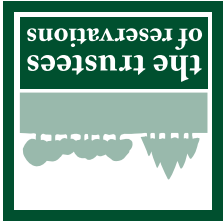




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Working to enhance the quality of life and rural character of the Highlands region of Massachusetts.

# THE HIGHLAND COMMUNITIES INITIATIVE (HCI)



THE HIGHLAND COMMUNITIES INITIATIVE  
 A program of The Trustees of Reservations  
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 Haydenville, MA 01039

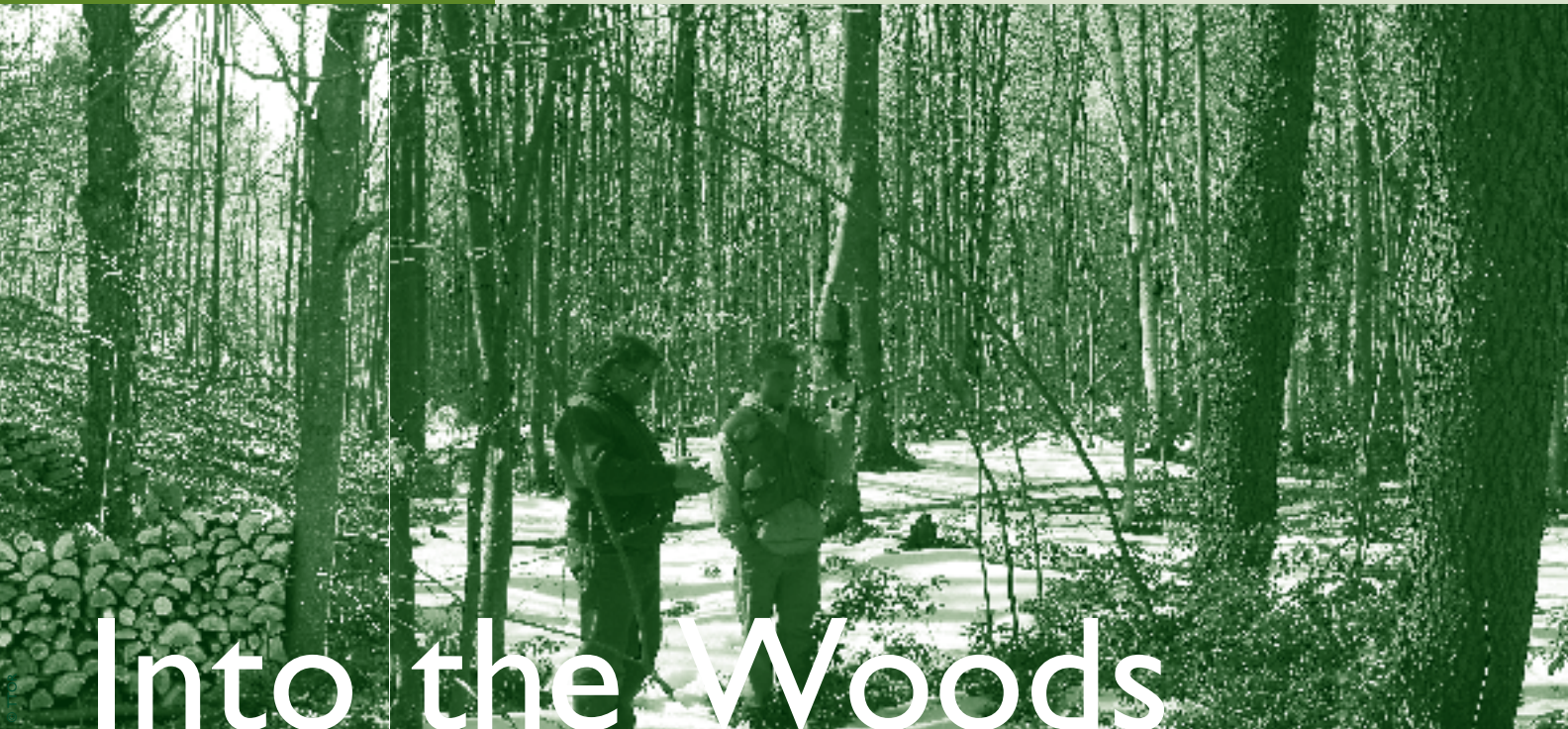
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HIGHLAND  
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# HighlandHAPPENINGS

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## Into the Woods

WHEN CLEARING OUT A THICKET, SOMETIMES IT'S best to dive right in. The many state and federal programs to help manage land may yield rewards for landowners, but they can also be a thorny understory of confusing acronyms and complex requirements. Whether you choose to participate in these programs or not, just making sense of the offerings has proven a worthwhile first step for many in the Highlands, bringing new forms of assistance or reaffirming existing goals for their woods.

