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 2017

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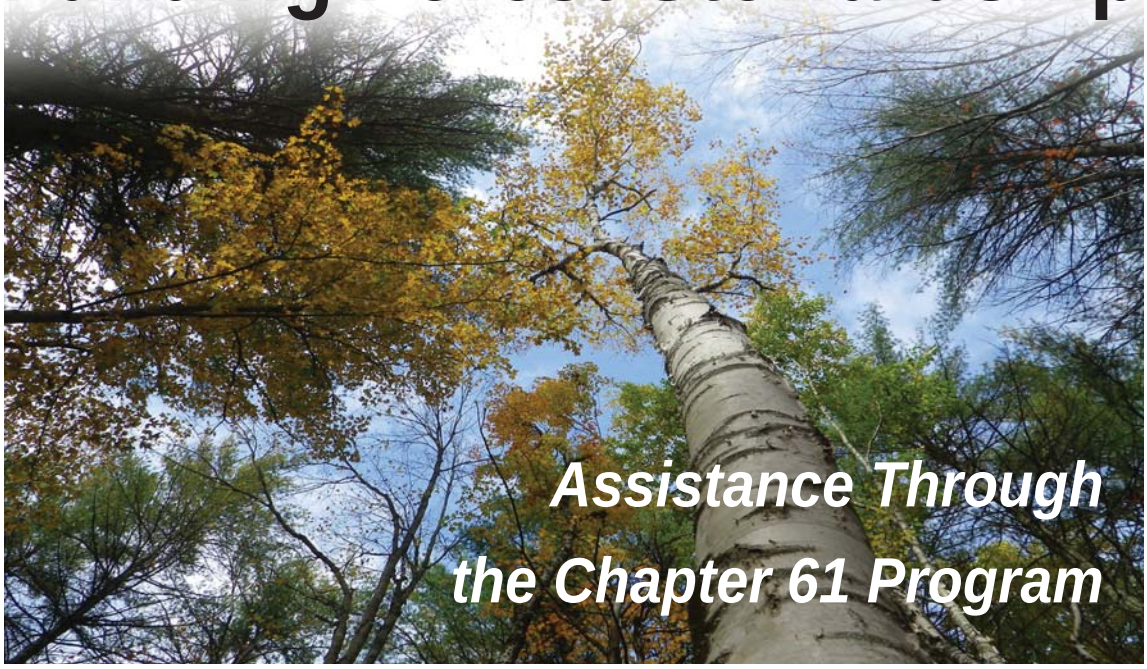

Assistance Through the Chapter 61 Program

Two of the most frequently asked questions by WPR landowners are "how can I lower my property taxes?" and "how can I learn more about managing my land?" The Massachusetts Current Use Forest Tax Programs can help with both. Many WPR landowners are already happily enrolled in these programs, but some of you are still unsure, so here are some answers to frequently asked questions.

What is the difference between Chapter 61, Chapter 61A, and Chapter 61B?

Chapter 61 is geared towards actively managed forestland, Chapter 61A is focused on agricultural land, and Chapter 61B is designed for recreational land. In this article, I will not discuss Chapter 61A, since most WPRs do not allow agriculture, so it is not the best fit for most WPR landowners.

How much will I save on my taxes?

For Chapter 61, the land value is set yearly based on the productivity potential of your property. In the current fiscal year, the values for central Massachusetts are between $43 and $64 per acre (depending on land productivity). The per acre price is then divided by 1,000 and multiplied by the per thousand municipal tax rate to get the annual property taxes for that parcel. For example, a 100 acre parcel of highly productive land would be considered to be worth $6,400. If the town tax rate is $15.00 per thousand, the annual property taxes would then be $96.

For Chapter 61B, a landowner pays 25% of their current taxes. For example, if their property is assessed at $200,000 and the municipal tax rate is $15.00 per thousand, their previous taxes would have been $3,000. Under Chapter 61B, they would pay 25% of that, or $750.

What are the requirements?

For Chapter 61, you must have a minimum of 10 acres to be eligible (houses, buildings and fields are excluded). Then, you hire a professional forester to write a Forest Management Plan or Forest Stewardship Plan (see bottom of page 3). The forester should listen to your goals for the property when writing the plan, and come up with management practices to achieve them over the next 10 years.

