

P.O. Box 60566, Florence, MA 01062

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

Volume 21, No. 1 Spring 2009

Affordable Housing Update

Home for the Chronically Homeless

In May of last year a generous grant from the Community Preservation Committee, together with private donations, enabled the *Friends of Hampshire County Homeless Individuals* to purchase a duplex as a permanent residence for six chronically homeless people who had spent many years in the shelter. "Yvonne's House," as it is now called, was deeded to ServiceNet Inc., who will maintain it and provide supportive services to the residents.

Truly a community effort, the two apartments were furnished by donations. Each resident has a comfortable private room, with shared kitchen, bathroom, and living areas. After many years of homelessness, the residents are proud and happy to have their own home.

Happy Frog

HAPPY FROG—another brainchild of *Friends of the Homeless*—is a bronze sculpture by Lu Stubbs that has taken up residence in Northampton in front of First Churches on Main Street and serves as a "piggy bank" for donations to feed the hungry. This community effort was financed by private donations and installed with the assistance of many city officials and the good will of First Churches. Donations to Happy Frog help to fund two free meals a week offered by the Catholic Community at St. Mary's Church. Together with the three meals a week provided by the MANNA Soup Kitchen, Northampton can now offer the hungry five meals a week. *Yvonne Freccero*

Northampton Housing Partnership News

The Northampton Housing Partnership received Community Preservation Act funding in the amount of \$35,000 to conduct a Community Housing Needs Assessment and Strategic Plan. After discussion and research, the NHP decided what we wanted the plan to do and created a list of what we wanted in the plan. The assessment and strategic plan is being conducted in two phases: first we hired consultant Karen Sunnarborg to assist the Partnership to develop a

works scope for the housing plan, and to create a request for proposals to secure services. The RFP has been written and approved by the Partnership and is currently navigating city offices before being sent out to bid. The second phase will be to work with selected consultants, in consultation with the Partnership and with input from the City and community, to develop the needs assessment and housing plan. We hope to have the process completed by the end of 2009.

Additionally, we have been keeping track of Northampton's SROs and have worked to support ServiceNet, Habitat for Humanity, and HAP, Inc. in their efforts to secure CPA funding for affordable housing. We have also participated in ongoing discussions regarding affordable housing at Hospital Hill.

Betsy Siersma

Betsy is a member of the Northampton Housing Partnership and also serves as BBC's Housing Liaison.



FEED THE FROG—FEED THE HUNGRY

From the President's Desk

April 24 is Arbor Day, a celebration of the importance of trees. We share this planet with millions of other species, and the tree looms largest in our minds when we think of our web of life.

Each of us can contribute to a better future by planting a tree on that occasion. There is a saying that planting a tree is a testament to our faith in the future.

BBC has discussed possible future projects to return disease-resistant American Chestnuts to the Fitzgerald Lake Conservation Area. The "native forest" in our area, before the European invasion, was very different from the woods we see now. The dominant tree was the American Chestnut, which commonly grew much taller than our big trees today. They were very hardy, and produced large amounts of seeds—a substantial part of human and animal diets, then.

Similar efforts for disease-resistant Elms may produce strains that could be used, in future, to restore that species in our area.

BBC has worked to enhance our natural surroundings, through the protection of open space, and to influence Northampton's treatment of our natural endowment. There are now more active groups in Northampton, doing what we do in our area of the city. This is good. Our area of focus is only part of the larger natural lifesupport system that flows over the whole landscape. The bear cubs Governor Patrick cuddled in Ashfield (see the *Daily Hampshire Gazette*, 2/28) could easily be romping in Fitzgerald Lake this summer.

HELP FOR HABITAT

Pioneer Valley Habitat for Humanity is beginning to work on a new site on Garfield Avenue in Florence. Volunteers will be needed on the weekends during the late spring and summer to build on site. BBC has not put together "official" Habitat volunteer days in recent years, but we encourage our members to get in touch with Habitat and help them provide our community with affordable housing.

