

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.

Summer 2017

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Photo: Thom Snowman

Milkweed
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Landowner Profile:

Protecting Nature Begins at Home

Interview with WPR Owner Bob Clark



One of my favorite parts of doing monitoring visits in Petersham is running into Bob Clark when I stop at the Petersham Country Store for lunch. He always tells me about some land conservation or stewardship project that he's working on, and his excitement is contagious. His joy in the natural world and in the people he works with always leaves me smiling for the rest of the day.

Bob Clark has lived in Petersham for most of his life. He married Fifi Scoufopoulos (who is also very involved in community service) in 1987, and they renovated and moved into the old farmhouse (built in the 1850s) on Old New Salem Road where they still live.

Bob can remember being interested in plants from when he was a toddler, and he says that it just "never, never waned." Since childhood, he has spent thousands of hours in the forest, exploring and learning by observation. He calls it, "a kind of focused sleuthing." In the 1970s and 1980s, he walked most of the land around the Quabbin Reservoir now owned by the Department of Conservation and Recreation – Division of Water Supply

Protection (DWSP), making meticulous field notes. He discovered the first Golden Eagles and the first breeding pair of Common Loons in Massachusetts. After telling me all of this, he sighs wistfully and says, "I need to do a lot more field work."

Bob and Fifi sold two Watershed Preservation Restrictions to DWSP. The first, in 2008, was on a 26.5 acre piece they bought across Route 122 from their house. Once they closed on the first WPR (which was a long process), they immediately got to work on the second. The second WPR, 22.5 acres around their house, transferred to DWSP in 2011. Bob points out that all of their land is sandwiched between

Bob Clark, continued on Page 3

This Old Field

Options for meadow management

WPR landowners own a diversity of land, including forests, wetlands, hayfields and old fields. Decisions on how to manage or maintain old hayfields can often be challenging. Maintaining productive hayfields takes a lot of effort. Regular mowing and baling requires specific, large equipment; soils may need to be tested and no-till seeding may be necessary. WPR landowners with existing hayfields may not be capable or willing to maintain these sites and are often left wondering: what should I do with these lands?

Once a hayfield is abandoned, a variety of grasses, herbs, and wildflowers will quickly invade. Depending on how long it's been since the field was last managed, woody vegetation may also be present. If left long enough, many fields will transition all the way back into a forested habitat (a process called succession). While there are numerous options available to landowners, most decisions will fall into one of two categories: maintain old field habitat or allow the field to succeed to forest.

A. Maintain old field habitat

Old fields are important habitat for a variety of wildlife, including rabbits, deer, small mammals, grouse, woodcock, songbirds (including towhees, whip-poor-wills, kingbirds, and cuckoos), snakes, turtles, and frogs. Fields can also be an excellent home to insects and pollinators, particularly if the field has flowering plants (such as milkweed, see article on page 4). Preventing an old field from becoming a forest requires setting back succession. Soil conditions, competition, allelopathy (chemicals released by plants that inhibit other plants from growing), the presence of non-native species, and past land use can all contribute to how long a field may remain a field. However, some management activity will be required to keep the field open. Individual trees will need to be removed before they get too big (a brush saw or chainsaw can be used). Periodic mowing or brush hogging may be neces-

sary, depending on conditions. In many cases, fields are quickly invaded by invasive species (rose, autumn olive, buckthorn, etc.). If left unchecked, these species can quickly dominate a field. They can be controlled mechanically or with herbicides if that's a viable option and allowed by the terms of your WPR. Some landowners also use prescribed fire to set back succession. This requires much more skill and should only be done with experienced professionals. Read more about ways to manage fields for wildlife in the Winter 2015 issue of *Watershed Currents*.

B. Allow succession

If the periodic maintenance required to keep an old field open is too burdensome, then landowners can choose to let the field go and allow succession to proceed. Early successional or "young forest" habitat also provides important wildlife habitat, as you can read about in the Winter 2017 issue of *Watershed Currents*. In many cases, this simply means stopping any management activity that sets back succession.

Landowners can promote natural succession (which is easier and free) or plant trees to speed it up. Depending on the conditions of the field, it may be many years before trees appear naturally. The decision whether to plant trees can be made by asking if the existing soil conditions can support trees. Many fields may have been farmed in the past and resulted in reduced soil nutrients. In addition, landowners can determine if there are tree seed sources available. Very large fields may require planting because seed sources are too far from the middle of the field.

Finally, landowners can assess whether non-native plants are interfering with succession. If a field has become overwhelmed with invasive plants, natural succession may be impossible. The invasives would need to be controlled first before any planting takes place. An important note is that in most of our WPRs, once a field succeeds into forest, owners are not permitted to convert it back to a field.

Whatever decision is made, old fields provide habitat for a wide-range of wildlife, and as they succeed to forest they provide different habitats throughout the process. There is no right or wrong decision when deciding what to do with an old field. The most important feature of a field or forest on a WPR is that it is being protected, providing important habitat and watershed protection, well into the future.

~Dan Clark

Bob Clark- from Page 1

DWSP land and Harvard Forest, and contains important wetlands and wildlife corridors.

