

# EGREMONT LAND TRUST ANNUAL MEETING AND LUNCH

September 9, 2007 – 11:00 a.m.

French Park

*Come CELEBRATE our exciting year.*

*MEET Randy Stechert and his timber rattlesnake and LEARN all about rattlesnakes and their habitat.*

*Be our GUESTS for LUNCH.*

## *The History of Guilder Hollow*

An active group of amateur historians covered nearly three centuries on foot early in the morning of August 19 while investigating traces of the earliest settlement in Egremont in what was then called Guilder Hollow (now Jug End). Led by retired professor Nic Cooper, ELT's unofficial historian, participants heard about the 1740 Van Guilder purchase from the Indians, looked for remains of the boys' school that once flourished there, admired the old houses still extant in the area, and listened to the story of Major Smiley's Olde Egremont enterprise and the rise of the Jug End Resort, in its heyday a mecca especially for single vacationers. Nothing remains now of the Jug End Barn, erected in 1932, and the area, now the Jug End State Reservation, has returned nearly to the peaceful solitude in which Van Guilder found it.

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NEWSLETTER  
FALL 2006



*Trout will continue to swim in this river.*



*And corn will continue to grow in this field.*

## On the Banks of the Green River

As a result of a community-wide fund-raising effort, and with the support of the Massachusetts Department of Fisheries and Wildlife, ELT has acquired 22 beautiful acres of farmland and woods along the Green River in North Egremont. The land will continue to be farmed but the public will have access to the river year round. The Department of Fisheries and Wildlife considers the Green River a premier trout stream and is pleased that fishermen will at last have a point of access to the river. And the purchase will safeguard the purity of at least a stretch of the river, which provides drinking water to the town of Great Barrington

All these happy results come at the end of a long and difficult process. Several years ago, when it seemed that the land might come on the market, ELT started talking to the owners, through their brokers, Bob Romeo and George McKeown at Century 21-Franklin Street. Land deals are seldom simple, and this was no exception. While the land trust is not anxious to become a landowner, preferring other methods of conservation, a purchase seemed our only option, especially since the land, flat, open, and with beautiful views, seemed a prime target for development. When the owners, who had been undecided, finally made up their minds to sell, the price was, as might be expected, far beyond the land trust's means. After some negotiation, the final price was a firm \$500,000. Still beyond our means, but this spring we acquired a partner: the Division of Fisheries and Wildlife, which

*continued on page 3*

## CR Honors Conservationists

One of the prettiest open meadows in South Egremont sits at the corner of Mt. Washington Road and Jug End Road. A field of gently waving grasses rises gradually back to woods bordering a section of Karner Brook. Now this field and the woods will remain forever open thanks to the generosity of the owner, an ELT member who wants to remain anonymous, who has donated to the land trust a conservation restriction on the 24-acre parcel.

The gift is in honor of three of the former owners of the property and one of the present neighbors: Kate Christie. Part of the property was once owned by Emily Deeter, and the rest, the open field visible from the road, by Linda and Leonard Benson. All four were ELT members and committed conservationists. Since Linda

Benson was the founder of Egremont Environmental Action, the original name of the Egremont Land Trust, it is particularly fitting that this land should come to us partly in her honor. Linda, who is now retired, led the land trust from its inception in 1986 until she stepped down in 1997. She was a very active and indefatigable opponent of the plan to build 600 houses in the Jug End valley; she was one of the drafters of Egremont's first Open Space Plan, and she was the leader of the Karner Brook ACEC project. Together with her husband Leonard she built the house next to the field and it was her delight to watch the wind rippling through the grass in her meadow. There can be no better way to honor these conservationists than to preserve the land they loved so well

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## Aunt Rose's Column

### Good news from Aunt Rose!

*Editor's note: Aunt Rose was late getting her copy in this year, and she explained that she's been busy with her law school applications. We expressed surprise. Yes; she says it's never too late to teach an old dog new tricks and when you're up against those wily Feds you've got to fight fire with fire. This new ambition of Aunt Rose's probably explains why her column this month reads like a legal memo: as our constant readers know, Aunt Rose's arch enemy is the tax man and she's obviously been glued to her little Philco radio gathering ammunition for battle. She starts on an historical note:*

In 2005 the Feds repealed the credit against the Federal Estate Tax for amounts paid for a state estate tax. The result is that the amount your estate pays to Massachusetts for state estate taxes can be quite expensive, as it is only a deduction and not a credit for federal estate tax purposes.

Thus, although the exemption from federal estate tax has been increased to \$2,000,000 for 2006 and later years, the Massachusetts exemption is only half of that, or \$1,000,000.

## BANKS OF GREEN RIVER

*Continued from page 1*

was anxious to provide public access for the public in general and fishermen in particular.

