



THE WREN

August 2022



Wildflowers Are Back



Partners Make It All Possible



Thank You, Volunteers



Take a Hike

New Partnerships in Conservation

In 2021, a unique group of partners protected Stonefield Farm in Acton: SVT, Acton Conservation Trust (ACT), the Town of Acton, and Boston Area Gleaners (BAG), an organization dedicated to alleviating food insecurity. Together, we conserved 55 acres of the farm with an agricultural preservation restriction (APR) that also provided BAG with a new headquarters for its work.

This is just one of several SVT partnerships that have included groups from outside the typical “conservation” sphere.

In this case, BAG (a nonprofit organization) wanted to purchase the farm but needed to offset a large portion of the purchase price. The solution was for BAG to buy the farm for its fair market value of \$2.8 million and sell the APR to the Town and SVT for about \$1.9 million.

The Town’s Community Preservation Act (CPA) funds were an important source of funding, and SVT and ACT raised a modest amount from private individuals and a private foundation. But BAG itself played a major role by appealing to its own donor pool and by obtaining grants and loans available to hunger-relief organizations—funding that SVT and other land trusts cannot access.

Today, the farm resembles a construction site, with piles of dirt and lots of activity. The APR grants BAG a three-acre “envelope”



A sign at Stonefield Farm in Acton celebrates the partnership that protected the property as agricultural land. Boston Area Gleaners now uses the farm to grow produce for donation to hunger-relief organizations.



on the property for constructing greenhouses, an office, farm-worker housing, food storage, and truck-loading areas. The 52 acres beyond that envelope are permanently protected for farming and wildlife habitat.

We are currently wrapping up a similar effort to protect Prospect Hill Community Orchard in Harvard, owned by the Community Harvest Project (CHP), which donates all produce grown at the orchard to area food banks. CHP tapped its donor network to assist SVT and Harvard Conservation Trust with a fundraising campaign that will help pay for an APR to be held by the Town of Harvard and the Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources.

In Concord, SVT teamed up with the Concord Land Conservation Trust to help the Town and the Concord Housing Development Corporation buy seven acres of land known as Assabet River Bluff. Six acres along the river will be put into permanent conservation, and the remaining acre will be used to construct five units of much-needed affordable housing (see page 3).

None of these efforts would have succeeded without a complex partnership, and the fact that the projects serve multiple community goals helped garner public support for their success. And collaborative projects aren’t limited to just land protection. Pages 4 and 5 illustrate how SVT works with an assortment of partners to conserve and care for natural areas.

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youtube.com/SVTsightings

SVT is committed to being an equitable and inclusive organization that works in partnership with the full diversity of people in the region to ensure everyone feels welcome to enjoy local natural areas and participate in the efforts to care for these lands.

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Celebrating Our Partners

Lisa Vernegaard, Executive Director

Phew! In the past three years, SVT has played a key role in 22 successful land protection projects. It has taken a lot of effort, but we've enjoyed collaborating with great partners to protect land in towns throughout the region. We've also collaborated on several important habitat-restoration projects that will help our conserved lands support native wildlife for generations to come.

I celebrate the dedication and efforts of all these partners: landowners, volunteers, land trusts, local voters, municipal governments, state and federal agencies, and generous donors and foundations. I also celebrate that we are joining forces with new types of partners, like Boston Area Gleaners and Community Harvest Project—organizations that work to grow and harvest food for hunger relief.

The inclusion of multiple partners can certainly make for complex projects. Each group has its own mission, its own working style, and its own expectations. There can be many starts and stops and a lot of frustrations. Yet, it can also be terrifically rewarding and fun. We meet lots of new people who share a passion for conservation, and together we rejoice when an important natural area is protected or a distressed habitat shows sign of rebirth.

I am grateful to all of our many partners, and I look forward to working with new partners, and a greater diversity of partners, in the years to come. It will take all of us—with our different goals, our different perspectives, and our different skills—to protect and care for the natural areas and farms that make this region special.

