

# East Quabbin LAND TRUST



## *Landscape Restoration Continues on Mandell Hill*

Those familiar with the East Quabbin Land Trust's Mandell Hill property at the intersection of Ridge and Barre Roads in Hardwick have seen a dramatic and ongoing reclamation of this landscape over the past four years. Long a conservation priority for EQLT, this landscape acts to bridge the largely agrarian countryside of Hardwick center with the heavily forested western slopes of both the Moose Brook and Ware River Valleys. In many ways this property acts as a critical lynchpin between these two important regional ecosystems, and once the Trust was awarded ownership of the property in 2003, its focus was turned toward managing this landscape in a way that facilitated its full potential.

The first step in realizing Mandell Hill's full potential began in the winter of 2003 when the Trust conducted a comprehensive inventory and assessment of the property's natural communities, resources and historical value. From this work a Management Plan was developed as a guiding framework for the property's future direction. This Management Plan was developed with the Trust's mission of

*preserving the natural, agricultural, historical and recreational character of our region* as a prime directive, and is intended to build upon the landscape's current positive features while realizing the potential that this property holds in terms of management directions not yet taken. In a nutshell, the Plan looks to maximize the property's contribution to regional biodiversity while simultaneously supporting relevant and viable local agriculture.

Significant strides have already been made toward these ends. Historic orchards and pastures have been reclaimed, hedgerows have been cleared, invasive plants are beginning to be controlled, and fields have been converted back to hay production to effectively support both breeding grassland birds and grass fed cattle. All of this work has been made possible through grants from conservation and agricultural entities, as well as through the labor of EQLT's many hard-working volunteers.

### What's Next?

In October 2007 a final dramatic management action is scheduled to begin: the clearing of a five-acre triangle of trees known as "The Wedge". The Wedge is essentially a wide hedgerow dividing the property's two main hay fields, and its removal was one of the first important actions identified in the 2003 Management Plan. This action is now being funded by the Federal Wildlife Habitat Improvement Program (WHIP). The primary reason for removing The Wedge is to greatly bolster the breeding grassland bird population on the property, and while clearing trees to help birds may seem counter-intuitive, the concepts of landscape context and a focus upon the species in most need are the driving considerations for the action.

In terms of species in need of active support, the main agricultural area of Mandell Hill was identified to be best utilized as a resource to aid local grassland bird populations. Nationwide, and especially in the east, grassland birds as a group are facing one of the



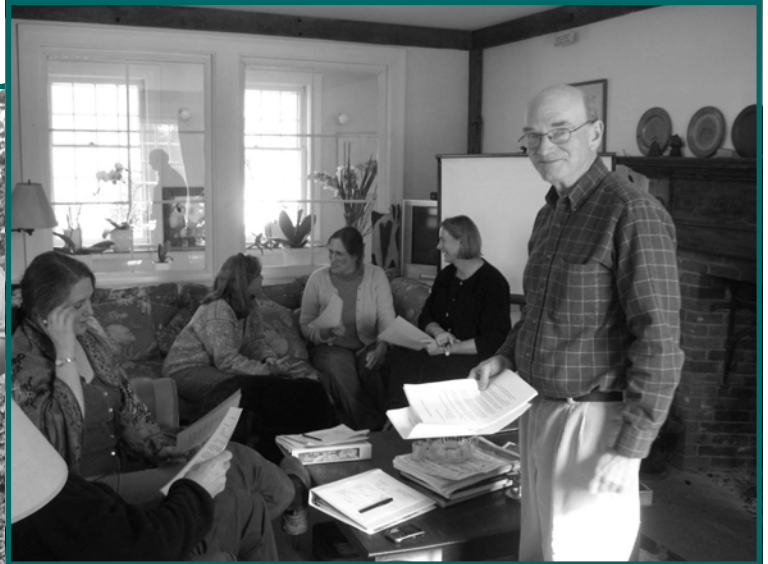
*Clearing invasive plants at Mandell Hill*

*Continued on page 4...*

# Photos of Recent Activities



*Charlie Peckham and Alan LePain painting a rail trail mileage marker. It's 36 miles to Northampton!*



