



WESTERN FOOTHILLS LAND TRUST

NEWSLETTER
Spring 2008

*Committed to the
Conservation and
Preservation of native
Ecosystem, watersheds,
Farm and forest lands,
And scenic landscapes in
Western Maine.*

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Western Foothills Land Trust
PO Box 107
Norway, ME 04268
207 739 2124
wflt@megalink.net
www.wflmaine.org

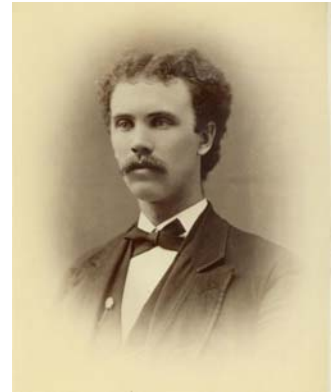
Field Day of Norway Grange in front of the Roberts Farm
Date of photo unknown

Site History Uncovered

Historic data and photos about the Pike-Roberts farm have been hard to find at both state and local archives. Fortunately, John Roberts was a Bowdoin graduate (class of 1877) and an archivist or librarian at Bowdoin at the beginning of the twentieth century saved "Some Ideal Oxford Homes; A Visit to the Fine Dairy Farm of Hon. J.A.Roberts" (Lewiston Journal, 1903) in J.A.Robert's file.

In one digital transmission from Bowdoin, the WFLT quadrupled what it or the Norway Historical Society knew about Roberts farm, and in many ways, about farming in our area at the turn of the twentieth century:

"A drive of two short miles from Norway village, on the Waterford Road, brought us to the fine farming establishment of Hon. John A. Roberts, who is widely known over Maine as a lecturer on agricultural subjects. Highland Dairy Farm, as it has so aptly been named, is located on a commanding eminence among the Oxford hills and having a fine view of Norway Lake that nestles at the foot of the nearby mountains. It contains 200 acres of choice and highly cultivated land, and here has been built up one of the finest dairy establishments in this section of Maine."



John A. Roberts, Bowdoin Class of 1877

Courtesy Bowdoin College Archives

We knew from 19th century Federal agricultural censuses that 72 acres were cultivated in 1880 and that the dairy included 4 milch cows. What we now know is that when ownership transferred to John Roberts in 1881, the farm was systematically transformed. By 1903 it was written that, "Highland Farm contains fully if not more than 200 acres well divided between tillage, pasture and wood...[The farm] has a herd of fifty cattle, about thirty of which are continuously kept in milk. In addition there are twenty-five pigs of varying ages, three horses for work and driving purposes and 200 finely bred barred Plymouth Rock hens."

This wonderful information heightens the regional and state significance of preserving the site. Our sincere thanks to Caroline Moseley at the Bowdoin College Archives, and to that unknown archivist on duty in 1903.

Trust Accepts Easements Protecting 720 Acres in 2007

Three new conservation easements were donated to WFLT during the final week of 2007 protecting 590 additional acres of open land in the Oxford Hills. Earlier in 2007, the Trust accepted an easement protecting the 130-acre Scribner Hill Farm in Otisfield, and purchased the fee ownership of the 150 acre Roberts Farm parcel. So in 2007, 720 acres were newly protected by easement, and 150 acres protected by fee. In comparison, WFLT protected a total of 230 acres in its first ten years (’87-’97.)

The easements completed include a variety of landscapes and habitats in Sumner, Norway, and Waterford:

Ingrid Eriksson and John Allen donated an easement protecting 200 acres of woods, pastures, fields, and wetlands on their farm in Sumner, including 1,700 feet along the West Branch of the Nezinscot River. The farm is also very near to another protected property in Sumner which enhances the wildlife benefits of the easement.

Mary Ellen Bills donated an easement on her 40-acre woodlot on Old Stage Road, Norway. This land protects significant woodland habitat and is located between three other easement properties on Old Stage Road. The land also includes x-c skiing trails open by request to the public. The Old Stage Road easements (collectively protecting 185 acres) create a meaningful conservation corridor.

The final easement completed in 2007 was donated by Bart and Mary Ann Hague of Waterford. The structure and wording of this easement was designed to serve as a flexible model easement for other major land owners in the Crooked River watershed. WFLT has been collaborating with four other area land trusts (Loon Echo, Greater Lovell, Mahoosuc, and Songo River Valley Land Trusts) and the Portland Water District (PWD) to develop a water resource conservation strategy for the Crooked River watershed. The Crooked River supplies 70% of Sebago Lake’s surface water- so the health of

the River’s watershed is a concern of the PWD and the area land trusts.

