

Littleton Conservation Trust



Newsletter

Spring 2021

Looking to the Future

The overriding focus of the articles in this newsletter shows a renewed commitment to the need to protect the open space that we have and add to it. With the ongoing pandemic, more of us have been drawn outdoors seeking physical exercise and emotional relief. In response to this surge in use of Littleton's open spaces, LCT has developed outdoor programs that provide achievement patches for those hiking many local trails and similar rewards for other challenges—for example, Hike 20 in 2020, extended by popular demand into 2021, and the seasonal Littleton Little Town Tree Hunt.



What we have noticed in Littleton is happening elsewhere. There is an emerging bipartisan vision and policy to protect 30 percent of all land and water in all states as protected open space by 2030. This is now referred to as the "30 x 30" program. Locally, some towns have surpassed 30 percent mark. While Groton has permanently protected some 34 percent of its land as open space, Littleton has achieved less than half that. As you read through the newsletter, we hope that you are excited by the positive things that the LCT and others are doing to permanently protect and steward our open space and are simultaneously inspired to help us protect more open space for all of us to enjoy.

Never Trust an Unprotected Piece of Land

**Littleton needs to work to protect our land.
Stay informed and attend town meetings.**

In the past decade, the Couper Farm, Bennett Orchard, Durkee Tree Farm, and Jones Meadow have become housing developments. During a recent Planning Board public hearing, an abutter to the proposed Littleton Station Village pointed out that his views of Oak Hill and beyond will be replaced by 50-foot-tall apartment buildings located 15 yards from his property line.

Fortunately for landowners and even homeowner associations, your land can be protected in perpetuity in a variety of different ways: Conservation or Agricultural Restrictions, Estate Planning, and Transfer of Development Rights are but a few.

With the Transfer of Development Rights Bylaw that is now being discussed by the town, landowners will be able to sell the development rights to their land in exchange for a permanent agricultural or conservation restriction. Then, the developer who purchases these development rights will be allowed to develop at higher density in areas identified by the town as appropriate for such development. This is a great way for landowners to sell at market value, while protecting Littleton's open space.

Unprotected land can never be trusted to remain undeveloped. Littleton is growing very quickly, and we can expect more and larger developments. If you love your land, protect it. Reach out to one of LCT's Trustees to learn more.

Concerns About Littleton's Limited Open Space

We have a problem! Although many people are drawn to Littleton's open spaces for their beauty, diverse wildlife, and passive recreational benefits, we actually have only half the state average of protected open land. We are among the state's municipalities with a below average percentage of protected open space. In fact, Littleton's permanently protected open space is one of the smallest in the region, lagging all abutting towns except Ayer which it matches. We need to improve upon our efforts to protect more land from development to benefit the community.



Littleton's percentage of protected lands is 14% instead of the state's municipal average of 28%. Littleton's Open Space Residential Development (OSRD) subdivision bylaw accommodates cluster development, allowing some open space land to be protected. Unfortunately, it also allows developers to additionally count already protected unbuildable wetlands and ecologically sensitive areas as part of their required compensatory new open space. Therefore, it encourages developers to set aside marginal land remnants that don't necessarily provide full benefit to the community and natural environment.

Further aggravating the situation, Littleton is, according to the U.S. Census Bureau, the seventh fastest developing municipality in Massachusetts over the last decade. Littleton's population now tops 10,000. There is a deep-rooted myth that more residential development will bring in extra taxes, but little thought is given to how to cover all the associated community service costs. While new property taxes are easy to measure, they

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Spring 2021**

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- Website:**
LittletonConservationTrust.org
Trail Maps:
LittletonConservationTrust.org/trail-guide
Facebook:
facebook.com/LittletonConservationTrust

The Littleton Conservation Trust (LCT), distinct from the Town's Conservation Commission, is a private land trust that was formed in 1962 to promote Littleton's rural character; to preserve its water, plant, and wildlife resources, and unique views; and to provide environmental education. The LCT is caretaker of over 300 acres of property (gifted from far-sighted residents) on which we manage a public trails system.

