



Great River Preserve, Bridgewater

What Does It Mean to Be an Abutter?

By definition, an abutter is “a person who owns adjacent land.” When talking about conservation, this refers to anyone who owns property that shares a border with protected land.

It’s easy to conjure a list of the benefits one enjoys when living close to protected land. Generally speaking, nearby property values are favorably impacted. Abutting landowners benefit from access to open space and trails, and the natural landscape provides aesthetic value. Additionally, there is comfort in knowing that the environment surrounding one’s home will always remain in its natural state, without the threat of development.

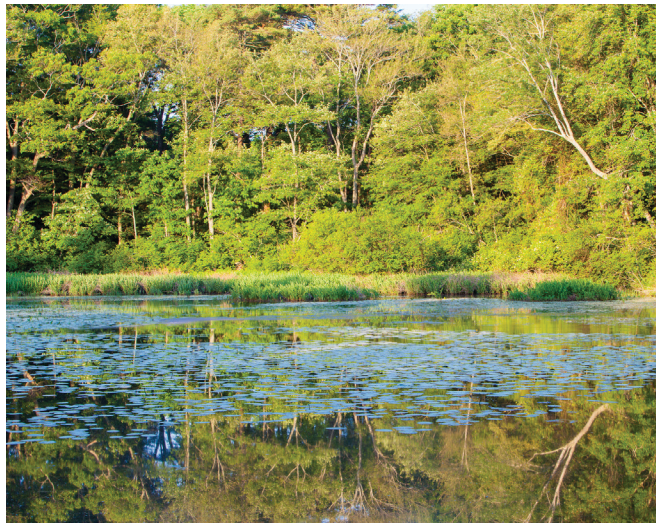
Peter and Rita Lehtola live next to Great River Preserve, in Bridgewater. Peter has spent his entire life on the land that the Lehtolas eventually sold to Wildlands Trust to ensure its permanent protection. Their family has long been invested in the care of this land, and Peter enjoys continuing to assist Wildlands’ staff with some of its upkeep. According to Rita, a notable benefit she’s enjoyed since it became publicly accessible conservation land has been meeting fellow dog walkers and other people who enjoy the outdoors. She says, “I’ve made friends with people and see them almost every day. Sometimes I join them, other times I just see them as they’re walking by.” She pointed out that, during the pandemic’s isolation, this type of regular interaction was especially valuable to her.

Wildlands is fortunate to have many positive relationships with our property abutters, like the Lehtolas, who appreciate and respectfully enjoy the protected land they border. However, there are also responsibilities that come with being a good neighbor to conservation land. Sometimes, according to Wildlands Trust’s director of stewardship Erik Boyer, “People don’t know who owns the woods behind their house, and they just don’t think to look into it.” This can lead to a number of challenges for organizations like Wildlands Trust, who are responsible for protecting the land. In some cases, an abutter’s lack of knowledge about the obligations of being a neighbor to a preserve can result in violations of conservation law. This is known as encroachment.

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The Stewardship Vow

Like a marriage, most land trust projects are grounded in a promise to care for the protected land in perpetuity, to the best of our ability. Living up to this commitment is easy when the sun is shining, the trails are cleared, and the human users behave. However, it becomes more complicated when encroachments arise, destructive storms occur, and people misbehave. Hardships like these remind us of our promise to steward our lands forever. Divorce is not an option.



Sylvia Place Pond at Stewart-Person Preserve, Kingston

In the late fall of 2007, I had been at my new job at Wildlands Trust for about a week when a certified letter appeared on my desk from the Office of Dam Safety. The letter was an order to repair or remove the failing dam on our beloved Stewart-Person Preserve in Kingston, a complicated, expensive, and time-consuming undertaking; nonetheless, a stewardship obligation.

Knowing nothing about dam removal, I relied on the support and advice of local watershed leader and master dam remover, Pine Dubois. Pine made it clear that it was an ecological imperative for Wildlands to remove the dam. I reluctantly heeded her advice, and we set out on a 14-year journey to secure the extensive plans, permits, and funding to remove this unsafe dam and restore fish passage in Sylvia Place Pond and Russell Pond in Kingston. Pending one more piece of funding, the actual dam removal project could start in late 2022, amounting to the most elaborate, expensive, and complex stewardship project undertaken in Wildlands' 50-year history.

