

Spotlight: Andy Meyer, co-steward of Blackstrap Hill Preserve

Interviewed by Mila Plavsic

fall

If you have walked or biked along the trails of the Blackstrap Hill Preserve (BHP), you know what a treasure it is. From forest to meadow, from streams to waterfalls, BHP has it all. If you have not yet had the chance, autumn is a perfect time to explore the 280-acre preserve, the largest property under the care of the Falmouth Land Trust. The Preserve is a well-maintained and welcoming place, thanks in large part to the efforts of co-stewards Andy Meyer and Phil Brown over the past 3+ years. I had a chance recently to ask Andy a few questions about his experiences as a steward. If you would like to learn more about becoming a steward, please check out our web page (www.falmouthlandtrust.org) or contact our Stewardship Director, Peter Farnum (phone 797-9728).



MP: How did you get involved in the land trust?

Andy: My predecessor, Alan Donald, invited me to join a group repairing the deeply eroded Orange Trail. It was a group of bikers and snowmobilers and I was inspired to see people with different hobbies working together on a common interest.

MP: What is it like helping to manage the trust's largest property?

Andy: Phil's been one of my best friends since we were roommates at Bowdoin in 1984. We've hiked together from Maine to California and now that we have kids, being co-stewards is a great way for us to spend time together. We get to catch up with each other while giving back to the community. We hike the Preserve updating our "to do list" based on Phil's knowledge of trails. I then recruit helpers and people are fantastic about pitching in. It really boosts my faith in humanity.

MP: What has been your biggest success at BHP?

Andy: It's very rewarding to see people of different ages and interests coming together to make a contribution to the common good. Though it has been amazingly easy, I think one of my biggest successes has been recruiting volunteers. I find that there are plenty of people who want to help; they just need to be asked. Each year we have dozens of people help us put in >100 hours of volunteering and we know they enjoy it because they keep coming back.

MP: On the flip side, what would you say has been the biggest challenge so far?

Andy: With 280 acres and miles of trails, there is always more that can be done. Setting limits for myself even when things are not perfect is a challenge for me.

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The purpose of the Falmouth Land Trust is to permanently protect field, forest, shoreline, and wildlife lands; to maintain the historical character and natural beauty of Falmouth; and to educate its citizens regarding the values of donation, stewardship, and enjoyment of protected lands.

DO WE HAVE YOUR EMAIL ADDRESS?

We're updating our outreach database at the FLT office and we want to keep in touch with you.

Please send your updated email address to us at info@falmouthlandtrust.org



May 2012 High School seniors donate their morning helping President Jed Harris clean up FLT trails.



August 2012 Youth volunteers help teacher Josh Ollins and Executive Director Analiese Larson clean up natural outdoor play area at elementary school.

Connecting To our Community

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Letter from the President: *Jed Harris*



Happy Fall! I hope that everyone has had a chance to get out on a Land Trust property during this amazing time of year. I highly suggest you head out to Suckfish Brook, a property we received a conservation easement on from the Town of Falmouth earlier this year. It's an amazing property with beautiful vistas and a well marked loop trail.

More detail can be found on our newly redesigned website: www.falmouthlandtrust.org.

Suckfish is the latest of several conservation easements that the Trust has received from the Town over the past several years and I wanted to take this opportunity to talk a little bit about what it means to receive an easement, Falmouth Land Trust's relationship with the Town, and the importance of your continued support for the Trust.

As a land trust and as citizens of Falmouth, we are very fortunate to live in a town that has placed such a high value on open space. The 2007 open space bond was an overwhelming vote in support of conservation. Armed with the money and the mandate, the Town set to work to acquire open space. Thanks to the tremendous work of the Openspace ombudsman, town staff, and the Council the town has successfully acquired and conserved several hundred acres of prime land. This is a remarkable achievement but it begs the question if the town is writing the checks what role does the Land Trust play?