Thank you,

**NATURE SIGHTINGS**

This **pair of ospreys** was photographed by Phil Sharpe in Sudbury. Although ospreys are skilled fishing birds, this image taken in early May shows the male carrying a branch in his talons. Ospreys build a large nest of sticks atop dead trees, on utility poles, or on nesting platforms. This couple, which took advantage of the stream habitat along the northern boundary of our Lyons-Cutler Reservation, nested atop a nearby ballfield's lighting pole.



Phil Sharpe

Success at Assabet River Bluff

Assabet River Bluff has been conserved! These seven acres along the Assabet River and the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail in Concord have been purchased by the Town of Concord and the Concord Housing Development Corporation. Six acres will be protected as open space, and one acre will be set aside for affordable housing.

SVT helped with fundraising and public outreach initiatives, and we will co-hold a conservation restriction with the Concord Land Conservation Trust. We are thrilled to have protected this beautiful public space that buffers the adjacent waterway. Thank you to everyone who supported the project. www.svtweb.org/arb



Wildflowers Are Back. Our years-long effort to fight invasive plants at Gowing's Swamp in Concord is showing signs of success. This past summer, a field once dominated by Japanese knotweed had become a colorful meadow of wildflowers and other native plants, including bee balm, Joe pye weed, white vervain, black-eyed Susan, and several types of goldenrods. A true pollinator's delight!

Upton Property To Be Protected



A 94-acre property on the Upton-Grafton line will soon be protected, thanks to a collaborative conservation effort. The Mechanic Street property includes a vernal pool and intermittent streams and is part of an important wildlife corridor that includes the nearby Upton State Forest.

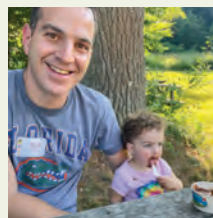
SVT helped structure the deal, and we processed over \$150,000 in donations raised by a group of Upton residents. The Town of Upton will use these funds, along with Community Preservation Act funds and a contribution from SVT, to purchase the property. SVT will hold a conservation restriction on the land. Thank you to those who supported this effort. www.svtweb.org/mechanic

Three New Reservations

Crawford Street Woodland, Northborough: SVT now owns this delightful, forested land along Crawford Street through a bequest from Juliette Dupont, who left the 24-acre property as wildlife habitat in her will.

Grist Mill Pond Extension, Sudbury/Marlborough: Thanks to a landowner who donated 4.5 acres to SVT, we've expanded our Grist Mill Pond Conservation Area, which buffers a vernal pool and is home to many native plants.

Oechsle Land, Sudbury: In 2008, Walter and Christa Oechsle gave SVT a CR on 8.9 acres that sit adjacent to King Philip Woods on Route 27. This year, the Oechsles' children donated the entire property to SVT, and the Sudbury Conservation Commission will hold the CR.



(L) SVT Staff; (R) Dany Pelletier

Lots of Fun at the Ice Cream Social. On July 20—one of the hottest days of a very hot summer—upwards of 150 SVT members gathered at Wolbach Farm for our Annual Ice Cream Social, where we enjoyed cones and cups served by Trombetta's Ice Cream Truck. Some members even braved the heat to join SVT Board Member Richard T.T. Forman on an Eco-Detective Tour of the grounds.

We look forward to seeing even more members next year at this always-delightful event!

Partners Make It All Possible

SVT rarely works alone. Whether conserving an expansive forest, restoring a pollinator habitat, or maintaining a walking trail, we collaborate with numerous partners in order to protect our region's natural areas for generations to come.



Prospect Hill Community Orchard Conservation and Hunger Relief

Land protection projects often require a variety of funding sources, as well as plenty of time to raise the money. In the case of Prospect Hill Community Orchard in Harvard, it has taken three years and financial commitments from individual donors, SVT, Harvard Conservation Trust, the Town of Harvard, the Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources, and the landowner—Community Harvest Project (CHP)—to raise the \$2.5 million needed to protect the orchard with an agricultural preservation restriction (APR).