The Hague easement protects 350 acres (230 acres in forest, 120 acres in wetlands) and encompasses 1.5 miles along both sides of the river. The land includes stone walls, scenic ledges, and lateral moraines. The riparian corridor features wetlands, oxbows, vernal pools, and an extended flood plain. The section of the river included in the easement contains landlocked Atlantic salmon spawning beds, an historic mill site, and a magnificent series of rapids (McDaniel’s Rips.) In many ways, this generous easement is the personal manifestation of Bart Hague’s professional career with the EPA.



Newly protected stretch of the Crooked River

Easements are unique and individually crafted documents. While donors retain ownership of their properties, including forestry and agricultural rights; they are protecting in perpetuity, open space, wildlife habitat, scenic values, wetlands, and riparian corridors that benefit us all. Advantageous tax benefits for easement donors have been continued through 2008. Anyone interested in the work of the land trust, or in protecting their own lands, should contact the Trust at 739-2124, www.wfltmaine.org.

CROOKED RIVER WATERSHED



PWD Supports Stewardship Endowment

Demonstrating its support of the conservation of the Crooked River Corridor, the Board of the Portland Water District (PWD) voted to make a donation to WFLT’s stewardship endowment in honor of the 350-acre Bart and Mary Ann Hague easement on the river. The easement will protect 1.5 miles of shoreline (on both sides of the river), significant wetlands, and forested uplands. Paul Hunt, director of environmental services said that, “In approving the donation, PWD’s Board of Trustees suggested that they would consider similar support for easements in the Sebago Lake watershed in the future.”

Significant Easement Acquired on South Pond, Buckfield with support from \$75,000 North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA) grant.

On March 14th, WFLT purchased a conservation easement from Scott and Li Gowell on 44 acres of their historic South Pond property. The easement parcel forms the northern shore of the 49 acre South Pond, and includes 1,775' of shoreline, 18.5 acres of wetlands, prime farmland soils, woods, and 3,100' of riparian corridor along the Outlet Brook. The latter drains north towards the Nezinscot River from South Pond.

The purchase of the Gowell easement marks the completion of the first part of a larger three-part conservation project to protect a total of 1294 acres in the South Pond basin. The portion of the Gowell's historic farm included in the easement is the portion critical to the health of the overall South Pond bio-system and to the viability of the nonmigratory and migratory wildlife that depend upon the parcel's wetlands, open agricultural fields, riparian corridors and woodlands.

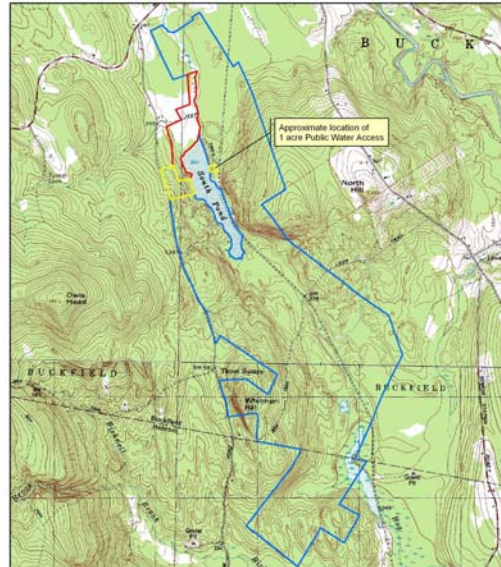
In March, after 18 months of negotiations, the Trust purchased the easement from the Gowells and received confirmation of the NAWCA small grant award of \$75,000. The grant is administered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The award was based upon project attributes: acres of wading bird, migratory bird, and endangered bird habitat to be protected by the overall project as well as the specific wading bird and migratory bird species to be affected by the project. The Trust received essential technical assistance from Lois Winter and Bob Houston of the USFWS Gulf of Maine Coastal Program, Ron Joseph of the USFWS, WFLT member John Gunn, and Mike Auger of the Androscoggin Land Trust. Jerry Bley of Creative Conservation also played a key role in helping WFLT structure and carry out its objectives.



Gowell easement: view across hayfield towards historic farm

The second phase of the South Pond project is the purchase of a 14 acre parcel on the west shore of the Pond. That wooded parcel includes 524' of undeveloped shoreline and has access along the Sodom Road. WFLT has applied for a Land For Maine's Future program grant to support that purchase. Partnering with MDIFW on that application, the proposal includes a one-acre water access parcel on the east shore of the pond, north of the current informal landing.

