almanac* is \$19.95 + shipping, and the *Trail Guide* is \$8.95 + shipping.*

- Members receive a discount from these prices when purchasing online.