Littleton Conservation Trust Contacts

- ➔ **Jim O'Neil, LCT Trail Crew Coordinator**, maintains a trail worker email distribution list. When work projects are planned, notifications and updates are distributed to its member list. Email JFOneil63@verizon.net
- ➔ **Littleton Trails**, a public Facebook group, is an interactive site to share stories, photos, and observations of Littleton's conservation lands and area wildlife. See facebook.com/groups/639049749490984
- ➔ **LCT Walks** will be announced and updated on the Littleton Conservation Trust website, listed in the Littleton Conservation Trust events calendar and automatically sent to the Littleton Conservation Trust email list. Sign up at LittletonConservationTrust.org/contact-us/subscribe/

Upcoming: Activities (A), Walks (W), Other Outdoor Events (O)

Date	Time	Event Description
7/24	1-3 p.m.	(A) Story walk at Oak Hill Conservation Land
6/5-8/21	10 a.m.	(O) Yoga in the outdoors with Karen O'Neil. Sessions will be on the 1st and 3rd Saturdays of the month from June through August. Raindate will be Sunday. Check website for locations.
Ongoing	Dawn to Dusk	(W) The hiking challenge is extended through 2021. Go to the website and join in the fun.

What's Happening at the Smith Conservation Land?

Since the 2019 acquisition by the Sudbury Valley Trustees (SVT) of the Edith and Paul Smith Conservation Land at 199 Whitcomb Avenue, they have worked with the LCT, area residents, the public-at-large, and the Smith adult children to plan and manage the property for enhanced wildlife habitat and improved visitor experience. The LCT holds a protective easement over the conservation property and works with SVT to ensure protection of conservation values. Among the changes implemented are the redirection of some trails away from neighboring property and sensitive areas, certification of critical vernal pools, creation of a parking lot and trailhead kiosk, and creation of an updated trail map. See the Smith Conservation Land trail map at svtweb.org/sites/default/files/property/map/littleton_smith_0_0.pdf

Current efforts include creation of a Habitat Management Plan found at svtweb.org/smith-habitat-management. Major elements include the removal of unsafe trees and non-native invasive plants that degrade the habitat and impact the property's



ecological sustainability. The diseased and dying red pine forest stand will be removed as soon as the invasive bittersweet is brought under control. The non-native European Tamarack will also be removed. This will enable native trees, shrubs, and plants to grow to foster a more diverse and resilient habitat. SVT may need to do some planting to achieve this goal.

A prime challenge is to remove the expanding aggressive Asiatic bittersweet (*photo, left*) that

(See "Smith Conservation" on page 3)

Littleton Conservation Trust Membership and Donation Form — Spring 2021

New Renewal Gift Membership Donation

Date: ____ / ____ / ____

Name: _____

(Your date designates tax deduction year.)

Address: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Please provide an email address to receive notification of upcoming walks and conservation-related events.

Checks should be made out to the "Littleton Conservation Trust" or just "LCT."

For donations under \$1000, we also accept credit card payments online at: littletonconservationtrust.org/donate

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Individual: \$25 | <input type="checkbox"/> Family: \$40 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Friend: \$100 | <input type="checkbox"/> Supporter: \$250 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Patron: \$500 | <input type="checkbox"/> Benefactor: \$1000 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other: \$ _____ | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Gift to Permanent Fund: \$ _____ | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Please send me information on preserving my own land. | |

Please send form to:

Christine Nordhaus, Treasurer
Littleton Conservation Trust
PO Box 594
Littleton, MA 01460



("Smith Conservation" continued from page 2)

strangles trees and overwhelms all other vegetation in its path. Its spread spans 22 acres of the 54-acre property.

SVT has spent considerable effort researching best control methods and has carefully selected several means, each targeted to specific landscape sensitivities. Read more about SVT's carefully crafted plans detailed in the online Habitat Management Plan. The Asiatic bittersweet plant is easily recognizable by its attractive colorful red berries and strangling vines.

