



Davis-Douglas Farm, Plymouth

Land Protection in the Age of COVID-19: Saving Sylvester Field

Executive Director Karen Grey reflects on an on-going project and how the pandemic has reshaped the way Wildlands' interacts with project partners and land owners.

I learned the finer points of land protection working alongside one of the best in the business, my Wildlands' colleague Scott MacFaden. After a decade of watching him advance thousands of acres over the finish line, I have come to understand that this work requires an abundance of hard skills developed over time. But, equally as necessary are the soft skills it takes to protect land, like having vast reserves of patience, being a great listener, and understanding and empathizing with the unique situation of each landowner. It's this balance of hard and soft skills, or heart and mind, that results in the credibility and trust required to close conservation deals.

Our work is highly relational and relationships are built, more often than not, while walking the subject property with owners or sitting at their kitchen tables, where you have to be willing to accept a cup of weak coffee or at times a glass of strong bourbon. It's simple. Unless landowners can comfortably connect with us as both people and credible



Sylvester Field has a range of ecological, historical and aesthetic qualities that have rendered it a community landmark, and a top priority for preservation.

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All Eyes on Deck

Last month, twelve people determined the fate of one of the most historic and scenic properties remaining in our region. Their headshots splayed across a Zoom screen, members of Wildlands' board of directors took turns challenging the staff with insightful, yet complicated questions about the Sylvester Field project in Hanover.



The final step in our internal evaluative process—the board review and approval of new land—is rigorous. It can be daunting for the staff. We thoroughly prepare for these sessions, but rarely well enough to anticipate all of the issues raised by this engaged group—especially the lawyers among them.

The conservation values must be high, the liability must be low and the fundraising goal needs to be realistic. What is the landscape context? Who are the abutters? Are there any title issues or public safety matters? While the staff's job is to present the strengths of each project, the board's job is to discover the weaknesses. As the governing body, the board serves as the backstop to the staff's unbridled land enthusiasm. Their vote always comes down on the side of ensuring our long-term organizational viability no matter how beautiful the land may be. Fortunately, Sylvester Fields passed the test.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Karen Grey".

Karen Grey
President

"Those who contemplate the beauty of the earth find reserves of strength that will endure as long as life lasts. There is something infinitely healing in the repeated refrains of nature — the assurance that dawn comes after night, and spring after winter."

~ Rachel Carson

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Newly Protected Properties

Moore Family Conservation Restriction (CR) 33.02 acres | East Bridgewater

- 300 feet of frontage on the Salisbury Plain River
- Scenic open fields and agricultural vistas
- Potential vernal pool
- First CR ever completed in East Bridgewater
- First completed Wildlands Trust project in East Bridgewater

Historic Sylvester Field Complex 3 Properties | 19.75 acres | Hanover

- Within Hanover's historic Four Corners neighborhood
- Parcel's include:
 - Woodlot (7.05 acres)
 - Sylvester Field (10 acres)
 - Homestead lot (2.75 acres)
- All parcels have frontage on lower Third Herring Brook
- Wildlands Trust to acquire woodlot in Fall 2020 and Sylvester Field in mid-2021

Wolfe Family Conservation Restriction (CR) 25.2 acres | Marshfield

- 740 feet of frontage on the North River
- 15 acres of salt marsh
- Abuts town conservation land and Trustee's of Reservation's Two Mile Farm
- Part of a 500 acre contiguous corridor of protected open space along the North River in Marshfield

Neponset River CPA Conservation Restriction (CR) 6.9 acres | Norwood

- Includes 878 feet of frontage on the Neponset River and 385 feet of frontage on Hawes Brook
- Provides passive recreation opportunities to an environmental justice community
- Abuts Charles Elliot Park (7.2 acres)
- Norwood's first Community Preservation Act-funded open space acquisition

Plymouth CPA Conservation Restrictions (CRs) 24 Properties | 975 acres | Plymouth

- All properties acquired by the town with Community Preservation Act (CPA) funds
- Landscapes Protected: Pine barrens, ponds and Hio Hill, one of Plymouth's highest vantage points
- Includes 3 "Super CRs" (properties possessing similar landscape features that are combined into a single CR document)
Landscape features found within these properties include:
 - Forest/Large landscape
 - Riparian Corridor
 - Bogs
- Conservation values protected:
 - Aquifer Protection
 - Wildlife Habitat
 - Riparian Corridors
 - Landscape Connectivity
 - Scenic Views
 - Passive Recreation

