



THE HIGHLAND COMMUNITIES INITIATIVE
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HIGHLAND HAPPENINGS

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Supporting
community efforts to
conserve the distinctive
natural and cultural
landscapes of the



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Highlands region
of Massachusetts

HIGHLAND HAPPENINGS

A NEWSLETTER OF THE HIGHLAND COMMUNITIES INITIATIVE (HCI)



Leading the Way with the CPA

CONWAY VOTERS APPROVE THE COMMUNITY PRESERVATION ACT

In April, Conway became the first town in the Highlands to pass the Community Preservation Act, (CPA). Approved by the state legislature in 2000, the CPA allows cities and towns to enact a property tax surcharge to fund local open space, community housing, and historic preservation projects. Conway voted for a 1.5% surcharge, and exempted low and moderate-income families and senior citizens. The money raised locally is matched by the state, and Conway can expect a 100% match for the next several years, resulting in a fund of about \$70,000 every year. For the average homeowner in Conway, this surcharge results in less than \$50 per year.

The opportunity to tap into a source of state matching funds was a key incentive for passing the CPA, as was the degree of local control that the CPA provides, according to Janet Chayes, a member of the CPA Advisory Committee. A town committee will prepare and recommend projects and funding amounts, but Town Meeting must approve each expenditure of CPA funds.

Though over 60 cities and towns statewide have passed the CPA, most are located in the rapidly growing regions near Boston. However, growth pressure was one reason that the CPA was well received in Conway. "Our rural landscape is changing due to development pressure, and we were feeling powerless to protect anything", said Chayes. "Though the CPA is only one tool, it will help us take action when we need to," she said.

Accepting the CPA in Conway did not happen quickly—it was discussed and researched over the past three years by an Advisory Committee appointed by the Selectboard. In that period, the Committee went to statewide conferences, talked to other towns with the CPA in place, held public meetings, and advocated for the Act's passage on the ballot. They also applied to the Highland Communities Initiative for a small grant to help the assessors and tax collector cover the costs of implementing the new tax. According to Chayes, the HCI grant helped build support for the CPA, and curbed likely objections from town employees about the implementation costs. The Advisory Committee also reached out to community groups to explain the functions and benefits of the CPA, which broadened the support for it throughout town. *(Continued on page 2)*



PASSAGE OF THE CPA WILL ALLOW CONWAY TO FORM A DEDICATED FUND TO PROTECT IMPORTANT LANDSCAPES, INCLUDING FARMLAND.

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The Advisory Committee had no shortage of examples of potential projects that would be eligible for CPA funds in Conway. Renovating a dilapidated covered bridge, preserving a farm that recently went on the market, and creating a network of multiuse trails were some of the potential CPA project ideas. The next step for Conway is to form a Community Preservation Committee that will consist of representatives from town boards as well as at-large community members. This committee will then be responsible for reviewing project proposals and making recommendations to Town Meeting. “The CPA is a good law that helps towns”, said Chayes, and now Conway is poised to take full advantage of it. 🍃

IF YOU'D LIKE TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THE CPA, CONTACT HCI FOR A FREE COPY OF A NEW PUBLICATION, "AN INTRODUCTION TO THE COMMUNITY PRESERVATION ACT".

Highland Blues

When you get an urge for the blues this summer, why not head for the hills? The Highlands region, owing to its climate and soils, is well suited to growing blueberries. Blueberries are members of the *Ericaceae* family, which also includes rhododendron, azalea, Indian pipe, heath, cranberry, and huckleberry. Most members of this family require acid soils for good growth and reproduction. As your taste buds may already be aware, there are two types of plants that produce berries and are grown commercially in the region—lowbush or wild, and highbush or cultivated.

Lowbush blueberries grow naturally low to the ground, and a single plant can spread to a diameter of 12 feet. They yield small fruits (averaging 1600 berries to the pound) that provide a blend of sweet and tart flavors. The highbush plants grow up to eight feet tall, with larger berries (averaging 500 berries to the pound). Their flavor depends on the specific variety.

