

BROAD BROOK COALITION

Dedicated to the preservation of open space and the promotion of affordable housing

Volume 21, No. 2 Fall 2009

New Land Acquired at Fitzgerald Lake Conservation Area

Broad Brook Coalition is very pleased to announce the addition of an important parcel of land to the Fitzgerald Lake Conservation Area. Located off North King Street and bordering River Valley Market, the land totals just over 12 acres.

When plans for a condominium development on this land faltered, the City of Northampton stepped forward, negotiating to acquire the parcel to preserve the bulk of the property for conservation while leaving a small parcel on North King Street for possible future development. Wayne Feiden, Director of the City's Office of Planning and Development,

deserves a lot of credit for engineering the acquisition. We also thank the City Council and the Planning Board for their consideration and approval.

BBC contributed \$10,000 from our Land Acquisition Fund for the purchase of this property. BBC has now contributed more than \$94,000 toward FLCA land preservation over the years.

Preserving this property is important for many reasons: there is a wonderful view over the Connecticut River looking towards Hadley and Amherst; there are significant wildlife and plant habitats; and the property includes a major part of a traditional trail known as "Middle Path." We hope that, at some point in the future, Middle Path

Cattails at Sunset

Photo by David S. Reid



From the President's Desk

*Stewardship for the
long-term*

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Ray is Remembered

*Ray LeBarge is
remembered for his
work at FLCA*

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Otters

*These fun-loving
weasels are active at
Fitzgerald Lake*

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Annual Meeting

*Steve Sauter to speak
at Annual Meeting on
November 1, 2009*

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will become one of the trails maintained by BBC, providing a connection from the Marion St. Trail to the River Valley Market area and perhaps beyond to the Pines Edge condominiums.

The addition of this property brings the total acreage of the Fitzgerald Lake Conservation Area to approximately 646 acres, over one square mile of land. BBC holds conservation restrictions on an additional 17 acres of land in FLCA.

Two other land acquisition deals are currently in negotiation and we hope to be able to make announcements about these efforts in the Spring newsletter.

The Land Acquisition Committee also welcomes two new committee members, Doris Cohen and David Ruderman, thus increasing our numbers to six. Other committee members are Frank Olbris, Norma Roche, Mitch Hartley, and Robert Bissell.

-- Robert Bissell

From the President's Desk

BBC acts with the advantage of a long view of the quality of our surroundings. A case in point is this year's city acquisitions in both the eastern and western parts of our corner of the world. Our persistent, and consistent, efforts to preserve open natural spaces within the Broad Brook watershed and adjacent areas sometimes take decades. And it is very satisfying when our long range efforts ensure a better environment. Read Robert Bissell's report of the Land Preservation committee.

BBC efforts to protect the biological integrity of our area are also rooted in the long view: harmful invasives are increasingly causing biological disruptions which need continual attention and work to keep them in check. Read Bob Zimmermann's report on our efforts.

A long view of other aspects of our goals can have similarly satisfying results. Our ideas of affordable housing, sustainable land use, diversity in biological systems, and remediation of the effects of poor policies in the past can improve these areas when we are persistent.

The long view is often not valued by dominant groups in our society. The book Collapse, by Jerard Diamond, which I am reading, is a fascinating survey of past and present societies. Diamond presents us with valuable comparative lessons in group dynamics and decision-making within societies. Some societies effectively deal with challenges, while others do not solve basic problems they are faced with -- and fail as a result.

One important practice, in Diamond's opinion, is accepting long term views of social and environmental needs. Some short term payoffs can be very destructive of sustaining benefits in both social and natural systems.

BBC pursues general benefits for our area within a long-term view of our social and ecological needs, and we will continue to strive to make wise decisions for future opportunities.

-- Frank Olbris



River Otters at FLCA

The Fitzgerald Lake Conservation Area (FLCA) has an amazing variety of wildlife because of its many healthy habitats, expanding size, and corridors to other wildlife-rich areas. One of the animals that are regularly seen by hikers is the river otter which is a member of the weasel family. They are very playful and fun-loving, and are often seen chasing each other, sliding down banks, and playing with rocks. They remain active throughout the year, and actually show an increased activity level during the winter.

Otters spend most of their time in the water, but will travel many miles on land between foraging locations. When moving through snow they tend to bound a few steps and then slide on their belly and push themselves along with their short legs leaving a distinctive pattern. The river

otter is a fairly large animal 3-4' long not including its 12-18" tail. They weigh 12-20 lbs with some up to 30 lbs, and have very dark brown fur with a whitish throat. Otters eat fish, frogs, salamanders, turtles, small snakes, and even some birds and plants.