Super CPA Conservation Restriction (CR) 193 acres | Scituate

- Eight properties acquired by the town with Community Preservation Act (CPA) funds
- Four properties are within Scituate's "West End", off or near Clapp Road
- Wildlands' first completed project in Scituate
- Conservation values protected:
 - Watershed Protection
 - Wildlife Habitat
 - Riparian Corridors
 - Landscape Connectivity
 - Scenic Views
 - High-Quality Farmland
 - Passive Recreation

Bridgewater State Collaborates with Wildlands

Over the years, Wildlands has collaborated with colleges and universities on projects that present unique opportunities for students to engage with conservation lands and for Wildlands to gain new information about the preserves.

This fall, Bridgewater State University (BSU) is using Wildlands' preserves for three different projects:

1. Dr. Jonathan Roling's marine biology class is using Shifting Lots Preserve in Plymouth as a weekly study site.
2. In participation with the Urban Wildlife Information Network, Dr. Thilina Surasinghe, associate professor in Landscape Ecology and Conservation Biology, has placed game cameras at four Wildlands properties to collect data.
3. Wildlands staff is working with BSU's Center for Advancement of STEM Education to enhance the environmental curriculum and available resources for students and teachers at Brockton High School.

We look forward to learning about the results of these studies and continuing to collaborate with the wonderful staff and students at Bridgewater State.

Adopt-A-Preserve Sees Increased Participation

Since its creation in 2015, The Adopt-a-Preserve (AAP) volunteer program has become the backbone of Wildlands Trust's stewardship department. Every month, volunteers walk the trails of their assigned preserve and report their findings to Wildlands staff. Volunteers also perform light property maintenance during their visit. As of fall 2020, the program has 83 active volunteers working on 25 properties throughout Wildlands' coverage area.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic began in March 2020, AAP volunteers have been more active than ever. During the summer of 2019 (June-August), AAP volunteers made 65 monitoring visits. During the same time period this year, 232 monitoring visits were completed. Stewardship staff have also trained 28 new volunteers. The efforts of AAP volunteers are deeply appreciated and are vital to the management of Wildlands' many properties. When it comes to keeping our trails safe and accessible, we can never have too much help. If you are interested in volunteering to monitor a preserve near you through the Adopt-A-Preserve program, please reach out to Stewardship Manager Erik Boyer at eboyer@wildlandstrust.org.

Davis-Douglas' Old Barn Foundation gets New Life

If you have ever visited Wildlands' headquarters at Davis-Douglas Farm (DDF), you have likely wondered about the old granite foundation in the middle of the field. A lovely relic of a by-gone era, the rugged blocks of tightly packed granite compose the foundation of the original barn, which was likely built in the 1890s before crumbling to its demise 100 years later. What to do with the open foundation has been the topic of many brainstorming sessions, and only this past spring did we encounter an idea that made sense for its repurposing and reuse.

Recently, Jerry Richmond loaded nearly 250 yards of fill into the foundation, raising the floor to prepare for a native planting demonstration garden. Designed by landscape designer Love Howard, the garden will be an educational feature highlighting the importance of gardening with native plant species. Teams of volunteers will plant the garden this fall with Love, Wildlands' gardener Kim Goggin and board member Marilyn Atterbury.

DDF Barn Foundation Before:



DDF Barn Foundation Now:



Wildlands' Work Continues in Brockton

Despite COVID-19 challenges, Wildlands continues to pursue Brockton partnerships and opportunities to further environmental justice efforts in the city.



Joan Pierce (left) joins Envirothon team members tabling at Brockton Nature Festival (October 2019).

The Brockton Audubon Preserve is a diverse landscape that provides habitat for wildlife and recreational opportunities for residents. When Wildlands acquired this preserve from the now-dissolved Brockton Audubon Society in 2011, we began to imagine the possibilities for widespread conservation in this environmental justice community.

With over 95,000 people in just 21.5 square miles of land, Brockton is the most densely populated and racially diverse city in Wildlands' service area. As a post-industrial

city, opportunities to conserve and protect large parcels of land for conservation are rare. With many studies linking access to nature to physical and mental health benefits, efforts to preserve land in urban environments are even more urgent. Wildlands' environmental justice work in Brockton is focused on protecting land for the public, making it accessible for people and healthy for wildlife. Additionally, we strive to foster opportunities to get residents outside to experience first-hand the benefits and enjoyment of nature.