The Benson Place, a farm on Flagg Hill Road in Heath, grows lowbush blueberries on 40 acres of rocky terrain that offers stunning views of the Highlands. Management practices include brush clearing and controlled burning of the fields each spring, which encourage the regrowth of this native plant and helps control diseases. Dave Gott, one of

the owners, hires 20–30 local residents during the harvest season, which runs from late July to late August. Fruit is harvested using hand rakes or scoops, then winnowed to remove the twigs and leaves. Besides the visitors who come to pick their own, the farm sells pints of berries to local markets, 10 and 20 pound boxes of berries for freezing, and their famed homemade blueberry spread. Some of the fruit also goes to West County Winery in Colrain, where it is used to make blueberry-apple wine.

Further south, Claire Bateman has owned and operated Running Fox Farm in Worthington, a three acre, pick-your-own, self-described, “Park with Blueberry Bushes”, for the past 30 years. The 1400 highbush, hybrid shrubs provide a delicious “Day in the Country,” from mid-July to mid-September for Claire’s loyal customers. Running Fox is one of only three certified organic blueberry farms in the state and likely the only one that operates on the honor system. No netting is used to ward off birds because Claire feels that “there’s enough fruit for birds and people.”

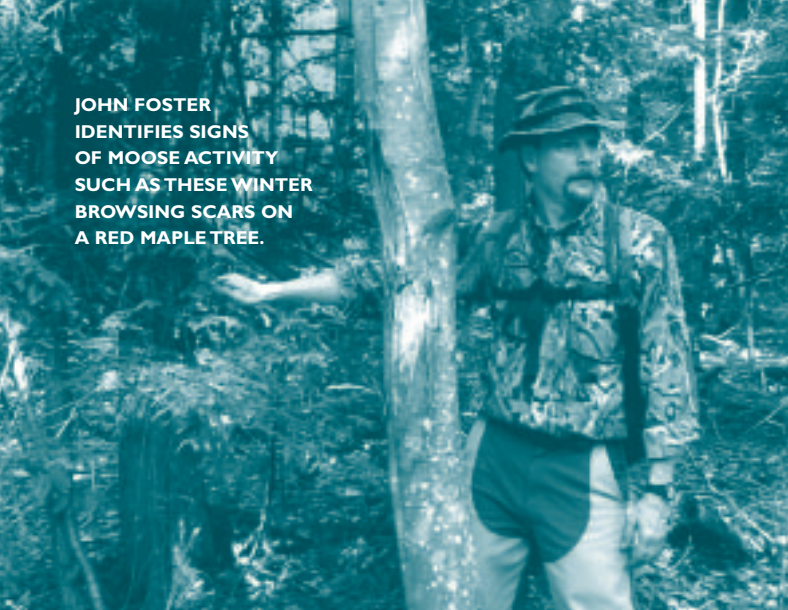
This is Claire’s final year overseeing the farm. Citing the many hours of pruning and mowing required to maintain the health of the bushes and the tug of other interests, she will be passing the reins after this season, but the blueberry tradition will continue. Running Fox is located off Route 112 and is listed in the CISA guide (www.buylocalfood.com or 413/665-7100). 🍃

IF YOU'RE A FAN OF THE "HIGHLAND BLUES," VISIT SOME OF THE FARMS THAT ARE PART OF THE BLUEBERRY FESTIVAL SCHEDULED FOR AUGUST 7–8, SPONSORED BY CISA.

The Highlands As Habitat

Charismatic megafauna, as John Foster of the New England Naturalist Training Center, called the moose, have taken up residence in Goshen and the rest of the Highlands. Moose populations have recently rebounded in Massachusetts due to the availability of red maple trees, one of their winter mainstays, and an abundance of beaver ponds that support the wetland vegetation moose prefer in the summer months. Participants in HCI’s Moose tracking program in May learned how to distinguish moose tracks and markings such as antler rubs and signs of winter browsing, and learned about their physical attributes, such as bottom incisor teeth,

JOHN FOSTER IDENTIFIES SIGNS OF MOOSE ACTIVITY SUCH AS THESE WINTER BROWSING SCARS ON A RED MAPLE TREE.



© TTOR / W. SWEETSER

that enable them to leave such distinctive signs of their presence. An owl pellet and three great blue heron nests were additional highlights of the spectacular spring day in the woods. 🍃

Zoning on the Ballot:

SPRING TOWN MEETING UPDATE

The Town of Huntington passed a new zoning bylaw to allow accessory apartments by special permit. These apartments, also known as in-law apartments or “granny flats”, are an efficient way of providing low cost housing without adding to the amount of developed land. They also create additional revenue for homeowners, and increase the diversity of housing choices in town. “We felt we had a social responsibility to pass this bylaw to provide for the changing needs of Huntington’s population”, said Steve Hamlin, Chair of the

E V E N T S

CONSERVATION EASEMENTS

July 10 | Huntington | 9–10AM

Free. To register, please contact Phil LaBranche at 413/454-3664 or protect_habitat@earthlink.net.

