Nature, Community, Forever

Curtis Farm Preserve: An Incredible Place
By Ed Robinson

On May 24, 2014, Brunswick resident Delia Guzman-Bass took an early morning drive down Route 123 to Curtis Farm Preserve. In three hours of birding, Delia counted more than 50 species, including 13 different warblers, scarlet tanagers, indigo buntings, thrushes, bluebirds, Eastern kingbirds and a bobolink. In a posting on the Maine Bird website, Delia wrote that she did not want to leave this "incredible place." If you spend time at this lovely preserve, you'll agree that Delia got it just right.

Over time, land trusts are offered a wide range of properties, but sometimes a really special opportunity comes along. So it was in 2011, when HHLT purchased two properties from private landowners (a third parcel was added in 2013). Thanks to a major fundraising campaign with many generous local donors, bolstered by federal and state grants, Curtis Farm Preserve now totals 86 acres, which makes it the largest undeveloped property in South Harpswell. But that number doesn't begin to tell the full story of this unique spot. The Preserve includes nearly 2,000 feet of shoreline on both Curtis Cove and Basin Cove, gravel beaches, a freshwater pond, critical salt marshes and 15 acres of intertidal mud flats for shellfish and wildlife nursery areas. Running up the ridge from the shore of Curtis Cove, the habitat runs from fresh water wetlands to brushy shrub areas, a mix of softwood and hardwood forest, and a six-acre open field. On a clear day, the views across Middle Bay as far west as Mt. Washington will make your heart soar.

There may be prettier places in Harpswell, but I can't think of a property with more diverse

Voices of the Sea

This winter, HHLT and Harpswell Coastal Academy (HCA) collaborated on an oral history project called, "Voices of the Sea." HCA teacher Kelly Orr wrote: “The project positioned students as historians and archivists, charged with preserving the rich cultural heritage of Harpswell. The project design was based on the premise that listening is an act of human connection, and this proved true both for the students and the residents they interviewed. HCA students listened, inquired, learned and reflected – and in the process, they deepened their own connections to Harpswell and its people.

“The product of these efforts is a series of oral histories that capture tales of bravery, hard work, and a deep and abiding connection to Harpswell.”

One particularly striking excerpt was local clammer David Wilson's description of the changes in the mud flats he has seen in his lifetime:

"I used to do a lot of harvesting at night with a headlamp and at night a lot of creatures and animals would come out. Even with the tide gone, you’d see a lot of life on the mud flats. Closing your eyes and just listening the sounds you hear at night out there are totally different, you’re hearing animals that you normally wouldn’t see or hear during the day. But...now it’s a barren wasteland, there’s really nothing for life on the bottom and it’s scary. And it wouldn’t be so scary if these species that are gone were just the ones that were, you know, fished upon. We see nothing out there anymore, things

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As part of the Harpswell Family Outings series, young and old challenged themselves to complete an orienteering course at Curtis Farm Preserve on a beautiful full day last year.

CURT CHIPMAN PHOTO

Mary Ann Naify PHOTO

MARY ANN NAHIF PHOTO

Mary Ann Naify PHOTO

Nature Day camp at Curtis farm Preserve.

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Our Mission:
To preserve and protect Harpswell’s natural environment, wildlife, open spaces, islands, shoreline and cultural heritage for the benefit of current and future generations through conservation, stewardship, education and landowner assistance.

SPRING 2015 / 1
Harpswell Heritage Land Trust at a Glance

Number of properties open to the public: 15

Number of miles of hiking trails: 7

Number of volunteers in 2014: 122

Benefits of Conserved Land

Operating budget for 2015: $164,500

Number of employees: 2

Number of public programs offered in 2014: 44

Number of member families in 2014: 672

Number of children reached by nature programs in 2014: 462

Number of acres of land conserved in Harpswell for clean water, undeveloped shoreline, public access, wildlife habitat and scenic views.