Since restoring the Brockton Audubon Preserve, Wildlands' intersectional environmentalism work in the city has gained momentum. From launching the Envirothon team at Brockton High School, to restoring Stone Farm Conservation Area, campaigning to expand the tree canopy through the Greening the Gateway Cities Program, and throwing the first-ever Brockton Nature Festival, we have emerged as a leader for conservation in this community.

Leadership staff from the Brockton YMCA recently masked up and joined Wildlands on a hike at Brockton Audubon and Stone Farm, where we discussed ideas for collaboration around youth environmental and outdoor education. As a community organization, we seek meaningful partnerships with both nonprofit and public entities throughout the city. Our staff is actively working with the science department at Brockton High School to develop and deliver environmental curriculum remotely this semester while we continue to work with the city to improve conservation and outdoor recreation opportunities for residents.



Rachel Calderara (far left) and Brockton YMCA staff meet at Brockton Audubon Preserve.

Your Gift Times Two!

The region counts on Wildlands Trust and in return, we depend upon our generous donors to help us get our job done. Recently, we heard from a loyal supporter who wants to help ensure that we meet our fundraising goals and is offering a one-to-one, dollar-for-dollar match on the following:

- All new gifts to the annual fund from people who have never given before.
- All increases in gifts from current, loyal supporters.
- All gifts from lapsed members who have not given during the past year.

Will you help us meet the match? If you value the contribution Wildlands Trust makes to our region, please support us as generously as you can. We thank you for your commitment to land protection.



professionals, the deal will not move forward.

Enter COVID-19 and, as is the case with so many other businesses, we at Wildlands are rethinking and adapting our practices for a new world that discourages people from being together. Can we establish trust and credibility with landowners without having face-to-face meetings? Can we conduct site visits with Wildlands' Lands Committee to review a project? How can we best hold our board's attention on long Zoom presentations for the projects they are required to vet? How will we interface with our state and municipal partners? Can we raise money from individuals we can't visit?

Regardless of the coronavirus constraints, our staff is in the midst of several important projects that we need to usher along swiftly. One, in particular, is Sylvester Field in Hanover. Situated along Washington Street in a historically rich part of Hanover known as "Four Corners," Sylvester Field is one of the town's most appreciated landscapes. The property is enshrined in the Hanover Master Plan as a priority for preservation. With the death of its long-time owner, Clayton Robinson, Wildlands has the opportunity to protect the property by working with the executor of Robinson's estate, Debbie Lincoln.

Scott and I have never met Debbie, Clayton's cousin, but we have a standing phone call with her every Friday at 3:00 p.m. We have never walked the property alongside her. Instead, our strategy is to address the complexities of the deal during regularly scheduled phone calls, all the while holding on to her strong and abiding interest to preserve the 20-acre field complex.

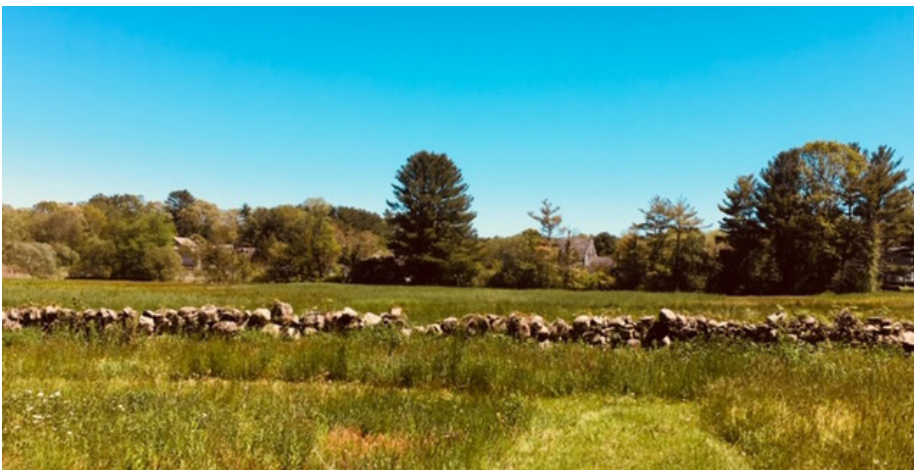
Undeterred by a blazing August sun and high humidity, the Lands Committee conducted a site visit to Sylvester Field, complete with masks and social distancing. Several steadfast members with concerns about the coronavirus opted out of the tour and will meet with us to learn about the project via Zoom. Projects die on the vine without the approval of this crucial group, charged with ensuring all lands brought into Wildlands' portfolio meet essential standards.

