The Arlington Land Trust is a community-based nonprofit organization established in 2000 to protect undeveloped land in Arlington. As a membership organization, ALT accepts donations and welcomes volunteers to support its work.

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Arlington Land Trust News

Editor

Ann LeRoyer

Contributors

Richard A. Duffy Brian Rehrig David White



Elizabeth Island Protected

WE DID IT! With your help we have purchased Elizabeth Island to permanently protect this jewel in Arlington's Spy Pond. Nearly 500 individuals and families, local businesses, and foundations contributed to the successful Campaign to Protect Elizabeth Island. The formal paperwork was completed on December 10, and our partnerships with Mass Audubon and Arlington's Conservation Commission are now in place.

A Brief History of the Campaign

After several years of negotiations, the land trust—with the invaluable guidance of Bob Wilber, Mass Audubon's director of land protection—reached a deal in July to purchase the two-acre island from its former owner, Elaine Sacco, for \$250,000. AIT then



The Campaign to Protect Elizabeth Island

launched the Campaign to raise the purchase price and associated transaction costs including appraisals and legal fees.

During the first few months of the Campaign, ALT prepared a proposal for the state's Conservation Partnership Grant Program and in October was awarded the maximum grant of \$85,000. This state program is unusual in that it supports land conservation projects led by nonprofit organizations rather than municipalities.

The Arlington Conservation Commission is also a key funder and partner in this effort, and on behalf of the Town it will co-hold the conservation restriction with Mass Audubon, a statewide land conservation and education organization.

notos: H.T. Noyes

The public phase of the campaign was launched at Arlington Town Day in September, when ALT set out to raise more than \$100,000 from local individuals, families, and corporations. A highlight of that event was the announcement of a \$10,000 corporate gift from Cambridge Savings Bank.

To meet the seller's year-end deadline for closing on the purchase of Elizabeth Island, AIT had only a few months in which to reach its \$265,000 goal. We are very grateful to the many dedicated AIT members and Arlington residents who rose to the occasion and helped us finish the campaign by the end of November.

Next Steps

A legal conservation restriction (CR) is now being prepared for approval by the state, laying out the guidelines for managing the island. ALT, as the owner, has primary responsibility for stewardship of this special place; Mass Audubon and the Conservation Commission will oversee the CR to advise on the island's permanent protection.

ALT board member Nellie Aikenhead will chair a new stewardship committee for Elizabeth Island, and we welcome volunteers to help monitor the island and work on maintenance and environmental education projects starting in the spring.

Stewardship workdays will build on the great work done by volunteers of the Spy Pond Committee of Vision 2020, especially in the ongoing—and increasingly successful—multiyear effort to reduce the infestations of phragmites, the tall tasselled reeds that have colonized large sections of shorelines around the pond and the island. Dense stands of invasives such as phragmites displace the diverse native wetland plants that provide food and shelter for fish and fowl. As the invasives are reduced, we will sow native wetland seed mixes to rebuild those natural communities as part of the ALT's comprehensive island management plan.

Stay tuned for more information via the ALT Web site and email notices.



Skaters enjoy getting out on Spy Pond for a closer look at Elizabeth Island.



Spring will offer opportunities for stewardship and maintenance projects.



Thank You, CSB!

At Arlington's 2010 Town Day, Cambridge Savings Bank representatives Karen Kindle, Senior VP, Retail & Business Banking, CSB (I) and Susan Lapierre, Senior VP, Community Relations & CRA Officer, CSB (r) present a check to ALT board members Brian Rehrig, Clarissa Rowe, and Ann LeRoyer.

A Short History of Elizabeth Island

By Richard A. Duffy

Por many years after the English settlement of Cambridge (of which most of present-day Arlington was part until 1807), Elizabeth Island was owned in common by the proprietors of the town. In 1704 it was sold to Moses Boardman, a tanner, and remained in purely private ownership for over 300 years. The Arlington Land Trust's purchase in 2010 restored it as a resource held for the common good. Following are glimpses from the last three centuries that reveal a surprisingly colorful history for two water-bounded acres in the middle of a pond in Boston's suburbia.

