

YOUNG NATURALISTS AT WORK

The land trust continues to help out with projects at Egremont's small schoolhouse for children in kindergarten and first grade. In the spring ELT arranged for the children to explore Karner Brook under the leadership of Stephanie



Bergman (who also led the land trust's wildflower walk described in this issue.) The young naturalists heard about the source of the brook and examined the tiny creatures that live in the streambed. In another project, ELT purchased new equipment for boiling sap from the school's sugar maple tree for the annual production of maple syrup.



PLEASE JOIN US!

If you're already a member, pass this envelope to a friend who's not yet a member. If you haven't yet joined ELT and love Egremont, use the envelope to become part of the good work.

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EGREMONT
LAND TRUST



NEWSLETTER
WINTER 2009-2010

An Extraordinary Undertaking: Preserving 1,000 Acres

In an inaugural cooperative effort, the Egremont Land Trust has joined the Sheffield Land Trust in the most ambitious project in ELT's history. The project's long and rather unwieldy name is the Sheffield-Egremont Agricultural, Ecological and Scenic Corridor and its objective is the preservation of the resources and rural character of more than 1,000 acres stretching from other protected land along the Housatonic in Sheffield westward across the farms on the plain and up the forested slopes of the Taconic range to the Appalachian Trail. It would abut and expand thousands of protected acres of state and federal land that includes the Appalachian Trail, Three Mile Pond Wildlife Management Area, and the Karner Brook and Schenob Brook Areas of Critical Environmental Concern. It is a rarity in the Northeast: a relatively unfragmented rural landscape and, most strikingly, an exceptionally beautiful landscape, in places scarcely changed since the eighteenth century.

So far, the Egremont Land Trust has concentrated on our own community. But the reality of land conservation, of which this project is an outstanding example, is that streams, habitats for plants and animals, farmland and landscapes don't stop at town boundaries. Working together, the land trusts can accomplish much more than the sum of their separate parts.

In round numbers, the core of the corridor covers more than 1,000 acres, (and an additional 1,000 would greatly enhance the corridor protection.) In addition to the federal and state park, forest, and wildlife reserves on which the corridor builds, close to 500 acres of the total corridor project have already been preserved or are in the process of being preserved. One hundred of these acres are in Egremont, with a goal of 200 more.

Land preservation demands time and money: a great deal of money, given the price of land in this part of the state. The cost of the current parts of the project is estimated at \$4.3 million, of which \$2.6 million would come from the state. With \$1.7 million to be raised from other sources, and \$300,000 already raised in donations and pledges, the two land trusts have embarked on a fundraising campaign to put together \$500,000 in challenge funds. In the next phase, they would go to the community, individuals, businesses, and foundations to raise the matching amount.

One funding source will be a theater benefit to be held June 12, when the Blue Hill Troupe from New York will present a performance of Gilbert and Sullivan's *Gondoliers* at the Mahaiwe Center for the Performing Arts. The Blue Hill Troupe is a group of amateur and professional theater people in New York who produce shows and concerts during the fall, winter, and spring in the city, and put on



one performance a year during the summer outside the city. The Blue Hill Troupe contributes all its proceeds to charity. Each winter non-profits outside New York fiercely compete to be the beneficiary of the troupe's summer performance, and this year the two land trusts won.

VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITY!

Here's a chance to get some fresh air, do a good deed, and give free rein to your most destructive urges. (You'll be destroying invasive species, after all.) On Saturday, February 20, from 11 to 2, ELT volunteers, led by Tom Ingersoll and Jess Toro, will assemble at ELT's Baldwin Hill Fen to expand the work of clearing the fen of invasive species and preparing the way for a nature trail. Bring clippers, pole saws, or whatever you use to cut branches. Wear gloves and dress warmly. We'll provide hot coffee. The site is across the street from a small pond and 44 Baldwin Hill N/S. If the temperature is below 30 degrees, or serious snow is falling, we'll postpone the project until the next Saturday, February 27. For more information, leave a message at 413-528-0556.