Chapter 61 is designed for active management, but timber harvesting is not required. Once your plan is approved by the DCR Service Foresters, you fill out a simple application and file it with the assessors.

You must have a minimum of five acres (excluding houses and other buildings) to be eligible for Chapter 61B. Then you fill out a

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Meet the Staff

Ginny Dautreuil

An environmental interest from a young age.

Ginny Dautreuil joined the Division of Water Supply Protection this past September as a Natural Resource Analyst, monitoring Watershed Protection Restrictions in addition to stream sampling, forest monitoring, and wildlife program responsibilities. She is the first permanent (non-seasonal) addition to the WPR monitoring team, and she will focus on monitoring Forest Legacy funded WPRs.

Ginny playing in the snow.

Photo: Tom Eaton

With a lifelong interest in the outdoors, Ginny started volunteering at the Cape Cod Museum of Natural History in Brewster, Massachusetts at age twelve. She earned a BS in Wildlife Science from Virginia Tech, after which she held a number of seasonal research positions, including studies in cetaceans, salamanders, freshwater fishes, and non-tidal streams. She then worked as a full-time field biologist in Texas for the Texas National Guard, with a primary focus on habitat management and wildlife ecology. Combining her interests in fire ecology and aquatic ecology, she returned to academia to pursue a master's degree in Aquatic Resources from Texas State University, examining the effects of wildfire on aquatic systems. A native of Connecticut, she returned to the Northeast after obtaining her master's degree and worked for DCR as supervisor of the state forests on Martha's Vineyard and Nantucket Islands, assisting with management of the early successional habitats, among other duties.

Ginny now resides in Hadley with her husband Marc, dog Thornton, and two grumpy cockatiels. She takes advantage of the close proximity of many DCR parks and forests where she can be found hiking and exploring. Ginny also enjoys dabbling in horticulture; recent forays include propagating cacti from seed as well as an ongoing project growing fringed gentian. An avid knitter, she can be found on foul weather days immersed in a fiber project.

The Need for Young Forests

A Vital Habitat

Sometimes described as "in-between habitats," shrublands and young forests are the stages between fields (discussed in *Meadow Habitat, Currents*, Winter 2015) and older forests. They fit into a category of habitats called early successional, which includes a range of habitat types with vegetation that is generally less than 30 years old. Shrublands begin when woody vegetation grows into a field, creating a patchwork of woody shrubs and small openings consisting of grasses and other non-woody plants (such as goldenrods and milkweeds). Likewise, an area that is predominantly saplings and small trees is a young forest.

Because shrublands and young forests are constantly growing, they will eventually mature and turn into older forests. It is due to this transitional nature that they are currently in decline across the Northeast. Historically, disturbances such as wind, fire, flooding and beavers created and maintained these systems. However, with urbanization, changing policies and lack of disturbance, open areas have grown in and developed into mature even-aged forests.

Why are these habitats important? A number of declining wildlife species need shrublands and young forests for part or all of their lives. One example is the Eastern Towhee (see the back page); this oriole sized bird spends most of its life in shrublands, where it forages and nests. Another species that need a mix of habitats includes the American Woodcock (also on the back page) which need open areas for courtship, dense shrubby area for feeding and resting, and young forests for rearing their chicks. Due to the decrease of early successional habitats, conservation groups have begun simulating natural disturbances through logging, prescribed fire and mowing to once again create these habitat types for the declining wildlife and plant species associated with them.

~Ginny Dautreuil

For more information:

- **www.mass.gov/eea/agencies/dfg/dfw/wildlife-habitat-conservation/habitat-program.html**
- **http://youngforest.org/sites/default/files/research_documents/Young%20Forest%20Guide-FINAL%20LOW%20RES-091916_0.pdf**

This patch of young forest in Hardwick shows the varied cover that makes good habitat for numerous species. *Photo: DCR Staff*

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simple application and file it with the assessors. Land does not have to be open to the public.

What is the fine print?

The current use tax program is designed to encourage keeping land in its current use. Therefore, there are penalties if you change the land use.

What does my WPR say about it?

All WPRs allow you to use both of these programs. Some WPRs require you to have a Forest Stewardship Plan on your property. If you hire a forester to write a plan, please provide them with a copy of your WPR to make sure that all management practices they recommend are compatible. If you have any further questions about these tax programs or how to find a forester, please contact me at the information on the front page. I would also appreciate receiving a copy of your plan when it is completed.