The regular use of Elizabeth Island is not well documented. For the most part, its owners appear to have simply possessed it among substantial total property holdings, in an era when land was abundant and cheap. In 1713 title to the island was conveyed to Col. Spencer Phipps, who for many years held the royal appointments of lieutenant governor and acting governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony.

By the end of the 1700s, ownership had passed to Col. Thomas Russell, whose mother, Elizabeth, was the widow of Revolutionary War martyr Jason Russell. Evidence from deed records suggests that Elizabeth Russell inspired the island's name.

To potentially support military efforts during westward expansion of the United States, towns held annual training exercises for the local militia. In 1810 Elizabeth Island was the centerpiece of colorful "war games" between the West Cambridge (Arlington) and Watertown forces, during which the "Indian encampment" on the island was "bombarded" and the "natives" sent fleeing to the eastern shore, where they were captured and marched in defeat to a "succulent baked bean" supper!

The most significant chapter in the history of Elizabeth Island centered on its strategic location to potentially facilitate construction of a railroad line across Spy Pond. In the 1840s it was decided to pursue an alternative route that is today's Minuteman Bikeway. But in 1868, seemingly unlimited desire for railnetwork expansion led the Fitchburg Railroad Company to purchase Elizabeth Island and build a second rail line through Arlington. The Mass. Legislature did not authorize

the route, but the development threat remained until 1920, when it was sold to the Middlesex Sportsman's Association, a hunt-club that saw conservation value in Elizabeth Island as a bird-nesting sanctuary.

Following financial failure of the Sportsman's Association during the Great Depression, Elizabeth Island became available for residential development, and in 1940, real estate salesman Henry R. DeForest began laying the foundation for his "honeymoonisle" home he expected to link by bridge to the new "Kelwyn Manor" development. DeForest abandoned his showy dream, and sold Elizabeth Island in 1946.

The island's most frequent use during the next six decades was as a fireworkslaunching site for town celebrations. From time to time, the murmur of one or another development notion might be heard, but none was ever seriously pursued.



Detail from the 1852 Shields map of West Cambridge shows Elizabeth Island as a landmark.

In 2010, ALT launched The Campaign to Protect Elizabeth Island, which swiftly succeeded in the landmark fundraising accomplishment of preserving the historical and natural resource that is, and is destined to remain, Arlington's Elizabeth Island.

There are even more interesting tales from the history of Elizabeth Island, and vintage images galore, to be shared in the coming months. A special illustrated commemorative publication on the history of the island will be produced by ALT member and local historian Richard A. Duffy. Look for its release in conjunction with our spring 2011 celebration of the acquisition and protection of Elizabeth Island.



Jim Poland and Omar Whittemore make camp on Elizabeth Island, circa 1885.

Photo: Arlington Historical Society

Thanks to you!

The Arlington Land Trust thanks its members and friends for their generous contributions to the Campaign to Protect Elizabeth Island.

\$5,000 and above

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Mill Brook Linear Park

n ad hoc group organized by Arlington's Open Space Committee has been studying the feasibility of a linear park along Mill Brook, an important ecological and historical feature that travels nearly three miles through the center of town, parallel to both Massachusetts Avenue and the Minuteman Bikeway.

Enhancement of and improved access to existing open spaces are key goals of the Town's Open Space and Recreation Plan, and recent Town projects at Cooke's Hollow and Wellington Park brought renewed interest to the linear park concept. These are just two of the Town-owned facilities that abut Mill Brook, thus offering public entry points for greater access to the corridor. Other properties are the Arlington Reservoir, Hurd Field, Arlington High School and fields, Buzzell Field, Mt Pleasant Cemetery, and Meadow-brook Park.

