

20 Years On the Taunton River Trail

An act of conservation and advocacy in multiple parts and multiple decades

"I could never resist the call of the trail." —Buffalo Bill

"Whenever the pressure of our complex city life thins my blood and numbs my brain, I seek relief in the trail; and when I hear the coyote wailing to the yellow dawn, my cares fall from me—I am happy."

—Hamlin Garland

Whether it's Buffalo Bill acknowledging the trail's irresistible allure, Hamlin Garland's desire for a respite from the stresses of everyday life, the hordes of summer visitors exploring the wonders of the Cape Cod Rail Trail, the tourists from all corners of the globe who flock to historically rich trails like Boston's Freedom Trail, or the thousands of hikers annually setting out to test themselves on the Appalachian Trail, trails of all kinds exercise a very strong pull upon our thoughts and aspirations.

Somewhat closer to home, along the lower Taunton River corridor in Taunton, Dighton, and Somerset, a long-dormant vision for a Taunton River Trail and Greenway has been revived in the past several years by a diverse group of stakeholders, including longtime trail advocates, state and federal agencies, and the Wildlands Trust. CONTINUED ON PAGE 6



TOP: Black dashed line shows the Taunton River Trail from Rt. 6 in Somerset to its current northern terminus at Weir Village in Taunton.

RIGHT: The view across the Taunton River from Sweets Knoll.



The Wildlands Trust is a non-profit organization dedicated to conserving land and preserving the natural heritage of southeastern Massachusetts. We work to permanently protect and steward important habitats and landscapes, including woodlands and fields, ponds, coastal areas, agricultural lands, and river systems. www.wildlandstrust.org

The Big Clean-Up

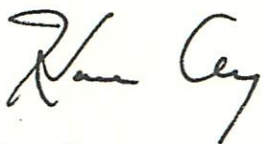
While there's still more to do, most of the clean-up from the winter storms of 2013 is behind us.

Even in the best of times, stewarding protected lands is an ongoing challenge for land trusts. At Wildlands Trust, this winter's weather events underscored the enormity of these responsibilities. Southeastern Massachusetts was hard hit by a series of devastating storms. An unusual double punch of heavy, wet snow coupled with high winds caused damage the likes of which haven't been seen in a hundred years. Thickly forested tracts, like many of the properties owned by the Trust, bore the brunt of the damage.

Before we could even do an initial assessment, the staff spent two days digging out and clearing the way to our office entrance. When they were finally able to inspect the properties, our land stewards encountered washed out trails, damaged signage, tree-strewn parking lots and extensive blow-downs—months and months of clean-up and repair adding up to tremendous unbudgeted expenses. With public safety as our foremost concern, crews gave immediate attention to potential hazards. Trails in Duxbury, Plymouth and Rochester were temporarily closed. Access was restricted to many parking areas that were deemed unsafe until crews could get to them.

The forested areas near the coast suffered the most from the storms. At Cow Tent Hill Preserve in Duxbury, gusts felled 35 large, mature, white pines on the 32-acre property. Clean-up crews are still working on the hard-hit Delano Preserve in Rochester and continue to find blow-downs as they walk the trails. Halfway Pond Conservation Area in Plymouth also sustained significant damage—but the adverse impact of the weather was offset by the energetic assistance lent by the neighbors. We appreciate their help in removing the dozens of trees blocking Gramp's Loop Trail.

While the lion's share of the work has been completed, our summer crews will be busy finishing the job, making our properties safe and accessible for you and your family. We are grateful for your financial support. It's what makes all this work possible—and for that we give you a hearty thank you.