Habitat is seeking LEED certification on this project, so if you have an interest and experience in green building, come down and help out, or get in touch with them to find out how you can help in other ways! For more information and to volunteer, contact Jess Wallis, Program Coordinator for Pioneer Valley Habitat at 413-586-5430, or

volunteer@pioneervalleyhabitat.org.

BBC has also discussed innovative ways of dealing with invasive plant species and shifts in natural conditions, which might call forth more focused volunteer efforts. We may seek more local activists, as well as state and federal assistance, to deal with such conditions.

We have many possible opportunities to protect open space that have been pending for several years. The current economic situation may well cause a number of them to become available. If that happens within a short span of time, we may be asking for extra help in protecting open space.

In times of uncertainty, the natural world can be a solace. Frank Olbris, President



Happy Trails to Bob and Carmen

A special version of BBC's Annual Award for Outstanding Volunteer Service has gone to two steadfast, longtime volunteers who have been maintaining and improving the trails at FLCA over most of BBC's 20 years. At its 2008 Annual Meeting, BBC presented "The 20th Anniversary Happy Trails Award" to Bob Rundquist and Carmen Ahearn.

Bob and Carmen were profiled in the Spring 2008 and Fall 2008 newsletters, respectively. Their knowledge, creativity, and willing hands have been behind the building of many of the structures we enjoy today, from bog bridges, water bars, and stepping stones to the Bridge over the Brook, canoe launch, and wildlife blind. And their work continues today, so if you see them out on the trails, give them a hearty thanks and congratulations!

Norma Roche

Trails Committee Plans Improved Signage

The Trails Committee has been busy during the winter. At the direction of the BBC Board, we have been working on a project to put up new signs at some poorly marked trail junctions in the Fitzgerald Lake Conservation Area, and to replace existing signs that have fallen down or need to be relocated because they are too high or are hidden by foliage. In addition, we are going to put fresh paint on the old, faded trail blazes. Volunteers will be needed in the spring to put up the new signs and to blaze the trails (volunteer days will be announced).

Starting in the fall, Jim Reis, Bob Bissell, and I walked all of the trails in FLCA to survey the existing signs and trail junctions. Using the guidelines for trail signage in the Appalachian Mountain Club's (AMC) book on Trail Maintenance, we determined what changes were necessary.

We decided that signs were needed to guide new-comers to FLCA to the dam, the bird blind, and Cooke's Pasture. Another needed change was to put up signs directing people back to the North Farms Road parking lot from the dam. In addition, we are considering placing a new sign at the trail entrance in the North Farms Road parking lot, listing the distance to the dam and bird blind. While this information is on the large map displayed on the kiosk, many visitors don't look at it or take a map brochure.

On the east side of the lake, new signs will be sited on the Marian Street trail. Newcomers might find it difficult to reach the bird blind from the dam, so new signs will be erected, particularly at the junction of Boggy Meadow Road and the trail to South Pasture.

The old-style wooden signs are beautiful, but not very durable. They will be replaced gradually as they wear out.



As for the blazes, the AMC recommends that when on the trail, the next blaze is in the line of sight; that is, when you are at a blazed tree, you should be able to see clearly the next blaze up the trail.

Blazing the trails will be done in three steps—several days' work. The first step will be to identify the trees that should be blazed with a temporary marker. Second, according to the AMC Trail Maintenance book, the surface of the tree has to be prepared for the paint by scraping off some of the bark (as opposed to just painting the blaze on the bark). Third, using stencils, a paintbrush will be used to apply the paint. (In the past, BBC used spray paint. However, the person using the spray cans is exposed to the toxic fumes, which are also bad for the environment.)

The Trails Committee is looking forward to a busy spring and summer with the new project.

Dave Herships, Chair, Trails Committee



The new signs, with yellow type on a green background, will be easy to read. Double blazes indicate a turn in the trail.