*Board members working on strategic planning with John Goodrich.*



*Hikers at Moose Brook Preserve.*



*Action at the Dunk Tank during the Hardwick Fair.*

## Board & Staff

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## *Volunteer Profile—A Word with Jeff Smith*

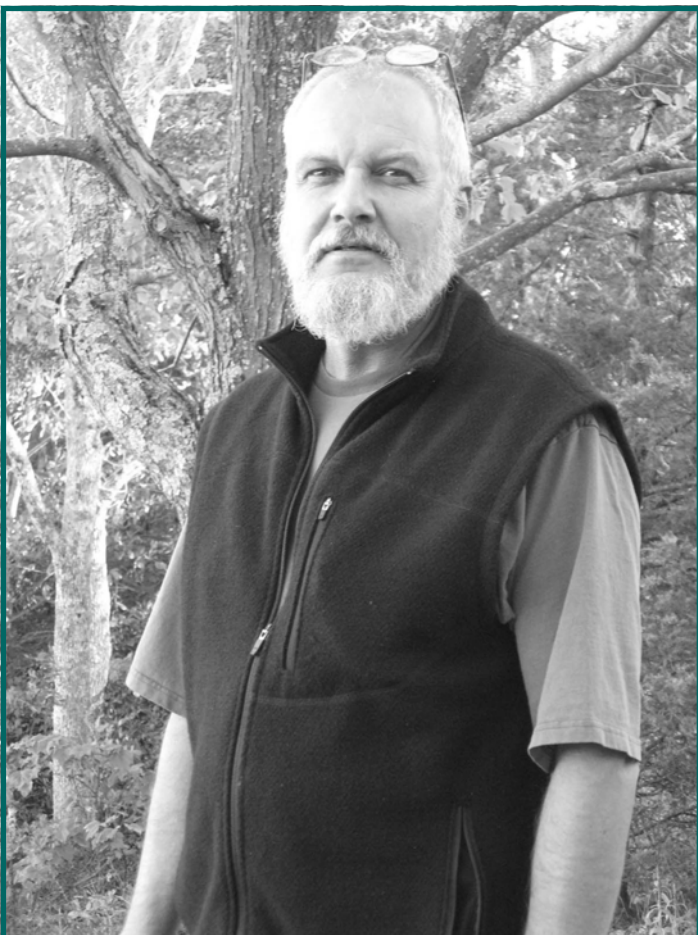
Jeff Smith is 58 years old, and originally hails from Indiana. Following college (Cumberland College, KY), he put his history and secondary education degrees to good use teaching science and English in a small private high school. He now works for the Quaboag Corporation, maker of Vibram soles for hiking boots, as the head supervisor on the 2<sup>nd</sup> shift. I recently got him to play hooky long enough to ask him a few questions.

**EQLT:** Jeff, can you tell us a little bit about what you do on the Stewardship Committee?

**JS:** As a committee, we make decisions regarding the future of our adopted properties. This past weekend we finished cleaning up Moose Brook, to get ready for our hike next week. Mandell Hill is a diverse area of fields and woods. As a member of the Stewardship Committee, I've helped clean up a trail system in the woods; also the area around a barn foundation.

**EQLT:** How did you get involved with the Land Trust?

**JS:** My first interest was in the Bird Club, but as time went by I became more involved with the land trust; I joined the



Stewardship Committee and became a more active member.

**EQLT:** And you've enjoyed it, I take it.

**JS:** Absolutely. I find Hardwick to be one of the prettiest places in Central Massachusetts. I enjoy being involved with the land trust and the bird club – it gives me a chance to do stuff I like to do. This year we built a number of birds boxes at Mandell Hill. In fact, we discovered one box that contained eight fledglings.

**EQLT:** What new plans are in the works for the Stewardship Committee?

**JS:** We talked a lot about the Patrill Hollow property; we're getting ready to put a parking lot in there, so hikers will have easier access. We're currently working on a trail there.

**EQLT:** Is this something you share with your family? Your wife and kids?

**JS:** My wife? She lets me do what I want (chuckles). That's what has made our marriage a success for 30 years. With my children, I'd like to leave something of a legacy. My son is much more inclined to outdoors stuff than my daughter. He loves to be outside, to hike and backpack.