In April 2010, the Mill Brook Linear Park Study Group produced a report that outlined current conditions, challenges, and opportunities for seven sections along the Mill Brook corridor. The report proposed linking these properties together in a greenway with pedestrian facilities and other improvements to help restore the environmental and visual qualities of Mill Brook. This work involved reviewing parcel lines, lot ownership, and current uses, as well as photo-documenting the conditions of the brook and its nearby built neighborhood.

The group is also working closely with the Planning Department and Redevelopment Board in conjunction with their ongoing efforts to enhance economic development opportunities and overlay zoning revisions in Arlington. The former Brigham's site offered opportunities for OSC members to attend ARB meetings about that site in order to reinforce attention to the brook and adjacent parklands as part of the redevelopment process.

For more information about the Mill Brook project, contact OSC member Lisa Decker at lisadec@gmail.com. The 2010 report is available on the Town Web site: www.town.arlington.ma.us/Public_Documents/ArlingtonMA_BComm/OpenSpace/projects/MillBrookLinearPark

Arlington's Great Meadows Restoration Project



Cub Scouts and parents helped with the upland meadow restoration project in October.

Tature cooperated for a banner volunteer workday at Arlington's Great Meadows on Saturday, October 23, when approximately sixty people of all ages turned out to remove woody vegetation in an upland area of the meadow. Organized by Friends of Arlington's Great Meadows (FoAGM), the event culminated years of planning with the goal of restoring several acres of meadows that were becoming woodlands. The meadow restoration will reopen a vista near the northwestern entrance off Bryant Road in East Lexington and enhance the diversity of plant and animal life.

Local area Cub Scouts (mainly Cub Scout Pack 306 students from Pierce, Stratton, and Bishop schools in Arlington), Daisy Scouts, and their parents joined the workday with great enthusiasm, along with members of Citizens for Lexington Conservation (CLC) and other volunteers from Arlington and Lexington. Twenty high school seniors and their chaperones from Tulsa, Oklahoma, who were in the area visiting colleges, also helped with clearing brush. Hundreds of staghorn sumac, buckthorn, Japanese honeysuckle, grey birch, and a few quaking aspen trees were cut down, hauled, and piled. Much of the buckthorn was pulled out by the roots using weed

wrenches to prevent regrowth. The next phase of the project is to obtain a permit to safely burn the brush pile. The cleared area will need ongoing maintenance to prevent the regrowth of invasive woody vegetation.

The restoration plan for this project was developed by Jeffrey Collins of Mass Audubon's Ecological Extension Service. This work has been approved by the Arlington Board of Selectmen, which owns the land. More information about this project and other FoAGM activities can be found at www.foagm.org, or contact Mike Tabaczynski at mith.green.com.

ALT MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL

If you have not already renewed your ALT membership, please go to the Web site (www.arlingtonlandtrust.org) to download a copy of the membership form, or sign up at networkforgood.org to renew online. Thank you again. If you have any questions, please contact ALT at info@arlingtonlandtrust.org.

Photo: David White

The Future of the Silver Maple Forest

n Arlington's Belmont/Cambridge border, legislative action is attempting to protect another important natural resource threatened with development.

The Friends of Alewife Reservation and many other advocates have worked tirelessly for many years to protect the unique urban woodland known as the Silver Maple Forest and its many wild inhabitants (including deer, coyote, fox, and many bird species). The area is also prone to flooding, and additional development in this wetland area will exacerbate the problem in all three communities.

To maintain public attention on this property, Representative Will Brownsberger of Belmont and Senator Steven Tolman of Watertown cosponsored House 701, a bill that would kick-start the conversation about state acquisition of this land, also known as the Belmont Uplands. The cosponsors had strong legislative support from Arlington's Senator Ken Donnelly and Representative Sean Garballey, among many other legislators, and the bill passed in early January 2011. While Governor Deval Patrick has not signed the bill for enactment as hoped, Rep. Brownsberger notes that it will nonetheless have the desired effect because the Secretary of Energy and Environmental

Affairs has agreed to move the process forward as prescribed by the legislation.