Karen Grey
Executive Director

Board of Directors

CHAIRMAN

Doug Hart/*Duxbury*

VICE CHAIRMAN

Crystal Farrar Gould/*N. Marshfield*

SECRETARY

Charlotte Russell/*Plymouth*

TREASURER

Greg Lucini/*Berkley*

Allan Caggiano/*Norwell*

Sam Chapin/*Plymouth*

Lisa Fortune Creeden/*Middleboro*

Scott Ford/*Brockton*

Michael J. Hanlon/*Plymouth*

Ken Johnston/*Duxbury*

Gary Langenbach/*Kingston*

Jean Loewenberg/*Plymouth*

Virginia Murray/*Plymouth*

Wayne R. Petersen/*Hanson*

Molly F. Williams/*Bridgewater*

SPECIAL COUNSEL

Michael Nuesse/*Hull*

Staff

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Karen H. Grey

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR

Gabriela Silva, Ph.D.

DIRECTOR OF LAND PROTECTION

Scott MacFaden

MEMBERSHIP MANAGER

Debbie D'Isabel

GIS & WEBSITE CONTENT MANAGER

Marilyn Levandoski

OFFICE MANAGER

Karyn Lord

ACCOUNTING

Lisa Burch

COMMUNITY GARDEN MANAGER

Elaine Pollack

AMERICORPS MEMBERS

Lianna Lee

Ariel Burgess

Administrative offices are at
165 West Street, Duxbury, MA.

FOR INFORMATION about
membership or the benefits of
conveying land or conservation
restrictions (agricultural included)
to the Trust, call or write:

Wildlands Trust
PO Box 2282
Duxbury, MA 02331

(781) 934-9018 Phone
(781) 934-8110 Fax
info@wildlandstrust.org

www.wildlandstrust.org



A Thank You and Farewell to Our Amazing Volunteers

AmeriCorps volunteers Lianna Lee and Ariel Burgess, and stewardship intern Hallie Schwab share some parting thoughts on their valuable contributions to the Trust.



LIANNA: Time is finite for an AmeriCorps member. When I started with Wildlands Trust in September, I had to rapidly familiarize myself with the organization. I remember struggling to answer people's questions, write our monthly e-newsletter, and come up with a concise service plan that detailed my upcoming projects. I wondered if I was in over my head. But I've grown into my role. Work has become more intuitive, with visible improvements in quality and efficiency. Now I'm able to coordinate multiple projects (Run for Conservation, Climate Lab, Bridie's Garden, and Wildlands Ambassadors) and get the results I want.

What I enjoyed most was working with volunteers. Our Trailblazers crew is the absolute best! Meeting people and networking on behalf of the Trust and teaching Rising Tide Charter School students about field work at the Climate Lab has been fun.

Working in the "goat shed" was pretty sweet. [Ed: Lianna's office is in the renovated goat shed] It's been great learning from my supervisor, Gabriela Silva, and having an opportunity to meet other conservationists through MassLIFT. We're all working with separate land trusts but it's wonderful knowing that my peers care, and are doing amazing work in a very brief amount of time. A special shout out to Hallie and Ariel for being awesome co-workers.

I've learned that preparation and flexibility are the keys to success. These skills have made me confident and comfortable walking into a situation that I don't have complete control over.

ARIEL: The variety of projects and tasks that I've worked on has been the best part of my tenure with Wildlands Trust. To a certain extent we can custom tailor our service with AmeriCorps to incorporate topics and projects that we are particularly interested in. I've honed my mapping skills and used BioMap 2 to assess ecological assets of parcels. I've assisted Dighton on the update of their Open Space Plan, an essential step for land protection in a town that is still very rural and has a lot of protection possibility. Site visits throughout our region and talking with the various stakeholders and collaborators has made me realize how unique each property is: its story, the people involved, the work that goes into protecting it and how it plays into a larger vision of land preservation.

Art for the environment is something that I am deeply involved in. Being a part of the Taunton River Trail Committee and attending Taunton River Stewardship Council meetings inspired a mural project. The flexibility of AmeriCorps and the supportiveness of the Trust allowed me to add this project to my service plan. The mural involves many groups including students from Somerset-Berkley High and the Park Service and uses art as a way of educating a wider audience about the natural and social history of the Taunton River.

