

East Quabbin LAND TRUST



The Dougal Range

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Dinner & Auction Fabulous Success!

Many thanks to the friends of the EQLT as we raised over \$12,000 in support of land conservation in the east Quabbin region. If you were unable to attend, please join us next year! Let us know if you have any auction items for 2008.

The steady backdrop of the Dougal Range stands as an icon above the village of Gilbertville and remains as much a part of the fabric of the community as were once George Gilbert's mills. The familiar steep slopes of the Dougal frame the western edge of the Village and its high ridges and dramatic overlooks have been a destination of local hikers, hunters and wanderers for as long as the area has been settled. The perspective from these lookouts provides an unparalleled view of not only the Village below, but of the wide-ranging extent of the Ware River Valley's other slopes, such as Goat, Ragged, Coy and Whiskey Hills. Whether driving on Church Street in Ware or descending the hill from Hardwick into Gilbertville, the five peaks of the Dougal Range feel like a timeless, ever-present part of our east Quabbin landscape.

The strong association that we have with the Dougal Range to our community is a logical one. Its slopes, supporting the cycle of first sustenance hunting, then fueling the Village's mills, to supporting extensive grazing and now once again functioning in a natural state, has driven the history of the area and has shaped not only the towns below, but the people who live in these towns. The Range continues to link the communities of Hardwick, Gilbertville and Ware not in just a figurative way, but also in a very real and physical way. The current sprawling wild state of the Dougal Range is the epitome of a proper balance between functioning communities and a functioning ecosystem.

Beyond Aesthetics

While the visual qualities of this Range are undeniable, a closer look at the ecological aspects of the Range reveal a landscape of surprising regional significance. The first aspects that stand out about the Dougal are its size and its place in the local landscape context. Stretching from nearly Hardwick Center to downtown Ware, the more than 2,000 contiguous acres of upland forest are quite rare east of the Berkshires. And stepping back further, it quickly becomes apparent that the Dougal is currently acting as a natural hub, keeping intact important links to other locally and regionally important landscapes like the Quabbin Reservation, the Muddy Brook Valley, the Ware River Valley and the extensive wild acreage of the hills of Warren and West Brookfield. Natural corridors such as these have now become the exception in Massachusetts and are critical in sustaining our local biodiversity and ecological integrity.

DOUGAL LEDGES, GILBERTVILLE



Looking upon the Range specifically reveals a trove of biodiversity. In 2002 the Massachusetts Audubon Society's Important Bird Area Initiative recognized the Range as a globally significant landscape in supporting an otherwise vulnerable suite of breeding Neotropical migrant bird species. The key to the continued success of these species is unfrag-

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Message from the Executive Director



Dear Friends,

As you read in the lead article, Dougal Mountain range is a unique spot in Massachusetts, supporting tremendous wildlife diversity and several rare natural communities. Many biologists contributed to the documentation of this exceptional landscape, but it was the work of the Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program that clearly identified the range as a vital natural area.

The Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program (NHESP) provides several conservation planning tools that are critical to the EQLT, local conservation commissions and others land planners. The EQLT regularly uses information from BioMap and Living Waters mapping projects in assessing the significance of conserving each parcel of land. In the past funding for the NHESP was provided through the state budget process. This year there is no General Fund support for the NHESP, leaving their funding mainly from project-specific bond monies and federal aid.

As users of the NHESP products and information, even if in an indirect way by supporting the EQLT, you can express your support for the NHESP by calling your state legislators. Ask them to support the NHESP funding at the \$1 million level in the Fiscal Year 08 budget! The NHESP program is within the Division of Fisheries and Wildlife, and lost its line item in 2004, meaning that the NHESP lost all General Fund funding. Join the EQLT in asking to have the line item restored and funded at the \$1 million level.

State congressmen for our area include:

Senator Brewer (617) 722-1540

Rep. Todd Smola (617) 722-2240

Rep. Ann Gobi (617) 722-2575

Rep. Lewis Evangelidis (617) 722-2263

If you have a question about which person is your representative, please visit www.mass.gov/legis/citytown.htm or call (617) 722-2000.

On Sunday April 22nd please join your neighbors to explore part of the Dougal range. This is an opportunity to see how the salamander eggs, fairy shrimp and finger clams are maturing in the vernal pools. Also, the group will hike to the ledges to take in the spectacular view over the Ware River valley. Come prepared for a strenuous hike with good boots, water and lunch. Please dress appropriately. After this walk you will understand why the East Quabbin Land Trust wants to work with interested landowners to see the range remain a viable natural landscape that supports humans and animals alike.

