

The East Quabbin Land Trust
Working to Restore Mandell Hill

HARDWICK – The East Quabbin Land Trust (EQLT) has been working hard for the past five years to restore the Mandell Hill property, formally the home of Harry & Betty Morss, to an active farmland, sanctuary for wildlife and headquarters of their growing organization.

“Our stewardship activities at Mandell Hill provide a visible and accessible example of how farmland can be enhanced and at the same time consider wildlife needs and expand walking trails,” said Chris Buelow, EQLT Board Member and ecologist. “We are also cleaning out the old apple orchard and fighting invasive plants in the woods.”

Join EQLT on Sunday, June 1st at 4:30 pm at Mandell Hill for the annual meeting of their membership. Help celebrate five years at the Morss estate and take a guided tour of the recent field expansion at Mandell Hill. Bring a dish to share and catch up with other conservation enthusiasts! Meet at 120 Ridge Road in Hardwick. Contact EQLT to register at 413-477-8229, email [eqlt@comcast.net](mailto: eqlt@comcast.net), or check out our website at www.eqlt.org.

Mandell Hill is a 200-acre farm overlooking the Ware River valley on Ruggles Ridge to the east of Hardwick center. Historically, the fields were pasture or produced hay and corn. The woods are largely mixed hardwoods and occupy the steepest and rockiest portions of the property. An abandoned apple orchard on Barre Road provides food and cover for wildlife.

In the 1970's Henry A. and Elisabeth Mixer Morss built a house on the property at 120 Ridge Road, which currently serves as the headquarters of EQLT. Conservation of the agricultural landscape meant a lot to Mrs. Morss because of her youth spent in Hardwick and their eventually retiring to the land. Through her will, Mrs. Morss ensured that her home and Mandell Hill would remain permanently conserved in perpetuity. In 2003, Mrs. Morss' executors worked with EQLT and the Trustees of Reservations to place a conservation restriction on the property and subsequently transferred the house and land to EQLT.

Recent land stewardship activities at Mandell Hill include reclaiming 15 acres of overgrown pasture that links with existing fields. The multi-year field creation effort was funded in part by the Grassland Reserve Program and Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) of the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service. The fields are currently leased to a local farmer producing grass-fed beef for regional markets. The grazing practices on all these fields are modified to facilitate successful breeding by grassland breeding bird species, such as bobolink and meadowlark. Populations of invasive plants, such as Asiatic bittersweet and multiflora rose, were also controlled in areas reclaimed to pasture. These species are aggressive in their colonization and dominance of an area creating conditions where mechanical and chemical controls are required to promote native plants.

The Mandell Hill property is a beautiful landscape that the public is encouraged to utilize, but do keep in mind that this is a working farm property, and that the ecological management is ongoing. There will be times when there is machinery about, and you may also witness areas of land clearing. This work is always according to a strict, long-term management plan in pursuit of EQLT's mission of fostering the sustainable use of the natural resources for the benefit of all generations. At times gates may block trails as cattle are being pastured in rotation. Gates on trails are meant to be passed through, but ALWAYS close the gates behind you immediately. Dog walking is discouraged because of potential conflicts with cattle, the electric fencing and the promotion of ground-nesting birds.

EQLT works to foster the sustainable use of our natural resources for the benefit of all generations through the conservation and stewardship of the farmlands, woodlands and waters in the east Quabbin region of Massachusetts. By working cooperatively with property owners, government agencies, conservation groups and other land trusts, EQLT has protected over 2,000 acres since 1994. It is the ultimate goal of EQLT to be a driving force in creating a local community that is compatible with its natural environment, economically viable, and preserves its quality of life for generations to come.