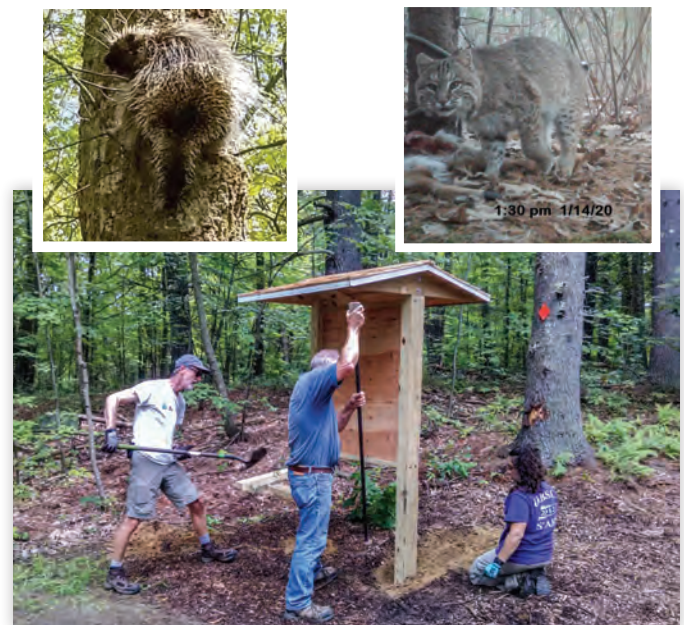
The orchard links a corridor of wildlife habitats that include Fruitlands, Dean's Hill, and the Oxbow National Wildlife Refuge. Once the APR is completed, CHP will use the \$2.5 million to endow its nonprofit mission of supplying produce to hunger-relief organizations. The orchard must always remain used as agricultural land, and a trail through the property will be available most of the year for public activities such as hiking and bird watching.

Forty Caves Creating Conservation Corridors

Forty Caves Conservation Area combines several properties that have been conserved over the last four decades through partnerships among SVT and the Towns of Berlin and Clinton.

At over 200 acres, Forty Caves is a testament to the benefits of collaboration and regional planning. By teaming up with conservation partners, we were able to leverage more funding from government and private sources. By conserving parcels that were adjacent to already conserved land, we protected large, intact forests where species like bobcat and porcupine can thrive.

Our partnership didn't end once the lands were protected. SVT also works with the two towns to care for the trails at Forty Caves. With the assistance of many volunteers, SVT handles routine maintenance, and we collaborate with the local Conservation Commissions on projects such as trail relocation, bridge building, and motorized vehicle enforcement. SVT also helped organize an ongoing invasive-species mapping effort on the Forty Caves lands.





Weed Warriors A Partnership of Volunteers and Conservation Groups

SVT launched our Weed Warrior Volunteer program in 2020, when public gatherings were restricted but people were eager to get outside. We taught interested volunteers (through videos and socially distanced meetings) how to remove harmful invasive plants like glossy buckthorn and Japanese barberry, and we certified some Weed Warriors to independently fight invasive plants on our properties.

Our partners in CISMA (Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area) agreed to expand the program to other organizations in the SVT region. The goal was to create a pool of volunteers who could help out anywhere that invasive plants threaten a conservation area. CISMA, coordinated by SVT's Kristin O'Brien, now manages the volunteer training and also posts Weed Warrior events on its website. www.cisma-suasco.org.

Dozens of eager volunteers have participated in training sessions and Weed Warrior Workdays, where they remove invasive plants in order to give native plants a chance to thrive and support our native wildlife.

Campbell Land Lending a Hand

Often, some of the most important partners in a project are the donors who make our work possible. Thanks to many generous supporters, SVT has a revolving fund that enables us to conserve land in urgent situations.