The third phase of the project is projected to be completed prior to the end of 2008. The Trust will be the recipient of the donated fee ownership of a 1236 acre parcel that embraces the eastern aspects of the South Pond basin. When all three phases have been completed, WFLT will steward by easement and fee, a 1294 acre South Pond conservation area, protecting in perpetuity the undeveloped 49-acre South Pond.



Francis Brautigam, fisheries expert for the Maine Department of inland Fisheries and Wildlife writes that due to development, fewer than 5% of ponds and lakes (greater than 40 acres) in southern Maine, offer multi-use public recreational opportunities in a setting characterized as unspoiled, undeveloped, and natural. South Pond presents a rare conservation opportunity.

As future stewards of such a large holding, this project has and will continue to spur the strategic and organizational development of the Trust. The 1236 acre parcel includes 2.5 miles of the former Buckfield railroad, now the multi-use International Trail System 89 (ITS 89) which means that there is built in access and existing four season recreational use. The Town of Buckfield owns the rail bed and is supportive of the Trust's future ownership of the parcel. Public access to South Pond for fishing and swimming will be continued, and non-motorized hiking trails on the land will be discussed, designed and implemented.

An endowment fund is being established for maintenance and management (taxes etc.) for the fee parcels.

Jersey Bog and South Pond stand out on Buckfield's *Beginning with Habitat* maps (available online and at the town office,) as important areas for habitat and wildlife conservation. Fortunately for Buckfield, both areas will be protected in perpetuity. The Androscoggin Land Trust (ALT) holds the fee ownership of Jersey Bog (WFLT holds the back-up conservation easement.) By 2009, WFLT will hold the fee ownership of the larger South Pond parcel; eventually, ALT will hold the back-up conservation easement on the parcel.

Summer Events 2008

WFLT Bird Count 2008 May 17, 7am

Set your alarms, dust off your binoculars and get out your field guide. It's time for the Trust's 13th annual way-too-early-in-the-morning spring bird count. This annual fund raiser is scheduled for May 17th at Bob and Mary Van Nest's farm, 265 Old Stage Road in Norway. Starting at 7 A.M., the group will set out to identify as many winged species as possible in a 3 hour time frame. Following a proven route, the group explores a wide variety of habitats- pasture, edge, woodlands, field, which yields an average of 47 species including many warblers and some unusual birds such as bobolinks. If lucky, the group might spot a meadowlark, a species in serious decline due to loss of grassland habitat. The Trust is asking for a donation of \$10.00 per person which includes refreshments after birding around the stove in the farm kitchen. This year all proceeds will go towards the Roberts Farm Preserve project. This event will be held rain, snow, or shine. For additional information, please call the Van Nests at 743-8104, or the Trust office at 739-2124.

Roberts Farm Preserve monthly walks

First Saturdays of each month, June-October, 9-11am
Join us on site to explore the Preserve on foot. Each month WFLT will invite an area naturalist to guide us. As the summer progresses we'll be able to witness the evolution of the recreational trail system. Donations welcomed. Please meet at the Roberts Road entrance. Long pants suggested. Call 739-2124 for information.

South Pond 5mile bike or jog June 15, 8am

Explore the South Pond Conservation Area on foot or on mountain bike from the luxury of the multi-use trail, ITS 89. 5 mile round trip, flat and straight, good footing. We'll meet at the Buckfield maintenance lot, John Ellinwood Road, Buckfield. \$10 donations for the South Pond stewardship endowment requested.

Annual Meeting July 31, 7pm

Members of our The Roberts Farm Preserve trails committee will be giving a presentation about the evolution of the trail design, and the status of trail construction for the Preserve. To be held at the Western Maine University and Community College, 232 Main St., South Paris, 7pm.



WESTERN FOOTHILLS
LAND TRUST

PO Box 107, Norway, ME 04268

Norway



Triathlon

Norway Triathlon

Saturday, July 19th, 8:30am

Now that the snow has left it is time to break out the running shoes, swim suits, and bikes and start training for the July 19th Norway Triathlon! Proceeds from this year's event will benefit trail construction on Roberts Farm Preserve. By next summer, the event's 5km foot race will be held on the Preserve's trails. Information and registration may be found on www.norwaytri.com. For the spectators among us, please consider supporting Roberts Farm Preserve by volunteering during the July 19th event: timers, boaters, support crew etc. are all needed. To volunteer, please see the norwaytri.com website, or call the Trust at 739-2124. The goal is to establish the Norway Triathlon as one of Maine's favorite annual events, and an event that will benefit the entire community. It will be the tri with the view!

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