Land Committee Describes Tax Incentives for Conservation Restrictions

The purpose of BBC's Land Preservation/Acquisition Committee is, of course, to preserve land near the Fitzgerald Lake Conservation Area. We are excited about current tax incentives that make certain types of land preservation more attractive for landowners. These incentives are scheduled to expire at the end of 2009, and while there is hope they will be extended, this is far from certain, thus making it imperative that landowners consider this option while there is still time for action.

The 2008 Farm Bill allows landowners to deduct from their federal taxes the full value of gifts of conservation restrictions (CRs) to a qualified organization through the end of 2009.

When you sell or give away a CR, you still own your land, but you've given up the right to develop it. This right has an appraisable value, and that value is tax deductible. You keep the land, and you continue to live on it or use it for farming or forestry. You do *not* necessarily need to allow public access to the land.

For those who need to raise cash, an approach called a bargain sale may be helpful. The landowner donates *part* of the value of the CR as a part of a sale of those rights. For example, if your CR were appraised at \$20,000, you could sell it to a conservation group for \$15,000. You'd get \$15,000 cash, and you would have made a donation of \$5,000, so you'd get to deduct \$5,000 from your federal income tax bill.

There are other possible variations involving CR transactions, so we suggest that landowners consult their own tax or legal advisers to determine what method will work best for them.

If you would like more information about these tax benefits or any of the other tools available for preserving your land, please get in touch with Bob Bissell (robertbissell@yahoo.com, 413-586-5488) or with Bruce Young at the Northampton Office of Planning and Development: 413-587-1263, byoung@northamptonma.gov.

You can also get more information about this and many other aspects of land conservation from the Private Landowner Network:

http://www.privatelandownernetwork.org.

In other news, the Land Committee is pleased to report the addition of two parcels over the past 16 months, totaling just over 5 acres and located to the west of North Farms Road off Morningside Drive, close to FLCA area labeled "Burke" on our maps. These parcels border Broad Brook and thus offer further protection to the Fitzgerald Lake watershed. These acquisitions bring FLCA to more than 633 acres, nearly one square mile of preserved land.

We offer our thanks to Wayne Feiden and Bruce Young of the Northampton Office of Planning and Development and to the members of the Northampton Conservation Commission. Their support and help has ensured the preservation and maintenance of FLCA.

Robert Bissell, Chair Land Preservation/Acquisition Committee

Grants, Grants, Grant\$!

Over the past year, Broad Brook Coalition has been awarded grants totaling \$23,000 to support the control of invasive plant species and the mowing of the pastures in the Fitzgerald Lake Conservation Area. In the Fall 2008 newsletter, we reported the receipt of a grant from the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) of the Natural Resources Conservation Service (USDA). The primary purpose of this award is to support mowing of the pastures over the next several years. With the help of the WHIP funds, we were able to mow all of Cooke's Pasture last fall and to brushhog South Pasture for the first time in many years.

Grants were also received from the Massachusetts Land Trust Coalition's "Empowering Local Land Trusts in Western Massachusetts" Program and from Northampton's Community Preservation Committee to control or eliminate certain exotic invasive plant species that threaten to damage habitats essential to the health of native wildlife and plants. This effort will focus on several patches of the common reed, *Phragmites australis*, in the marsh downstream from the wildlife blind, and Black Swallow-Wort, *Vincetoxicum nigrum*, an aggressive perennial vine that has been found on land adjacent to FLCA on which the City holds a conservation restriction.



Thick stands of *Phragmites* like this one choke out native plant species in FLCA's wetlands. Photo from *IPANE: Invasive Plant Atlas of New England* (2003). Department of Ecology & Evolutionary Biology, University of Connecticut, Storrs, CT, http://www.ipane.org.

Work on the control of *Phragmites*, which forms dense, 6- to 8-foot-tall stands that choke out native plant species and degrade the usefulness of the marshland habitat for wildlife, began this winter with the cutting of last year's stalks. This will be followed in late spring with a carefully targeted application of Rodeo, a glyphosate-based herbicide approved for use in wetlands, by a professional environmental services firm. We hope that we can substantially reduce the viability of the existing stands of *Phragmites* and stem its further proliferation in the next 2-3 years. The spring will also see an effort to eradicate what is now a fairly small infestation of Black Swallow-Wort in a wooded area close to FLCA. If left unchecked, the abundant dispersal of Swallow-Wort seeds could lead to the invasion of open land within FLCA and surrounding areas, where it has the potential to form extensive, monotypic mats that crowd out and replace grasses, goldenrod, milkweed, and other native plants.

