

dcr

Massachusetts



The newsletter for owners of land protected by a Watershed Preservation Restriction (WPR) held by the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR), Division of Water Supply Protection.

Winter 2013

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# Watershed Currents

## 100th WPR Celebration a Success

On Saturday, October 13th, 2012 the Department of Conservation and Recreation, Division of Water Supply Protection's Watershed Preservation Restriction Program hosted an event honoring landowners, partners, and Land Acquisition Coordinator Jim French, for reaching the 100th Watershed Preservation Restriction milestone.

In attendance at the gala held in Harvard Forest's Fisher Museum were 25 WPR landowners as well as nine other people who were in the process of attaining a WPR. Five appraisers, whose work is central to the WPR acquisition process, were also present, as well as Leigh Youngblood, Executive Director of a partner organization, the Mount Grace Land Conservation Trust. Six DCR staff, including agency Commissioner Ed Lambert, hosted this celebration.

Old friends met while new ones were made as people mingled and enjoyed the refreshments, catered by the Millers River Café in Orange. Attendees examined maps of the three watersheds on display, eager to find their properties amongst the protected lands. Landowners from Wachusett compared notes

with their counterparts from Quabbin. Phyllis George, a Sterling landowner, showed Caroline Raisler, Watershed Preservation Restriction Coordinator, photos of her exquisite garden.



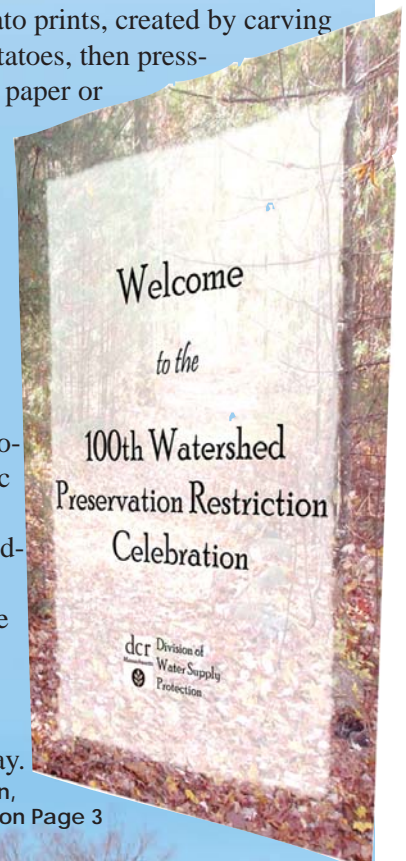
Jim French was honored for his ongoing dedication to the land protection process at the 100th WPR Celebration.

Jim French, Land Acquisition Coordinator, grumbled about the attention given to him and told everyone that it was the landowners who deserved the credit.

There was a steady flow of people appreciating the artwork that depicted local wildlife. Wendell WPR landowner Helen Haddad's potato prints, created by carving and inking potatoes, then pressing them onto paper or fabric, were reminiscent

of woodcuts but with their own softer 'potato' character. Abbie Rorer, WPR landowner in Petersham, provided dramatic 'black-line' engraved woodcuts, where the lines of the image are left raised to take ink, while all else is cut away.

Celebration, continued on Page 3



## Meet the Staff

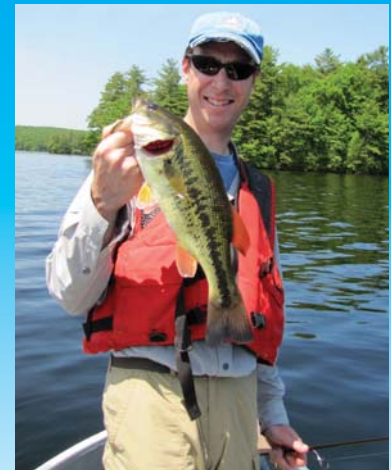
## Dan Clark, Director of Natural Resources

Dan Clark joined the Division of Water Supply Protection in 1995 as a Conservation Biologist. After a number of years as the Division's Wildlife Biologist, Dan became the Director of Natural Resources in 2007. As Director, Dan has responsibility for the Land Acquisition and Stewardship, Wildlife, and Forest Planning Programs. On a few lucky occasions, Dan gets to join Caroline in the field to conduct a monitoring visit and meet dedicated landowners.

Before joining the agency, Dan worked in Missouri (his home state) for several years after getting his Master's

degree in Wildlife Ecology from the University of Missouri, Columbia. Dan is currently pursuing his PhD in Wildlife Ecology from the University of Massachusetts, Amherst.

Dan's office is in West Boylston, but work often finds him in the other DCR watersheds. He lives in Northborough with his wife, 15 year-old son and 10 year-old daughter. An avid fisherman, Dan tries to spend time fishing local ponds and lakes from his canoe. Occasionally he manages to convince his kids to join him.