BRYANT HOMESTEAD CRAFT FESTIVAL

July 17–18 | Cummington | 10AM–5PM

Trustees of Reservations nonmembers: \$5.

A MUSHROOM RAMBLE

July 24 | Windsor | 1–4PM

Free. Please register in advance with HCI.

OLD GROWTH FOREST HIKE

August 28 | Charlemont | 10AM–2PM

Free. Please register in advance with HCI.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON THESE EVENTS, PLEASE VISIT WWW.HIGHLANDCOMMUNITIES.ORG OR CALL 413/587-0716.

Planning Board.

“Accessory apartments are a great way to help support the aging population by providing more housing options”, he commented.



ACCESSORY APARTMENTS LIKE THIS WILL NOW BE ALLOWED IN HUNTINGTON.

Proposed zoning changes in other Highlands towns did not fare as well. Middlefield defeated a proposal to allow several types of businesses by-right, and Conway rejected a proposal to increase the lot size and frontage in their Rural Agricultural Zone. 🍃

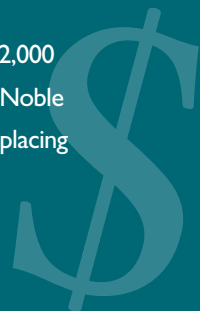
Winding River Land Conservancy:

A NEW FACE IN THE HIGHLANDS

The southern Highlands towns in western Hampden County have something to cheer about: They have gained a conservation ally, thanks to the Winding River Land Conservancy’s interest in expanding their project area into the hills. This southeast corner of the Highlands sits along the edge of one of the fastest growing urban regions in western Massachusetts, and as Winding River Land Conservancy expands its territory beyond its original boundaries, it becomes one of the few conservation organizations in a position to actively contribute to the protection of this region’s special landscape. Winding River Land Conservancy’s mission is to preserve and protect natural open space and farmland in Western Hampden County for present and future generations, and the successful

HCI SMALL GRANT AWARDS

- HCI awarded the Town of Conway \$4,000 for the implementation of the Community Preservation Act.
- Appalachian Mountain Club (AMC) received \$2,000 award that will be used for an appraisal of the Noble View Property in Russell. AMC is working on placing a conservation restriction on the property.



six-year-old nonprofit organization has been doing just that. Since their founding in 1998, Winding River has protected over 550 acres of land and has obtained \$3.5 million in funding for land protection.

Winding River Land Conservancy has Westfield origins, having originally been formed by current Executive Director and former Westfield City Planner Mark Noonan to protect open space and farmland within the City of Westfield. Its establishment was supported both financially and politically by the community, and since its inception, the organization has made great progress in the protection of some of Westfield's most important landscapes. This success has led to a bolder vision for the Conservancy, which has recently recognized the conservation needs beyond Westfield's borders and the value of a broader conservation perspective.

Though most of Winding River's projects to date have been located within the City of Westfield, the organization's staff and Board of Directors have recently agreed to expand Winding River's territory. This is good news for towns in the southern Highlands—Chester, Montgomery, Russell, Granville, Blandford, and Tolland—as well as the urban landscapes of Holyoke, Agawam, and West Springfield. All of these communities will now be able to call on the Winding River Land Conservancy for conservation assistance and they will know that they have an effective conservation agent working on their behalf.

Like many other land trusts, Winding River works closely with local, federal, state and private organizations. It has successfully partnered with the Massachusetts' Agricultural Preservation Restriction program on many farmland preservation projects in a concerted effort to support the viable agricultural community in southern Hampden County. Though the majority of the farms Winding River has protected in the past have been in Westfield, the Conservancy's recent farm protection projects are located in the Highland towns of Russell and Granville.

As the Conservancy expands its work into additional urban and rural communities, it will continue to educate landowners about the value and benefits of land protection and assist landowners in their efforts to protect open space and farmland.

TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THE WINDING RIVER LAND CONSERVANCY, THEIR CURRENT PROJECTS, AND HOW YOU CAN SUPPORT THEIR WORK, VISIT WWW.WINDINGRIVERLANDCONSERVANCY.ORG.



