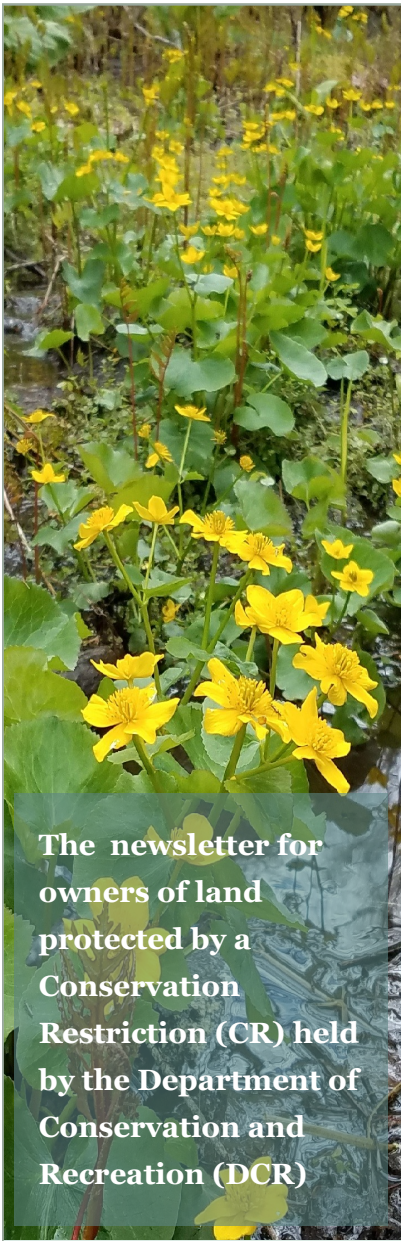




The newsletter for
owners of land
protected by a
Conservation
Restriction (CR) held
by the Department of
Conservation and
Recreation (DCR)



Department of Conservation
and Recreation

Spring 2021

Conservation Connections

DCR Land Protection Program News

Dear Friends,

It's been a long winter, but as the days grow longer and the weather warms up, it feels as though the Massachusetts landscape is waking up from its winter slumber. Flowers are beginning to bloom, the final remnants of winter are washing away with rainy spring days, and everything is a bit more energetic. We are too.

Land Acquisition Staff are finishing up many of their projects, adding to DCR's State Forests and CR protected lands, CR Stewardship Staff are gearing up for our busy monitoring season, and the Land Protection Program and DCR as a whole are saying farewell to one of our beloved colleagues as he heads into his much-deserved retirement (see page 3).

As the season changes and many of you head back outside to continue stewarding your protected land, we hope you will find this newsletter to be a valuable resource. As always, we look forward to seeing you on a site visit sometime soon.

Happy Spring!

CR Stewardship Program Staff

Nature Corner

Vernal Pools

One of the most important and magical habitat features in a Massachusetts forest is the vernal pool. In the fall and winter, depressions in the ground fill with snowmelt and rainfall and become the breeding sites for many creatures in the

springtime. Some animals, such as certain amphibians and fairy shrimp will only breed in a vernal pool and would go extinct if this feature disappeared from the landscape. Why not breed in a stream or a pond or lake instead? Predation. Vernal pools have no streams flowing in or out of them and dry out every summer or at least every few years, and therefore, fish that eat things like amphibian eggs and larvae can't become established.

.....Cont. Page 4.

Spotted salamander—Photo by Ale Echandi



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Funding Opportunities for Landowners

Conservation Collaborative for Habitat Management

MassWildlife and the MA Forest Alliance have teamed up to offer funding to landowners through the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Regional Conservation Partnership Program. The Collaborative will provide funding to encourage habitat management on private lands that can: 1) help rare or declining species as well as game species like ruffed grouse and 2) expand on existing habitat projects on MassWildlife lands. For more information, please visit: mass.gov/news/funding-available-through-new-conservation-collaborative-for-habitat-management

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)

The NRCS provides technical and financial assistance to improve water and air quality, conserve ground and surface water, increase soil health, reduce erosion and sedimentation, improve or create wildlife habitat, and mitigate against drought and increasing weather volatility. Farmers and forest landowners who own or rent agricultural land are eligible. The NRCS will help the landowner or manager develop a conservation plan and can potentially provide funding to cover some of the conservation practices in the plan. For more information visit: [Environmental Quality Incentives Program \(EQIP\)](#)

Short-eared owl—Photo by Sean Riley



Exploring Forest Management

The CR on your property most likely allows for forest management, however, each CR is different; your CR document explains the specific forest management requirements that are in place on your property which often include developing a MA Forest Management Plan (FMP) or Forest Stewardship Plan (FSP). Please ask us if you have any questions about what your CR allows or requires.



There are many good reasons to do forest management. Some people like to manage their forest to enhance wildlife habitat or to attract certain wildlife species, such as deer, moose, or birds. Other people want to create or improve recreational trails, or to manage their forests as a source of income. Often the goal is a combination of several different management objectives.

If you want to manage your forest, the first thing to do is find a [licensed consulting forester](#) for advice. A good forester will listen to your goals for the property and help you develop a plan (FMP or FSP) to achieve them. Cost-share programs are available to help with the cost of hiring a forester to create an FSP. You can also reach out to the [DCR Service Forester](#) for your area to discuss your plan and options for forest management. Having a DCR approved plan also makes your land eligible for the Chapter 61 current use program, which can reduce your property taxes. Remember to give a copy of your CR to your consulting forester so they can integrate its requirements into your plan.

