

Fall 2006 Newsletter

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### *From The President's Desk:*

Dear Members and Friends -

This column usually chronicle's current land conservation and education programs. Today's column takes a different perspective --- money. What does it cost the Bolton Conservation Trust (BCT) to protect land in Bolton? How is it paid for? What does it cost to run a nature camp for 185 young people, and sponsor a popular school nature program? And what new town wide effort can help our taxes and help conserve Bolton's unique natural resources?

The BCT is a non-profit corporation with two sources of income: annual memberships and an occasional major capital campaign. This year we received \$22,454 in annual memberships, from over 200 members.

We set our summer camp fees relatively low so that as many children can participate as possible. The fees cover camp costs and there is usually a few thousand dollars left over, which is enough to fund the ELF program, a hands-on nature study program in Bolton's schools run by over fifty parent volunteers. The BCT spends a modest amount of money on these newsletters, our website and communications with our members. Much of our membership funds, and all of our capital funds, are spent conserving land in a variety of ways.

Many land projects are just helping a long time landowner donate their land, or a perpetual conservation restriction on it. In the last three years we have helped, or are now helping six landowners protect nearly 200 acres. While land gifts are extremely generous, BCT incurs appraisal and legal costs, which have been rising. One gift recently cost more than \$4,000.

The BCT sometimes funds a "creative development" where most of a parcel is protected and one or a few house lots are created. For example we are now working with the Mentzer family to preserve 25 acres on Main St, at no cost to the town, by developing one adjacent house lot. While we usually recoup our costs in the end, the cost of hiring engineers and navigating Bolton's development process is significant.

A few times, on very big projects, the BCT has asked town meeting voters to contribute town funds, such as the Nashoba Valley Winery and the 171 acre Nicewicz & Schartner farms. We are thankful for the overwhelming majorities that passed these articles, but both still received most of their funding from other sources, including significant contributions from the BCT. On some other big projects the BCT contributes to a town led effort, such as contributing \$40k to the Conservations Commission's recent protection of the 77 acre Stephenson land, the centerpiece of a 450 acre preserve.

One of the best values in protected acres per dollar has been the BCT's spending on research of new town bylaws that protect land. We collaborated with the Planning Board and Selectmen on Open Space zoning and Recreational Zoning which have protected over 800 acres.

Today, the BCT is working with a group of town boards to have Bolton adopt the Community Preservation Act (CPA). Warrant articles are being sponsored for a spring town meeting by the Conservation Commission, Planning Board, Historical Commission and Housing Partnership. If passed, Bolton would join over 100 CPA towns. It would add a 3% surcharge to our property tax bills, which the state then matches with grants. Low

income residents are exempt, as are seniors with below average income. CPA money can be used for land conservation, new recreational facilities, historic preservation and affordable housing.

Five years ago Bolton considered CPA, but was concerned that the state might not come through with its matching funds. Since then the state has delivered, for example Stow has received over \$1.5 million of state CPA matching funds. If Bolton had passed CPA, state matching funds could have been used for many projects that the town is doing anyway, including farm preservation, new playing fields, and renovations to the historic library building. CPA looks like a tax increase, but if Bolton had

passed CPA the state grants would probably have resulted in lower taxes today than we are now paying. The BCT encourages you to vote yes on CPA.

Soon you will receive the annual membership mailing from the Bolton Conservation Trust. We hope you will be a BCT member for 2007, and that now that you have a better idea where the money goes, please consider contributing what you can. And new this year, family memberships or higher can register their children immediately for this summer's Tom Denney Nature camp.

-Ken Swanton

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## *Animals in our Backyards*

An often mentioned but frequently misunderstood mammal in Bolton is the fisher. The common name "fisher-cat" leads many people to believe it is related to cats. In fact, the fisher is a member of the weasel family, not the cat family. Like a weasel, it has a long slender body, a long tail, a pointed snout, small round ears, and short legs. Its long, sleek build allows it to move sinuously over the ground and up and down trees. Think furry snake with short legs and you'll get the picture. Unlike a snake, though, it can also bound rapidly through the woods.

As a predator, the fisher is often portrayed as a vicious beast, and fear causes people to exaggerate its size and hunting ability. It's not uncommon for someone who has caught a glimpse of a fisher to estimate its weight at 30 pounds or more, and to believe that it could take down a healthy adult deer. Indeed, I have heard this from several Bolton residents. But how large is a fisher, and what kind of prey does it usually take?

Wildlife biologists from both the Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife and the Northeast Furbearer Resources Technical Committee report that an adult male usually reaches a weight of 8-15 pounds and length of about 3 feet, while an adult female typically achieves a weight of 4-6 pounds and length of two and a half feet. Rarely, a male may approach a weight of 20 pounds and length of four feet. The largest fisher on record was a male trapped in Maine, tipping the scale at 20 pounds, 2 ounces. So, a fisher usually weighs only about as much as a house cat. It may appear much larger than a cat as a result of its length and long, lush coat, but a 30 pound fisher would be extremely rare.