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Aunt Rose's Column

Aunt Rose is a very cautious old lady, not one to lose her head in the rush to do a good deed. After all, if you can save a little money by thinking ahead, why not?

Last year I told you not to make charitable contributions of land (or interests therein, e.g., conservation easements) in 2008. And I'm here today to give you the same advice for this year. But suppose you really, really want to make a charitable contribution of a few acres to a good cause such as, to take a random example, the Egremont Land Trust. Well, I've got good news for you and bad. The good news is that for the first time the Commonwealth of Massachusetts has provided a tax credit for gifts of land and conservation easements to a charity. The catch is that under an amendment to that law no credit is allowed for contributions made before 2011.

The benefits to qualifying taxpayers under the Act are as follows:

- Gifts of land may be made by deed or conservation restriction, as long as they are permanently protected;
- Tax credit is valued at 50% of the appraised fair market value of the gift;
- Tax credit is limited to \$50,000 per gift;
- Tax credit cannot exceed the donor's annual state income tax liability; however, the excess may be carried forward for 10 consecutive years.

The tax credit is a Massachusetts tax credit that may be taken irrespective of any charitable deductions claimed on the taxpayer's federal income tax return for the same qualified donations of qualified lands.

There is a problem, however. Under an amendment to this new law, the total state-wide credits for any given year cannot exceed \$2,000,000 and the administration has yet to propose regulations for allocating this annual cap. This is another reason for postponing a gift of real property interests: to give the Massachusetts Administration more time to work this out.

And the final reason for postponement is a change in federal tax law. As I told you last year, the Feds slightly relaxed their grasp on the throats of taxpayers by changing the rules for tax deductions of charitable contributions of real property. With that 2008 change the limit on annual deduction was increased from 30% of adjusted gross income to 50% and any unused deduction carried forward for 15 years rather than 5 years as under the then law. However, that change expired at the end of 2009, and so we're back to the old rule of 30% and 5 years unless Congress passes a further amendment to continue the 2008 change to 2011.

So 2010 is not the best year for making charitable contributions of real property unless the Feds and the Mass tax collectors enact the changes referred to above. It is, however, a good year to die, as the federal estate tax does not apply to people who die in 2010. Aunt Rose does not advocate this course of action. She wants you to stay healthy, be patient, and keep your powder dry.

TREES FOR OUR FUTURE

ELT planted two young sugar maples (one is pictured at right) in front of the First Congregational Church in South Egremont last summer to replace the two century-old trees that had been removed as a safety hazard. The trees were planted in time to help celebrate the church's 175th anniversary on August 16.

On the subject of trees: Tom Whalen, the arborist who was responsible for planting the thirty shade trees that were the result of ELT's Trees for 2000 project, has generously offered this winter to do whatever pruning any of those trees may need to continue in the best of health. This will be done at no cost to either landowners or ELT. The owners of land where these street trees were planted have been notified, and asked to call Tom (413-528-4077) if they have any questions or concerns.



Land Trust Lunch Celebrates Spring

ELT's ninth annual spring luncheon was held at The Old Mill Restaurant in South Egremont on May 17. ELT member Chef Terry Moore heralded the arrival of spring with a delicious array of seasonal and local produce. Enjoying his warm hospitality and generosity, old friends and new greeted each other over hors d'oeuvres and cocktails. Luncheon was served, beginning with Equinox Farms mesclun and Monterey chevre and cherry salad and followed by a choice of grilled farmed striped bass with tomato beurre blanc and fennel-potato gratin, grilled Vermont quail with port reduction, polenta cake and mission figs, or roast rack of Berkshire pork (related in name only), braised red cabbage and sweet potato puree. Fumé blanc and Cotes du Rhone were poured. Dessert of strawberry-rhubarb cobbler with crème fraîche completed our feast.

The after-lunch speaker was Jess Toro, familiar to ELT members as director of The Nature Conservancy's local battle against invasive species, whose subject that day was climate change and biodiversity.

When the snow melts and the mud dries out in the Berkshires watch your mailbox for the announcement of our next spring event.