1983: 2
1990: 308 acres
2000: 1,003 acres
2010: 1,316 acres
2015: 1,472 acres

Successful Launch of Forever Fund

W hen HHLT accepts a property or a conservation easement, we are agreeing to care for that property forever. With this in mind, HHLT’s Board of Trustees decided in 2013 to establish the Forever Fund to permanently secure the financial viability of the Land Trust. The fund is off to a good start, but there is still a long way to go. Success will ensure that HHLT will have the annual funding to pay staff, program costs and maintenance of properties, while setting aside funding for special projects and emergencies.

Thank you to 2014 Forever Fund donors

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Leave a Legacy for Harpswell

Y our legacy could be one of clean air, clean water, an abundance of wildlife, thriving fisheries and beautiful natural spaces for future generations to enjoy.

Please consider a planned gift to HHLT. Naming HHLT as a beneficiary of your estate plan or a specific asset, such as an IRA or a life insurance policy, is a simple way to begin your legacy.

For more information, contact Reed Coles at info@hhltmaine.org or 207-721-1121.
Land

Conservation

Liberty Farm West

This year Lorraine Lowell and her daughter, Eini, will fulfill a family dream. They will ensure that the cherished saltwater farm on Harpswell Neck that has been in their family for more than 200 years will forever remain as beautiful and wild as it is today.

“My father, Clarence Skolfield, often expressed his wish that it remain undeveloped. The Harpswell Heritage Land Trust has the ability to make this happen and honor his wishes,” said Lorraine.

HHLT’s Lands Committee is actively working on several interesting and important conservation projects, but cannot yet release more details.

Stewardship

HHLT’s stewardship activities focus on caring for the properties we own, building and maintaining trails and monitoring conservation easements we hold on private property.

No dogs policy at Skolfield Shores Preserve

HHLT strives to be a good neighbor. When one of our neighbors at Skolfield Shores Preserve approached us to express her concern about unleashed dogs chasing her farm animals, we took action. We added a sign to remind pet owners to keep their dogs on leash. Because that didn’t work, and since this has been an ongoing concern, we have decided to ban dogs from the preserve. This decision will be unpopular among dog owners, we know. But there are many other trails in Harpswell where dogs are allowed. Please respect the livelihood of our neighbor. Please choose another spot to walk your dog.

Curtis Farm Preserve Grand Opening

On June 6 from 10-11 a.m., we will hold the grand opening for a new trail system at Curtis Farm Preserve (see our website for details). Read more about this Preserve in the featured article on Page One.

New maps, brochures and trailhead welcome signs

This year will bring big improvements to your experiences on HHLT preserves and trails. We are in the process of redesigning and creating trail maps and brochures and intend to install trailhead welcome signs with brochure boxes at many of your favorite trail heads!

Harpswell Invasive Plant Partnership

The Harpswell Invasive Plant Partnership is a collaborative effort of HHLT, the town of Harpswell and local citizens to assess and address the problem of invasive plants in our town. Widespread infestations of invasive plants threaten our natural areas and native plants and animals. These problem plants are already here – so what the Partnership plans to do this year is look closely at some of the public areas in Harpswell and the edges of major roads to pinpoint the location and extent of these infestations. In this way, we can begin to prioritize and focus our efforts to restore our prized natural areas. More information can be found at: http://hhltmaine.org/join-the-harpswell-invasive-plant-partnership/.

Community Outreach and Education

Much of HHLT’s increased education programming is made possible by the Holbrook Education Initiative, with support from the Holbrook Community Foundation.

Third Annual Sunset Cruise

We hope you can join us for the third annual Sunset Cruise. Enjoy the wild shorelines of Harpswell’s Islands.

Keep an eye out for seals, dolphins, eagles, shore birds and more. Enjoy tasty snacks, wine, beer and soft drinks. Chat with friends, listen to live music, and learn about Harpswell’s fascinating natural and human history. Tickets for the Sunset Cruise cost $60 for adults and $30 for children 12 and under. Your ticket purchase supports the conservation and education work of HHLT.

Engaging Harpswell Community School students with the outdoors

During the past year and a half, HHLT has focused on engaging children at Harpswell Community School with nature through outdoor science learning and hands-on exploration. In the fall and spring, HHLT now offers a free before or after school program called Explore Nature. This program combines games, hands-on exploration, science study and nature-inspired art. More than 100 children have participated. HHLT also offers

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Thank you to our 2014 members. You are crucial to our success.