Many people who own woodlands do so for the privacy, tranquility, and recreational opportunities that they provide – not for income or wood products. Still, to anyone who spends time in the woods, the long history of human use and management is abundantly clear, from the stone walls and cellar holes to the trees growing into and over old barbed wire fences. Though it's hard to imagine now, nearly 80% of the region was entirely clearcut for pasture land in the 18th and 19th centuries. Since then, the land has rebounded into a remarkably intact, largely even-aged forest. But one thing has remained the same – the land is primarily owned by individuals and families whose ownership and decisions make countless contributions to the health of our communities and region.

So should you bother managing your woods? The choice to actively manage woodlands by cutting or cultivating timber and other plants is a personal one, with advantages, downsides and complexities as varied as the trees in the woods. For example, young forests provide rare habitat for wildlife, but timber harvests can initially be an eyesore. Completely unmanaged land may let an invasive plant population grow out of control. And woods with higher timber value may be less likely to turn into housing lots, while also providing us with local sources of flooring, firewood, and other important products.

Fortunately, the choice to manage is not simply black and white, according to Paul Catanzaro, a forester at UMass Extension: “A whole spectrum of opportunities between management and non-management exists for landowners, and if the supporting government programs match your goals for your land, they can be very handy tools.”

This issue of *Highland Happenings* will untangle and compare some of the more popular forest management tools and programs and hopefully help you decide what is good for your woods.

# From Trees to Tap

WHEN YOU TURN ON YOUR KITCHEN SINK, YOU probably aren't thinking about the many acres of nearby forestland where that water likely originated. But for the public employees tasked with protecting our water supplies, forested land is one of the most efficient filters available to them to turn rain, ground, and surface water into a human drinking-water supply. The Shelburne Falls Fire District is responsible for managing more than 800 acres of land in Shelburne, Buckland, and Colrain that provide a back-up water supply to the residents of Shelburne Falls.

Though the main purpose of keeping all that land in its natural condition is to provide clean drinking water, utilizing it for other compatible values and roles is a goal for the District, according to Superintendent Guy Wheeler. The Forest Stewardship Program is intended to help landowners identify the resources contained in their forests, such as wildlife habitat areas or trails, and articulate steps to maximizing them. The non-regulatory program documents management options and practices designed to maintain the land in a productive and healthy condition for the next generation. Soil and water quality, wildlife and fish habitat, timber and other wood products, and outdoor recreation are all incorporated in a set of recommendations to implement over the plan's 10-year life span.

For example, the District's forester, Ed Denham of New England Woodland Management, Inc., identified a stand of white pines, likely planted by the Works Progress Administration in the 1930s, that had never been thinned or managed properly, and was not providing any habitat or future timber value. Clearing that stand of pines allowed for the nearby oaks to regenerate, and the oaks' many acorns will provide a much richer source of food for wildlife. The District has also allowed for occasional timber harvests in appropriate areas, which brings in revenue for the agency.

The Forest Stewardship Program is currently providing assistance covering the costs of developing a plan for landowners with more than 10 acres, meaning that nearly all the costs are covered by the program. Enrollment is open to individuals, nonprofits, and municipalities. The cost share made the critical difference to the Shelburne Falls Water District, who wouldn't have pursued the plan without that financial assistance.

For more information, contact Mike Downey at 413.442.8928 x135.

A program of The Trustees of Reservations, the Highland Communities Initiative (HCI) is a group of neighbors and volunteers working to enhance the quality of life and rural character of our communities. HCI connects people and provides them with the information and support they need to preserve the special natural and cultural landscapes of the Highlands region.

The Trustees of Reservations are more than 100,000 people like you who want to protect the places we love, or simply like to be outdoors. Together with our neighbors, we protect the distinct character of our communities and inspire a commitment to special places.