If you decide to harvest timber from your property, you will need to follow both the MA Forest Cutting Practices Act and the terms of your CR, which will likely require that you file a Cutting Plan and that Best Management Practices be followed to keep soil and nutrients in the forest and protect aquatic resources from degradation. Your forester should be familiar with these requirements.

For more information, please visit the [Forest Stewardship Program](#).

Landowner Spotlight

CR Landowners inspire us every day with their unwavering dedication to their land and we want to share their words of wisdom, stories, and land protection strategies. We hope to interview other landowners for future newsletters so please reach out to us if you would like to be featured!

Interview with CR landowner Michael Bathory

Mike Bathory and Maryanne Gallagher's 100-acre CR property in Gill is a mosaic of rich forestland, meadows, marsh and riparian habitat. They have employed a variety of different management strategies to enhance and protect the ecological integrity of the property and we wanted to highlight some of these practices by asking Mike a few questions.

What is your overall vision for the property?

We see ourselves as stewards on the land just passing through this life while we try to provide a legacy for the future. We have set aside an area of the conservation land in our forest management plan as an Old Growth or Legacy section of very large trees that have not been harvested for many years. One of our main goals for the property is to reduce erosion along the Connecticut River bank which has been an ongoing issue. Our riverbanks are across from the Northfield Mountain Pumped Storage Facility.

What are your goals and techniques for the management of your forestland?

We have worked with our forester to design a plan to maintain a healthy forest that allows some of the younger and diverse trees to grow and replace some of the very large pine trees. Hopefully our nearly 100 acres of forest land will help to provide some relief to climate change.

Do you have advice for other landowners looking to combat invasive species on their land?

Find a professional to help you make and carry out a plan. We were referred to a local company that responsibly and selectively cleared some of the land that was severely overgrown. They implemented cut stem treatment with stem injection when appropriate to avoid mass spraying. The Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) was helpful in finding some grant money to help defray some of the cost.

What are some of your top wildlife sightings on the property?

We see deer routinely with the occasional fox, bear, bobcat, or racoon, and we hear the coyotes much more than we see them. We have some squirrels but no rabbits, which is probably due to a combination of the coyotes' fondness of rabbits and hence the rabbits relocating.



Coyote—Photo by Sean Riley



Photo by Jen Soper

Jim Comeau Retirement Tribute

Landowners always remember who they worked with to protect their land. For people in the Metro Boston area, that DCR staff person has been Jim Comeau since the mid-1980s. Jim has worked his way from an entry-level grounds maintenance position to his current role as a Land Protection Specialist due to his ability to work so well with so many. In addition to managing DCR Parks and buying hundreds of acres of land for DCR, Jim has coordinated the successful completion of 35 CRs totaling 463 acres that enhance 12 DCR state parks in 15 cities and towns. Landowners, attorneys, surveyors, title examiners, DCR staff, elected officials, municipal employees – all have come to appreciate Jim's broad knowledge base and willingness to put in the effort to make each project a success. If you have had the privilege of working with Jim, it is very likely that he has given you many four-leaf clovers from his collection. He has an eye for finding these gems absolutely anywhere that grass will grow. It is the gift that symbolizes the faith and hope that he has in your ability to succeed. Join us in wishing Jim the very best, as he has always shared his best with us.



Vernal Pools Continued...

Much to the delight of kids exploring the forest (and adults!) some eggs of amphibians can be easily viewed because they are clumped together in jelly-like globs near the surface. The egg masses of two species in particular, the wood frog and spotted salamander, occur more frequently than those of other amphibians and these two species depend on vernal pools for reproduction. The wood frog is the only frog found as far north as the Arctic circle and produces a special anti-freeze substance that allows it to survive overwinter in leaf litter. From March through April, the “quack” calls of the males can be heard day and night at some vernal pools. The spotted salamander lives in underground burrows and travels to vernal pools in early spring to breed as well. Both species attach their egg masses to sticks or grass in shallow water. Some spotted salamander eggs appear green due to an algae species that lives inside them. It is thought that there is a mutualistic relationship between the algae and the spotted salamander whereby the algae raises the oxygen content of the egg capsule and removes waste, and the salamander embryo creates a nitrogen rich environment benefitting the algae. (Cool!)

Other species that depend on vernal pools for reproduction include the blue-spotted salamander, Jefferson salamander, marbled salamander, spadefoot toad and two species of fairy shrimp. The spring peeper, gray tree frog, American toad and Fowler’s toad use vernal pools to breed but will also use other types of water bodies. Vernal pools also host all kinds of other wildlife including birds, mammals, and reptiles and can sometimes be found in other habitat types such as meadows and river floodplains. Additional vernal pool information can be found at vernalpool.org.



Wood frog—Photo by Ale Echandi



Spotted salamander eggs—Photo by Ale Echandi

MA has a [vernal pool certification program](http://vernalpool.org) whereby staff and volunteers from all over the state collect data from vernal pools which are then mapped by MassGIS (view the [vernal pool map](http://vernalpool.org)). Knowing where vernal pools are located can help landowners and managers safeguard them and the surrounding upland areas that function as habitat for many of the species that use vernal pools for reproduction. Special consideration for these important habitat features when conducting land management activities such as timber harvesting will help ensure their continuance and the survival of the species that depend on them.

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