Because the banks of the Green River are heavily shaded and the water runs fast and cool, the stream is a natural habitat for a self-sustaining population of brook and brown trout. In addition, the wetlands along the river have been identified by the Massachusetts Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program as a habitat for several rare species. DFW agreed to pay ELT \$200,000 for a conservation restriction on the land, assuring that the premises "will be retained in perpetuity predominantly in their natural, scenic, and open condition for fish and wildlife conservation, native habitat protection, . . . [and] public outdoor recreation." Since these are exactly the objectives of ELT, this was a partnership made in heaven.

Heaven did not provide the \$300,000 we were still lacking, however, and we had a deadline to meet: DFL's offer would expire at the end of their fiscal year: June 30. ELT immediately embarked on a community-wide fund-raising campaign. Our first stroke of good fortune was the offer by an anonymous donor to match contributions, on a dollar-to-dollar basis, up to \$100,000. Effectively, every contribution would be doubled. The response from Egremont, and its friends elsewhere, has been amazing. So far, more than 100 contributions have amounted to \$76,000, for an after-match total of \$152,000.

After a cliff-hanging series of misadventures (the check

With the locally escalating price of land, you could find your estate subjected to Massachusetts estate tax on \$1,000,000 even though you owed no Federal estate tax. What to do?

One possible solution is to place a conservation restriction on your property and to give the conservation restriction to a charitable organization such as ELT. (You probably guessed I'd say that.) This will reduce the value of the land substantially (possibly by as much as 90%), thereby taking the value of your estate below the Massachusetts exemption of \$1,000,000.

If you are not prepared to make a gift of a CR now, you can still protect your estate from the Massachusetts estate tax by directing your executor to make the gift after your death. But by making the gift prior to death, you get the benefit of an income tax deduction that provides you with cash NOW to use for whatever purpose you please.

A few days later... THIS JUST IN !!

Gifts to charity (and you know which charity I mean) are now more valuable to the donor. Sometimes the Feds surprise us. Under a recently proposed amendment to the Internal Revenue Code, the deductibility of such contributions to charity will now reduce your adjusted gross income up to half: previously the limit was 30%. Furthermore, if you can't use the deduction in full in the year of the contribution, it will now carry forward for 15 years instead of the previous limit of 5 years.

This amendment passed both houses of Congress. This was the hard part, since it was a foregone conclusion that the President would sign it--we all know that George Bush has never met a tax reduction he didn't love. And he did sign it, on August 17. Hurray!

One footnote: the amendment only applies to gifts of conservation restrictions made in 2006 and 2007. So get going; time's awasting!

was lost in the mail and arrived in the nick of time, battered and tattered but viable) we closed with the owners and with DFW on the last possible day. Jim Lamme, ELT's pro bono lawyer, who has provided countless hours of time and energy to this deal, supervised the simultaneous exchange of checks: ELT to the owners and DFW to ELT.

The landscape will remain unchanged. Farming will continue as it has before and visitors to the river walk around the growing crops. The fund-raising will also continue as the matching grant has a few more months to run, and ELT's coffers have been nearly emptied by this purchase. And while we're truly proud of this project, we want to be ready for the next one: Egremont has so much that is worth preserving!

## A Plea for E-Mail Addresses

When you renew your membership each year, please include your e-mail address. ELT never shares members' addresses with anyone, no matter how worthy the cause. But e-mail would give us an instant, easy and economical way of sharing information with members, especially news of upcoming events. Thanks!

## What's the Envelope For?

Do you like the activities you've been reading about? Is it work you'd like to be a part of? Then use the envelope to join us. And if you're already a member (check to see if your name is on the list) please pass the envelope on to a friend who might like to join us. And finally, if you have comments, suggestions, or questions, leave a message on our office answering machine: 528-6626. We want to hear from you.

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If we have inadvertently omitted your name, we apologize. Please let us know by leaving a message at 413-528-6626.

# A Record Flock of Birders

ELT's fifth annual bird walk drew the largest attendance ever. On May 29, thirty enthusiastic birders of all ages and experience ---absolute neophyte to expert---followed ornithologist Brian Kane as he hiked the fields and woods of Jug End State Reservation, looking for birds: migrating and resident. As always, the walk was open to everyone, without charge, and several Berkshire towns were represented. In all, birders spotted 43 species, many through the scope that Brian set up at every opportunity. Those participants who left their e-mail addresses later received this list of the day's sightings:



*Birders line up to see what Brian Kane has spotted.*

great blue heron  
turkey vulture  
mourning dove  
ruby-throated hummingbird  
downy woodpecker  
eastern wood pewee  
alder flycatcher  
least flycatcher  
great crested flycatcher  
red-eyed vireo  
warbling vireo  
blue jay  
american crow  
tree swallow  
barn swallow

tufted titmouse  
black-capped chickadee  
white-breasted nuthatch  
eastern bluebird  
american robin  
wood thrush  
veery  
gray catbird  
european starling  
cedar waxwing  
yellow warbler  
chestnut-sided warbler  
blackburnian warbler  
black-throatedgreen warbler

ovenbird  
common yellowthroat  
scarlet tanager  
northern cardinal  
indigo bunting  
rose-breasted grosbeak  
field sparrow  
chipping sparrow  
song sparrow  
red-winged blackbird  
brown-headed cowbird  
common grackle  
baltimore oriole  
american goldfinch

## Spring Benefit Luncheon

On Sunday, May 21, ELT held its sixth annual benefit luncheon once again at The Old Mill Restaurant in South Egremont. ELT member Chef Terry Moore created a sumptuous three-course menu featuring Berkshire produce. Ted Dobson of Equinox Farms was the keynote speaker. He gave us a history of how local organic farming has become a thriving business, with customers in top restaurants in New York City and Boston.