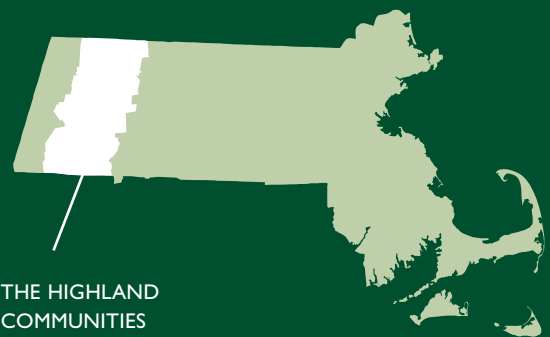
For more information, or to receive this newsletter regularly, contact us at:

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### THE HIGHLAND COMMUNITIES INITIATIVE REGION

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Becket	Heath	Russell
Blandford	Hinsdale	Sandisfield
Buckland	Huntington	Savoy
Charlemont	Leyden	Shelburne
Chester	Middlefield	Tolland
Chesterfield	Monroe	Tyringham
Colrain	Monterey	Washington
Conway	Montgomery	Westhampton
Cummington	New Marlborough	Williamsburg
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NEIGHBORS IN ACTION

# Jack & Danielle Lochhead

## CONWAY

IT ALMOST ALL ENDED OVER A PHOTO ID. WHEN the Landowner Incentive Program (LIP) was first introduced, Conway selectboard member Jack Lochhead joined a carpool of Conway landowners to the government offices in Hadley to learn more. The problem? Many in the group did not bring the proper identification to pass through security at the building. Jack Lochhead weathered that first, trying event. Since then, the patience and persistence of he and his wife Danielle have helped them pass through the complexities of several forest management programs, putting them on a path to having woodlands that meet their needs and dreams.

“I’m a big fan of meadow-birds,” says Jack, who would ultimately like to see his 250 acres of woods and pastures in Conway begin to resemble what it looked like 200 or 300 years ago – a rich habitat of old-trees, younger forest, and meadows. Enrolling in the Forest Stewardship Program and creating a 10-year vision plan for his woods was a big step in the right direction, providing a thoughtful approach for selective timber harvesting that would create bird habitat and a multi-age forest. The land is also enrolled in Chapter 61, reducing the Lochhead’s tax burden, and helping them continue to own the land into the future.

“We did a lot of things that we wouldn’t have otherwise done, and it really brought us closer to our land.”

— JACK LOCHHEAD

Like most of the Highlands, the Lochhead’s property had been cut down for pasture land at various points in history. The result brought both problems and opportunities, for which Jack and Danielle chose to take an active approach to managing their land. “It’s similar to a garden,” Jack says, “If I just let it grow as is, it’s going to become a tangled mess. None of the plants will be able to reach their full potential.”

On a property crisscrossed by recreational trails that the community uses for hiking, skiing and horseback riding, and that supports a major snowmobile trail, the “tangled mess” threat exists from invasive species. What was once cow pasture along the South River was filled with Japanese knotweed and barberry, as well as honeysuckle and multiflora rose that blocked access and even views to the river. The Lochhead’s consulting forester, Mary Wigmore, also alerted the couple that the invasive plants in their woods had grown dense enough to damage trees.

With a backpack sprayer in hand, along with money from the federal Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program (WHIP), Jack had the invasives in his woods under control in about two years. With \$5,000 in additional WHIP funds and help from their forester, the Lochheads also developed an oak regeneration program on part of their property. The program calls for thinning competing trees around a handful of old oaks, allowing their progeny to grow. Additional funding ensured that the Lochheads can now see the river from their property.

“It’s been a good experience,” says Lochhead, looking back. “Consulting with our forester helped us understand the more technical aspects. Communicating well with our logger was also key, as many are unfamiliar with wildlife habitat management techniques.” He adds, “The folks at the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS, who administer the WHIP program) were very helpful in getting through the rather complicated application process. If you’re relaxed and patient about it, they’ll guide you through it.” Though tackling some of the outdoor labor themselves may have had the greatest impact on the Lochheads. “We did a lot of things that we wouldn’t have otherwise done, and it really brought us closer to our land.”