Spring and Summer Volunteer Days at FLCA

Bob Zimmermann, Chair, Management Committee

Shrubland Habitat and Native Plants Saturday, May 2, 8:45 AM

This year, as last, we have decided to forgo the planting of an additional "shrub island" in Cooke's Pasture in favor of maintaining those established in past years. Each of the three existing shrub islands contains a variety of native shrubs, including Bayberry, Winterberry. Spicebush, Viburnum. Dogwood. Serviceberry, Elderberry, and Chokeberry, that are intended to provide birds and other wildlife with enhanced food and shelter. On Saturday, May 2, we will spend a morning pruning the shrubs we have planted in previous years, cutting back some of the competing undergrowth, and replacing plants that have not survived the winter. Some tools will be provided, but additional clippers and shears are welcome. Please join us at the former Moose Lodge parking lot at 8:45 AM or at the Fitzgerald Lake dam at 9:00 AM We should be finished by noon. For further information, call Bob Zimmermann at 585-0405.

Help us remove invasive water chestnut plants from Fitzgerald Lake. It's wet, muddy work, but we promise you don't have to get all the way into the water, as these volunteers did. Photo by Bill Williams.

Invasive Plant Control Saturday, June 6, 9:00 AM

A number of the invasive plant species growing in and around Fitzgerald Lake can be effectively controlled by cutting, pulling, or digging. We will target garlic mustard, multiflora rose, Japanese knotweed, and autumn olive for hand removal, with special attention to a particularly vigorous stand of multiflora rose on the dam. As usual, we will provide most of the tools, but some extra shovels would be welcome. And it's probably a good idea to wear long pants and long-sleeved shirts as multiflora rose can put up some pretty tough resistance. Duration: 3 hours. Meet at the North Farms Road entrance at 9:00 AM. For further information, call Bob Zimmermann at 585-0405.

Water Chestnut Removal Sunday, July 26, 1:00 PM Saturday, August 15, 9:00 AM

A 3-year effort to curtail proliferation of water chestnut in Fitzgerald Lake has met with considerable success. Nonetheless, continuing efforts are needed to prevent the resurgence of this harmful invasive species in portions of the lake where it has been previously identified and make sure that any new growth is located and eliminated. We will survey the entire lake and remove any plants we find by hand. We'll need canoes and kayaks to get us onto the lake, as well as large plastic buckets to collect the plants. Wear long pants and sneakers (no sandals) and bring water, sunscreen and gloves. PFDs (personal flotation devices) are required, and if you can contribute a boat, let us know. Meet at the North Farms Road parking lot (duration ~3 hours on both days). For further information, call Bruce Hart at 584-4176.



BBC Walks and Talks Spring 2009

Beavers of Fitzgerald Lake Bob McMaster, Holyoke Community College Saturday, April 25, 9:30–11:30 AM (Rain date: Sunday, April 26) North Farms Road entrance

No species has affected our New England landscape as much as the beaver. Felling trees, dragging logs, building dams and lodges, and foraging for food are just a few of the ways in which beavers alter forests and streamcourses. Bob McMaster has been observing and studying beaver wetlands in our region for 25 years. He'll show us several active beaver sites at Fitzgerald Lake, point out evidence of the beaver's handiwork, and describe how this amazing animal has affected biodiversity in our region's wetlands.