Warmest regards,

Cynthia Henshaw

EQLT Upcoming Events:

Earth Day walk on Dougal Range: Sunday, April 22, 11 a.m.

Join EQBC and the EQLT as we spend an afternoon exploring one of the wildest tracts of privately-owned land in our region. A short hike up a steep grade will bring us upon a plateau that stretches from Hardwick to Ware and offers great birds, vernal pools, special natural communities and dramatic views of the Ware River Valley and Gilbertville. Meet Sunday at the athletic fields off of Prospect Street in Gilbertville.

EQLT Annual Meeting: Saturday, May 6, 4:30 p.m.

Please join fellow EQLT members and supporters for the annual cookout and potluck dinner. This is an excellent opportunity to revel in the beautiful view from the Morss property. Meet at 120 Ridge Road, Hardwick.

EQLT Benefit Garden Tour: Saturday and Sunday, June 9 & 10, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Explore gardens in Hardwick, New Braintree and Petersham with their glorious spring colors. Tickets are \$15 and box lunch is \$15 and can be purchased by calling (508) 867-6679.

Edible Plant Walk with Russ Cohen, Tuesday, July 24, 6 p.m. to 8 p.m.

Hold the date! Details to follow in our Summer newsletter.

Check www.eqlt.org for details on other activities...

EQLT Volunteer Profile— Martha and Brian Klassanos: An Interview with naturalists

Martha and Brian Klassanos are both fifty years old. Martha, originally from Springfield, has a BS in Environmental Design and is on the board of the land trust. Brian is a naturalist who certifies vernal pools, and is active on the stewardship committee and with efforts to clear the Rail Trail. They have been running a landscape construction business in Ware for the past 25 years.

EQLT: What interested you, originally, about getting involved with the land trust?

Martha: Twenty-eight years ago, we moved to Ware, and bought a large parcel with a great stream on it. We really loved the natural beauty of the place, though we felt it was remote; almost too remote. Now, we are alarmed at the amount of development. We want more than anything to preserve the rural quality of the area.

EQLT: How long ago did you become involved with the land trust?

Martha: We've been supporters for four years, now, and we joined because we were concerned about development in our area. I joined the board two years ago, before Cynthia came, and Brian and I are both involved with land stewardship and direct acquisition.

EQLT: As residents of Ware, how is the EQLT useful in your town?

Martha: A regional land preservation effort is badly needed. The ongoing sprawl and development are a cause for grave concern. We think that the land trust mobilized just in time, as before then there was no resource for individuals to do what needs to be done. Ware is a land rich and cash poor town, and our mission here is to keep land, and be stewards of it.

EQLT: You are involved with land conservation in Ware as well?

Martha: Yes, with the Ware Conservation Commission. Conservation commissions are sort of municipal land trusts, but in 1973, with the passage of the Wetlands Protection Act, many conservation commissions became so busy with wetlands permitting, that they didn't have time for land conservation. Land trusts are, in this sense, a secondary line of defense. Municipal permitting processes have become very complicated, and only wealthy towns that have a large staff can actually preserve land, as well as dealing with wetlands permitting issues. Because of this, the original mission fell by the wayside.

EQLT: What about the land trust's new project in Ware?

Martha: We're excited about the new project, the Dougal Range. It will be the land trust's first foray into Ware. We're property owners in the area; what we see is in our backyard. Hopefully, the area will be preserved under coordinated management with the bird club, which will bring news of the ecological significance of the area.

EQLT: This is with the help of Chris Buelow?

Martha: Chris Buelow has been a force with guidance and education as to how special this area truly is. When Chris starts talking about habitat, it makes the cause more important. I'm not a scientist, and it is very helpful to understand what makes this area unique and special.

EQLT: Where do you see the land trust going in the future?

Martha: Since Cynthia has come in, we have become far more disciplined and organized. You can only do so much with volunteers. She has made us much more efficient, and I see the land trust going much further in the future. Having her as director has helped us to see the question of conservation in a much more dispassionate light. I see us gaining momentum at this point and being able to make a greater difference in our areas. But there's still a long way to go: we haven't gotten into the Brookfields yet.

—Chuk Kittredge



What Gets You Excited About the East Quabbin Land Trust?

Here is one readers response...

