

## **Open Space Committee Annual Report 2009**

The Open Space Committee (OSC) continues outreach efforts to landowners and townspeople with one primary goal: that owners of land ranking high in natural resource value give thoughtful consideration to conservation. The OSC is available to talk with landowners about the many forms of land conservation, as well as funding support.

### **Voter support**

Funding. The Open Space Committee recommended to the Capital Improvement Committee and Budget Committee a \$25,000 appropriation to the Land Acquisition Capital Reserve Fund, and voters approved that amount at May town meeting. Voters have added to the fund every year since it was established in 2002.

Warrant article. The OSC assisted the Conservation Commission in bringing a warrant article to Town Meeting vote. The article clarified that the town, when it helps to fund a conservation project, does not have to take a tangible interest in the property. This has been the practice in the past, but with towns increasingly funding land conservation the legal wisdom was to clarify the matter. The vote appeared to be unanimous.

### **Projects**

Shieling Forest expansion. The town partnered with the state in purchasing a 4.5-acre field that abuts Shieling Forest and fronts on Dunbar Brook. Years back OSC began conversation with Amy Miller, owner of the field. The conversations expanded to include the State and quickly reached a shared goal of adding the old farm field to Shieling's otherwise forested 47 acres. When Monadnock Community Hospital bought the Miller property, the hospital committed to the project as a good neighbor to one of the town's most appreciated and popular conservation areas. The town's \$5,000 contribution, one third of the project cost, made the project possible.

Conservation easement support. On a glorious day in June the OSC turned out with a legion of others to celebrate the Thomas conservation easement that permanently conserved 428 acres on East Mountain Road abutting the Wapack National Wildlife Refuge. The land falls along the Temple-to-Crotched corridor, a high priority land protection corridor both locally and regionally. Neighbors, friends, town committee members, and Monadnock Conservancy staff and board members were among the gathered. The town's conservation fund, following established protocol, paid the landowner expenses involved in the project, including surveys of the many parcels involved.

At the gathering, appreciation was expressed to the Thomases for joining 32 other families who, over the years, have placed conservation easements on their land, with a new total of some 3,500 acres of privately held land now under permanent deeded conservation.

Calendar project. OSC is working on its third high quality photo calendar. The previous two focused on conservation lands in town, whether private conservation easement land, town conservation land, state or federal. Narratives told the stories behind how they became conservation land. The 2011 calendar broadens the focus to *Nature of the Monadnock Region*, and features what's going on in the natural world throughout the year whether it's red squirrels tapping trees for their sap (February), or the first monarch butterfly arriving back from their winter territory in Mexico (July). As always, the goal is to heighten knowledge and therefore appreciation and stewardship of the great natural world that surrounds us.

Landowner outreach. Each year the OSC seeks to communicate with owners of land with high conservation value following a natural resource ranking system set forth in the town's Master Plan. This year's letter included a photo montage and narrative about four recent projects in town that conserved family land, the Thomas land included.

As always, members attended land conservation workshops and gave a few; wrote town newsletter and Ledger-Transcript articles; and assisted the Conservation Commission in monitoring the 21 conservation easements held by the town. When families place land under deeded conservation easement, the easement deed must be held by a land trust or conservation commission that monitors the land to ensure the development restrictions are honored.

Townsperson involvement is essential to land conservation. Involvement comes in many forms, including helping to take care of town conservation land in your neighborhood (trail work; combating invasive species, etc.); thanking landowners for the benefits their open land provides to all of us; donating to a land protection project; joining a town committee and working towards wise land use planning; joining with neighbors to conserve land in your neighborhood.

The OSC meets the second Thursday each month, 7 p.m. in the Town House, and welcomes townspeople attendance.

Alan Bannister  
Ed Henault, Chair  
David Cheney, Alternate  
Debby Kaiser, Vice-chair  
Liz Thomas  
Eric Thum  
Francie Von Mertens, Secretary  
Alex Walker