Fulfilling our vast stewardship obligations could not happen without the support of our members. Thank you for helping Wildlands fulfill our obligation to protect and enhance the conservation values on the lands we all hold dear.

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Foolish Hill

64 acres | Foxboro (*land donation*)

- Landscape Connectivity - directly adjacent to Town of Foxboro Open Space Land & Town of Mansfield Water Department Land
- Wildlife Habitat - two potential vernal pools, within MA Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Program-identified Core and Priority Habitats
- Wildlands' first completed project in Foxboro
- Includes part of the summit plateau of Foolish Hill, one of the highest and most notable landforms in the area



Foolish Hill, Foxboro



Richmond Woods Preserve Addition, Lakeville

Richmond Woods Preserve Addition

17 acres | Lakeville (*land donation*)

- Landscape Connectivity - directly adjacent to Wildlands' Richmond Woods Preserve; close proximity to Wildlands' Leonard Washburn Brook Preserve & Lakeville Nursery CR
- Wildlife Habitat - within MA Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Program-identified Core and Priority Habitats; includes areas of Atlantic White Cedar
- Watershed Protection - helps protect land in the headwaters area of Leonard Washburn Brook, which supports a native brook trout population

What Does It Mean to Be an Abutter? - CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

In general terms, encroachment is defined as the act of “trespassing upon the property, domain, or rights of another, especially stealthily or by gradual advance.” When property owners begin to use neighboring open space as an extension of their own yard, it is encroachment. Infringements can range from relatively minor and unintentional to significant and/or deliberate. Whatever the magnitude of the violations, they all threaten to damage natural environments and the wildlife that inhabit the area and, therefore, must be addressed.

WHAT CONSTITUTES ENCROACHMENT?

To prevent unintended violations, our stewardship team compiled a list of some of the problematic abutter behaviors that have been encountered on Wildlands' properties, and the ways in which these encroachments threaten conservation land.

- **Dumping yard waste** - This is one of the most common issues we see. People use neighboring woods to dump grass clippings and other yard waste, often with the misconception that, because the materials are “natural,” they don't pose a threat to the environment. Unfortunately, the reality is that such materials are not at all conducive to native soil, and they are often treated with chemical fertilizers, insecticides, etc. that threaten both plants and animals.

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Upcoming Events

Wildlands' Opening Day

Sun., May 1 | 12:00 pm - 4:00 pm
Davis-Douglas Farm, Plymouth
Free Program

Wild for Wareham

Sat., May 7 | all day
Onset Bay Center, Wareham
Free Program

IHRT Trails Day

Sat., May 14 | all day
Chapman's Landing, Hanover
Free Program

Kickoff: Climate Change Community Read Program

Sun., June 5 | 5:00 pm
Davis-Douglas Farm, Plymouth
Free Program

Amazing Arthropods: Lecture with Entomologist Blake Dinius

Thurs., June 9 | 6:00 pm
Davis-Douglas Farm, Plymouth
Free Program

Wildlands' Ramble (Hike)

Sat., June 11 & 18 | all day
Plymouth
\$5 per day - members
\$10 per day - non-members

Wildlands' Movie Night

Sat., June 25 | 7:00 pm
Davis-Douglas Farm, Plymouth
\$5 per family
\$10 per day - non-members

For monthly hikes, workshops,
yoga and more, visit our website:
wildlandstrust.org/events

Wildlands Awarded Planning Grant for Brockton Park Restoration

Wildlands Trust is thrilled to have received an anonymous grant from a private foundation to fund the initial planning and design stages of a significant revitalization project proposed for Brockton's 700-acre D.W. Field Park. Working collaboratively with city officials, including the Mayor's Office, and several community-based and statewide partners, the project will provide much-needed improvements to the well-utilized open space and recreation area over the next 5 to 7 years.

"I am extremely grateful to this private foundation for its generous investment in D.W. Field Park – a park that is frequented by a wide number of patrons from all over the Commonwealth," said Mayor Robert F. Sullivan. "I am a strong advocate for collaboration with organizations who can help make the City of Brockton better, and I look forward to witnessing the final product of this important revitalization project."

"I very much look forward to working with Wildlands Trust on this project," said Superintendent of Parks Tim Carpenter. "It marks an investment in D.W. Field Park by making immediate physical improvements and, perhaps more importantly, it marks

an investment in the future of the park through community engagement and creating an understanding and passion for the park for years to come."