# 2010 FOREST MANAGEMENT

PROGRAM	ADMINISTERING AGENCY	PURPOSE	TAX REDUCTION	COST SHARE
Forest or Land Management Plan	MA Dept of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) Service Forestry Program	Articulates landowners' goals for timber harvests, wildlife habitat, recreation, etc. Used primarily as a vehicle for enrollment in Ch. 61/ 61A/ 61B	None, though a Management Plan is a requirement for enrolling in Ch. 61.	The Forest Stewardship Program and the NRCS are currently offering cost-share assistance.
Forest Stewardship Plan	DCR with assistance from the Berkshire Pioneer Resource Conservation and Development Council	Integrates long term ecosystem values in a plan prepared by a consulting forester to reflect landowners' goals	None, though can be combined with Ch 61	Current rates are \$850 up to 36 acres or \$850 + \$12/acre over 36 acres
Chapter 61	DCR	Provides a property tax break to landowners who keep their land in active timber production.	Recommended current use values for forest land are set on an annual basis by the Farm Land Advisory Committee FY11 value is \$75/per acre for land west of CT River.	Available for the development of a new forest management plan.  *see Stewardship or NRCS
Chapter 61A	Town Board of Assessors	Provides a property tax break to landowners who keep their land in active agriculture.	Values for farm and forest land are based on the market value of crops produced on the land.	None
Chapter 61B	Town Board of Assessors.	Provides a property tax break to landowners who keep their land in an open, natural condition, or for an approved recreational use.	75% reduction in property taxes.	None
Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)	USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)	Provides grants to enhance and protect soil, water, air, plants, and animals.	None	Payments are limited to \$300,000 over a 6 year period for part of the costs of implementing conservation practices.
Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP)	USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)	Provides grants to improve fish and wildlife habitat or restore natural ecosystems.	None	Payments are limited to \$50,000 annually for part of the costs of implementing conservation practices.
Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) Green Certification	DCR	Third party verification of well-managed forests. Certification tracks forest products in the marketplace.	Can be combined with Ch. 61/61A/61B	\$300 available to upgrade an existing Stewardship Plan; \$600 to upgrade existing Forest Management Plan
Pilot Forest Carbon Offset and Trading Program	CarbonTree LLC and MA DCR	Encourage landowners to store carbon by aggregating and selling carbon credits.	None, though can be combined with Ch 61	Landowners may be eligible to receive reimbursement for developing a carbon inventory.

# TOOLS AND PROGRAMS

LAND REQUIREMENTS	OPEN TO	WITHDRAWAL PENALTY	TIME FRAME	CONTACT
Minimum of 10 acres.	Private landowners, municipalities, and non-profits.	None	Plans cover a 10 year period	Your local service forester. Visit <a href="http://www.masswoods.net">www.masswoods.net</a> to find one.
Minimum of 10 acres (7 of which must be forested)	Private landowners, associations, municipalities, and non-profits	None	10 years	Michael Downey 413.442.8928 x135
Minimum of 10 contiguous acres	Private landowners	Conversion penalty applies, and the town has a right of first refusal.	Plans cover a 10 year period	Your local service forester. Visit <a href="http://www.masswoods.net">www.masswoods.net</a> to find one.
Minimum of 5 contiguous acres, and \$500+ annual gross sales.	Private landowners	Conversion penalty applies, and the town has a right of first refusal.	Annual application to the Board of Assessors.	Your local Board of Assessors
Minimum of 5 contiguous acres	Private landowners	Conversion penalty applies, and the town has a right of first refusal.	Annual application to the Board of Assessors.	Your local Board of Assessors
Privately owned farmland, forest land, or other land capable of growing trees. No minimum acreage.	Private individuals, groups who own or manage land with a minimum annual sale of \$1,000 of agricultural products.	No penalties but participants have some responsibilities. Call your local NRCS office for more information.	2 – 10 year contracts.	Call the NRCS State Office at 413.253.4350 or visit <a href="http://www.ma.nrcs.usda.gov">www.ma.nrcs.usda.gov</a> to find your local NRCS office.
Privately owned farmland, grassland, forestland, land capable of growing trees or other land that NRCS determines is suitable for wildlife habitat. No minimum acreage.	Private individuals, groups, and entities who own or manage farmland or forest land.	No penalties. Program participants have some responsibilities. Call your local NRCS office for more information.	2 – 10 year contract or 15 year critical habitat agreement.	Call the NRCS State Office at 413-253-4350 or visit <a href="http://www.ma.nrcs.usda.gov">www.ma.nrcs.usda.gov</a> to find your local NRCS office.
Minimum of 10 acres.	Private landowners, municipalities, and non-profits.	None	Plans cover a 10 year period	Doug Hutcheson 413.545.5993 or your local service forester. Visit <a href="http://www.masswoods.net">www.masswoods.net</a> to find one.
Varies	Must be FSC Green Certified	*contact Mike Burns at CarbonTree	*contact Mike Burns at CarbonTree	Mike Burns 518.463.1297 x313

**NOTE:** Each of these programs has many important details to consider that are not listed here. Contact the administering agency for more information.



## CHAPTER 61B: Two Properties Tell the Tale

CHAPTER 61B, THE “CURRENT USE” PROGRAM THAT reduces property taxes on open space and recreational land, has become one of the more flexible programs available to Massachusetts land owners who choose to take a more passive approach to land management. To understand the variation and benefits the program entails, you need not look further than the properties of the LaPlante and Leue families.