This spring, SVT hired a contractor to clear brush and small shrubbery in two areas to allow annual mowing of a portion of the property's former farm field. A professional Environmental Risk Assessor has been hired to review SVT's plans for limited use of state and federally approved herbicides to remove intransient bittersweet to achieve healthy habitats and attain sustainable ecological restoration. SVT has recruited an SCA/Americorps member to initiate immediate manual and mechanical pulling of bittersweet in targeted wetlands and other sensitive areas. The SCA/Americorps member will work with a summer intern and volunteers.

For more details on the Smith Conservation Land Management Plan, updates, planned activities and programs, please consult SVT's Smith Conservation Land web page at svtweb.org/smith

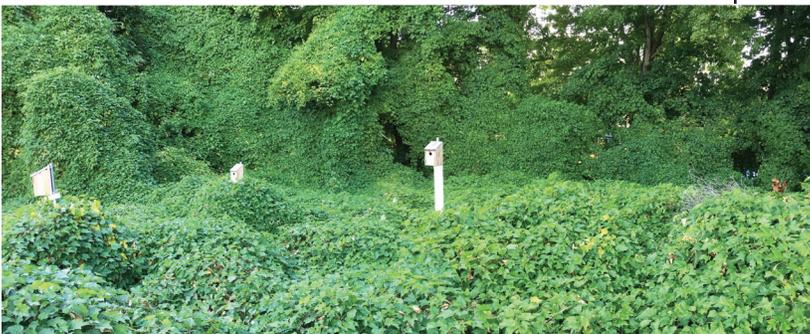
Invasive Aliens: Ongoing Efforts' Update

Invasive aliens are an ongoing challenge throughout the town of Littleton. The Sudbury Valley Trustees have taken on the **Asiatic bitterweet** challenge for Smith Conservation Land with a strong and responsible management plan. Listed below is a summary of ongoing eradication efforts around town.

- The **Garlic Mustard** challenge is in full swing with volunteers attacking infested areas and adopting street sides near their homes. Get to know this plant. Don't let it get established on your own property, and volunteer if you can to help control it around town.
- **Mile-a-Minute Vine** growing between Rt. 119 and Brook Way is somewhat under control with regular monitoring and pulling of occasional vines. Residents in the area should be on the lookout and report any sightings.
- **Porcelain Berry** (*photo, below left*) is a recent arrival, establishing itself near the New England Forestry Foundation Barn. NEFF and LCT have started a project designed initially to prevent vines from fruiting, then ultimately killing them off. Porcelain Berry is related to the grape, and easily confused with it. The light blue fruit is distinctly different, however, and if you see it elsewhere in town, please report it. It is highly aggressive and capable of covering the ground and trees.
 - **Black Swallow-wort** is a serious problem in the neighborhood between Shaker Lane, and Manchester Drive. Homeowners in the area have been alerted to the problem and are doing a good job of controlling the spread of seeds.

Pictures and information about these and other invasive plant species threatening our area can be viewed on the SuAsCo CISMA website:

cisma-suasco.org



("Concerns" continued from page 1)

often do not cover expensive obligations associated with development such as the need for expanded schools, roads, and emergency services. The development pressure, combined with our lower level of protected open space, means that the possibilities for securing good conservation lands are diminishing.

The Role of the Town Government

The Littleton Planning Board (PB) reviews and approves development projects. Over the past few years, the board has had mixed success in balancing development and open space.

When the Cobb family subdivided and developed their lands, they submitted a complete plan, with clearly defined residential lots and high-value open space lands permanently reserved for public use. Furthermore, the developer involved all stakeholders early in the process. The open space included was easy to use and well interconnected with its surrounding properties. The conservation organization that agreed to accept and manage the open space was funded with a small endowment. When the PB approved the subdivision project, there were no lingering details to be figured out after the approval process. This provides a good model for future subdivision projects.