WINDING RIVER WILL NOW BE A CONSERVATION PRESENCE IN WESTERN HAMPDEN COUNTY.

© B. WARREN

Share in the Summer Bounty

Agriculture is an important component of the Highlands economy and landscape, and if you'd like to support local farmers this summer, there are plenty of opportunities to do so. There are three weekly farmers' markets in the Highlands: Hinsdale Common, Fridays, from 4–7PM. Ashfield Town Common, Saturdays, from 9AM–12:30PM. Hilltown Farmers Market, Cummington, Saturdays, from 9AM–1PM.

Joining a Community Supported Agriculture farm, or CSA, is another popular way to support local farms. CSA's sell "shares" of the farm, which then entitle you to a weekly portion of the seasonal crops. There are plenty to choose from in the Highlands: Brook Hollow Farm, Ashfield; West Branch Farm, Chester; Crabapple Farm, Chesterfield; Natural Roots Farm, Conway; Holiday Farm, Cummington; Wilder Brook Farm, Shelburne; and WildCat Farm, Williamsburg.

TO FIND OTHER SOURCES OF HIGHLANDS PRODUCE, VISIT THE CISA WEBSITE [HTTP://WWW.BUYLOCALFOOD.COM/FARM.HTML](http://WWW.BUYLOCALFOOD.COM/FARM.HTML)

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THE HILLTOWN FARMERS MARKET IS BACK IN BUSINESS FOR ITS SECOND SUMMER.

Unsung Heroes— Local Volunteer Spotlight Tom McCrumm & Judy Haupt, Ashfield

One wonders when Tom McCrumm and Judy Haupt find the time to sleep at night. This busy couple has been involved in land use and conservation issues since they moved to Ashfield nearly twenty years ago. Judy serves on the Open Space Committee and Planning



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Board, while Tom is the Coordinator for the Massachusetts Maple Producers Association, a member of the Town Center Planning Committee, and the Ashfield Trails Group. The two run a maple syrup business at South Face Farm and a busy weekend restaurant during sugaring season. In addition, Tom and Judy are also active with The Trustees of Reservations through both the local Chapelbrook Property Committee and a statewide advisory committee. They have deeply held beliefs in grassroots conservation efforts, and a desire to give back to landowners and organizations that protect open land for recreational opportunities, which has been a driving force in their activities. In the summer months, you'll most likely find Tom and Judy on two wheels—though not necessarily together—since Tom prefers mountain biking and Judy road cycling. 🍃

IF YOU'D LIKE TO NOMINATE SOMEONE FOR OUR VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT, GIVE US A CALL OR EMAIL US AT [HIGHLANDS@TTOR.ORG](mailto:highlands@ttor.org).



THE HIGHLAND COMMUNITIES INITIATIVE REGION

Ashfield	Conway	Huntington	Peru
Becket	Cummington	Leyden	Plainfield
Blandford	Florida	Middlefield	Rowe
Buckland	Goshen	Monroe	Russell
Charlemont	Granville	Monterey	Sandisfield
Chester	Hawley	Montgomery	Savoy
Chesterfield	Heath	New Marlborough	Shelburne
Colrain	Hinsdale	Otis	Tolland
			Tyringham
			Washington
			Westhampton
			Williamsburg
			Windsor
			Worthington



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JOSE GARCIA, THE WESTERN REGIONAL ECOLOGIST WITH THE TRUSTEES OF RESERVATIONS, POINTS OUT DELICATE WILDFLOWERS SUCH AS TRILLIUM AND JACK-IN-THE-PULPIT TO THE PARTICIPANTS OF HCI'S EXPLORING THE SPRING LANDSCAPE WALK HELD IN MAY AT CHAPEL BROOK IN ASHFIELD.

Useful Website—Townboard.org

Do you ever get the feeling that there is a lot going on, but you don't know how to find out about it? Do you want to take advantage of workshops and training opportunities, but



never hear about them until it's too late? UMass Extension has created a new website to help solve these problems—www.townboard.org. The site contains a calendar of upcoming land-use related events offered by a wide variety of organizations, including HCI. So log on and sign up for some of the great events that are coming up soon! 🍃

FOR MORE INFORMATION, OR TO JOIN OUR MAILING LIST, CONTACT US AT:

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