



SPRING | SUMMER
2020

Piscataquog News

THE PISCATAQUOG LAND CONSERVANCY NEWSLETTER



Bedford Land Trust **Merges** with PLC

Benedictine Park Bedford



The Bedford Land Trust (BLT), a non-profit organization founded in 1990 to conserve open space in Bedford at a time when the town was undergoing rapid development, has merged into the Piscataquog Land Conservancy. The Bedford group's 704 acres of conservation easements and lands, and its financial assets have been transferred to PLC, under a merger agreement reviewed by the Charitable Trusts Unit of the N H Attorney General's office. The merger became effective January 1st.

"...it was a bittersweet decision, in that during our 30 years as a land trust we worked very hard to successfully conserve 700 acres of land in Bedfordat the same time, we know this is the right thing to do, and that the Piscataquog Land Conservancy will be an outstanding steward of our conservation easements going forward."

The two conservation groups began discussing a possible merger in late 2018. The Bedford Land Trust's volunteer board looked at the demands of perpetual stewardship of the lands it had protected over almost three decades, and concluded the responsibility would be better handled by a larger land protection organization with professional staff. For its part, the PLC had already worked closely with the Town of Bedford in 2017 to take ownership of the 332-acre Florence M. Tarr Wildlife Sanctuary in the northwest corner of town. After agreeing on the essential terms of the merger in early 2019, the two organizations spent the balance of the year performing due diligence and developing the legal documents required to finalize the union.

The Bedford Land Trust's former board co-chair Rita Carroll says "it was a bittersweet decision, in that during our 30 years as a land trust we worked very hard to successfully conserve seven hundred acres of land in Bedford. Every property has a story behind it, and we are grateful to all who have helped us in our work. At the same time, we know this is the right thing to do, and that the Piscataquog Land Conservancy will be an outstanding steward of our conservation easements going forward." Carroll is now a member of the PLC board.

Of the fourteen conservation properties in Bedford transferred to the Piscataquog Land Conservancy, 12 are conservation easements.

Seven of these are held on conservation properties owned by the Town of Bedford. These include the town's 330-acre Pulpit Rock conservation area, 192-acre Joppa Hill property, 68-acre Van Loan Preserve and four other smaller town-owned parcels. Two easements

totaling about 19 acres are on properties owned by the Bedford School District next to the town's middle and high schools. Three more easements are on small privately-owned properties. Two small properties, including Bedford's historic 19th-century town pound, were owned outright by the Bedford Land Trust, and are now PLC property.

Every conservation easement and deed restriction was transferred to PLC without modification, so all restrictions, use limitations, reserved rights, etc. listed in each easement or deed remain unchanged and the land will remain protected in perpetuity. Existing restrictions on the use of Bedford Land Trust's financial assets also continue under the merger agreement.

PLC board chairman Jim Shirley says "the integration of the Bedford Land Trust with the Piscataquog Land Conservancy brings together two conservation organizations with a combined eighty years of experience protecting forest, farm, and watershed lands. The Piscataquog Land Conservancy will honor the Bedford Land Trust's history, uphold its commitment to stewardship, and continue the work of protecting land of high conservation value in Bedford and throughout southern New Hampshire."



TO CONSERVE

the natural and scenic landscapes of the Piscataquog, Souhegan, and Nashua River watersheds of New Hampshire.

PLC



From My Corner

By Chris Wells
PLC President/
Executive Director

However much longer these hard times last, PLC will continue to protect the places that we have all come to depend on.

Spring Hopes

The coronavirus pandemic has made this a spring unlike any other. As I write this in mid-April, most normal human interactions remain off limits, and large parts of the economy are shut down. Thousands of people in our area have lost their livelihoods overnight, while thousands more continue to do jobs that put them at risk. Our kids are at home and cut off from their peers, we wake in the night fearing for the health of our loved ones. There has been a lot to worry about.

As we all look for ways to get out of the house, exercise, and maintain a positive state of mind, conservation lands throughout our region are experiencing a dramatic upsurge in use. Providing local places to be outside in nature has always been a big part of why we conserve land, but over the past few weeks access to the outdoors has proven truly essential to our physical and mental health. This has been true not just for “outdoorsy” types, but for many who never normally venture into the woods. Sometimes it takes a crisis to see what was there all along.



As someone who has spent much of my working life in the conservation field, the sudden and nearly universal realization that open land is critical to human wellbeing is incredibly heartening. At the same time heavy recreational use – compounded by the urgency for “social distancing” – tests our ability to be good stewards of protected properties. It is, as ever, a balancing act. As of this writing PLC-owned properties remain open for public recreation, and will continue to be so long as the public health guidance says they can, and people work together to make their use safe and sustainable.