Unfortunately, it is more typical for OSRD project plans to develop slowly after being submitted to the PB. Consideration of open space set-asides is often left to the very end of the planning. In fact, fatigued and confronted with a busy schedule, the PB may approve a subdivision before the open-space details are resolved. Because developers know that they may get approval even without complete plans, some developers do not feel any urgency to provide appropriate plans and full details in a timely manner. Consequently, the community may not get the full open-space benefit intended by an OSRD subdivision. In addition, the nonprofit open-space recipients end up accepting less than ideal open space.

Politics and personalities also rear their ugly heads when it comes to developments and open-space plans. Developers are sometimes caught between boards that are not working well together. This means that even if a developer has the best intentions, the plan may not be approved and Littleton does not gain the open-space parcel. All town land use regulatory boards, including the PB, Conservation Commission, and Board of Health, are faced with managing the process to meet full regulatory compliance and community benefit. It is necessary to do this in an equitable and consistent manner.

How to Improve Open Space Acquisition

Improving open space acquisition requires the collaboration of professionals, volunteers, and the citizens of Littleton. In order to protect more land, we need to aggressively pursue state funding resources and change counterproductive practices.

Funding Sources to Pursue

- The state's new Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness (MVP) action grant program is a major resource for funding nature-based solutions and Low Impact Development (LID). Recently a large MVP grant was awarded for acquiring the Browns' Woods property.
- State directed funding through the Green Community program allows Littleton to obtain funding for energy efficient and resilient projects, thereby lessening community and open-space impacts.
- The PB is currently developing the Transfer of Development Rights (TDR). This allows a developer constrained by

limited building rights at a proposed project site to purchase additional development rights assigned to an already designated high-priority conservation property that is privately owned and located elsewhere. The developer's funding is used to acquire the development rights and in compensation that remote high-priority conservation property is permanently protect.

- The Community Preservation Act (CPA) allows Littleton to use both CPA funds from local and state matches, and if desired, to use designated local funding for additional state matching, providing sizable supplemental CPA funding. The LCT promoted the local adoption of this successful program. The Williams and Church Meadows Conservation Lands were acquired this way.
- The state's Local Acquisitions for Natural Diversity (LAND) program allowed the funding for the Yapp and Prouty Conservation Lands.
- Federal funding through the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) has significantly increased recently. The Oak Hill Conservation Land was acquired through this fund.

Things to Change

- Revitalize the Open Space Planning and Implementation Committee (OSPIC). This committee is needed to prioritize open space and drive town efforts to protect open space.
- Challenge the PB to adjust the planning process to avoid approving an OSRD subdivision without full completion of open-space plans and details, and to stop accepting wetlands and other unbuildable sensitive areas from the developer's contribution to designated open space set-asides as required under OSRD.
- Encourage more collaboration between Littleton's professional regulatory land use personnel, citizen board members, and all stakeholders. Establish the expectation that the PB and all town boards will invite community nonprofit land conservation trusts and similar town organizations "to the table" at the planning stage of new developments.
- Establish an open-space advisory committee, get more input from the Conservation Commission, and institute regularly scheduled meetings of a revitalized OSPIC.
- Ensure that land management funding and assignment of open space set-aside recipients fit town plans. The choice of recipient entities for open space set-asides should be based solely on best public benefit, and free of politics.

Conclusion

Protecting and increasing our open spaces is worth the effort. Open space is not only a delight to walk through; it often pays for itself in a relatively short period of time by reducing the costs associated with increased residential and commercial development. However, a balance is needed between protecting open spaces and development. The LCT, other town conservation entities, and the citizens of Littleton can help our town government by attending meetings, encouraging collaboration, and casting our votes. We encourage you to get involved in preservation efforts in any way that you can.

For more details about effective open-space protection techniques, see "Losing Ground: Nature's Value in a Changing Climate," 2020, 6th edition. Massachusetts Audubon Society, Inc., Lincoln, Massachusetts, 33 pp. and online at: massaudubon.org/our-conservation-work/advocacy/shaping-climate-resilient-communities/publications-community-resources/losing-ground

Littleton “Rocks”

The 2020, and now 2021, pandemic changed all of what we considered the normal rhythms of our lives. People have had to make many adjustments.