The Land Trust has played an integral role as the recipient of numerous conservation easements on the

acquired land. Conservation easements contain different restrictions based on the donor's wishes but in the simplest form the easements granted by the Town ensure that the land will never be developed. In its role as recipient of conservation easements the Land Trust is responsible for the perpetual stewardship of these properties. Stewardship, in this case, involves ensuring the legal requirements of the easement are upheld and requires a healthy defense fund as we comply with our mission to ensure conserved land in Falmouth is permanently protected. In addition to the Town land, the Land Trust owns in fee over 570 acres that require monitoring, trail maintenance, and upkeep. The long term success of the Town's open space initiatives depends upon a strong Trust. The Falmouth Land Trust has doubled in size in terms of acreage protected and we need your ongoing financial support to ensure that we can successfully uphold our stewardship duties.

The Land Trust has numerous events scheduled for the Fall including a series of walks and our third annual raffle on November 15th at the Falmouth Sea Grill. Raffle tickets are available for purchase now. Check our website at www.falmouthlandtrust.org for all of the details. I hope to see you at an upcoming event.

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Please make checks payable to Falmouth Land Trust. The Trust is a non-profit 501(c)3 organization. Your contributions are tax deductible. **THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT!**

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Update from Bob Shafto, *The Invasive Challenge*

Invasive terrestrial plants are pervasive in our town, readily found on both private property and on most of our open space tracts. The Conservation Commission is trying to come to grips with this problem through a new initiative they call Invasive Free Falmouth.

The first goal is to try and get these invaders under control on both town and Trust open space properties, starting with the River Point Conservation Area. River Point is home to nearly every species on the target list, but population levels are still manageable enough that they can be controlled. FLT trustees Ted Asherman and Caleb Hemphill and I have all been certified as master level herbicide applicators and have been busy this summer killing hundreds of multi-flora rose, honeysuckle, bittersweet, buckthorn, and barberry plants by cutting them off at ground level, then treating the cut stump with a dab of brush killer. We have also dug up dozens of purple loosestrife growing there. Continuous monitoring over the ensuing years should keep these noxious plants under control.

A second goal is to educate town residents about the problem invasives pose to our natural environment. Because they have no natural enemies, and often outcompete native plants by such strategies as blooming earlier than they do, thus shading the natives out, they can soon become the dominant plant in many an ecosystem. The result is less diversity, diminished habitat value, and disrupted food webs.

You can help by identifying the invasives on your own property and treating them accordingly. For assistance with that process, feel free to call me at 878-8933 or email at openspace@maine.rr.com. Remember, just one plant can be responsible for spreading the invasion to many other properties.

Falmouth will never be truly invasive free – it's much too late for that – but we can all take steps to significantly reduce the presence of these plants in our town, and the impact they have on our native plant communities.

Spotlight: *Andy Meyer* continued from page 1

MP: Why do you like being a FLT steward?

Andy: I love hiking/snowshoeing, staying local, volunteering and spending time with cool people. Being a steward allows me to do all at once. It's a pretty neat job.

MP: Who uses BHP the most (bikers, hikers, etc.)? What changes in usage have you noticed over the years?

Andy: We don't see most guests, but the ones we do see have a wide range of interests: dog walkers, runners, hikers, hunters, bikers, snow-shoers, snowmobilers, and neighbors all seem to enjoy the Preserve. Bikers seem to have really discovered the Preserve in the past couple years and I'm told they come all the way from Vermont to ride our trails.

MP: What do you do when you are not out on the trails of BHP?

Andy: I'm a Program Manager at Efficiency Maine. I manage programs that encourage people to save energy: using efficient light bulbs, buying Energy Star appliances, weatherizing their homes, installing efficient heating systems, etc.

MP: How can people get involved if they want to help?

Andy: There is always work to be done. If people want to pitch in at BHP, they can simply send an email to me andymeyer@maine.rr.com and I'll add them to my "Friends of the Preserve" email distribution list. Several times each Phil and I host work days where we gather with other volunteers for 2-3 hours of trail work. We trim branches, cut brush, fix erosion, set stepping stones, and re-blaze trails. We get to meet interesting people and give the Preserve a face lift. We'd welcome more people.

MP: The trust really relies on volunteers at all levels to help preserve the nature of Falmouth and your contributions have been invaluable. What would you advise someone who wants to become a steward? It sounds like you know how to keep it fun and rewarding.

Andy: I don't know that I'm the best steward, but we have been able to stay committed for a while now without burning out. To avoid burning out, Phil and I do as much as we enjoy doing ourselves, we engage volunteers to do the bulk of the work, and we let some work remain undone. It's a totally flexible job!

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