ELT ON LINE

Egremont Land Trust's new website was launched this spring. Do visit us at www.egremontlandtrust.org. There you will read the story of how the land trust was started and about the projects that we have accomplished so far. There is also a calendar of events and a link to local resources. You are able to email us through the website as well as being able to print out a membership and donation form.

ANNUAL MEETING 2009

The 2009 Annual Meeting of the Egremont Land Trust was held on September 13 at French Park. The guest speaker was Professor Tom Tynning, who discussed his on-going survey of rattlesnakes in Egremont. The endangered timber rattlesnake is, in a manner of speaking, Egremont's mascot and has been the subject of considerable research by naturalists and of predation by poachers. Tom did not bring a rattlesnake to the meeting, since it is illegal to capture or keep one (although a timber rattlesnake was a guest at an ELT meeting a few years ago) but his audience was very pleased with the very attractive (and harmless) king snake he and his associate, Ann Stengel, did pass around, explaining that he had just found it a good home.

Another speaker was Kathy Orlando from the Sheffield Land Trust, who announced the new Sheffield Egremont Corridor project more fully described on the first page of this newsletter.

After a short business meeting, participants broke into social groups over lunch provided by ELT.

Susan Bachelder, Tom Tynning, and Ann Stengel holding an honored guest.



WILDFLOWER WALK

On May 23, Stephanie Bergman, who holds a Master's degree in Environmental Education and a Bachelor's degree in Biology, led a morning wildflower walk through ELT's most recent land acquisition of 22.5 acres whose borders are Route 71 and the Green River in Egremont. Stephanie's husband, Robert Hoechster, joined us as co-leader.

We followed a path through the field and along the river bank stopping along the way to query our guides. Some of our local wildflowers have medicinal purposes. We saw Golden Alexander, a native plant, whose roots were brewed into a tea by Native Americans to fight fever and encourage sleep. Another medicinal plant we spied was the False Solomon Seal – the smoke from its burning roots supposedly cures insanity and calms restless babies. Down by the river, we saw False Hellebore, a toxic plant, which has been used in drugs to reduce blood pressure; native Wild Geranium whose roots can help stop bleeding; and on the culinary side, we saw the familiar Jack in the Pulpit whose fruit early settlers ate.

Stephanie and Robert pointed out Sensitive Ferns, Ostrich Ferns, Blood Root, Trillium, Speedwell, Great Angelica, Fleabane, Forget Me Not, Blue Cohosh, Henbit, Swamp Buttercup, Dwarf Cinquefoil, and Dame's Rocket.

Invasive plants have unfortunately become familiar to us. One of the more invasive is Garlic Mustard. One good thing is that it is edible, but the bad news is that its seeds stay viable for up to seven years in the soil and that the plant emits an anti-microbial substance that kills mushrooms. The lack of fungi in the forest is detrimental to the health of trees and the survival of tree seedlings.

Our walk was enlivened by a life and death struggle on the side of the trail. A garter snake was consuming a toad. We gave the pair wide berth so as not to disturb nature's way.

Stephanie has promised us another wildflower walk this spring, this one co-curated by baby Mara, who was on the way last spring.



yellow goat's beard



wild geranium



trillium



jack-in-the-pulpit



Stephanie Bergman beginning the wildflower walk.

ELT MEMBERS 2009

Here are our members for the past year--- thank you all! Without you, there would be no Egremont Land Trust. If you renewed your membership after September 15, you are enrolled for the coming year. If you need to renew your membership (or want to become a new member) you may use the enclosed envelope.