Dan shows off the catch of the day while fishing with his son at Little Sebago Lake in Maine

*Photo: Brendan Clark*

### Current Research

## Tracking Gulls in Massachusetts Shorebirds' Inland Habits

While a variety of birds utilize the Quabbin and Wachusett reservoirs for breeding, migratory stops, roosting, and feeding, gulls are top concern of the Division because of their ongoing presence (loafing, roosting), their life history (feeding at landfills, etc.), and their documented link to water quality degradation.

The Division has had an active bird harassment program on the reservoirs for many years. While this is very effective in reducing the number of gulls within the harassment zone, the Division would like to see the number of gulls roosting on the reservoir substantially reduced or eliminated. For this to occur, understanding gull ecology is necessary.

In January 2008, an intensive research program was undertaken to address the following questions:

1. What and where are the seasonal food resources for each gull species?
2. What are the seasonal movement patterns between feeding and roosting sites and between reservoirs and "alternate roosts"?
3. What are the population dynamics of gulls in Massachusetts?

To conduct this study, DCR captures and marks gulls so they can be identified and tracked. To catch gulls, bait is placed in front of a net launcher, and a net is propelled out and over them, harmlessly capturing up to 30 birds at one time.

Once captured, birds are marked with a combination of bands and tags. Birds are leg-banded with both a silver federal band and a uniquely color-coded metal band. In addition, most birds receive uniquely coded colored wing-tags. A solar powered satellite transmitter was also harnessed onto the backs of a small

number of gulls, providing up to six locations per day from anywhere in the world.

To date, the Division has captured close to 1,600 gulls (mostly ring-billed), and almost 4,300 sightings of wing-tagged gulls have been reported (see the map on Page 4). Most sightings, documented by the general public and then reported to the Division, have been in Massachusetts, but some study birds have ventured far and wide and have been spotted from Florida to Labrador, Canada.

Satellite transmitters were placed on 14 ring-billed gulls and 10 herring gulls. Some of the larger transmitters were equipped with GPS, allowing accuracy levels within a few meters. Satellite tagged gulls also displayed tremendous movement out of Massachusetts. Two gulls traveled to Florida, and several more made their way south to Georgia and New Jersey. With this data, the Division has been able to identify key feeding areas, document the gull's use of the reservoirs and other water bodies, and track their movements seasonally.



Naturally curious, gulls are distracted by delicious cheese crackers just before capture and tagging for observation in the study.

*DCR Staff Photo*

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An example of the whimsical folk art of DCR's Jim Taylor on display at the 100th WPR celebration.



DCR's Jim Taylor brought his unique folk art made from "cut-offs" and found lumber, in which he lets the shapes of the cast-off materials guide his creations.

WPR Coordinator Caroline Raisler's opening remarks for the speaking program thanked everyone for coming and telling all that she has the best job ever, regularly interacting with wonderful landowners. DCR Commissioner Edward Lambert praised the WPR Program's contribution towards DCR's mission "to protect, preserve, and promote our common wealth of natural, cultural, and recreational resources for the well-being of all" and thanked staff members, partners, and landowners for making this milestone possible. Jonathan Yeo, Division Director, and Dan Clark, Director of Natural Resources, spoke about Jim French's tireless 20 year effort being central to the acquisition of all 100 WPRs. Jim was presented with a photo book of the 100 WPRs and a one pound chocolate bar. Jim graciously thanked everyone present for the opportunity to work with them.

Jim then switched hats, stepping into a different role as volunteer docent for the Fisher Museum and describing the museum's New England forest history dioramas created in the 1930s. Many attendees, previously unaware of the dioramas, were impressed at the level of detail. They also found the story of the forests, from thick woods to tilled fields to pine and back to thick hardwood growth again in just 200 years, equally incredible.

Last on the event's agenda was a showing of WPR landowner Henry Cramer's movie, *Wild Things of North Quabbin*. The film, made by Hank from footage of his New Salem woods over five years, shows the secret lives of more than 25 species of locally common birds and mammals. Mr. Cramer answered many questions after the film. This was one of the first viewings of the movie, but it has since had several more screenings, many by the Mount Grace Land Conservation Trust. Keep an eye out for future showings if you have not yet had the opportunity to see this excellent documentary.

While Jim French ate his bar of chocolate within the week, his memories of the event continue to linger. "What a joy to see so many familiar faces gathered together from so many kitchen table talks over the years," Jim said. "What an honor to have these good folks come out to celebrate our land protection successes that only they, each and every one, made possible. What a fine time I had."