Birds Welcome Spring Lisa Rock, Hampshire Bird Club Charlie Quinlin, Hoffman Bird Club Saturday, May 9, 7:00 AM Moose Lodge entrance

This will be an early wake-up call for folks who are not used to birding at this hour. It is a pleasant awakening though, to discover the intensity and beauty of bird sounds and sightings in the earlier part of the morning. Charlie and Lisa will offer their combined 40-plus years of experience, and take a look at some of the habitats and plants at FLCA. They hope to make it out to the blind that overlooks the marsh, and possibly the dam as well. Bring binoculars.

Wild Edibles Walk Blanche Derby, wild food enthusiast Saturday, May 16, 1:00 PM (Heavy rain date: Sunday, May 17) North Farms Road entrance

On this leisurely walk, you'll learn about some common plants with culinary and medicinal properties. Some of these are dismissed because they're weeds, but you'll discover that they're actually good for something! This walk is mostly stop and start, so it's appropriate for all ages. It should take about 2 hours.

Blanche Derby leads edible plant walks all over New England. She has written/illustrated three books and made three films. For more info, check out her Web site: www.tagyerit.com/freefood.htm.

In Search of Mushrooms

Pat McDonagh, mushroom enthusiast

Saturday, August 22, 9:30–11:30 AM North Farms Road entrance

Saturday, September 12, 1:00–3:00 PM Moose Lodge entrance

Saturday, October 3, 9:30–11:30 AM North Farms Road entrance

Pat's walk last year was quite well attended, so she has generously offered to do a series of walks this year. Feel free to attend one or all programs. Identification, edibility, and responsible harvesting will be explored, with a period for discussion after the walk. For further information, call 584-4176.

Directions to Entrances and Trailheads

North Farms Road entrance:

From the center of Florence (Route 9) traveling west, turn right onto North Maple Street at the traffic light. Proceed north 1.1 miles (North Maple Street will turn into North Farms Road). The FLCA parking lot and entrance kiosk will be on your right.

Moose Lodge/Boggy Meadow Road entrance:

From Routes 5 and 10 (King Street) traveling north, turn left onto Bridge Road at a set of traffic lights. At the next set of lights, take a right onto Cooke Avenue. Take Cooke Avenue to its end and you will be in the former Moose Lodge parking area. Please park on the public right of way near the kiosk. The parking lot is actually a private lot generously shared with FLCA users by the owners of the Moose Lodge property.

Want more BBC news and events?

- **Keep an eye on the listings** in local news-papers, especially in *Hampshire Life*
- Visit the BBC Web site:

www. broadbrookcoalition.org

• **Sign up for BBC e-mail alerts**: go to the BBC Web site, click on "Events," and then "Join the Listserve"

Chickadees Charm Visitors at the Bird Blind

Even in the winter the bird blind is a wonderful place to visit to see many different birds and animals. A number of adults and children also enjoy bringing bird seed and having chickadees land on their outstretched hands to get some. Here's what one visitor had to say about his experience.



It's fun to see the chickadees land in your hand. They tickle my hand. I like to feed them at the bird blind.

Chickadees have a black cap. And I think that is why they are called a black-capped chickadee.

A black-capped chickadee is our state bird. They like to hide seeds.

Isidore Donnelly, age 6

Locating Massachusetts's Owls

As part of a 5-year program to compile a new Breeding Bird Atlas of Massachusetts, the Massachusetts Audubon Society is making a special effort to map the distribution of owls that currently breed in our state. Of the seven owl species that are known to nest in Massachusetts, four are found in the Connecticut Valley: the Great Horned Owl, the Barred Owl, the Eastern Screech Owl, and the Saw-whet Owl. Great Horned Owls, which inhabit a variety of wooded habitats—especially those adjacent to wetlands—are relatively common in our region and are often encountered in FLCA. They breed very early in the

year, and many are already raising their young by the end of February. Anyone who hears their haunting courtship calls in the dead of a winter night will surely find it a memorable experience.

If you've seen or heard any of the four resident owl species and believe them to be nesting locally, Mass Audubon would like to know. Observations can be reported at

http://www.massaudubon.org/owls/index.php,

which provides information about each type of owl, including its geographical distribution, what it looks like and sounds like, and its preferred habitats, as well as an easy-to-use page for entering data, making comments, and recording precise owl locations on a state map. The information you provide will be included in the database of the Breeding Bird Atlas, which aims to map the distribution of all the breeding birds in the Commonwealth.