However much longer these hard times last, PLC will continue to protect the places that we have all come to depend on. We’ll find the ways to complete new land conservation projects, maintain our properties, and monitor our easements. We will still celebrate what is our 50th Anniversary year. You may not see PLC-sponsored walks in the woods for a while, but we’ll experiment in the meantime with new “virtual” ways to connect. For now, late summer events like the Rose Mountain Rumble and a special 50th Anniversary celebration are still on. Thank you for being part of this organization through thick and thin. Stay healthy, and see you outside.

Weare Couple Leaves a Gift for the Neighbors

Last fall PLC accepted a conservation easement on 36 acres of forestland in the town of Weare. The easement was donated by Carolyn Sheehan and Pat Myers, who had lived on the property for more than three decades. When the couple decided that the time had come to sell their house, they approached PLC about the possibility of first donating a conservation easement on the wooded portion of the property. “We had built our house on an old log landing on an otherwise forested forty acres of beautiful woodlands,” says Myers, “over the years we came to know the animals that live on the land as our neighbors.” Sheehan adds: “we looked forward to greeting the giant snapping turtle that crosses the yard every spring to lay her eggs; in winter we’d catch glimpses of the resident weasel in his white winter coat!”

Pat and Carolyn worked with PLC’s Land Protection Specialist, Tom Jones, throughout the spring and summer of 2019 to navigate the steps of conservation easement in record time so they could get their home sold and move in the fall. Jones says “Carolyn and Pat worked really hard and incurred significant expense to make this easement happen, which makes their generous gift all the more special.” Pat Myers says “we’ve been so fortunate to have lived in our home in the woods for 33 years. Thank you to PLC for making it possible to leave this spot for our wild neighbors!”

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Nissitissit Headwaters Project Nears Finish Line

With a June deadline approaching, the Piscataquog Land Conservancy's ambitious effort to purchase 267 acres of forest, streams and wetlands in Mason has entered the home stretch. The land PLC hopes to buy is located in northeast corner of town off Abbott Hill Road. When the property came on the market in early 2019, a conservation-minded buyer stepped in to quickly purchase the land before it could be bought for development. PLC then signed a purchase agreement with the interim buyer that gives us until June 30, 2020 to raise the necessary funds. If PLC's fundraising effort to purchase the land is unsuccessful the current owner will have to place the parcel back on the market.

In the closing weeks of 2019, the Nissitissit Headwaters project received a huge boost from two state grant programs. In late November, PLC was awarded a \$300,000 grant towards the land acquisition project from the Aquatic Resources Mitigation (ARM) fund. Then on December 4th, the project was awarded an additional \$200,000 grant for the project from the Land and Community Heritage Investment Program (LCHIP). PLC had applied to both grant programs in the summer of 2019.

The Aquatic Resource Mitigation Fund's coordinator Lori Sommer says "ARM is thrilled to provide funding to protect this outstanding property, which contains extensive high-quality wetlands, headwaters streams, and exemplary wildlife habitat." Administered by the N.H. Department of Environmental Services, the ARM Fund focuses on the conservation and restoration of wetlands and other aquatic resources. Its funding comes from mitigation payments made by building or transportation projects that impact wetlands.

LCHIP Executive Director Dijit Taylor says "LCHIP is pleased to be able to assist with the Nissitissit Headwaters project. Partnerships like this between a strong regional land trust and a local conservation commission build on the strengths of each group, and lead to careful project selection and effective long term conservation of important parcels. The LCHIP team enjoyed seeing the pond, dam, ledge, wetlands and recreational opportunities during a summer visit to the site."

The property is also a top priority for Mason's conservation commission, which has committed \$80,000 from the town's conservation fund towards the purchase. The land directly abuts the Town's Spaulding Brook Conservation Area and Doonan property, and builds on the larger protection effort in the area which has to date protected over 1,700 acres of land in Mason and Milford.

The project would also expand conservation to the north and west towards another 1,800 acres of nearby protected land centered on Russell-Abbott State Forest in Wilton.

PLC has to raise \$640,000 to close the purchase by June 30th. With the two major state grants, town funding, and additional grants awarded to the project from the Merrimack Conservation Partnership and the state's Conservation License Plate grants



From left: Amanda Merrill (LCHIP), Gov. John Sununu, Tom Jones (PLC), Dijit Taylor (LCHIP), NH Sen. Melanie Levesque

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program, we have only about \$20,000 left to go. PLC hopes to raise this remaining balance between now and June from private grants and local fundraising.