One of the most valuable benefits of serving with the AmeriCorps program and the Trust has been the number of new skills that I can add to my resume. My experience has given me a broad view of how land trusts operate and how they fulfill the critical need for land protection. AmeriCorps is a great opportunity to test drive your education and work on perfecting unpolished skills that have only been explored in an academic setting.

HALLIE: I had the opportunity to visit every property in the portfolio, about 200 in total, and get an appreciation for the range of habitats and landscapes that Wildlands Trust protects. It's a great slice of what southeastern Massachusetts has to offer.

So many of these special places are tucked away out of plain sight, and don't have a sign or a trail network because they protect watersheds or sensitive habitats. I feel lucky to have had the chance to explore these hidden gems.

The highlight for me was definitely getting to know the Wildlands Trust community, speaking with neighbors and visitors out on the preserves, connecting with landowners in our CR program, and working with the many volunteers who give their time at Trust events.

From here I'll be heading out to work on a forest growth study with the US Forest Service in southeastern Alaska. The position promises long hours in the field collecting data on forest conditions, something I'm well prepared for after seven months with Stewardship at Wildlands Trust.

Protecting Land Isn't Just About Protecting the Land

Of the 105 natural community types identified by the Massachusetts Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program, 70 are found in southeastern Massachusetts. Protecting the natural habitats that many animals depend on for food and shelter is considered the most effective way to maintain local biodiversity—and is at the center of our work at Wildlands Trust. Our preserves showcase a variety of habitats, such as rare pine barrens and coastal plain ponds, as well as more common fields and forests. Here are a few of the inhabitants you may run into.

WILDLANDS TRUST VISIT 5 GAME

WIN A TOTE BAG BY ENJOYING OUR PRESERVES

Hey members! Get out and explore the Wildlands Trust preserves this summer by playing our "Visit 5 Game." Visit any 5 of the preserves listed on the game card and fill in the boxes with the code you find at the kiosk at the trail head of each preserve. Collect 5 preserve codes, then follow the mailing instructions on the card to redeem it for your free Wildlands Trust tote bag. Cut out the game card in your March newsletter or download it at www.wildlandstrust.org. Not a member? Don't miss out. Visit www.wildlandstrust.org and become a member today.

RULES: Open to current Wildlands Trust members only. Limit one tote bag per member, while supplies last



The **EASTERN BOX TURTLE** (*Terrapene carolina*) has a dark brown shell patterned with yellow to orange markings and is less than 7 inches long. Sometimes you'll see them soaking in mud. Did you know that box turtles eat mushrooms that would be poisonous to people?

The **LONG-EARED OWL** (*Asio otus*) migrates as far south as southern Mexico. The long, black ear tufts on both sides of its head makes this owl appear larger than it really is in order to frighten off predators. You can spot it perched in a tree while roosting during the day or gliding about at night.

Photo by Mindaugas Urbonas



The **GREAT BLUE HERON** (*Ardea herodias*) is a tall wading bird that resides in wetlands, feeds on small fish, and builds bulky stick nests. Its grayish-blue color, large size, and prehistoric call, make it unmistakable. Spot this elegant heron standing still in shallow waters. You'll never forget if you see one flying overhead with its six-foot wing span.

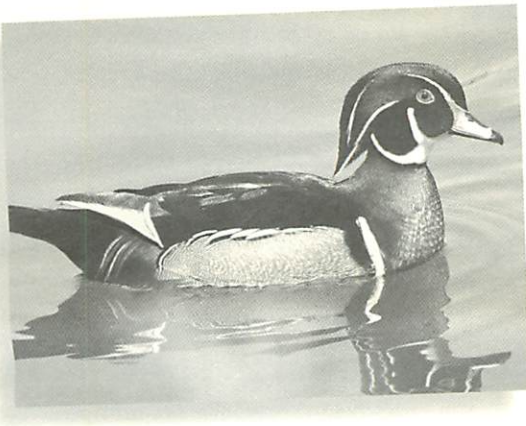
Photo by Michael "Mike" L. Baird

WOOD ANEMONE (*Anemone quinquefolia*) is among the first wildflowers of early spring. It has an extensive network of rhizomes that allows it to spread in thick mats of white flowers and whorled, lobed leaves, on the forest floor.