While fishers are capable hunters, they generally prey on small mammals like squirrels and rabbits, and sometimes medium sized mammals like porcupines. They may take down larger animals that are sick or weak. Fishers can and do kill fawns, but not healthy adult deer. A fisher may occasionally take down an adult deer weakened by starvation, injury, or disease. Fishers are also quite willing to scavenge adult deer that died of other causes. Thus, the discovery of a fisher feeding at a deer carcass does not necessarily mean that the fisher itself killed the deer.



Native to Canada and parts of the northern United States, the fisher is a forest dweller that prefers relatively mature woods with some dead or dying trees riddled with cavities. The fisher searches these holes for cavity nesting mammals and birds to eat, and uses the larger cavities for its own nesting.

The fisher's range in this country shrunk dramatically after European settlement as a result of the clearing of forests for agriculture, and of intensive hunting

pressure. It's silky, lush, dark brown fur was in demand, and trapping took a heavy toll. However, with reforestation and stricter hunting regulations, the fisher, like many other North American mammals, has made a remarkable recovery and has reclaimed much of its former range. We now find their tracks regularly in Bolton.

Recognizing fisher tracks in snow is not difficult, and following them can be great fun, as you reconstruct the fisher's adventures. The 2-3 inch wide foot prints typically show five toes with claw marks, and are often arranged in what we call a "2-2 bounding pattern". You can see pairs of paw prints separated from each other by about two to four feet. Within each pair, you will see one footprint slightly ahead of the other. When the fisher slows down, the pattern is less regular, but you may be able to follow the tracks

as they meander through the forest, circling and exploring all the largest and oldest rotting trees, as the animal explores the holes in these snags for squirrels, mice, and nesting birds. You may even see evidence of its tearing away at the rotting wood to get at the cavity occupants. Occasionally, you might discover the remains of the fisher's meal at the base of such a tree, perhaps punctuated with its urine and "scat", the tracker's delicate term for animal poop.

Curious? Arm yourself with a basic tracking book and look carefully the next time you course the snow covered trails of Vaughn Hills or Rattlesnake Hill. Keep an eye on the Nashaway Trackers events page at the BCT website and consider coming along on one of our winter walks.

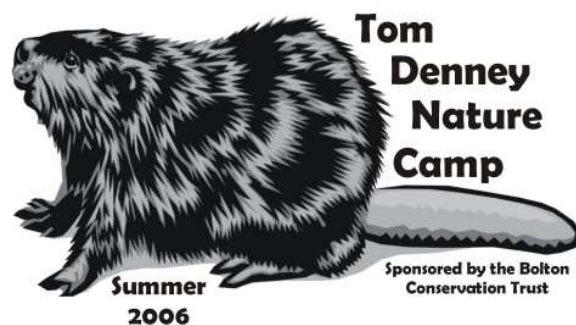
Janet Pesaturo

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## *Tom Denney Nature Camp*

The 2007 Tom Denney Nature Camp schedule is on the Bolton Conservation Trust web site. As mentioned in the President's letter, there is a new benefit for memberships at the Family level or higher. You no longer have to wait to find out if the week you want is available. As a Family Member, you can register your children for the Tom Denney Nature Camp and get your confirmation within ten business days.

The 2007 Counselor in Training application will be on the Trust web site in January. In keeping with our goal of making environmental learning fun, a three session orientation for prospective CIT's will be held this spring. Betsy Kyle, the Camp Director, has offered to make this program available to Trust Members. Pond Life, Trees in Our Backyard and What Animal Lives Here are among the topics to be covered. Sessions will take place in the Trust office in the Emerson Building. Dates will be announced in the Winter Newsletter, due out in February/March 2007.



Every year, there is a new design for the Tom Denney Nature Camp t-shirt. This year, we invite the campers to submit ideas for the shirt. The winning design will be included in the Spring Newsletter and the winner will receive a packet of Tracking Cards from *Keeping Track*. Entries can be sent to the Trust at P.O. Box 14, Bolton, MA 01740.

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## *Bolton Conservation Trust Annual Meeting*

*Save this date:* The 2007 Annual Meeting will be held on Sunday, March 25, 2007 in the Davis Hall of

the Federated Church in Bolton. Details to follow in the Winter 2007 Newsletter.

***The Bolton Conservation Trust***

*Established 1974*

*Dedicated to its mission, "to assist in and promote the preservation of the rural character of Bolton, to preserve and maintain conservation areas, and to educate the public concerning the use of natural resources."*

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***Trust Administrator: Alice Roemer***

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***Bolton Conservation Trust  
2007 Annual Membership Drive  
Coming Soon To Your Local Mail Box!!***

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