The bill asks the Secretary to determine an appraisal value of the Silver Maple Forest, which in turn will help inform a decision about whether the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) will acquire the forest if the owner is willing to sell at that price. The bill then gives local municipalities 120 days to determine how much, if anything, they will contribute to the purchase of the property (from their own funds or privately raised donations). If the necessary funds are raised, then DCR will acquire the property and add it to the Alewife Reservation.

The bill does not include an appropriation, leaving it the DCR Commissioner to determine any state contribution toward the purchase from its bond-funded land acquisition program. The state and local communities have very limited funds this year, but the bill provides a framework to continue the conversation about the future of this important urban wild site.

For more information on the legislation and future actions, visit Rep. Brownsberger's Web site at *willbrownsberger.com*.

Prospects for Busa Farm

Located just over the Arlington/Lexington border and abutting the Arlington Reservoir, Busa Farm has been a family farm since the 1920s. For many years the farmers have offered their produce through memberships in a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) program and at farmers markets in Arlington and other nearby towns, as well as at the long-established farm stand on Lowell Street. Now this agricultural legacy is threatened.

Lexington Town Meeting in May 2009 authorized the purchase of the nearly eight-acre farm property for about \$4.1 million, using Community Preservation Act funds.

This state law permits land purchased by eligible cities and towns to be used for open space (including agriculture, conservation, and recreation), historic preservation, and affordable housing. The farm sale was completed in December 2009, and Lexington now leases the land to former owner and farmer Dennis Busa, who has continued to operate the farm stand and CSA.

The Lexington Board of Selectmen appointed a sevenmember Busa Land Use Proposal Committee (BLUPC) to identify desirable future uses of the land, and throughout 2010 the committee held many meetings to gather ideas. In late October, Arlington's Department of Planning and Community Development held a forum specifically for Arlington residents to provide input to the committee. Their overwhelming consensus was for continued farm uses, including community farming and educational opportunities for all ages.



Busa Farm awaits a new growing season and a decision on its future.

The BLUPC is now evaluating three formal proposals that represent primary interests in a community farm, affordable housing, and playing fields, although all proposals suggest some degree of mixed uses. While the strongest support has been expressed by both the community and the BLUPC for significant community farming activity with some affordable housing, the committee will not submit its formal report and recommendations to the Lexington Selectmen until February 2011.

For more information, visit http://ci.lexington.ma.us/ committees/busalanduse.cfm hoto: Ann LeRoyer

UPCOMING EVENTS

Arlington Land Trust Annual Meeting and Celebration

of the Campaign to Protect Elizabeth Island

Friday, January 28, 2011 7:00–9:00 pm

Masonic Lodge 19 Academy Street, Arlington

Music, Drinks, and Hors d'oeuvres

Speakers include

Richard Duffy, Arlington Historical Society Bob Wilber, Mass Audubon

Massachusetts Land Conservation Conference

The 21st Massachusetts Land Conservation Conference offers 30+ workshops for land trust volunteers and staff, open space committee and conservation commission members, agency staff, elected officials, watershed associations and anyone else committed to land conservation in Massachusetts. It is convened by The Trustees of Reservations' Putnam Conservation Institute and the Massachusetts Land Trust Coalition, and is cosponsored by Mass Audubon, The Nature Conservancy, The Trust for Public Land, and the Land Trust Alliance.

The 2011 theme is "Climate Change and Land Conservation" with a focus on raising awareness about climate change and ways in which land conservation and stewardship can contribute to mitigation and adaptation. For more information: www.massconservation.org

When: Saturday, March 26, 8 am-4 pm

Where: Worcester Technical High School, Worcester, MA

EcoFest: Focus on Water

"How You Affect the Water That Affects You" is the theme of this year's EcoFest, an annual event cosponsored by the Town of Arlington Department of Public Works, Conservation Commission, and Open Space Committee, as well as the Arlington Garden Club and Vision 2020/Sustainable Arlington Committee, and other committees and local businesses.

When: Saturday, March 26, 10 am-2 pm

Where: Arlington Town Hall