Photo by Gary J. Wood



The **WOOD DUCK** (*Aix sponsa*) lives in wooded swamps, shallow lakes, marshes, and ponds, and feeds on aquatic plants, seeds, insects, and tadpoles. The male is easily identified by his smooth, iridescent green crest and crown and vibrant colors. Wood ducks make their nest in hollows in trees and ducklings leap from the nest hole in as little as 26 hours after hatching.



The **NORTH AMERICAN RIVER OTTER** (*Lontra canadensis*) is a semi-aquatic mammal with a long, streamlined body, thick tapered tail, and short legs. Otters glide on their bellies on slippery surfaces. You might spot one along waterways, where they construct burrows and hunt for fish underwater. By closing their ears and nostrils to keep water out, otters can stay underwater for up to 4 minutes.



The **FOUR-TOED SALAMANDER** (*Hemidactylium scutatum*), with speckled red-brown skin, is the smallest salamander found in Massachusetts. It likes mossy, wet and muddy places, and eats insects and worms. Mainly nocturnal, these salamanders are hard to spot during the day.



FARMS NEED PROTECTION TOO



Did you know Wildlands Trust preserves farmland? To date, we've helped to save over 500 acres of farmland in our region. The Trust assisted in the preservation of two of the last remaining active dairy farms in Plymouth County.

■ **O'Neil Farm**—In operation since the early 1700s, this Duxbury dairy farm was protected thanks to an effective partnership of the Trust with the state, the town, and supportive local residents.

■ **Anderson Farm**—Committed to preserving this symbol of W. Bridgewater's rural and agricultural heritage, the Anderson Brothers worked with the Trust to protect the farm and the fields, leaving an extraordinary farming legacy.

20 Years On the Taunton River Trail

—CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

The vision for the Trail dates back to the early 1990's, when Somerset resident Frank Donahue contacted Environmental Planner and ardent trail enthusiast Bill Napolitano to express an interest in creating a bike trail along the Taunton River. Then as now, Bill worked for SRPEDD ("Southeastern Regional Planning and Economic Development District"), a Taunton-based regional planning agency. Bill has his fingerprints on almost every worthwhile initiative advanced in the Taunton River watershed over the past 25 years, including the effort to designate the Taunton as a National Wild and Scenic River and co-founding the Taunton River Watershed Alliance.

Working with Frank and other interested parties, Bill and SRPEDD established the original TR Trail Advisory Committee to help advance the trail concept. The committee worked with Conway School of Design to create elaborate, hand-drawn renditions of the trail attached to foam boards, and with a variety of stakeholders worked tirelessly to spread the word about the vision. Now artifacts of a time before GIS technology became widely available, the foam boards nonetheless were quite helpful in telling the trail's story. Though Bill and Frank's efforts did elicit support for the trail vision, overall there wasn't sufficient public buy-in, as support for cycling and multi-use/multi-modal trails wasn't as widespread as it is today. And as preposterous as it might seem, part of the reason for the lack of public buy-in was a concern that rail trails engendered criminal activity, a myth that has been thoroughly debunked by the resounding and crime-free success of such trails all across the country.

A second problem that proved irresolvable at the time was a physical one—significant stretches of the proposed trail route were



The lower tidal portion of the Taunton River in Dighton offers quiet places to enjoy the beauty of the river.

either not in public ownership, or were not available for conservation and recreation uses. This latter problem was particularly vexing, as many assumed that public ownership should have translated into easy conversion for conservation and recreation. Without sufficient public support and no prospect of utilizing the old rail beds as the trail's center, there seemed no way forward, and the trail vision faded into an underserved obscurity. To add insult to trail injury, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts subsequently auctioned off to private buyers a significant portion of the old railroad line between Taunton and Somerset. With that transfer, all seemed lost.