**EQLT:** Where do you see the land trust going from here, Jeff?

**JS:** Well, I've only been involved for a year, now. Cynthia has been great; she has a lot of energy and foresight. She wants to do a lot of things with the properties we're adopting. As a member of the Stewardship Committee, so do I. One thing I'd like to see is more volunteer days. Right now, there are only a few during the year. They're a great chance to get outdoors and do fun stuff.

**EQLT:** How do we attract new members?

**JS:** About getting new members, I can't tell you, really. I know there are a lot of people in my age group, people whose kids have grown up and moved away. I'd particularly like to attract people to the Bird Club; right now we only have six to ten people at our meetings.

**EQLT:** Jeff, we're just about done. Do you have any final words of wisdom you'd like to offer?

**JS:** Well, what we're trying to do is save a few acres from the bulldozers. We're trying to slow down all the building that's been going on in the last five years.

**EQLT:** Thanks for your time, Jeff.

**JS:** Thank you.

—Charles Kittredge

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most dramatic population declines of any avian suite. This decline is mostly due to loss of breeding habitat from development and forest succession, but is further compounded by conflicts with modern agricultural practices; primarily mechanized haying that cuts fields low during the breeding season, often resulting in near 100% nest mortality and serious population sinks in otherwise appropriate grassland breeding habitats. With this in mind, the Mandell Hill site is not only intended to be a refuge for breeding grassland birds, it is also intended to be used as a model for viable agricultural practices that benefit breeding grassland birds like bobolink, eastern meadowlark and savannah sparrow.

Though the twelve acres of hayfields now actively managed for grassland birds are important for the handful of breeding pairs of bobolinks and savannah sparrows currently present, a vast majority of the grassland potential here is currently not utilized. Grassland birds are considered to be area sensitive, that is, they require a specific landscape context and patch size for them to move in and colonize an area. Another way of looking at this is that grassland birds invariably avoid edges. Edges are full of predators for exposed grassland birds and their nests, and these birds have evolved to seek the safety of wide-open vistas afforded by the centers of large fields. The two active hayfields on Mandell Hill are relatively long and narrow, which translates into a high edge-to-center ratio: a lot of edge and little prime center habitat. Looking at the current configuration of these fields, it is expected that the maximum number of bobolink pairs supported here may not surpass ten. However, by removing the long, narrow wall of trees dividing these fields, the number of pairs has the potential to rise near exponentially, and well over 50 pairs of bobolinks eventually settling here is not unrealistic. Removing The Wedge will do much more than add five acres of potential breeding habitat to the property. It will create a square field of 20-acres with a very low edge-to-center ratio that, combined with the peripheral clearing work already accomplished, will create a very relevant regional grassland bird habitat that works as not only a refuge, but a model for what is possible when both ecology and agriculture are considered in concert.



*Bobolink in grassland*

when measuring the value of this project. First were the potential negative ecological impacts of removing The Wedge. Much in the way that The Wedge fragmented the surrounding fields, The Wedge itself was being greatly fragmented by the fields around it. In this landscape context The Wedge was determined to be too isolated to be of ecological significance as a forest. Breeding bird surveys targeted at The Wedge backed this conclusion, and considering that there are over 1,000-acres of upland forest habitat adjacent to Mandell Hill's fields, it was a fairly easy decision to opt for the enhancement of grassland bird habitat. Secondly, The Wedge is also experiencing a fairly serious infestation of Asiatic bitter-sweet that has seriously degraded this wooded habitat and is now using The Wedge to broadcast bittersweet seeds into the surrounding forest.

Long-term maintenance of the footprint of the cleared Wedge was another important factor when considering this project. For this reason, after the trees have been cleared, the WHIP grant will allow EQLT to remove all stumps and stones from the area. This will give the planted hay crop a clear advantage, as a majority of non-grassland plant species will be removed. The area will then be folded into the grazing rotation currently in place, and if for some reason succession still gets ahead of the grazing cattle, the footprint can be mowed until the agricultural grass species have completely taken hold.