Recently, the Town of Boxborough was given 120 days to exercise its option to purchase 21 acres of land along Sargent and Littlefield Roads, a property that links several adjacent conserved lands in an important wildlife corridor. The short window gave the Town little opportunity to obtain state grants to make the purchase, and it faced the prospect of losing the land to development.

With our revolving fund, SVT will purchase and hold the property until the Town can buy it back from us and forever protect the land as open space. The Boxborough Conservation Trust also played a role by spearheading a community fundraising campaign that raised \$200,000 to help offset the Town's costs.

Forest Health An Educational Initiative

In 2019, SVT and the Metrowest Conservation Alliance (MCA) launched the Forest Health Initiative to help local conservation organizations make decisions about managing their wooded properties. SVT's Laura Mattei led trail walks with groups in Ashland and Carlisle where she described plant diversity, vernal pools, pest invasions, deer overbrowsing, and other factors that affect forest health. SVT and MCA also produced a Forest Health Toolkit to help landowners assess whether a forest can sustain both itself and the wildlife that rely upon it—and whether a habitat management plan is warranted.

This past spring, SVT and the Ashland Town Forest Committee created a self-guided Forest Health Walk along the trail at Cowassock Woods and the Ashland Town Forest on the Framingham–Ashland line. Designed for the general public, the trail includes 14 stops where visitors can scan a QR code and listen to a narration or read a description of nearby forest features.

www.svtweb.org/forest-health





Spotlight On...

...Improving CR Lands

The owners of land protected by a conservation restriction (CR) are important partners to SVT. These landowners can often enhance the habitat on their properties and still comply with the terms of the CR.

Luke Ascolillo recently purchased a 28-acre farm covered by a CR in Carlisle, and he has been working with SVT to remove invasives plants from the land around his new home. The property has a bit of everything: open fields, woods, wetlands, and even a certified vernal pool.



How are you improving the land's ecological features?

Removing invasives through targeted removal has played a role in allowing a number of native plant species to bounce back. This year, I've seen fox grapes around the field edges where it's been Asian bitter-sweet in the past, and I've had cherry and crab apple trees flower that I would have bet were dead. When mowing, I left a huge patch of clover just to grow. It was really amazing to hear all of the bees.

How has SVT helped?

I've received advice on invasives control—what natural practices work, but also what herbicides are best for particular species and when to treat.

What challenges have you faced?

As most folks have seen with invasives, it's not just a one and done; you really need to battle invasives for years in areas where they are well established. It's also critical to not replace one invasive with another. I've used an app, "Picture This," to identify a number of plants and trees to decide which to keep and which to remove.

While I don't run right to the sprayer, sometimes chemical treatment is necessary. When you take a controlled approach through direct application or cutting and painting, it takes significantly more time than just broadcast spraying.

Were you concerned the CR would be limiting?

I was initially, but it's important to fully review the CR to know what you are getting into. I knew I would have enough flexibility to respect the CR and enjoy the property the way I wanted to. I could see what the property once was and the potential of what it could be again. It's both rewarding and motivational when you see the impact the hard work has.



Thank You, Volunteers

SVT couldn't succeed without our dedicated volunteers, who maintain our trails, fight invasives, help with bird surveys, take photographs, lend a hand in our office, and do much, much more.

More than 30 of these valued conservationists attended our Volunteer Appreciation event in June, where we enjoyed a light supper and wonderful conversation. It was great to see everyone in person after two years of the pandemic.

Interested in volunteering? Visit our website to learn about our opportunities. www.svtweb.org/volunteer

Voice of the Volunteer

Joanna Welch started volunteering as a Weed Warrior in the spring of 2021 to help fight invasive plants on SVT reservations. She became certified to remove glossy buckthorn on her own, and she has also participated in group Workdays. We asked her what inspired her to become a Weed Warrior and what she enjoys about it.