Otters mate between December and April, and birth follows 9 or 10 months later due to delayed implantation of the fertilized egg in the womb. The young remain with their mothers about a year before going out on their own. They live in well-hidden dens near water or in abandoned beaver lodges or muskrat houses. I hope you are lucky enough to someday see one of these wonderful creatures.

-- *Jim Reis*



Otter at Fitzgerald Lake Conservation Area

Photo by John Body

Notes from the Stewardship Committee

You will undoubtedly note from the heading that the Management Committee has metamorphosed into the Stewardship Committee. While the functions of the committee remain the same, we thought that "stewardship" better reflected what we do and, more importantly, what we see as our relationship to the Fitzgerald Lake Conservation Area.

Our activities once again focused strongly on the control of invasive plant species. Our battle against the proliferation of water chestnut in Fitzgerald Lake is showing signs of success after several years of intensive efforts to locate, pull and dispose of this aquatic invader. An armada of canoes and kayaks, involving some 20 individuals, systematically plied the lake in July to find the water chestnut population significantly diminished compared to last year. In a follow-up outing in August, we found only a small number of plants which were quickly dispatched. Complacency is not in order, however, as water chestnut seeds are very persistent. We envision that the lake will have to be carefully scanned in the coming years to make sure that the infestation does not become re-established.

A project aimed at controlling three significant stands of *Phragmites*, or common reed, in the Broad Brook marsh was initiated this winter by Polatin Ecological Services, who cut the dormant stalks to a height of 2-3 feet. A thick layer of ice on the marsh made access a lot easier. In late September, Chris Polatin and his crew will treat these plants with Rodeo, an herbicide



A happy band of water chestnut eradicators

approved for use in wetlands, to suppress this year's growth. Rodeo will be applied to surviving plants again in 2010 and, possibly, 2011 to attain the highest feasible level of control. This project is being carried out with grants from the Massachusetts Land Trust Coalition and the Natural Resource Conservation Service of the USDA.



Volunteers work to control non-native invasives

Last winter, the committee met to consider other problematic plant invasions in the FLCA. In view of the steady increase of spotted knapweed and glossy buckthorn in Cooke's Pasture, we decided that these species should be the next targets for our control efforts. Both plants are very aggressive and threaten to infest the entire pasture if left unchecked. We are currently soliciting advice from invasive plant control experts, as well as from ecological service firms, as to the best methods for achieving control of these plants while minimizing "collateral damage" to native shrubs and grasses.

Several other jobs were carried out in the FLCA over the spring and summer. In early May, we cleaned up the three shrub islands in Cooke's Pasture to reduce the burden of competitive plants and, at the same time, planted several new shrubs to replace those that had succumbed over the previous winter. Removal of a heavy infestation of garlic mustard in and around the North Farms Road entrance to the FLCA was the focus of another work day during the first week of June.

Please Join Us!

If you're not already a member, please complete this form and return it with \$25.00 to:

Broad Brook Coalition, P.O. Box 60566, Florence, MA 01062
(all contributions to BBC are tax deductible.)

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone _____ e-mail _____

I've included an additional **tax deductible** contribution to the Land Acquisition Fund

Please do **not** include my name in any listing of contributors to Broad Brook Coalition

Broad Brook Coalition needs your help, too!

We appreciate your membership dues, but want you to know that you can contribute in other ways, too. Members and friends are needed to help carry out our goals. Please consider one or more of the following volunteer opportunities:

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Trail maintenance and repair | <input type="checkbox"/> Newsletter editor |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Invasive species removal | <input type="checkbox"/> Stewardship Committee; manages conservation area |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Clerical help/mailings | <input type="checkbox"/> Land Preservation/Acquisition Committee |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Computer help | <input type="checkbox"/> BBC Board of Directors |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Writer/reporter for newsletter | <input type="checkbox"/> Educational/recreational program planning or leadership |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Fundraising campaigns | <input type="checkbox"/> Walks and Talks |

- - - - - *Already a member? Consider passing this page on to a friend!* - - - - -

About Us

Broad Brook Coalition (BBC) is a nonprofit, all-volunteer community organization dedicated to the preservation of open space and the promotion of affordable housing. BBC co-manages the 646-acre Fitzgerald Lake Conservation Area (FLCA) in cooperation with the Northampton Conservation Commission. It organizes volunteer days for trail improvement and maintenance and invasive species removal, runs educational Walks and Talks at FLCA, raises funds for the expansion of FLCA, and monitors land conservation and affordable housing issues.

Broad Brook Coalition Board of Directors: 2008-2009

Frank Olbris, president
Robert A. Zimmermann, vice-president
Norma Sims Roche, secretary
Alan Marvelli, treasurer
Robert Bissell
Bruce Hart
Pat McDonagh
James Reis
Bill Williams

Walks and Talks: Fall 2009

Discovering the Eastern Forest

Robert Leverett

FRIDAY Oct. 16. 3:30-5:30 p.m.