Together, Bob and Fifi have two adult daughters. They started getting livestock when their kids were little – first horses, then goats (which didn't last long, as they ate Bob's heirloom apple trees), then Shetland sheep around 12 years ago. It was his older daughter's project, and now they have over 20 sheep. The animals are on the part of their property that is not protected by WPRs, as the WPRs do not allow livestock. Bob says that even though that land is not protected, they are "trying to make sure the right things happen here" so that they do not contaminate the soil or the water which runs through their land and into the Quabbin. They are also working on protecting that remaining acreage, probably with a local land trust that will allow them to keep the livestock. Bob says, "Once we acquired [the land], it was a given that we would be protecting it." His dedication to protecting Petersham's natural areas begins at home, but extends to the whole community.

~Caroline Raisler

A serene wetland setting on the Clark WPR.

Photo: DCR Staff

**You too can get involved!**

Much of the land conservation and land stewardship in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts happens at the local level and is done by volunteers, and many WPR landowners already are working in this way. If you have the time or inclination, many groups would welcome your help in many different roles. The following are just some options to pursue.

- Town Land Trusts: Many of the towns in our region have their own land trusts.
- Town Boards: Planning Boards, Conservation Commissions, and Open Space Committees make a lot of important decisions shaping the landscape around you.
- Regional (Multi-town) Land Trusts: In our area, East Quabbin Land Trust, Franklin Land Trust, Greater Worcester Land Trust, Kestrel Land Trust, Mount Grace Land Conservation Trust, and North County Land Trust.
- Statewide Land Conservation Groups: The Massachusetts Audubon Society and The Trustees of Reservations.
- State Agencies, including the Department of Fish and Game and the Department of Conservation and Recreation.
- Natural History Groups, such as the New England Wildflower Association.

Start by becoming a member; going to events, walks, or talks; or just visiting protected properties to take a walk and see how they are managed. Bob Clark advises that you should get involved for "the satisfaction of knowing you're helping someone else," and because the land is "not ours to exploit, but ours to be a part of."

~Caroline Raisler

Bob Clark, a Pillar of the Conservation Community

Though Bob's career was not in land conservation - he worked as the environmental health and safety officer at Worcester State College from the early 1980s until his retirement in 2002 - his lifelong study of the natural land has led to a dedicated involvement in conservation in his community. Some groups he's been involved in:

- The Trustees of Reservations, where he served on the Petersham Committee and Central Regional Committee.
- Petersham Planning Board.
- Petersham Conservation Commission since 1979, being chair at intervals since 1981. In addition to land protection and stewardship, Bob started an environmental education program in the Petersham Center School financed through the Conservation Commission.
- Massachusetts Association of Conservation Commissions, where he served on the board and learned and taught about land protection and wetland delineation.
- Fisheries and Wildlife Non-Game Advisory Committee.
- Friends of Quabbin (past president).
- Quabbin Watershed Advisory Committee.
- Petersham Historic District Commission (chair and co-chair).

In every role, Bob asks, "How are we going to make it happen?" and is open to working with any group that will help to achieve the goals of land protection. He is satisfied that his work in protecting pieces of land has over time led to protecting a whole living landscape. He is proud to have been "a part of the continuity, perpetuating conservation into the future."

~Caroline Raisler



Photo: DCR Staff

Wildlife on Your Land:

Got Milkweed?

Did you know there are nine documented milkweeds in the state of Massachusetts? Milkweed flowers range in colors from the white of poke milkweed (*Asclepias exaltata*), to variable pinks of common milkweed (*Asclepias syriaca*) and swamp milkweed (*Asclepias incarnata*), to purple of purple milkweed (*Asclepias purpureascens*), to the brilliant orange of butterfly milkweed (*Asclepias tuberosa*). The different milkweed species grow in a variety of habitats including open sandy areas, roadsides, rocky outcroppings, fields, wet meadows, forest edges and woodlands. A few are rare in the state and only have a few known populations, such as the endangered purple milkweed and the linear-leaved milkweed (*Asclepias verticillata*).

All milkweeds' flowers provide important food sources to many pollinators, and the plant itself is crucial to monarch butterfly larva. Monarch caterpillars feed exclusively on the leaves of the milkweed, hindering the flow of latex (white sappy liquid) to the leaf by trenching the petiole, or leaf stalk, to make the plant more palatable. Milkweeds also contain a toxic steroid called cardenolides which the monarch caterpillars ingest; it renders the larvae toxic and bitter-tasting to predators.

The monarch population has declined by



Above: A monarch caterpillar gorges on swamp milkweed.

Photo: Ken Mackenzie



Left: A Coral Hairstreak feeds on butterfly milkweed nectar, one of its favorite foods.

Photo: Ginny Dautreuil

approximately 80% in the last 20 years due to changes in land use, farming techniques, and loss of overwintering habitat.

How can you help?

Plant some milkweeds (or let them grow naturally)! You can create habitat for young monarchs to feed and thrive by planting their host plant. Plants can be found seasonally at Nasami Farm in Whately, MA or at Garden in the Woods in Framingham, MA (<http://newenglandwild.org/store/garden-shops>).

Want to grow milkweeds from seed? Milkweed seeds in our region benefit greatly from being stratified. For milkweeds this just means they are subjected to cold moist conditions for a period of time, which can either be accomplished naturally by planting the seeds before winter, or by placing seeds in a damp coffee filter, enclosed in a sandwich bag and placed in the refrigerator for thirty days. More complete instructions with pictures can be found at: <http://monarchbutterflygarden.net/cold-moist-stratification-milkweed-seeds/>.

Local seed sources and additional information on milkweeds and monarchs can be found at:

- <http://xerces.org/milkweed-seed-finder/>
- <http://www.monarchwatch.org/>
- <https://monarchjointventure.org/>

~Ginny Dautreuil



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