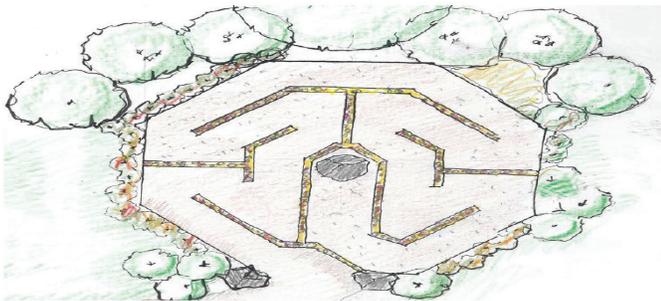
One way that families adjusted was to take to the woods! At the same time, people started painting and leaving “kindness rocks” on the trails. (See the one by an unknown artist to the left.) While most people agree that the rocks added surprise and joy to hikes, it is clear that the rocks can’t stay in the woods indefinitely.

Enter the Littleton Cultural Council (LCC). This group, appointed by the Board of Selectman, receives funds from the Massachusetts Cultural Council, and grants money to local organizations and individuals to support the arts and culture.

In November of 2020, they announced an initiative to collect the rocks. They partnered with local artist GERALYN MILLER, who has spearheaded many art initiatives in town focused on children and families, such as the Shaker Lane cafeteria mural.

The LCC and GERALYN brainstormed and came up with an idea to use the rocks to create a place to remember this time. The interactive piece of art will take the form of a labyrinth. It is intended as a way to bring people together and to support community reflection. The plan is to ask everyone to collect the rocks from the woods (and paint more) and bring them to Castle in the Trees to place in the the labyrinth.

Look for the announcement about the start of the project!



Eggcellent Hiking

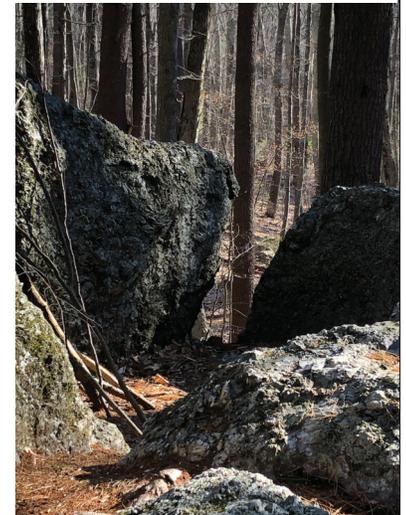
While the news this spring has been hopeful and we are all looking forward to a lovely summer, the efforts to isolate in the past year have meant that people spent more time cooped up at home—and many turned to baking to pass the time.

Homemade goodies have become a common indulgence as people practice “stress baking.” You might, in fact, be surprised to learn of the deep connection eggs and chickens have with Littleton’s own Cobb Memorial Forest.

Robert and Emily Cobb Memorial Forest, along with the adjoining Yapp Conservation Land, provides walking paths through 100 acres. The forest boasts some of the best natural features around, including a boulder in the shape of a fort (photo, below) and a tree in the shape of a foot.

The roots of the Cobb Memorial Forest come from the Old Pickard Farm, which Robert C. Cobb purchased in 1916. Starting with just cows, horses, and pigs, Cobb grew the farm into a chicken breeding operation with sales of more than a million fertilized eggs by 1935.

The Cobb Breeding Company went on to become an international success, reaching across South America, Europe, and Asia, before ultimately being acquired by Tyson Foods. Though operations have moved out of Littleton, it is amazing to think the enterprise that feeds billions was born in this small town. We invite you to explore this hidden gem in Littleton.



Happy hiking!