The Brockton Interfaith Community (BIC) will be a primary partner in Wildlands' Field Park Initiative, taking responsibility for community outreach. Here, BIC representatives Kevonna Jones-Tandon (L) and William Dickerson (R) meet with Wildlands' project manager, Rachel Calderara (C) at the park.

The expansive green space of D.W. Field Park is very important in the densely populated City of Brockton. With seven miles of paved road for walking, running, and biking, several ponds, trails, and a 65-foot stone observation tower, it has been a valued resource for residents for nearly 100 years. However, the park has suffered considerable decay over the years, and needs costly repairs and maintenance.

"Having grown up in Brockton, I have a very strong sense of how important the park is to the people of this city," said Karen Grey, President of Wildlands Trust. "Wildlands is well-positioned to convene the partners, conduct the planning, and leverage the funding to restore the glory of Field Park."



D.W. Field Park, Brockton

Wildlands Awarded Planning Grant for Brockton Park Restoration - CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4

“Over the years, Wildlands Trust has made significant contributions to the Stone Farm Conservation Area,” said City Planner Rob May. “They have been tremendous partners to the City of Brockton, assisting with overall maintenance efforts throughout the park. I am excited for them and look forward to collaborating with them on this crucial revitalization project.”

The main goals of the proposed project are to improve ecological functioning within the park, address deteriorating infrastructure, upgrade recreational amenities, and provide education and

outreach for youth and adults in the community. According to Wildlands Trust’s director of special projects Rachel Calderara, “We are embarking on a truly collaborative process that will help us create plans that reflect the community’s values, wants, and needs. This park is a pillar of life in the city, and we want all Brockton residents to feel that it is accessible and valuable.”

Wildlands Trust has been invested in the City of Brockton for over a decade, protecting and restoring 250 acres of open space at the Brockton Audubon Preserve and Stone Farm

Conservation Area, coaching more than 125 Brockton High School students in the Massachusetts Envirothon program that introduces high school students to environmental issues and related career opportunities, managing community outreach for the city’s urban tree planting program (Greening the Gateway Cities), providing Brockton youth with paid service-learning positions on supervised natural resource projects, and advising community gardening, church, and neighborhood park groups whose members were interested in furthering environmental progress in the city.

Wildlands Introduces Hathaway Legacy Partners



Our new planned giving society recognizes those who have included Wildlands Trust in their estate plans. Its name is inspired by the life of Mary Chilton Hathaway, a visionary conservationist who had the courage and strength to make the world she inherited a much better place. Mary spent her life in Kingston, Massachusetts – attending Kingston High School and later teaching at Silver Lake Regional High School, where she chaired the English Department. An enthusiast of physical activity, Mary always chose walking over driving. Several decades ago, Mary began noticing, with alarm, how much land was being lost to development, and thus began her battle to protect the wild spaces of Southeastern Massachusetts. Because of her energy, tenacity, and her own gifts of land parcels, future generations will know the enjoyment of open spaces and quiet woodlands.¹

Watch for a response card in future mailings, inviting you to let us know if you have already included Wildlands in your will, or if you would like to learn more about ways to join the Hathaway Legacy Partners. Options for planned gifts include bequests, trusts, real estate, insurance policies and more.

By joining the Hathaway Legacy Partners, you will help us continue to protect the natural beauty of our region and preserve the quality of our air and water. Members will also be listed in the Conservation Barn at Wildlands’ Davis-Douglas Farm headquarters and will be invited to an annual luncheon to learn more about the progress we’re making together. We hope to see you there!

For more information or help with any estate questions, please contact Sue Chamberlain at schamberlain@wildlandstrust.org or call 774-343-5121 ext 114.

¹ Excerpted from the obituary of Mary Chilton Hathaway, Boston Globe (Boston, MA), 15 January 2022. <https://www.legacy.com/us/obituaries/bostonglobe/name/mary-hathaway-obituary?id=32255666>



Trash dumped at a Plymouth preserve in 2021.

• **Dumping trash** - Man-made junk also gets thrown into the woods by homeowners or the contractors they hire. While most people (fortunately) don't throw their household trash out the back door, it's not uncommon to find items like scrap wood, shingles, and other unwanted items or equipment deposited on adjoining land. This creates both aesthetic and environmental issues.