However, good ideas never die—they just go dormant until the timing for advancing them is right. In 2009, and with the support of the Sheehan Family Foundation and the Trust, the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation acquired the 57-acre Sweets Knoll property along the Taunton River in Dighton for a new state park. Among Sweets Knoll's many attributes is its nearly three miles of old railroad bed, which so happened to be a critical link in the

Taunton River Trail vision. With this vital segment of the trail again under public ownership, and officially designated as conservation land, two longtime conservation stalwarts, our friend Bill Napolitano and local conservation advocate Al Lima thought it an auspicious time to revive the Taunton River Trail concept.

Al is a retired city planner, President of the Greater Fall River Land Conservancy, author, and a lifelong resident of Fall River. A staunch proponent of bike and rail trails of all kinds, Al brings a planner's eye to the task, and a bicyclist's zeal.

In addition to Al, Bill, and the Trust, the newly revitalized Trail Committee includes representatives from the DCR, the National Park Service, the Taunton Municipal Light Plant, and the Taunton River Watershed Alliance.

As Bill relates, "It's exciting to be a part of the initiative to revive the Taunton River Trail vision. I think that the social and political climate is *right for this renewed effort* as the public and elected officials seem to have an enhanced awareness of the value of transportation alternatives in our communities."

The most pressing challenge confronting the committee is to make as many connections as possible along the core stretch of trail, which runs from the historic Weir Village in downtown Taunton through Dighton, ending in the Town of Somerset. While much of this stretch is under public ownership and accessible, thanks in large measure to the Sweets Knoll acquisition, several critical gaps remain that require trail users to divert to heavily trafficked roadways. Closing these gaps will pull more of the trail off these busy roads, providing trail users with a safer and more enjoyable experience.

Photo © 2009 Jerry & Marcie Monkman

Thank You for Your Contribution

The Trust relies on private philanthropy to fund the work we do to save land throughout the region. You, our supporters, *are* Wildlands Trust. Thank you for your vision and for your dedication to preserving land for future generations.

New Members

Welcome to the 47 new members who have joined the Trust since March. We look forward to seeing you out on our properties this summer!

In Memory of

EUGENIA ADAMOWSKI
-Kate Stearns Barnes, *Plymouth*

CHANDLER GREGG
-Dorothy Davis, *Plymouth*
-Caro Gregg & Family, *Plymouth*
-Wesley & Janette Somerville, *Plymouth*

MARK MAHONEY
-Chuck & Kay Foster, *Haymarket, VA*
-The Office of Compliance at the EPA, *Washington, DC*

GENE AND SUZIE SITTIG
-Greg Boyd & Tricia Sittig, *Berkley, MA*

URSULA TRAENKLE
-Chuck & Kay Foster, *Haymarket, VA*
-Joe and Shelly Hamilburg, *Wayland*

In Honor of

BEVERLY GOURLEY
ON THE OCCASION OF HER BIRTHDAY
-Kristen Draper, *Fort Collins, CO*

BEVERLY WESTERVELD
-Karen Taylor, *Cottage Grove, WI*

At the same time, the committee is advancing a vision not just for a trail, but for a greenway as well that would buffer the trail, connect existing protected open spaces, and establish a greenbelt along the lower Taunton River corridor. Trust staff is assisting the committee in its efforts to eliminate trail gaps and design the greenway, including outreach to land-owners. The committee is also working on a brochure describing the trail that will help introduce it to a wider audience. The previous edition of Wildlands News featured an important land acquisition

Thank You, Volunteers!

Thanks for all you do—the Trust wouldn't be where it is without volunteers.