For more about the history of Cobb, look at cobb-vantress.com/en_US/our-story/our-history/

Big Night Around Town

There haven’t been many social gatherings around town lately, but that all changed at a vernal pool on a recent “Big Night.” Inquiring minds may crave some context: A “Big Night” is one of the first warm, rainy nights of the spring when many amphibious species come out of their winter hiding and, taking advantage of the conditions, make a journey to their ancestral vernal pools. They gather in large groups and kick off their year with a massive mate-seeking party. You may have heard the wood frogs getting the chorus started or the spring peepers (photo, below) peeping their presence in a frog’s aural version of Tinder.

But the trek to a vernal pool in a suburban environment like Littleton is fraught with dangers: predators like owls, crows, snakes, and most of all, cars! Navigating across local roadways can mean doom for the frogs and salamanders just out looking for dance partners to accompany their reproductive songs.



Amy Green, Conservation Coordinator of Littleton’s Conservation Commission, once again coordinated a small army of volunteers over several nights to help out in this community effort to shepherd the amphibious marching band safely to their destinations. Gathering near some of our area’s busiest vernal pool-adjacent roadways, the volunteers helped slow cars and escort the frogs and salamanders safely across. In a single night at Fort Pond Road, the crew tallied the fatalities and counted every single save: 164 wood frogs, 53 peepers, and 14 spotted salamanders crossed safely. Other local spots included Arlington Road in Acton and Depot Road in Boxborough.

In total this season, the group assisted at least 335 frogs and salamanders! The action was early this year and spread over several rainy nights, with March 3rd and 10th being the most active.

For more information and to sign up to assist the effort in the future, check out:

littletonma.org/conservation/pages/vernal-pools

Spring 2021

Littleton
Conservation
Trust



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*"Preserving Our Rural Landscape"
for over 50 Years*

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Permit #6

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Littleton, Massachusetts 01460

TOWN MEETING

Saturday, June 12, 2021

9:00 a.m.

Alumni Field, 55 Russell Street

(Rain date is Sunday, June 13.)



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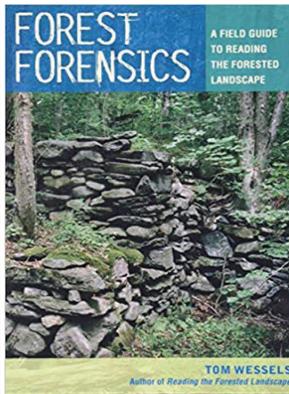
The Book Corner by Kathy Stevens

LCT donated books can be found at the Reuben Hoar Library.

Forest Forensics: A Field Guide to Reading the Forested Landscape

by Tom Wessels

If you enjoy walking through the woods and have a curiosity about things such as the landscape's history, the age of the trees, why trees are down, or why there is a stone wall in the forest, this field guide will help answer your questions. *Forest Forensics*, by the well-known ecologist Tom Wessels, will help you "read" and gain insight into virtually any piece of woodland in New England. The guide helps you understand the forest evidence that tells of the natural features and processes, as well as the human imprint that may have helped shape the land.



The guide is organized by a dichotomous key that guides you to topics in three categories: agriculture (including crops and hay fields, pasture, and abandonment); old growth and wind (tree-aging primer); and logging and fire (evidence of fire and stump decay). Along with written "primer" explanations, the guide contains more than 80 photos to aid in identification. So if you wonder how a place came to be the place it is, this is the guide to take on your journey.

Hand Printing From Nature

by Laura Bethmann

Now that spring is here and the flowers and leaves are back, it's a great time to be inspired to use natural materials to create various kinds of beautiful and practical works of art. In *Hand Printing From Nature*, artist Laura Bethmann explains how to make unique prints on a wide variety of materials and surfaces to create 50 different projects. She gives detailed information on how to gather, use, store, and handle the natural materials, and provides simple-to-follow instructions and techniques to help you complete your own special projects.

The book includes information on colors and palettes, types of pigments and inks, and types of surfaces on which to print. All the necessary tools and methods are listed for each project, and lore on the history of printing provides background. There are photographs throughout to inspire the reader to make items such as note cards, lampshades, pillows, wall decorations, and much more. There are, of course, a number of projects and ideas that are appropriate for children, so they too can join the fun and make whimsical art of their own.