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Curtis Farm Preserve

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and valuable wildlife habitat that allows a range of public uses. Curtis Farm offers residents and visitors off-road parking for vital shoreline access, quiet trails, a mix of forest types and wide open space to fly a kite or watch migrating raptors. To the south of the field there is a sizable glacial erratic (a rock) hidden in new forest growth, and a lovely stand of mature oak trees to the north provides valuable food for wildlife.

As with our other preserves, HHLT has put a great deal of thought into how best to care for this wonderful land. HHLT assembled an advisory group of local citizens called the Friends of Curtis Farm to help the Trustees think through a wide range of options for the property. Local consulting forester Rob Bryan was heavily involved in drafting a long-term management plan for Curtis Farm that takes into account historical uses of the property, a current inventory of plants and wildlife and best practices for managing such land long into the future.

Unlike some preserves that are left to progress in a relatively untouched state, sometimes referred to as “forever wild” management, Curtis Farm will be actively managed for a diversity of habitats, emphasizing habitat for species of special conservation concern (e.g., American woodcock, blackburnian warbler, scarlet tanager).

Over the centuries, there has been a wide range of public uses at the Preserve. There is the foundation of an old homestead on the property and the field used to host ball games and bean suppers.

By carefully planning the next 10 years of management, HHLT hopes to provide recreation and educational opportunities for people, as well as valuable habitat for plants and animals.

We are blessed to have this opportunity to protect and enhance a special place that will provide food and shelter to a wide range of resident and migrating wildlife, and become a living laboratory for young and old. Whether you are interested in going for a hike, installing bluebird boxes or completing the orienteering course with other families, laying new trails and signage through the forest or clearing invasive plants with volunteers, Curtis Farm will become a place where you can quietly observe the natural world around you and have a hand in making it even more special as the years go by. If you have not experienced Curtis Farm, you owe it to yourself to do so very soon. For directions, visit http://hhltmaine.org/conserved-land/public-access/curtis-farm-preserve/. Please join us on June 6 for a grand opening of the new trail system!

Voices of the Sea

Continued from page 1

that you wonder, what was their place, you know, what was the reason behind these animals living here?”

Alicia Heyburn talked about her connection to Yarmouth Island.

“I am the fifth generation of owners of an island in Cundy’s Harbor and it’s land that is very special to me and has been part of my childhood and formative to who I am today and what I care about. “One of the reasons that the place is so special to me is that it is unchanged and we don’t intend to change it. And part of that specialness is that life goes pretty fast and to be able to rest and be slow and return to something extremely familiar and unchanging is great comfort, very relaxing, because we don’t have electricity, because we don’t have telephones, all those types of things. There are no distractions and you find that sense of peace and connection.”

To listen to audio clips from all 22 interviews, visit: http://harpswellstories.org/.
Deirdre Strachan: A “Stalwart Member of HHLT’s Board of Trustees”

by Doug Warren

There is a discernible lift in Deirdre Strachan’s already cheerful voice when the topic of conversation turns to Harpswell, her adopted home and the town she loves. “It’s such a beautiful community, with so much to offer,” she says.

Strachan, who moved to Harpswell from Massachusetts in 1998 after a distinguished international career in public health services, has been doing her best to keep it that way. A member of the Harpswell Heritage Land Trust’s Board of Trustees for nine years, and its current vice president, Strachan is stepping down this summer, although she’ll continue to use her grant-writing skills as a volunteer on the Development Committee.

“I absolutely love the people who work with the Land Trust because they’re focused on protecting Harpswell’s natural resources and its working waterfront,” Strachan explains.

The feeling is definitely mutual. Land Trust Executive Director Reed Coles says of Strachan: “Deirdre has been a stalwart member of HHLT’s Board of Trustees, always ready to help and willing to lead on the difficult work of raising the money needed to fund our activities. Her commitment and dedication has been instrumental to the vast increase in our conservation, stewardship and educational activities.”