Bob will be leading us in a discovery of the forest at FLCA. We'll be looking at and discussing the development of the forest and its successional past. How can we observe and identify non-charismatic species, what might or will expand their growth, and how can we evaluate the age of the forest through physical characteristics. Trees will be identified by bark and form. Bob will also explain how the Eastern Native Tree Society documents forest sites and individual trees, how trees are measured, and what statistics are gathered.

Bob is the co-founder and Executive Director of the Eastern Native Tree Society and co-founder and President of the Friends of Mohawk Trail State Forest. He is the author of the Sierra Club Guide to the Ancient Forests of the Northeast, and has co-authored works on old growth forests of the Eastern U.S. He is the principal architect of the Eastern Old Growth Conference Series. A helpful website to prepare for this program:

www.nativetreesociety.org

**Watch your local newspaper listings or visit our web site -
broadbrookcoalition.org - for information about Winter Walks
at Fitzgerald Lake Conservation Area.**

Broad Brook Coalition ANNUAL MEETING SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 1

**Hubbard Hall Chapel at the Clarke School
47 Round Hill Road, Northampton**

From Elm Street, take Round Hill Road to the top of the hill and look for the flagpole at Hubbard Hall on your right. Go in the front entrance and walk to the Chapel at the back of the building.

Refreshments - 6:30 p.m.

Meeting - 7:00 p.m.

Speaker (Steve Sauter) - 7:30 p.m.

Open to the public -- all are welcome.

(Stewardship report: continued from page 4)

Finally, in response to the report of zebra mussel infestations in several Berkshire lakes in July, we evaluated the possibility of their spread to Fitzgerald Lake. The best way to prevent the spread of zebra mussels -- as well as the introduction of other invasive aquatic plants and animals -- is to ensure that boaters thoroughly clean the hulls and the interiors of their boats before launching. A sign reminding boaters to do this was placed next to the kiosk at the NFR entrance. However, it may well be that Fitzgerald Lake does not provide a suitable habitat for zebra mussels as these organisms require high calcium concentrations for development and shell growth. While lakes in the Berkshires are often supplied with ample calcium owing to the abundance of limestone in the region, the geology of the Connecticut River valley is quite different. To be on the safe side, we have submitted a water sample from Fitzgerald Lake to an analytical laboratory at the University of Massachusetts to determine if calcium concentration in the lake is above or below the zebra mussel threshold.

-- Bob Zimmermann



Steve Sauter is this Year's Annual Meeting Speaker

Steve Sauter, Education Coordinator at the Amherst College Museum of Natural History and Director of the college's Bassett Planetarium, will be our featured speaker at the BBC Annual Meeting on Sunday, November 1.

While many of us are familiar with Steve's monthly columns on the natural history of our region in the Daily Hampshire Gazette, he will offer us a broader perspective of his development as a naturalist from his childhood in Hartford, Connecticut to the Hilltowns of western Massachusetts in his talk entitled, "From the Projects to the Wilderness: One Human's Journey Back to Nature."

An accomplished birder, Steve has traveled extensively throughout the country, compiling a life list of over 500 species. He also has a keen interest in weather and serves as a cooperative observer for the National Weather Service at his home in Ashfield where he writes the monthly "Weather Observer" column for the Ashfield News. Steve's interest in the operations of Natural History Museums dates from his years as an undergraduate at Case Western Reserve University where he specialized in the natural sciences and literature. After graduating, he served as curator of museums in Connecticut and New York. Subsequently, he obtained an M.Ed. from Lesley University in Cambridge. Since 2002, he has been at the Amherst College Natural History Museum, where he combines his enthusiasm for the natural world with his interest in science education. Please join us and share in Steve's excitement about our unique corner of Massachusetts.

BBC AT THE LILLY LIBRARY

The BBC archive at the Lilly Library in Florence is now completely catalogued and is available for your perusal in the Local History Room on the second floor. Among the highlights are notebooks chronicling animal and bird sightings at the wildlife blind since its construction in 2000. To view the holdings online, go to the library home page at <http://lillylibrary.org/>, livepage.apple.com, click on "catalog" in the upper left corner, then choose "number searches" in the "Other Searches" box on the catalog page. On the next screen, click on the "Dewey Call #" button, enter "LH BBC", hit the "Submit" button and you are there!

HELP WANTED: Volunteer Opportunities

BBC can function and accomplish its goals only with the volunteer efforts of its members. There are many different projects you can help with. Time commitments vary from a few hours a year to a few hours every month. Many tasks require no special skills, only a willingness to help.