~Caroline Raisler

The path to funding forest stewardship is not so difficult to follow

Photo: Jim Taylor

More information on Chapter 61

- Find a DCR service forester and professional foresters who could write a plan for you: **http://masswoods.net/professionals**
- Chapter 61 and 61B applications **www.mass.gov/dor/docs/dls/mflb/forms/cl1.pdf**

Program Descriptions:

- **www.mass.gov/eea/agencies/dcr/conservation/forestry-and-fire-control/ma-current-use-forest-tax-program**
- **www.mass.gov/eea/docs/dcr/stewardship/forestry/service/chapter-61-programs.pdf**

Foresters 'for the Birds'

Funding Available for Forest Stewardship Plans

If you are interested in taking advantage of Chapter 61 or just want to learn more about how to manage your woods, you should hire a professional forester to write a plan. A simple Forest Management Plan is a good first step and is all you need to be eligible for Chapter 61. However, a Forest Stewardship Plan (FSP) adds in a more long-term perspective and also considers the natural resources and soil and water quality of your property.

There is currently cost-share money available for creating new FSPs. Depending on the cost of your FSP, the money may cover all or part of the cost of creating it. For more information, ask your forester or contact DCR Service Forester Mike Downey (michael.downey@state.ma.us, 978-368-0126 x129).

A new program called "Foresters for the Birds" provides funding assistance for a trained professional forester to evaluate existing and potential habitat for priority birds on your land. Foresters will provide landowners with a Bird Habitat Assessment - forest management recommendations to improve or create new bird habitat. Shrublands and young forests (discussed on page 2) may be among the important habitats they identify.

The Bird Habitat Assessment can be added on to an existing FSP or be done as part of a new FSP, and money is currently available. For more information contact DCR Service Forester Alison Wright (alison.wright@state.ma.us, 413-262-2370). *~Caroline Raisler*

For more information:

- **http://masswoodlandsinstitute.org/programs/foresters-for-the-birds**
- **http://masswoods.net/landowner-programs#fsp**
- **www.mass.gov/eea/docs/dcr/stewardship/forestry/service/cost-share-application-for-stewplan.pdf**

The Wildlife on Your Land

Two Woodland Birds

Two interesting birds that benefit from mixed habitats, including young forest growth, are the Eastern Towhee and the American Woodcock.

The Eastern Towhee

Among the thick growth of shrublands throughout Massachusetts, a pleasant bird call may be heard with intonations similar to "drink your tea." It is the classic call of the male Eastern Towhee (*Pipilo erythrophthalmus*), an oriole sized bird with distinct markings: black above on the head, back, wing and breast; rusty sides; and white bellies. Female towhees have similar markings, however instead of black they are brown. Eastern Towhees are generally solitary birds found in shrublands, where they use the thick cover of the shrubs to nest and ground forage. They are omnivores, eating a range of seeds, acorns, fruits, buds, invertebrates and even an occasional small salamander or snake.

The Eastern Towhee is at home in the branches of shrubby growth (left), while the American Woodcock (above) is more of a ground dweller.
Photos: USFS

The American Woodcock

The male American Woodcock (*Scolopax minor*) will begin its unique courting style on early March evenings using small clearings in shrublands or young forests. On the ground they will give their "peent" call, then take off into the air to begin what is referred to by some birdwatchers as their "sky dance." It will circle high in the air then descend zigzagging while modified feathers produce a twittering sound. I had the good fortune of watching this acrobatic display in a small clearing a number of years ago on Cape Cod while hunkered down under shrubs. The Cape isn't the only place the American Woodcock, also known as the timberdoodle, can be found in Massachusetts. There may be an American Woodcock hidden in the leaves and other debris on the ground wherever there are shrublands and young forests (see the Young Forest Habitat article on page 2).

This plump little bird, a member of the shorebird family, is camouflaged well, with a mottled brown appearance, buff-colored breast and sides, and black bars across the crown of its head. Males and females are similar in plumage, with females overall larger in body size, similar to a Mourning Dove. Unlike the Mourning Dove, the American Woodcock has a long bill to probe moist soil for its primary prey: earthworms. Although not the first choice, it will consume other invertebrates as well as occasional small seeds.

~Ginny Dautreuil

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Watershed Currents is produced semi-annually for WPR landowners in the DCR water supply watersheds.

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