Protecting the Mason property would help complete a decades-long effort to protect the headwaters of the Nissitissit River. The Nissitissit is a main tributary of the Nashua River that flows through Brookline and Hollis, and was given National Wild and Scenic River status in 2018. The Piscataquog Land Conservancy has previously worked with the Town of Brookline to conserve key parcels along the river's mainstem.

Volunteers

Improve Habitat, Trails and Views



On a grey, blustery day last November, fifteen volunteers gathered at PLC's Rose Mountain Preserve in Lyndeborough. Their goal was to accomplish several long-planned tasks that would improve the recreational experience on the mountain. First, they created a new section of walking path that re-routes hikers around a badly eroded section of one of the two main trails to the summit. Next they did some ditching to drain standing water along the trail in two locations, and placed stepping stones to prevent erosion and give hikers better footing in times of high water.

Later in the day the volunteer crew used hand tools and muscle power to clear shrubs and small trees to expand a spectacular view to Mt. Monadnock from the summit. Since PLC

acquired the Rose Mountain property in 2015 we have aimed to selectively restore views from the summit, which has grown in since blueberry cultivation ended on the mountain in the early 1970s. The November work day was the first step towards making this goal a reality.

In another volunteer work day in October, six volunteers joined staff from PLC and NH Fish and Game for a habitat improvement project along Scataquog Brook, which flows through PLC's Proctor and Rice Preserves in Lyndeborough. The brook is cold, clean and supports an exemplary population of native brook trout. The aim of the volunteer project was to enhance this already good trout habitat by adding woody material to the stream through a process known as "chop and drop." Fish and Game staff first felled small trees,

then volunteers carried and strategically placed the trunks and tops in the brook. The basic idea is to mimic the natural (but slow) process by which downed trees fall into a stream, trap sediment and nutrients, create pools, and increase dissolved oxygen in the water.

PLC Stewardship Coordinator, Hailey Nase says "like so much of PLC's work, these two recent projects in Lyndeborough would not have been possible without the hard work, smarts, and good cheer of devoted volunteers."

**Want to volunteer for a future workday?
Email Hailey Nase at hnase@plcnh.org,
or call her at 487-3331.**

Early Spring Brings Brushfires

After a relatively snowless winter, early warm and windy weather has quickly dried out the woods in our region. This has been great for getting outside, but it also means increased fire danger. This was brought home to us in early March when PLC staff and volunteers were out at our Florence Tarr Wildlife Sanctuary in Bedford/Goffstown looking at a possible trail improvement project. They met up with a crew from the Goffstown Fire Department, who were looking for a brushfire that was called in by a mountain biker riding the Tarr trails.

Everybody walked in to find the blaze, which was burning through dry leaf litter on Holbrook Hill in the remote west end of the property. The fire was put out successfully thanks to the fast work of the Goffstown fire crew. The cause of the fire is unknown, but more than likely it was started by smoking material discarded by a trail user.



Thank you and three cheers to the Goffstown Fire Department, the alert mountain biker, and the PLC folks who were in the right place at the right time!



Story and photos by Dave Butler

The Piscataquog Land Conservancy acquired the 330-acre Florence Tarr Wildlife Sanctuary in July 2017. In the fall of that year, a team of volunteer trail builders working on a section of trail over Holbrook Hill at the western end of the property discovered a large boulder that had been cut into pieces, apparently by hand. It is actually not unusual to find stone in the forest which was cut with hand tools in the 19th century. Farmers quarried stone for sills, steps, and fence posts. Road crews quarried stone for use in culverts and bridges. Since Holbrook Hill is the highest point in Bedford, it would have been a good place to quarry granite back when horse power, not horsepower, was used: any stone that was harvested could be moved down the hill to Holbrook Hill Road, then on to its final destination (likely a local farm).

Two main methods were used to split stone by hand in the 19th century. According to the NH Division of Historical Resources, the flat wedge method came into use around 1800 and the plug & feathers method came into use around 1830. The flat wedge method uses a cape chisel to create one inch deep slots spaced evenly across the face to be split. In each slot a steel wedge and two shims of sheet iron are placed. The wedges are then hammered one at a time repeatedly, going deeper into the slots until the stone splits. Stone split with this method is identified by the row of trapezoid-shaped depressions along the edge that was split (see photo).

There is an art to cutting glacial erratics, since different boulders, brought by the glacier from different sources upstream, can have different characteristics.