Bob Zimmermann

Some birders say that the haunting call of the Great Horned Owl sounds like, "Who's awake? Me ... Too." The startling call of the barred owl, pictured below, sounds like, "Who cooks for you? Who cooks for you all?" Photo by Frank Gessing.



BBC Calendar: Spring-Summer 2009

Saturday, April 25, 9:30–11:30 AM Walks and Talks: Beavers of Fitzgerald Lake

Bob McMaster

(Rain date: Sunday, April 26) North Farms Road entrance

Saturday, May 2, 8:45 AM Volunteer Day: Shrubland Habitat and Native Plants Meet at Moose Lodge entrance at 8:45 AM or at the Fitzgerald Lake dam at 9:00 AM

Saturday, May 9, 7:00 AM Walks and Talks:
Birds Welcome Spring
Lisa Rock and Charlie Quinlin
Moose Lodge entrance

Saturday, May 16, 1:00 PM Walks and Talks: Wild Edibles Walk Blanche Derby (Heavy rain date: Sunday, May 17) North Farms Road entrance

Saturday, June 6, 9:00 AM Volunteer Day: Invasive Plant Control North Farms Road entrance

Sunday, July 26, 1:00 PM Volunteer Day: Water Chestnut Removal North Farms Road entrance

Saturday, August 15, 9:00 AM Volunteer Day: Water Chestnut Removal North Farms Road entrance

Saturday, August 22, 9:30–11:30 AM Walks and Talks: In Search of Mushrooms Pat McDonagh North Farms Road entrance

Saturday, September 12, 1:00–3:00 PM Walks and Talks: In Search of Mushrooms Pat McDonagh Moose Lodge entrance

Saturday, October 3, 9:30–11:30 AM Walks and Talks: In Search of Mushrooms Pat McDonagh North Farms Road entrance

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 633-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, in 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
Patricia McDonagh

James Reis Bill Williams

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 Broad Brook Coalition are tax deductible.)

Name			
Address			
City	State	Zip	
Phone	E-mail		
(All contr	on to the Land Acquisition Fund: ributions to Broad Brook Coalition are to ing of contributors to Broad Brook Coal rook Coalition Needs You	ax deductible.) ition.	_
We appreciate your membership dues, but we goals. Please consider one (or more) of the fo		mbers and friends are needed to help	carry out our
Trail maintenance and repair Invasive species removal Clerical help/Mailings Computer help Writer/reporter for newsletter Newsletter editor	Management C Land Preserval BBC Board of I Educational/rec	Fundraising campaigns Management Committee (manages conservation area) Land Preservation/Acquisition Committee BBC Board of Directors Educational/recreational program planning or leadership, Walks and Talks	

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.

Newsletter Producer. Work with the Newsletter Editor to solicit and edit material and produce the BBC Newsletter. Desktop publishing skills are helpful but not essential; if you have basic computer skills and you're willing to learn more, please talk with us! The newsletter is produced twice a year (usually March and September). Help us keep BBC's main contact with its members vital!

Apprentice Webmaster. Work with BBC's Web site coordinator to update and polish our Web site, and eventually take over as BBC's Webmaster. Basic knowledge of Web design would be helpful.

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 a computer; interest in developing and maintaining connections with our local media would be a plus.

Trail Blazers and Plant Pullers. See the notices elsewhere in this newsletter for volunteer days at the Fitzgerald Lake Conservation Area. Get outdoors and enjoy some time with others who love FLCA.

If you're interested in any of these positions, or if you'd like to discuss other ways you can help, please get in touch with Jim Reis (reis13@comcast.net, 586-0567).



P.O. Box 60566, Florence, MA 01062

NONPROFIT ORG.

U.S. POSTAGE

PAID

NORTHAMPTON, MA

PERMIT NO. 45