Finally, the aesthetics are a major consideration throughout the contemplation of this project, as has been the case with each management action taken on Mandell Hill to date. This property is considered a direct representation of the East Quabbin Land Trust itself, and the pursuit of an ecologically significant, agriculturally viable and historically appropriate vision for this landscape should inherently lend itself to the fulfillment of the Trust's stated mission. A few of the special considerations for this project include the retention of regularly spaced sugar maples along the main trail through the property, the use of aesthetically correct fencing, and the removal of all slash and stumps from the property.

This is a very exciting time for the East Quabbin Land Trust on Mandell Hill, and though the work scheduled to begin this autumn will initially be quite dramatic, the long-term benefits of sustainable local agriculture and rich biodiversity will make this winter's work well worth the investment.

— Chris Buelow

## *Patience and Persistence:*

### *EQLT Facilitates the protection of 90 acres in West Hardwick*

When it comes to land protection, one often has to take the long view. After more than 10 years of frustrations and hold ups, a parcel of land in West Hardwick was finally protected forever when the New England Forestry Foundation (NEFF) purchased a portion of the Nield's Family Trust land along Muddy Brook near Gate 43. A Conservation Restriction was then sold on the property to the Mass. Division of Fish and Wildlife (DFW) that assures public access and protection as wildlife habitat while the land still remains actively managed for its forest resources. In addition, a conservation restriction was also placed on 180 acres of NEFF land.

It was the original hope of the late Jim Nield, Sr. that the land be protected as open space. The conservation of the parcel was complicated because of the old three acre Hardwick town landfill\* that was used until the 1960's. The Mass. Dept. of Environmental Protection (DEP) wanted some way to ensure that the area was stabilized. Recently a complex agreement between DFW, DEP, NEFF, and the Nield's Family Trust was negotiated after years of remaining idle.

EQLT helped to break the impasse by obtaining engineering proposals that will further evaluate the area. In addition, EQLT also played a role by providing legal assistance and accessing grant monies from North Quabbin Regional Land-

scape Partnership making the purchase more palatable to NEFF.

"It took us a long time to get here", said Stan White, president of EQLT. "I remember walking the property with Keith Ross when he worked for NEFF years ago. This is a

classic example of how it takes many dedicated individuals and agencies to work together over a long period of time to finally result in protecting land in perpetuity. I am very proud of EQLT's role in helping to make this project happen. It illustrates once again the need for our local land trust in the East Quabbin region."

--Rick Romano

*\* please note that this landfill is **NOT** in any way associated with Hardwick Landfill, Inc., or Casella, Inc.*



*White pine stand off Greenwich Road, Hardwick*

## *EQLT Upcoming Events:*

### *Gould Woodlot Center Kickoff with Harvard Forest, Saturday, October 13, 1:30 p.m.*

Attend the kickoff announcement about the Gould Woodlot Conservation Initiative and establishment of the Gould Center for Conservation as part of the Annual Meeting for the Friends of Harvard Forest. The program will also include a brief review of Harvard Forest activities and tour of the Gould Woodlot. Meet at Harvard Forest, 324 North Main Street, Petersham. Kindly RSVP at 978-724-3302 by October 5.

### *Clearing the Indian Rock Trail, October 20, 9 a.m.*

Join us at the Stelmokas Farm on Spring Hill Road in Barre to clear a trail to historic Indian Rock. Bring clippers, chain saws, water and sturdy boots. Contact EQLT at 413-477-8229 for directions.

### *Tour of Gould Woodlot, Saturday, October 27, 2:30 p.m.*

Join Bob Clark, a Petersham naturalist for a tour of the Gould Woodlot. Terrain is variable and will require bush-whacking. The group will meet at Harvard Forest, 324 North Main Street, Petersham and walk to the property from there. Bring water and dress appropriately. Contact EQLT at 413-477-8229 for directions or more information.

### *Benefit Game of Texas Hold'em, Saturday, November 3, 7 p.m.*

Experience the thrill of victory or the agony of defeat during this evening of lively card play at the New Braintree Town Hall. Tickets are \$35, doors open at 7pm with play beginning at 7:30pm. Call 508-867-6679 for tickets or more information.