The plug & feathers method uses either a single-bladed steel plug drill with a V point, or a double-bladed steel star drill with a V point. Each hole is created by striking the drill repeatedly with a 5-pound hammer. A helper is required to hold the drill (and for the plug drill rotate the drill 90 degrees between blows). Once the holes have been “drilled”, a wedge-shaped steel plug and two shims are inserted into each hole. As with the flat wedge method, the wedges are hammered deeper into the holes until the stone splits. Stone split with this method has the familiar 2-3 inch deep round holes along the edge that was split. The Holbrook Hill boulder was split using this method.

Now that we know when each stone-splitting method was first employed, can we make assumptions about who quarried the boulder atop Holbrook Hill? From the *History of Bedford*, we know that Deacon John Holbrook moved to Bedford in 1803 and acquired a “large farm”. He had five sons between 1790 and 1803, and four of them were given acreage from within the original large farm. Based on the ages of the Holbrook sons and the approximate date that the plugs & feathers method came into use (1830), I like to think that the boulder could have been cut by the Holbrook sons as they built up their farms.

It seems odd that some of the cut stones were left behind in the pasture (now forest) after all that work. The pieces left behind do not have the required sheer faces, so were likely not useable for their intended purpose. This could be because the granite in this particular boulder doesn't cut cleanly, or because it took the crew a few cuts to get the hang of it. There is an art to cutting glacial erratics, since different boulders, brought by the glacier from different sources upstream, can have different characteristics.

Dave Butler of Bedford is a member of the PLC Board of Trustees and Stewardship Committee.



Holbrook Hill split stone



Plug and feathers tools (star drill + sets of plugs & feathers)



Flat wedge tool (cape chisel)

Meet PLC's New Trustees

At our 49th Annual Meeting last November PLC members elected three new members to the Board of Trustees.

Jordan Bailey, Brookline

Jordan is a Soil Conservationist for the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service. Since moving to NH in 2010, she worked as PLC's Stewardship Coordinator (2017-2019) and has volunteered extensively on the Brookline Conservation Commission (2012-present), Nashua Rivers Wild & Scenic Stewardship Council (2016-present), and is also a current member of the PLC Stewardship Committee (2019-present). Previously, Jordan was a Wildlife Biologist and Cartographer for the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries & Wildlife. She holds a B.S in Wildlife & Fisheries from Louisiana State University, and a M.S. in Wildlife Ecology from the University of Maine. She has also spent time in Georgia and South Carolina researching songbirds, shorebirds, and wading birds. She currently resides in Brookline with her husband and two children.

Dave Butler, Bedford

Dave is a member of the PLC Stewardship Committee, and was PLC's Volunteer of the Year in 2017. He has been a volunteer property monitor since 2012, and is currently the volunteer monitor and trail maintainer at PLC's Florence Tarr Wildlife Sanctuary. He leads outings for PLC and the Harris Center, and writes articles for the PLC newsletter that share insights about the natural and human history of our region (see previous page of this newsletter). Dave attended UNH Cooperative Extension's NH Coverts program in 2017. Dave retired in 2015 after working as an engineer for 35 years. He is a resident of Bedford.

Mike Thomas, Deering

Mike is a retired biologist from the Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station where he assisted in studies of forest insect pests and in studies on the epidemiology of mosquito-borne diseases. He is a member of the PLC Land Protection Committee, the Piscataquog River Local Advisory Committee, the Deering Conservation Commission, and is a Curatorial Affiliate at the Yale Peabody Museum's Division of Entomology. Mike also volunteers with the Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests and the NH Audubon Society. He is an avid nature photographer. His photographs have been published in magazines and books. Mike and his wife Sue live in Deering where they enjoy the outdoors and everything New Hampshire has to offer.

Rita Carroll

In February 2020 PLC also welcomed Rita Carroll, former co-chair of the Bedford Land Trust, to our Board of Trustees.



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The Piscataquog Land Conservancy (PLC) is a 501(c)(3) registered in the State of New Hampshire. Our federal tax ID number is 23-7085677. Information regarding the PLC, including our recent financial reports and tax filings, is readily available upon request.

50TH ANNIVERSARY ESSAY



It didn't
just happen

By John McCausland

The dean of the seminary I attended (I'm an Episcopal priest) had a saying: "these things don't just happen." He'd pronounce it at every event, the prelude to a long recitation of thank you's for all the work behind the scenes that made the event possible. I thought of the dean's saying when I was asked to write about my years of involvement with the Piscataquog Land Conservancy.