News and Updates

Continued from page 3

science programming to teachers during the school day, both at the school and at natural areas around Harpswell. Five out of six grade levels have participated in hands-on, place-based science learning about topics including habitats, geology, matter and energy, weathering and plants and animals. Teachers, students and parents are enthusiastic about these programs.

Expanded Nature Day Camp

This summer, HHLT is expanding its popular Nature Day Camp program to four weeks! For the first time, we are offering a full-day camp. Nature Day Camp is an amazing opportunity for children to explore Harpswell’s interesting natural habitats and have fun outdoors. For more information, or to register, visit: http://hhltmaine.org/events-programs/nature-day-camp/.

Summer Trail Challenge

HHLT, Access Health, Brunswick-Topsham Land Trust and Kennebec Estuary Land Trust are launching a summer trail challenge. Participants will visit trails in Bath, Brunswick, Harpswell and Topsham for a chance to win prizes. Fun for all ages! For more information, visit www.hhltmaine.org.

Read about Wildlife and Adventure

The Land Trust is fortunate to have some great writers as volunteers! We encourage you to check out Ed Robinson’s Nature Notes series profiling local wildlife species, which appear in our email newsletter. Read them all at: http://hhltmaine.org/about/nature-notes/.

We’ve also launched an Outdoor Adventure Blog, where you can read entertaining stories about your neighbors’ excursions outdoors in Harpswell. Check it out at: http://hhltmaine.org/category/outdoor-adventure-blog/

Volunteer Opportunities

As always, HHLT has a variety of volunteer opportunities for many interests. Those wanting regular updates about volunteer opportunities are welcome to join HHLT’s Volunteer Opportunities email list. Sign up on our website or contact Julia at outreach@hhltmaine.org.

HHLT’s Office: A Community Resource

Did you know that HHLT’s community room is open for use by community groups for meetings and public events? In 2014, more than 20 groups used this free community space.

Foundation support in 2014 came from the following sources

Alfred M. Senter Fund
Holbrook Community Foundation
John Sage Foundation
Leonard C. and Mildred F. Ferguson Foundation
Newman’s Own Foundation
Norcross Wildlife Foundation, Inc.
Ram Island Conservation Fund
Summer Events and Programs

All events are free unless otherwise noted. For more details, visit www.hhltmaine.org or contact Julia McLeod at outreach@hhltmaine.org or 207-837-9613.

Rain or Shine Hiking Group: Every Thursday in May, 10 a.m., various locations.

Learning Light Photography Workshop: May 8, 7-8 p.m., Pott’s Point Preserve. Registration required.

Harpswell Hiking Challenge: June 6 and 7, all day, various locations.

Preschool Nature Day Camp (ages 3-5): June 8-12 and July 20-24, 9 a.m.-12 p.m. $75. Registration required.

Spring Flower Walk: June 13, 10:30-11:30 a.m., Curtis Farm Preserve.

Ice Cream on the Trail: June 14, 4:5-30 p.m., Houghton Graves Park. Suggested donation: $3 adults, $2 children 10 and under.

Elementary Nature Day Camp (ages 6-10): July 6-10, 8:30 a.m.-3:30 p.m., $175. Registration required.

Sunset Cruise: July 7, 6-8 p.m., $60 adults, $30 children. Registration required.

Ice Cream on the Trail: July 12, 4-5:30 p.m., Hackett and Minot Trails. Suggested donation: $3 adults, $2 children 10 and under.

Annual Meeting: Barns of Harpswell: July 21, Doors open at 6:30 p.m. Meeting starts at 7 p.m., Orr’s Island Schoolhouse.

Harp SWell Family Outing: Rock Party!: July 25, 10 a.m.-12 p.m., Stover’s Point Preserve.

Elementary Nature Day Camp (ages 6-10): August 3-7, 8:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m. $75. Registration required.

Ice Cream on the Beach: August 9, 4-5:30 p.m., Stover’s Point Preserve. Suggested donation: $3 adults, $2 children 10 and under.

Tide Pool Life for Adults: August 29, 4-6 p.m., Pott’s Point Preserve.

Please Join Us!

Harpswell Heritage Land Trust, 207-721-1121, info@hhltmaine.org, www.hhltmaine.org