My kids and I really enjoy exploring SVT properties, so I wanted to be able to make a positive impact that gave back to these special places. I think it's so important to protect our local ecosystem. People might walk through conservation land and just see plants, without realizing how much is actually invasive.

At the Workdays, it's been so fun to meet other people and I've learned a lot! But with two small kids, my availability rarely matches up. So I do more pulling on my own, and I've enjoyed getting acquainted with the lands in a totally different way.

It's been fascinating to explore them and find clues about how they were previously used. And it's very satisfying to see the impact I'm having in a tangible way, whether that's amassing large piles of pulled invasives or getting out some particularly large plants.



Take a Hike: Mainstone Farm

It has been 5 years since Mainstone Farm was protected and added to the complex of conservation lands that includes SVT's and the Town of Wayland's Hamlen Woods properties as well as adjacent town lands. Local Boy Scouts recently improved the trails by building two bridges over Snake Brook. David Liu built one with a team of volunteers (pictured) as part of his Eagle Project in April, and a group of Wayland scouts built the other as a service project in June.

Hiking options include a 4.5-mile circuit around the red trail and a 3.5-mile out-and-back walk along the blue trail. Plus, during the month of October, we'll map out a special 2-mile "anniversary hike" through Mainstone Farm that features stops where you can learn about the property and the conservation effort. Directions and a trail map: www.svtweb.org/hamlenwoods



SVT Sustainers: Members Giving Monthly

Become an SVT Sustainer and your monthly gift helps sustain our mission all year long.

- **It's easy.** Sign up once and specify how much you'd like to donate each month.
- **It's flexible.** You can change the amount or frequency at any time.
- **It's budget friendly.** Just \$10 a month adds up to \$120 per year!
- **It's environmentally friendly.** No paper reminders needed.

Contact Grace Fauver at gfauver@svtweb.org for more information, or visit www.svtweb.org/donate to sign up today. Thank you!

Collaborating for Conservation

Vernal Pool Assessment.

Led by Professor Scott Shumway, Wheaton College students documented and certified the vernal pool at SVT's Sawink Farm in Westborough. This documentation provides important biological information that we will incorporate into our management of the property.



Bridges for Bikes. At Whitehall Woods in Hopkinton, Boy Scout Ashwath Sridhar is leading the effort to build a bridge over a muddy section of trail as part of his

Eagle Project. Members of New England Mountain Bike Association and Bay State Trail Riders Association are helping to design the bridge, which must support not only hikers but bicycles and horses as well.

Trail Improvements.

Our Walkup and Robinson Memorial Reservation in Westborough was spruced up during a summer workday, thanks to several volunteers who trimmed vegetation and also built a rolling grade dip to divert water off the trail and reduce the risk of erosion.



Nancy Wright

Saving the Hemlocks.

SVT has released colonies of *S. tsugae* beetles at Smith Conservation Land in Littleton to control the hemlock woolly adelgid (HWA) insects that suck sap from hemlocks and eventually weaken and kill the trees. Both insects are native to Asia, and the *S. tsugae* feed exclusively on HWA eggs and nymphs. The *S. tsugae* beetles have been released in the U.S. for 30 years with no signs of adverse effects on native species.





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New Partnerships in Conservation

See page 1



You're Invited!

Annual Meeting Planned for October 6

SVT invites our members to join us in the barn at Wolbach Farm for our 2022 Annual Meeting.

Thursday, October 6

6:00 p.m.

Wolbach Farm, Sudbury

Highlights will include the presentation of our **Annual Conservation Awards** and a recap of our **conservation successes** from the past year. Plus, SVT's Christa Collins and Dan Stimson will give keynote presentations about Valuing Nature's Services and Identifying Priorities for Conservation.

Look for more details in our Monthly News e-mail newsletter and on our website, www.svtweb.org.

RSVP: www.svtweb.org/AM2022



The recipients of our Annual Conservation Awards posed for this group photo at the conclusion of the 2019 Annual Meeting. We are looking forward to meeting in person again after two years of virtual events.