We extend much thanks to Ted Dobson and to Terry Moore and his staff at The Old Mill. Ginny Filkins, Barbara Chase, Kerry Willig, Nancy Beebe, Suzanne Fili, and Jenna Turner all graciously contributed their services as their own donation to ELT.

## The Bradford APR: A Sequel

When ELT sold an Agricultural Preservation Restriction on our Bradford property last year, a small strip of land, part of our original purchase, was left out. It consists of a strip of 2 ½ acres along Jug End Road, including a right-of-way for the farmer to approach his fields from the road. This year we offered the land for sale to the highest bidder, with the understanding that it carries a CR specifying, among other things, that it can never be built upon. The minimum bid was the appraised value of the land. The successful bidders were abutters Pauline and Tony De Mairo, whose winning bid, in addition to being the highest, was a very odd number. The De Mairos happily explained that, to insure good luck, they had chosen the number of their street address in New York.

## More Protection for Jug End

At the end of last year, ELT received a very generous gift of three lots of land in the Brookvale subdivision of Guilders Hills. Together, the lots form a parcel of just over four acres adjoining the Jug End State Reservation. The donors of the largest lot are Marian Faytall and Joel Friedman and the two abutting lots are the gift of the Guilders Hills Homeowners Association. This acquisition continues ELT's goal of protecting the Jug End valley and hillsides. As long-term members know, the land trust was formed in response to a threat to develop Jug End, and a number of our recent conservation projects have been in the Jug End and Karner Brook watershed area. The land trust is very grateful to these donors, who are so materially helping ELT realize its objectives.

## Trees for 2000: Conclusion

As a fitting way to mark the millennium, ELT carried on a very successful campaign to raise funds to plant new trees along village streets, to replace heritage shade trees that had disappeared. We used the last of the money this year to mulch, prune, and fertilize the trees we planted in 2000. (These trees are presently encircled with blue tape, soon to disappear.) The young trees have flourished, and their growth has been remarkable, as you can see from this one sequence, which shows a roadside scene first without a tree, then with a newly-planted tree, and finally with the tree as it appears today.



*The schoolhouse in 1999, without a tree.*



*The young maple has just been planted.*



*Six years later the tree has shot up.*

## Our Score So Far

Since 1999, the Egremont Land Trust has protected, one way or another, 529 acres of land in Egremont, working sometimes alone, sometimes with conservation partners. At present, we actually own, in fee simple, 77 ½ acres and hold conservation restrictions on another 74 ½ acres. Numbers don't tell the whole story, of course. ELT takes very seriously the educational mandate in our mission statement: "To promote appreciation of natural and historic resources in the Town of Egremont."

## WHIP Grant for ELT

The U.S. Department of Agriculture has awarded ELT a grant of \$11,280 under the Wildlife Habitats Incentives Program (familarly known as WHIP) to eradicate the invasive species that have begun to overwhelm our little fen on Baldwin Hill Road N/S.

During the summer of 2005 several young volunteers hacked out a walking trail into the fen and around the small pond in the center, and it is ELT's long-term objective to create a nature trail through the property. One condition of the grant, however, is that ELT make a small in-kind donation of volunteer labor to the first phase of the cleanup, which will begin this fall (under professional guidance.) Anyone wishing to spend a few bracing hours of outdoor work amid beautiful scenery should leave a message at the office: (413) 528-6626 and we'll get back to you with the schedule.



*Searching for native plants on the bank of Karner Brook.*



*Eating cupcakes on the ELT office porch.*

## Young Naturalists at Work and Play

Next time you drive past the South Egremont School, please notice the new garden in front of the building, planted by the kindergartners and first-graders.

The Egremont Land Trust and the Eagle Fund worked together to hire naturalist and environmentalist Judy Isacoff, from Mt. Washington. Judy worked with teachers Julie Milani and Barbara Delmolino and their students throughout the past school year. The children learned about foods in their natural (original) wrappers, they created an earth worm farm, and they studied the life cycle of seeds.

As a culminating activity this spring, the students planted a native perennial garden in front of their school. Finally they visited the ELT office to learn about what a land trust does and to celebrate with cupcakes and lemonade (see photo.) Afterwards they investigated the lawn and the bank of Karner Brook behind the office to explore the native plants that grow there.

It will be exciting to watch this school garden grow and expand over the years and to know that ELT was instrumental in helping this happen!