Jim's work on WPR acquisition, of course, continues. Dave Hamilton, who attended the 100th WPR Celebration as a prospective WPR landowner, became the 106th WPR landowner on 12/6/2012. The new year also started well, as the 109 and 110th WPRs were acquired on 1/31/2013!

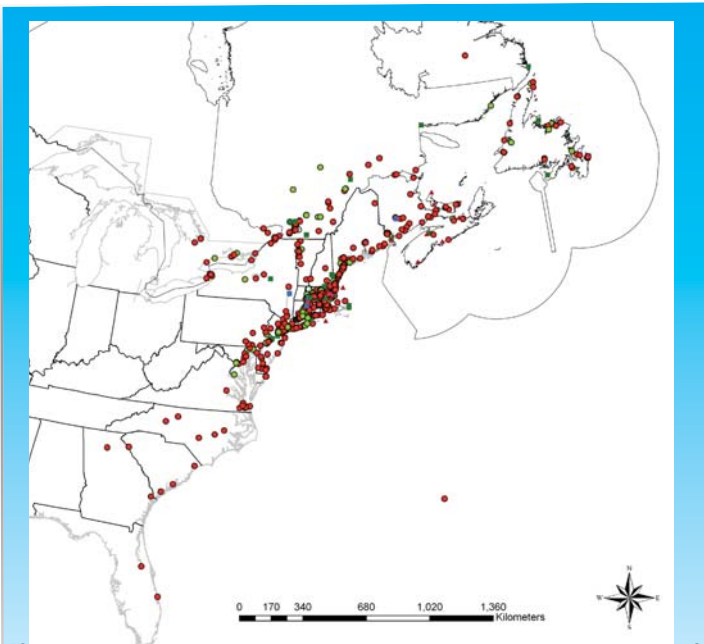
- Caroline Raisler

"Old Field Pine Followed by Hardwood -1915", is an impressive example of the dioramas at Harvard Forest's Fisher Museum. The series of 23 dioramas depict the natural history of local forest lands from before European settlement up until the mid-20th century.



The Fisher Museum at Harvard Forest is located on Route 32 in Petersham, MA. Hours are Monday-Friday 9 am - 4 pm and Saturday-Sunday 12 pm - 4 pm, May to October. The museum can be contacted by calling (978) 724-3302 or online at <http://harvardforest.fas.harvard.edu/fisher-museum>. Other exhibits at the museum represent the range of ecological research ongoing at Harvard Forest.

## Tracking Gulls - Continued from Page 2



This map shows gull sightings tagged for this study, reported by bird watchers and local authorities. Red dots indicate birds caught in the Wachusett area and green dots represent birds caught in the Quabbin area. Gulls have been reported from Labrador, Canada to the north and as far south as Florida. The study shows that Gulls can travel great distances, but most have remained in the state.

## Gulls and People

How have these ocean birds adapted to inland areas? In large part, the answer lies with the relationship gulls have with people. Gulls need a few basic necessities to survive: food, water, a safe place to rest, and areas to breed. It turns out that during the winter Massachusetts provides most of these requirements. Man-made reservoirs and large natural lakes make ideal roosting spots for gulls. Food is another critical resource. Before the development of strip malls and fast food restaurants, most gulls fed on a natural diet of fish, insects, and worms. Inland Massachusetts during winter

doesn't provide an abundance of these items, so historically gulls travelled south. But more recently, gulls began overwintering in Massachusetts surviving almost entirely on bread, french fries, cereal, and muffins from people, most of which is intentionally fed to gulls.

Unfortunately, this is a bad idea for both humans and birds. Gulls fed an unnatural diet of processed breads and fats can develop short and long-term health effects. In addition, feeding congregates birds and makes it easier to transmit diseases and pathogens. Gulls encouraged to stay in the area during winter roost nightly on Wachusett and other reservoirs, causing water quality problems.

**Residents of Massachusetts are strongly encouraged to NOT feed gulls.** Homeowners are discouraged from leaving out bread or cereal in their yard that may attract gulls. Birdseed is fine – gulls don't appear to like it. In addition, the next time you're in a parking lot and a gull is staring sadly into your eyes waiting for a french fry, please refrain from feeding them. It's better for the gull and better for the environment. And if you see a wing-tagged gull, please contact [dan.clark@state.ma.us](mailto:dan.clark@state.ma.us) or 508-792-7423 x 215 with the date and time of the sighting, the color of the wing-tag, and if possible the alpha-numeric combination. More information is available at [www.mass.gov/dcr/gullstudy](http://www.mass.gov/dcr/gullstudy).

- Dan Clark



Gull A-853 is observed at Webster Lake, MA. The numbered tags do not discomfort the bird or impair its regular activities, but the sighting information provides valuable data.

DCR Staff Photo



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