Board Members/Board Secretary: Elections for Board members will be held at the Annual Meeting in November. At least one new member will be needed this year. The Board meets monthly, and members are also involved in subcommittees and many other aspects of running our all-volunteer organization. There are nine Board members to split the work. We're especially in need of members who might be willing to serve as officers eventually. Experience as a BBC volunteer is a plus, but is not required.

We're especially in need of candidates who would be willing to serve as Secretary. The BBC Secretary takes, distributes, and keeps minutes of all Board and BBC membership meetings and performs other organizational and record-keeping tasks.

If you'd like to run, please get in touch with any member of the Nominating Committee (Alan Marvelli, Bill Williams, and Bob Zimmermann) or with Jim Reis, Volunteer Coordinator. (see below).

Publicity Coordinator: Help us get the word out! Work with Board members, event organizers, the Webmaster, and our local media to let people know about BBC events and issues. You'll need good writing skills and access to the Internet; interest in developing and maintaining connections with our local media would be a plus.

Fundraisers: We hope to be planning a fundraising campaign for a major land acquisition soon—stay tuned! We're likely to need people to work on mailings, call on local businesses, and apply for small grants. If you're interested in helping us find the funds to preserve an important piece of habitat, it's not too soon to let us know.

Trail Maintenance and Invasive Plant Removal: Watch for notices for volunteer days at the Fitzgerald Lake Conservation Area. Get outdoors and enjoy some time with others who love FLCA.

What are your skills? If you'd like to be involved, but you don't see a task that fits your time or talents here, please talk with us!

If you're interested in helping, please get in touch with BBC's Volunteer Coordinator, Jim Reis, at 586-0567.

Broad Brook Coalition offers thanks to all our Walk and Talk leaders.

Leaders are volunteers who often spend at least 3-4 hours on site and in transit on the day of the program -- not to mention time spent in emails and phone conversations to confirm details. They also often prepare by scouting the territory once or twice and they commit a slot of treasured weekend time to help us appreciate the wonders of our local conservation areas. This is a generous gift to our community and we thank them for their time. Walks and Talks in 2008-2009 included:

Bob McMasters who enlightened us regarding beavers.

Lisa Rock and Charlie Quinlin who welcomed spring birds and birders alike.

Blanche Derby stimulated our taste buds with her wild edibles walk.

Pat McDonagh led us on three walks to help us understand the role of mushrooms in the forest ecology -- and their role sometimes (but only sometimes!) in the kitchen.

Ray La Barge Remembered

When Ray La Barge's obituary appeared in The Gazette last month, it told of his long service on the city council, his devotion to the district he represented, his loyalty to his friends and neighbors, his interest in working with youth doing community service, and his sometimes curmudgeonly disposition. It was his work with youth that brought him to a volunteer work day at Fitzgerald Lake, accompanied by several teens he was supervising, to work off their community service obligation by helping cut brush on the earthen dam that forms Fitzgerald Lake. Brush-cutting on the dam, to prevent damage done by the roots, was an early BBC stewardship commitment. Contrary to what you might think, the roots were not glue holding the soil of the dam in place, but fingers digging in and loosening it. While in later years the BBC helped raise money for dam repairs, in the early days, we cut the brush by hand. This brush cutting, with loppers, saws and weed-wackers, to clear four- and five-foot high shrubs, many with thorns, was no small job, and many people were needed. Ray must have wondered about this when he came with the teen volunteers he supervised.

"Why doesn't the DPW do this?" he asked. "They've got a machine," and he went on to describe how it could be done. Although we had tried to interest the DPW in this project, we had gotten nowhere.

Ray, however, had the right connections, prestige and disposition to get the DPW's cooperation, and since then it has been on their calendar, liberating the 20 or so volunteers needed for the job, who used to get hot, dirty and scratched up for the sake of maintaining the integrity of the dam.

Just another side of someone who could be as prickly as the thorns on the brush.

--Carmen Ahearn

YOUR PHOTO

(or poem
or essay
or sketch)

HERE

We welcome contributions from BBC members and other visitors to FLCA. Send us a photo, poem, or short essay; we'll include it in the newsletter if we have room.

Send to:

news@broadbrookcoalition.org

Check our web site for trail maps and for information about upcoming walks, volunteer opportunities, and much more

broadbrookcoalition.org

**Remember that hunting is permitted in certain areas of Fitzgerald Lake Conservation Area.
(See map brochure for details:
maps are available at trail head kiosks and at our website.)**

Please exercise caution at all times.



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**Broad Brook Coalition
ANNUAL MEETING
SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 1**

**Hubbard Hall Chapel at the Clarke School
47 Round Hill Road, Northampton**

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Open to the public -- all are welcome.