### *Leaving a Legacy: An Estate Planning Workshop, Thursday, November 8, 6:30 p.m.*

Join Attorney George Dresser and William Cole, C.F.P. to learn more about techniques used to direct your assets to those you want to provide for, rather than paying more federal and state taxes than necessary. Meet at Barre Town House on the common. See page 6 for more details.



## *Leaving a Legacy:*

### *Using Estate Planning to Provide for Yourself, Your Family and Your Land*

Thinking about the future when we will no longer be around often feels morbid, but every day takes us closer to that time. One way to make our passing easier for those left behind is to write a plan for what you want to have happen to your possessions. That is the essence of estate planning. Deciding on what you want and then setting up the steps to ensure that it will happen.

Do you want your spouse, children, nieces and nephews to share equally in all that you had or give more to one than another? Would you like to recognize your college or other charity that makes an important difference in your community? Should your land be divided among heirs or permanently conserved for future generations?

*Here is one example of how planning for the future can make a big difference.*

Mrs. Smith inherited the 5-bedroom house, barn and 380 acres from her father, which had been in her family for over 200 years. Her two daughters had spent summers with their grandparents and loved the land. In her 70's, Mrs. Smith wanted to see that her daughters could continue to enjoy the property after her passing and liked the thought that it would remain much the way it was now; fields and woods.

Jane, the younger daughter, was interested in retiring and living at the homestead and running a bed and breakfast business. The older daughter Sue, lived in Maine and wanted to stay there, but enjoyed periodic visits back to the homestead. In order to decide on an equitable split for her daughters, Mrs. Smith had the property appraised. The

value of her house and land was so high that federal estate tax would be due, and there wasn't enough cash to pay for it. Some of the land would need to be developed to cover the tax.

But a solution was found. Mrs. Smith donated a conservation restriction on 350 acres to the local land trust, reserving 5 acres around the house and four additional houselots. Mrs. Smith changed her will so that the house and 5 acres would pass to Jane, while Sue would inherit the remainder of the family land with the opportunity to build a house for herself and her children on the unrestricted lots.

Mrs. Smith got an immediate income tax deduction from the donation of the conservation restriction and the knowledge that the land will largely remain the way it is. Sue and Jane each were able to remain connected to the family land in meaningful ways and not be burdened with an excessive estate tax when their mother passed away. Without taking action, this outcome was not possible.

Planning is essential to ensure that your wishes are met regardless of how many assets you have. That might be done through a will, or maybe setting up a trust or partnership arrangement is necessary. Please attend an introductory workshop on asset transfer techniques lead by Attorney George Dresser and William Cole, CFP on Thursday, November 8<sup>th</sup> from 6:30 to 8:30 pm at the Barre Town House on the common. To RSVP call 413-477-8229 or [chenshaw@eqlt.org](mailto:chenshaw@eqlt.org). This workshop is co-sponsored by EQLT, EQUAL, Listening-A Wellness Center, and NOFA-Mass. Chapter.

## *A special Thank You to the many volunteers that serve on one of EQLT's Committees*

Michael Audette—West Brookfield, Finance

William Cole—Hardwick, Finance

John Goodrich—Hardwick, Strategic Planning

Brian Klassanos—Ware, Stewardship

Robert Paquet—Petersham, Land

Jeffrey Smith—North Brookfield, Stewardship

Lucinda Childs—Hardwick, Land

Tremaine Cooper—Hardwick, Stewardship

Chuk Kittredge—Barre, Development

Lee McLaughlin—New Braintree, Land

Harrison Quirk—Ware, Finance

William Zinni—Hardwick, Land

If you are interested in getting more involved with the activities of the East Quabbin Land Trust, please contact Cynthia Henshaw at 413-477-8229 or [chenshaw@eqlt.org](mailto:chenshaw@eqlt.org)

## On the Land...

### *Mandell Hill Trail, Hardwick*

The trail takes you upon the plateau of the East Quabbin Land Trust's Mandell Hill property, through active pastures and high-canopied forests. From the environs of the parking area, easterly views offer Winimusset Wildlife Management Area, the Ware River, and Mount Wachusett. Looking west shows more active agricultural land falling away towards Hardwick center. This is a great spot to take in both sunrises and sunsets. Throughout the pastures, take care to notice the wire fences alongside the trail: they are often electrified to keep in cattle.