We moved to beautiful rural Hardwick to our Lower Road home about thirty years ago. Throughout the years, I have noticed the now rapidly changing landscape. The big nearby change was the housing development on River Run Road. Where once was a quiet country road with tracks of deer and the home of the haunting voice of the whippoorwill, there is now houses, more people, noise, and more traffic. This is just one example of many that points to what has and is happening to Hardwick. All loss of landscape effects the quality of life for all of Hardwick. All the efforts of East Quabbin Land Trust now offers hope to preserve and protect Hardwick's quality of life for all future generations. We are all connected in Hardwick in one web and community of life where all elements plants, animals, landscapes, farms, air, and people live together and when one part is harmed or dies a part of all of us is damaged or dies. Please let us do all we can together to save the essence and "soul" of Hardwick. Thanks you East Quabbin Land Trust for doing your big part.

Richard Bachtold
825 Lower Road
Gilbertville, MA 01031-9843

Current Use Taxation Programs Amended

Governor Romney signed the Chapter 61 amendment bill into law. This legislation streamlines the interpretation and administration of the property tax statutes of Chapters 61, 61A, and 61B by simplifying and making consistent the three programs. Chapters 61 (forest), 61A (agricultural), and 61B (recreational) govern the taxation of non-residential land. "Enrolling in a chapter" allows a landowner to register land with the local town to derive tax benefits under chapter provisions. Hopefully, the new amendments will encourage landowners to participate in chapter 61, thereby promoting the growth of open space.

The following websites highlight all the specific changes:

www.mass.gov/legis/laws/mgl/61
www.mass.gov/legis/laws/mgl/61a
www.mass.gov/legis/laws/mgl/61b

Some of them are:

- Landowners can switch their land from one chapter to another without penalty with certain criteria, to allow more flexibility in land use.
- Municipalities can choose to tax chapter land at the Class Two Open Space Property Tax Rate rather than the Class Three Commercial Property Tax Rate.
- Withdrawal from enrollment under any of the three chapters will not result in a rollback penalty if the use remains unchanged for five years.
- Land under Chapter 61 will be assessed on a per acre fee basis to make it consistent with Chapter 61A.
- The Farm Advisory Committee (FAC), which decides the per acre assessment, will now include a forestry representative.
- Land cannot be sold or converted for a use not compatible with the three chapters within one year of being taxed under these programs without notifying the town officials.

- There is now a conveyance tax that will be imposed if land is changed or sold for development.

Changes specific to Chapter 61:

- No more stumpage fee.
- No more inspection of land for prior cutting.
- No more fees for forester review.
- The state forester only can issue certification.
- Application deadline - October 1st, which is the same for 61A.
- Eliminates the word "hardwood", allowing a wide variety of products.
- The definition of "forest land" more generalized.
- Abatement applications due within 30 days, not 60, of receiving tax bill, which is the same for 61A.
- The Roll Back tax will only look back 5 years.
- If land sold to a Non Profit, no less that 70% of the land must be preserved, rather than 50%.
- Three appraisals can be done to determine value of land if being sold for development, which is the same for 61A.
- The town has the right to inspect and survey land.

Changes specific to Chapter 61B:

Land can now be in a "pastured condition" and commercial horseback riding and equine boarding are now recreational uses.

These reforms, and others not listed, will enhance opportunities for municipalities to protect working farms, forests, and recreational land.

—Claire Reavey

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mented upland forest such as found upon the Dougal. Around that same time the Massachusetts Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program turned attention upon the Range by designating much of the landscape as both Core and Natural Supporting Habitat in its Bio-Map and Living Waters Programs. These three projects were designed to act as a tool to direct conservation strategies toward areas of high ecological integrity that are functioning to support high levels of biodiversity. It's no coincidence that all three of these statewide projects ended up with a local focus upon our own Dougal Range.

Since the conclusion of these three projects, state biologists, university researchers and local naturalists have taken to the land of the Range to further expand upon this knowledge base. The results have been impressive as the further research shows the Dougal and its immediate watersheds (Muddy Brook, Danforth Brook and the Ware River) emerging as one of the state's most diverse and important in terms of supporting rare and endangered species and unusual natural communities. In 2006 alone populations of four terrestrial state-listed rare species have been found to be dependant upon the Range itself, and overall, over a dozen state-listed species have been documented to be either dependant upon the Range or dependant upon sections of watersheds in direct contact with the Range. Surveys have also found several examples of unusual Natural Plant Communities, including Rich Mesic Forests, Circumneutral Talis Slopes and Hickory Hop-hornbeam Communities. These uncommon Communities are expressions of unusual geology and soil chemistry for our region, and often harbor rare species themselves. The Range is also now known for its large concentration of vernal pools found throughout its entirety. These important



temporary wetlands are home to some of the region's highest concentrations of biodiversity, and initial surveys have found many of the Range's pools to harbor species rare to our region. These recent findings in many ways only hint at the overall ecological value of this area. Further survey and research are expected to uncover a growing significance of the Range to the state's biodiversity.