Kevin Beggs	Helen MacLean
Larry Bliss	Peter McLaughlin
Cynthia Brown	Breanne Messier
Dick Brown	Karen Messier
Barbara Cain	Ellen Milt
Lourdeen Casoni	Leah Nagel
Marlene Clark	Beverly Ness
Sandy Clark	Pauline Perkins
Moira Coffey	Joan Pierce
Evan Dalton	Plymouth Area
Debbie D'Isabel	Coalition residents
Natalie Derrick	Elaine Pollack
Jack Eddy	John Mariano
Alex Etkind	Danny Mariano
Richard Federico	Alexandra Rozen
Robert Fitzgerald	Molly Seeley
Bob Flagg	Sheila Sheridan
David Gain	Jim Smith
Evie Galanis	Victoria Stearns
Vera Gaun	Nancy Stewart
Fran Giardino	Dorie Stolley
Geoffrey Griffiths	Steven Telford
Eric Gustafson	Caroline Vigna
Robena Haigh	Judi Vigna
Brian Harrington	Luke Vigna
Kate Harvey	Paul Vigna
James Heffernan	Maryellen Ward
Barbara Kelley	Lyn White
Bill Keohan	Stephanie Whiting
Darcy Lee	Molly Fannon Williams
Ken Leonard	Anne Marie Winchester
Jeff Lord	Jon Witkowski
Trevor Lloyd-Evans	Lorenzo Wood
Bob MacDonald	Jason Zimmer

upriver in Taunton that filled in a gap in the larger greenway vision.

The Taunton River Trail will be a true regional amenity, offering bicyclists, runners, walkers, nature lovers, and just about everyone else abundant opportunities for everything from a short river walk to an all-day expedition. Longer-range possibilities exist for connections to other trails, including potential linkages to Cape Cod and Rhode Island to the south, and various points north.

See you on the Taunton River Trail!

MEET A MEMBER



Member: Scott Sauchuk

Hometown: Plympton, MA

Joined: 2012

Twelve years ago, Scott started Sauchuk Farm in Plympton fulfilling his lifelong dream to become a farmer. Scott supports the Trust's mission to preserve farmland. "Wildlands Trust provides balance to an otherwise growth and development-based mindset." Scott adds that by supporting the preservation of farmland "we all can continue to enjoy fresh-picked produce direct from local farmers." The 200 members of Scott's popular CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) program get weekly shares of his farm grown produce—including a dozen ears of corn a week.



PROPERTY SPOTLIGHT

DAVIS-DOUGLAS FARM
10 Acres, Plymouth, MA

This once-active historic farm is now preserved in its natural state for all to enjoy



In the early 1890s, Howland Davis bought land on the eastern shore of Long Pond in Plymouth. Davis, his wife Anna, and their 10 children traveled by train from New York City each June and stayed at their summer home on the pond well into September. To feed their family, they established a farm the property with large vegetable gardens, fruit trees, berry patches, dairy cows, chickens, pigs, and horses. There was a barn, a chicken house, a piggery, and other small outbuildings. Water for the

crops was pumped up the hill from the pond and stored in a cobblestone water tower that still stands there today.

Davis employed local men as farmers and offered their families housing. His own children worked alongside the farmers' families, planting, weeding, hoeing, milking, and picking. Recreational activities took place on the fields, including baseball games between locals and teams from other neighborhoods.

Shortly after World War II, the rapid development of modern post-war life reduced the need for the farm. At that point, the Davis Family gifted the property to Percy and Agnes Douglas, who had raised their eight children there while running the farm for the Davis Family.

Looking to preserve this beautiful property and local landmark, the grandchildren of Percy and Agnes Douglas, Rob, David and John Bongiovanni, decided to sell the property to the Wildlands Trust. At their request, the property was named "Davis-Douglas Farm" to honor their grandfather, Percy Douglas, and the Davis Family who gifted the farm to him. The farm will host a conservation center and serve as the new headquarters of Wildlands Trust. Plans are well underway for breaking ground as this newsletter goes to print. We hope you will support us in carrying out our vision.