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TURNPIKES IN EGREMONT

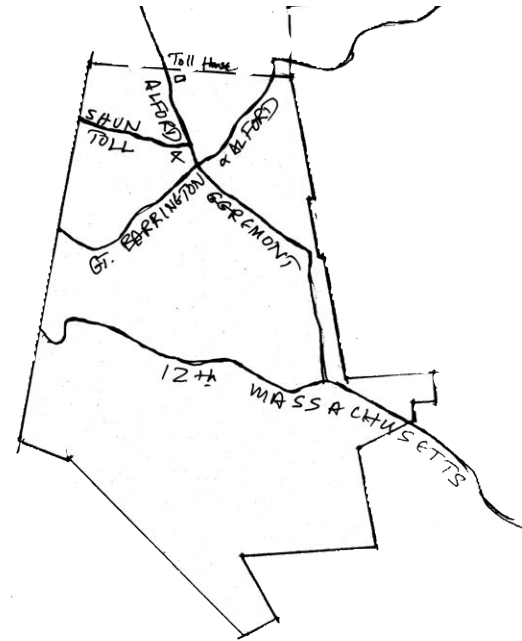
Early nineteenth-century Egremont was a kind of transportation hub, with three important turnpikes passing through town. These were the focus of Nic Cooper's history walk on July 18, held at the present site of the only toll house left in Egremont. Neal and Renee Goff, who graciously invited the ELT history walk participants to view the toll master's office, have moved the house from its original location on the edge of Route 71 to its present site. Route



The old toll house being moved.

71 once was part of the Alford and Egremont Turnpike: the other two were the Twelfth Massachusetts Turnpike and the Great Barrington and Alford Turnpike. In those days, Nic said, the turnpikes were not necessarily continuous: they were paid for by businessmen in individual towns, who hoped that a good road would attract travelers to their towns, and turnpikes would eventually pay for themselves through the tolls each levied. They didn't, and our Shun Toll Road is evidence of one reason tolls did not

bring riches to turnpike investors. Outside of town, the turnpike might revert to the very rough roadway that was standard throughout rural Massachusetts. Next summer, Nic hopes to discuss the historic area in South Egremont that once centered on our lost Egremont Inn.



Routes of turnpikes through Egremont.

RECENT ACQUISITIONS

On June 29, the Egremont Land Trust purchased from the town two small parcels of land that the Town of Egremont had acquired in a tax taking. Both parcels (in total, just over eight acres) border Karner Brook, and both are on Mt. Washington Road, although they are widely separated: one near the point where Mt. Washington Road branches off Route 41 and one on the mountain, just on the border of the town of Mt. Washington. And perhaps most significantly, both abut other, larger parcels that are either already conserved or about to be conserved by other organizations that have expressed interest in buying our new acquisitions.

KEEP CURRENT!

Please fill in your e-mail address on the membership application, or simply e-mail it to us at egremontlandtrust.org. That way you'll hear instantly about ELT events and projects. We do not share membership information with anyone, no matter how worthy the cause.

Bird Walk 2009

Led once again by Professor Brian Kane, this spring's little company of birders sighted or heard a total of 29 species. Because this annual ELT bird walk, on April 18, was earlier in the season than usual, fewer species had yet returned. As always, however, the group saw birds (golden-crowned kinglet and wood duck) that had not been seen during the previous seven annual walks. Brian, who teaches at UMass Amherst, and is a forester as well as an ornithologist, broadened the scope of the walk by describing the different trees preferred by different birds. For example, the red-breasted nuthatch will breed only in coniferous (preferably pine) woods and won't breed in forests with only deciduous trees.

And, good news for 2010, Brian will lead another walk on May 29. Save the date!

Here's the list for 2009:

American crow
American goldfinch
American robin
belted kingfisher
black-capped chickadee
blue jay
brown-headed cowbird
chipping sparrow
dark-eyed junco
downy woodpecker
eastern phoebe
field sparrow
golden-crowned kinglet
mallard
mourning dove



northern cardinal
northern flicker
red-bellied woodpecker
red-tailed hawk
red-winged blackbird
ruby-crowned kinglet
song sparrow
tree swallow
tufted titmouse
turkey vulture
white-breasted nuthatch
white-throated sparrow
wood duck
yellow-bellied sapsucker

In addition, a hairy woodpecker, a European starling, and a pine siskin were spotted nearby that morning.



Bird walk leader Brian Kane with birders



Many thanks to the friends who contributed illustrations to this issue:
Peggy Barrett, Walter Cliff, Nic Cooper, Neal and Renee Goff, Jon and Elaine Hyman,
Julie Milani, and Kathy Orlando