A Unique Opportunity

Considering the contribution of the Dougal Range to the region's biodiversity, history and culture, the East Quabbin Land Trust has designated this landscape as its main 2007 focus area. It's rare in our area to find a landscape still in the condition of the Dougal – large, intact and rich in history and biota – and the Trust has begun to work with the patchwork of landowners to find a mutually beneficial direction for this landscape. For many landowners this direction may mean the adoption of a Conservation Restriction on parts or on most of their property. Conservation Restrictions are voluntary agreements where landowners sell the development potential of their property while still owning the property and still being able to use the property as they always have: for timber harvest, agriculture, hunting, etc. Adopting Conservation Restrictions qualify landowners for significant tax relief as well, and a recent change in the Federal tax code allows for even greater tax relief for Restrictions adopted in 2007. To this end, the East Quabbin Land Trust has teamed up with the North Quabbin Regional Land Partnership and others interested in conservation to work on a wide-ranging project designed to promote and protect the integrity of timber producing forests in the Northeast. Keeping a large and diverse landscape such as the Dougal Range in its current state is a great undertaking, but, in many ways, the reasons that make it a challenge are the very reasons that the challenge is worth pursuing.

—Chris Buelow

Partnering for Conservation Success

The EQLT is partnering with other organizations to assist more landowners in realizing their land conservation goals. "We are pooling our proposed CR acquisitions, of predominately private forest lands, with other land trusts into one large project," said Stan White, board President. "This project would then seek funding from a variety of sources including federal, state, local and private philanthropy."

"The benefits of this effort can be tremendous," stated Keith Ross, project proponent and Senior Advisor at LandVest, Inc. "Aggregating many land conservation projects from a large area results in a broader array of conservation values being protected on a greater number of acres, which results in increased overall project significance and a greater likelihood of achieving funding." The outside funding is leveraged because participating landowners are asked to provide a significant 25% contribution towards the purchase price. To date, ten landowners in the east Quabbin region are interested in participating in this project. If you or someone you know is wants to conserve their land please have them contact Cynthia Henshaw at 413-477-8229 or chenshaw@eqlt.org to discuss their options.

Board & Staff

Terry Briggs—Hardwick
Chris Buelow—Gilbertville
Elizabeth Coe—Petersham
Judith Jones—New Braintree, V.P.
Martha Klassanos—Ware, Clerk
Jerry Reilly—Hardwick, Treasurer
Rick Romano—Hardwick
Jeff Schaaf—Wheelwright
Stan White—Hardwick, President
Magi Ziff—New Braintree
Marion Cooper, Staff
Cynthia Henshaw, Exec. Director

P.O. Box 5
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www.EQLT.org
Email: eqlt@comcast.net

"Conserving the land, preserving our character."

Our Mission :

The East Quabbin Land Trust exists to conserve the natural, historical, agricultural, and recreational character of our region. To this end we gather resources, educate, and develop and implement land-protection strategies.

Deer Park now owned by the EQLT— Partnership with Hardwick Conservation Commission continues

The historic Deer Park on Simpson Road was permanently protected last year when a conservation restriction over the entire 58-acres was donated to the EQLT. Just recently the title to the property was also donated.

"Many thanks to Paul Gabens and the Hardwick Conservation Commission for making this possible," stated Stan White, EQLT President. "We look forward to sharing the historic Deer Park enclosure and abundant woods and wetlands with outdoor enthusiasts."

The Hardwick Conservation Commission accepted the conservation restriction over Deer Park from the EQLT. That paved the way for the EQLT to accept ownership of the property. "The partnership with the Hardwick Conservation Commission was instrumental in meeting Mr. Gabens' goal of seeing the property permanently conserved and open to the public," said Cynthia Henshaw, EQLT Executive Di-

rector. "We are completing a forest management plan that will guide trail creation and other stewardship activities on the land."



"My cousins would be very happy to know that the land is permanently protected from development," said Paul Gabens, donor and executor for Helen and Paul Vitkus. "I am thankful that the land trust and Conservation Commission both stepped forward to make our vision a reality."

—Cynthia Henshaw