I first learned of what was then the Piscataquog Watershed Association, or PWA, in 1997. My wife and I had just moved to Weare from Chicago and we wanted to learn about our new community, especially the woods, old farms, rivers and mountains that had attracted us to rural New Hampshire. So when we saw that a man named Gordon Russell would be talking about the history of the Piscataquog watershed at the Weare library, we knew we wanted to go. It was an evening of slides and lecture, of Gordon filled with passion for his subject. Starting with the glaciers, then the Indians, then the settlers, all the way up to a powerful appeal to preserve the environment from rapidly encroaching development.

After his talk, we engaged Gordon in conversation and a few days later walked with him on the property we'd bought with its old farm house that turned out to have once belonged to Gordon's great grandfather. In the course of the walk, Gordon asked me if I would be willing to go on the board of this conservation organization he was part of. "We need to grow the board, broaden our reach. We need to be bigger to do what needs to be done," he said. Thus began what is now my 23-year association with PLC.

In 1997 the PWA already had a long history behind it. Many of the founding fathers and mothers were still actively involved. It was still adding protected properties. But it was an all-volunteer organization, holding board meetings in people's homes, its modest finances run much like a family's checkbook. Most of its land conservation work was brought in through word of mouth.

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The first step to build from this base was to broaden the board membership to include representation from as many as possible of the Piscataquog watershed towns. There were still many individuals from the "old days" who volunteered their services and kept the organization feeling like a family. But there were also new people who brought skills—organizational, legal, financial, as well as environmental—that were essential to our growth.

In 2002, after months of discussion, we took the momentous step of hiring a part-time staff person to take care of the growing administrative work. We soon realized that we needed a professional land protection staffer. In 2003 we hired our first executive director, Margaret Watkins, and rented a two-room office in the old house connected to the New Boston Community Church. The pace of project acquisition picked up, and became more focused. We began seriously raising money.

Looking back, these steps may seem small and obvious, but each involved an organizational risk. The thing that struck me, as a board member and officer through these years, was how time after time when faced with the choice of expanding our reach or staying steady, PLC chose growth. We added staff, we began to build our stewardship fund reserves, we became more systematic and proactive in assessing properties to protect. We changed our name in 2008 to the Piscataquog Land Conservancy to more accurately reflect our mission.

In recent years PLC has continued to choose growth. We have become a fully professional organization, covering twenty-three towns (from an original eleven), and protecting over 8,000 acres (I remember when we crossed the 1,000 line). Today we have a staff of four—still crammed in that same tiny office behind the church. We are nationally accredited, our finances are in good order, and we have a solid reputation in the conservation community in New Hampshire and beyond.

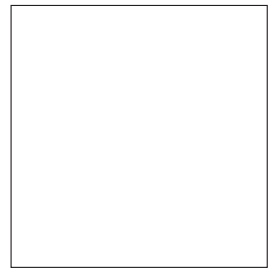
I think back to Gordon Russell's words about needing to grow. I think back to all the meetings, all the phone calls, all the emails, all the fundraising visits—and all the joy of protecting special places and making special friends. These things didn't just happen, and at the PLC they'll still be happening when this octogenarian is long gone. To have been part of it is one of the great satisfactions of my life.

John McCausland is the retired vicar of Holy Cross Church in Weare, and a former member and chair of the PLC Board of Trustees.



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Upcoming Outings & Events

Due to public health restrictions related to the Covid-19 pandemic, PLC has not scheduled any public outings for the spring or early summer of 2020. Depending on how state health guidance evolves, we may still schedule outings on a month to month basis, so watch our e-newsletter and website for updates. To subscribe to our e-news. Just click the "join our mailing list" button at the bottom of our website: www.plcnh.org.

Aug 22 / Rose Mountain Rumble, Lyndeborough

Sep 6 / 50th Anniversary Celebration, Goffstown

Oct 24 / PLC's 50th Annual Meeting, New Boston



IN THIS ISSUE

Bedford Land Trust Merges with PLC	Page 1
Spring Hopes	Page 2
Weare Couple Leaves a Gift for the Neighbors	Page 2
Nissitissit Headwaters Project Nears Finish Line	Page 3
Volunteers Improve Habitat, Trails and Views	Page 4
Early Spring Brings Brushfires	Page 4
The Split Stones of Holbrook Hill	Page 5
Meet PLC's New Trustees	Page 6
It Didn't Just Happen	Page 7

Welcome New Friends in Bedford!



Joppa Hill Farm, Bedford

If you are a past supporter of the Bedford Land Trust receiving the PLC newsletter for the first time, welcome! We hope that after reading this issue you'll be inspired to continue to your support of local conservation as a member of the Piscataquog Land Conservancy.



TO CONSERVE
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