As part of our projects, we frequently communicate with members of town open space committees, conservation commissions and abutters to ensure community needs and interests are being addressed. We hope to find a way to solicit input from these and other stakeholders in some vastly scaled-back manner as we advance the Sylvester project.

The Hanover Community Preservation Committee, which we hope to involve in the project, will hear from Scott via Zoom later this week. If they approve the project, it will have to go before the Hanover Town Meeting, which may or may not go forward as scheduled.

Then, of course, there is the \$500,000 we need to raise—from people we can't visit.

It's all going to be very interesting; however, maintaining momentum on Sylvester Field and other projects is critical, especially at a time when so many families are making decisions about the fate of their land. We don't have the luxury of putting deals on the back burner because to do so is to risk losing them altogether.



With extensive frontage along Washington Street, the Sylvester Field is punctuated by a graceful knee-high stone wall and a thin row of mature trees. Once past the wall and its guardian trees, the full vista of the field opens up.



Stewardship Manager Erik Boyer (left) and Community Stewardship Program Manager Conor Michaud (right) meet outdoors while practicing social distancing.

Thank You for Your Contribution

Wildlands Trust relies on private philanthropy to fund our work to save land throughout the region. We would like to thank those who have recently given in honor or memory of a loved one. Your gifts help us permanently protect the natural beauty of Southeastern Massachusetts.

In Memory Of:

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- Claudia Furtado | *North Port, FL*
- John & Gretchen Moran | *Plymouth*

NICHOLAS BIDDLE III
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Property Highlight

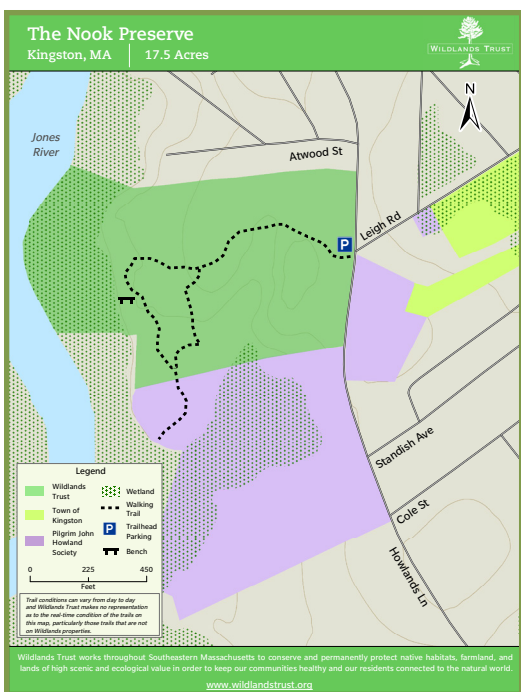
The Nook | Kingston

Gift Of: Mary C. Cherry (1992) | 17.5 acres

Nestled along the Jones River, The Nook is one of the last quiet refuges amidst the heavily-developed Rocky Nook peninsula in Kingston. A once favored area of the Native Americans, visitors of this preserve today can follow an old cart path, a remnant of the days when this property was used as active farmland and pasture, through pine and red cedar thickets.

As the land slopes gently down to the estuary, an expansive view of a salt marsh meadow and tidal creek can be seen. Wild geranium, a showy relative of the more familiar garden plant, grow here. Although it is uncommon in this region, it may thrive on the calcium-rich soil from the scattered middens of shells left by Native Americans.

Abutting a 4-acre parcel owned by the Pilgrim John Howland Society, where John Howland and his wife lived, the trail through this property provides an easy walk and beautiful view of the mouth of the Jones River. After your walk, be sure to visit the memorial to John Howland across the street.



DIRECTIONS: From Exit 9 on MA Route 3, drive south on Route 3A for about a mile before turning left onto Howlands Lane. Continue on Howlands Lane for about a half mile. The preserve will be on your left.

PARKING: Parking is on the left side of Howlands Lane, across from the Pilgrim John Howland Memorial.