#### **Start and Ending Location:**

The marked parking lot south of the intersection of Barre and Ridge Roads.

**Getting there:** From Barre Common, go south on School Street to the intersection of Route 32. Follow Route 32 south and turn west onto Barre Road (opposite the silver bridge to New Braintree). Follow Barre Road about a mile to the peak of the long hill. Parking is on the left side at the hill's peak. From Hardwick Common, head east on Barre Road for a mile. Parking is on the right.

**Route Description:** From the parking lot, walk south around the gate and follow the farm road. Immediately to your left is the reclaimed foundation of the Mandell Farm whose rich history has been well documented by local historians. Continue on, soon coming to a fork in the road. This is a loop trail, so either direction is appropriate, but this description is following the branch left. Take the left branch, walk through a farm gate (please close it behind you if it was closed), past the enormous European Beech tree, and bear right, up the low knoll. Once upon the knoll take a look back for a great view of the working pastures, grazing cattle, and the historical landmarks. Off the knoll the trail continues, bearing right, into the forest and bisecting the steep, wooded slope of Mandell Hill. Soon a subtle jog in the trail left passes through a historic farm lane bordered on each side by stonewalls, now under the forest canopy. The trail continues relatively flat through the forest for another  $\frac{3}{4}$  mile before it turns to the west and climbs

steeply back up to the plateau and active farmlands. Follow the trail around the west end of the first pasture you encounter, known locally as the President's Field due to lore of George Washington's army setting camp here. On the north end of the field you will be reunited with the farm road that will bring you back the parking lot gate.

**Alternate Route:** For a completely level trip, simply bear right at the fork in the road and walk out to the President's Field. There is no loop associated with trip, so you will have to back track for a total walk of a little over a mile.

**Terrain:** Somewhat steep in places, with a few rocky sections.

**General Comments:** Mandell Hill is a working landscape in many senses of the term. One major aspect of the property is the ongoing management of invasive plant species such as Asiatic bittersweet. In concert with this work is the reclamation of acres of former pastures that were lost to these invading plants and are now once again supporting active agriculture in the form of a certified organic grass fed beef operation. The third leg of this operation is the management of the large upper fields for breeding grassland birds such as bobolinks and meadowlarks. Supported with sustainable forestry and other endeavors such as sugaring, the Mandell Hill property is intended to be a model of ecologically sensitive, financially profitable and culturally appropriate land use.



*Flag pole at Mandell Hill*

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 the East Quabbin Land Trust's mission of preserving the natural, historical, agricultural and recreational character of the region. 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. Hunting is allowed on the property with permission.

P.O. Box 5  
120 Ridge Road  
Hardwick, MA 01037

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[www.EQLT.org](http://www.EQLT.org)  
Email: [eqlt@comcast.net](mailto:eqlt@comcast.net)

"Conserving the Land, Preserving Our Heritage."

Postal Patron

Hardwick, MA 01037

### *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.

## *Quabbin to New Braintree Wildlife Corridor*

### *An Explanation of the Vision*

In 1996, the Hardwick Open Space Committee put forth a vision in its Open Space Plan of an east-west open space connection between the ecologically diverse Ware River Valley and the Quabbin Reservoir protected lands. The corridor already had a foundation of permanently protected APR parcels including the Goodfield farm, the Korzec farm, the White farm, and DFW Muddy Brook WMA. However serious gaps in the corridor existed and it took EQLT to carry the vision forward to it's nearly 90% completion today. Gaps in the corridor have closed through protection of parcels such as the Morss-Mixter farm, the Patril Hollow Preserve parcel, the fore mentioned Nields/NEFF/DFW project, the DFW-Lubelczyk acquisition on the Barre-Hardwick town line. The corridor has been widened to include supporting habitat with the Hinckley property and the Deer Park property. Even the acquisition of the Rail Trail is a part of this east-west corridor and guarantees foot (or paw/hoof) access across the Ware River into New Braintree. With ongoing efforts along the Ware River Valley, the Winnimuset Meadows region, and other existing protected lands in New

Braintree, this corridor helps to further protect the ecological integrity of the region. --Rick Romano



*View over the Ware River valley into New Braintree*