• **Creating unauthorized trails and/or cutting trees to clear a scenic view** - Cutting trees and clearing vegetation on conservation land is not allowed. Whether it serves to open up a homeowner's view of a nearby pond or creates access from

a neighborhood or private property to an existing trail system, without permission to do so, it is a violation. Wildlands welcomes volunteers to sign up and assist with trail maintenance on our properties, but reminds people that only Wildlands' staff members are permitted to cut trees or create trails on our land.

• **Using motorized vehicles** - ATVs, dirt bikes, snowmobiles, and other vehicles tear up trails, damage vegetation, and generate both noise and air pollution. They also pose a danger to other visitors passively recreating on the trails. Motorized recreational vehicle use is not allowed on any of Wildlands' properties.

• **Building/digging beyond property lines** - This is a significant and costly example of encroachment, whether it is done with the property owner's knowledge or not. When building a shed or garage, or digging to install a driveway or pool, it is extremely important for abutting property owners to know the exact location of their property lines, and acquire appropriate permits before beginning such work. The permitting process alerts owners to applicable restrictions that may exist. Failing to obtain permits can have serious environmental consequences (especially when close to wetlands), and can become extremely costly and problematic for the

abutter to resolve when violations are later discovered.

• **Hunting** - While this is seldom an issue on our preserves, it is worth pointing out that owning property that abuts conservation land does not authorize someone to hunt on any land where it is not permitted. Doing so is unsafe for visitors and nearby residents, and it disrupts the natural habitat for wildlife.

Wildlands Trust much prefers to utilize our resources to maintain properties and trails for safe recreation than to address issues of encroachment from abutters. As for what our stewards most wants abutters to know, Erik says it boils down to, "Know the property lines and the rules of the adjacent conservation area, and be respectful." Pay attention to posted regulations and don't damage or remove informational signage. When issues arise, if necessary, conservation organizations have the law to fall back on, and pursuing litigation is an option. However, Wildlands' stewardship team prefers to talk first, rather than jumping to a heavy-handed response. In the majority of cases, when people don't realize their offense and wish to make amends, education and communication prove to be the best tools to resolve issues and maintain positive relationships with our neighbors.

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.

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- CONTINUED FROM PAGE 6

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Property Highlight

Brockton Audubon Preserve | Brockton

Donated by: Brockton Audubon Society (2011) | 126 acres

Evidence of the agricultural history of this area is found in the stone walls, trees scarred by barbed wire, and old farm roads that are visible throughout the preserve. Once cleared for pasture, the forest has reestablished itself through the natural process of succession over the last century, with most of its trees estimated to be under 50 years old. Thousands of years earlier, at the end of the last ice age, glaciers retreating northward deposited large boulders called glacial erratics on the landscape. One noteworthy erratic, located where the Main Loop Trail intersects with the West Elm Connector Trail in the center of the preserve, stands 20-feet tall!



Brockton Audubon Preserve, Brockton

Today, Brockton Audubon Preserve serves as a natural sanctuary in the City of Brockton, providing wide-ranging benefits for people and wildlife alike. Although a relatively small preserve, Brockton Audubon boasts about 2 miles of well-established trails through a variety of habitats, from towering pines to red maple swamps and shrub lands. There is even a certified vernal pool, a seasonal wetland critical for the survival and reproduction of many amphibians and invertebrates. The preserve's generally flat topography with boardwalks over its wetlands make exploration relatively easy, even for new trail users.

For those looking for additional adventure, a quick walk from the end of the West Elm Connector Trail down West Elm Street Extension provides a link to more trails at the City of Brockton's Stone Farm Conservation Area, a preserve restored by Wildlands Trust in 2019. Brockton Audubon Preserve's location, between the Stone Farm Conservation Area and Easton's Dorchester Brook Wildlife Management Area, places it in the center of a combined 300-acre wildlife corridor. Large areas of conserved land located near densely populated areas, such as this one, provide important habitat to support the survival of terrestrial and avian species alike.

DIRECTIONS: From MA Route 28 & MA Route 27, Brockton: Head North on Montello Street. Turn Left onto Pleasant Street. Brockton Audubon is 2.7 miles ahead on Left.

PARKING: Parking lot is on Pleasant Street, nearly across from Albany Street.

(Download trail maps at wildlandstrust.org/trails)