Ed LaPlante and his family own a small, 15-acre parcel of land behind their home in Blandford. The woods there provide a nice backdrop for the LaPlantes, and an occasional place for their son to run cross-country using his GPS system. But the woods are not an active concern in their lives. “The land was logged once before we moved here,” says Ed, “and the woods are in very rough shape due to last year’s ice storm. But they’re mostly just used by the wildlife right now.”

Ed enrolled the land in Chapter 61B as open space and receives a yearly reduction in taxes of about \$400. “It’s been pretty simple,” Ed says. “We just drop off the paperwork with the town every year.” Unlike Chapter 61, Chapter 61B requires a yearly reapplication, but it does not require a 10-year forest management plan. And the program is administered through local town assessors instead of the state. There are potential tax penalties for withdrawing from the program or changing the land’s use, however.

Like Ed, Tom Leue gets a reminder every October from his town about the Chapter 61B reapplication deadline, and has even turned the application into an easy-to-use form on

his computer. But from there, his use of Chapter 61B departs significantly from the LaPlante’s.

Tom is the administrator of a family trust that holds nearly 200 acres of Chapter 61B land surrounding three family house parcels on either side of Rt. 112 in Ashfield. His family’s decision to not manage the land actively is very deliberate. “We had a small portion of it logged once to help pay the hefty taxes we were facing, and we really didn’t like the outcome,” he says. “We’d like not to intervene, to let the land be less productive and allow it to become old-growth naturally.” Chapter 61B proved to be a solution on all fronts. “My grandmother bought the land in 1908, and, after a time, the taxes really started to crush us,” Tom says. He reports that his property taxes were reduced by about 75% in the 15 years the land has been enrolled.

His family also chose to make the land eligible for Chapter 61B by keeping it open to the public for recreation. The option fit the land and his family’s goals for it. “We have very polite hunters who come and use the property. There is a snowmobile trail, though that doesn’t seem to get used much anymore. There’s also an interesting glacial cave to explore, as well as an old sawmill site and a wetland. It’s a very beautiful property and we’re glad to let people see it.”

To learn more about Ch 61B, request a copy of HCI’s latest publication. See our new publication notice on the next page.



# New Landowner Publications Available!

MANY PEOPLE WHO OWN WOODLANDS ARE INTERESTED in protecting their land and its habitat value while lowering their carrying costs. But finding good information on the many programs, agencies, and acronyms involved in doing so can be overwhelming and time consuming. We worked with UMass Extension to develop three new and updated publications to help landowners learn about their management and conservation options as they make important decisions about their land's future.

*Your Land, Your Choices* walks through the steps and implications of two key decisions: whether to harvest your trees and whether to conserve your land for future generations. *Your Land, Your Financial Choices* examines the financial repercussions of six different management and conservation decisions, such as enrolling in Chapter 61 and harvesting timber. For landowners specifically interested in lowering their property taxes by leaving their land in its natural and unmanaged condition, *A Guide to Chapter 61B Open Space and Recreational Land Current Use Tax Program* details the benefits, process, and potential penalties of enrolling in this often overlooked program.

The free publications are available by calling HCI at 413.268.8219 or emailing [mwamsley@ttor.org](mailto:mwamsley@ttor.org). They are also available for downloading at our website [www.highlandcommunities.org](http://www.highlandcommunities.org)

## UPCOMING EVENTS

### Footsteps and Footholds at Chapel Brook: A Day of Trails and Climbing

Saturday, April 24 | 9AM – 1PM  
Chapel Brook Reservation, Ashfield

### Dig and Digest Garlic Mustard: Putting a Pesky Invasive to Use

Saturday, May 8 | 9:30AM – 12PM  
Bryant Homestead, Cummington

### Tapping the Potential of Town-Owned Land

Saturday, May 1 | 9:30AM – 12PM | Green Field's Market and Griswald Conservation Area, Greenfield

### Green Thugs in Your Neighborhood: Invasive Species

Saturday, May 22 | 9AM – 12PM | Fellowship Hall, Shelburne

### Managing Land for Climate Change: Field & Meadow Management

Saturday, June 5 | 6AM Bird walk; 9AM – 12PM Program  
Notchview Reservation

Pre-registration required. All events are free and open to the public. Please call 413.268.8219 or email [highlands@ttor.org](mailto:highlands@ttor.org) to RSVP or for more information.

## HCI NEEDS YOUR HELP

Times are tough all around, and we need your help to sustain HCI's programs and publications. Please consider supporting HCI through a donation or by becoming a Trustees of Reservations member. We also need to save printing and postage costs, so if you are willing to receive this newsletter electronically, please email [highlands@ttor.org](mailto:highlands@ttor.org) and we'll switch you over. Thanks for all you do!