

Winter 2007 Newsletter

From the President's Desk: It's Time for Bolton to Adopt CPA

This spring Bolton voters will have the opportunity to pass the Community Preservation Act (CPA). The Bolton Conservation Trust supports this proposal which is sponsored by many town boards.

What is the CPA?

CPA is a state grant program that was created in 2000. Towns have to vote to become a CPA town, and so far over 100 towns have, including Stow and Harvard.

How does CPA work?

It works like a 401k program, with a match. It would add a 3% charge to our tax bills, which would go into a CPA fund. The state then adds matching dollars to the fund. This pool of CPA funds could then be used for town projects that are voted on at future town meetings, and as a result the state matching funds wind up subsidizing these projects.

How does it help our taxes if it starts out as a 3% surcharge?

The key is to use the CPA money on things the town would buy anyway. For example, CPA funds can be used for some of the upcoming Emerson school rehab project. In this way the state helps pay for it. As a result of using state grants in place of our tax dollars, the CPA program slows the growth of our taxes.

Has Bolton ever voted on the CPA before?

Yes, back in 2001 both Bolton and Stow considered becoming CPA towns. It passed in Stow, but not in Bolton. Since then Stow has gotten \$1.5 million in state CPA grants. Bolton has gotten none. If it had passed we would have received \$1.3 million so far. We could have used these state grants to defray much of the town's cost of two big farm preservation projects, as well as the new soccer fields on Forbush Mill road, and a significant portion of the library project.

When will the town vote on CPA?

CPA must pass two votes. First, it must be approved at the April 2nd Special Town Meeting. Then, it must also be approved in the town ballot election on May 14.

Who decides how CPA funds are spent?

The town meeting still decides all spending items. There would be a new CPA advisory group that would make a recommendation, but just like today each project is only approved at town meeting and in the ballot box.

What can CPA funds be spent on?

CPA funds can be spent in any of four areas: historic buildings and resources, open space and farm preservation, affordable housing, and recreational land and playing fields. Ten percent of the CPA funds must be spent

in each of the first three areas, and the balance can be spent anywhere. |

Since the state match is the key, will they keep it up?

The state has matched town CPA funds on a dollar for dollar basis every year so far, and this is expected to continue for a while. However, the state gets its CPA funds from deed fees collected at the court house on real-estate transactions, and since the housing market has been off, these funds have slowed. In addition, more towns have jumped on the CPA gravy train. As a result the state match is expected to decline and not remain at the dollar for dollar level. The 3% surcharge is proposed for Bolton, because it would give us the most state matching funds, as some funds are reserved only for towns that are at 3%.

Which town boards are proposing CPA?

CPA is co-sponsored by the Planning Board, Conservation Commission, Park and Recreation, Historical Commission, Housing Authority and Housing Partnership.

Why does the Bolton Conservation Trust support CPA?

Conservation efforts in Bolton have enjoyed strong voter support, and usually have gotten state grants as well. While many town investments squeak through in the ballot box, voters have supported open space efforts by more than 2 to 1, and farm protection by more than 3 to 1. If we are

likely to protect more of our landmark farms and forests anyway, why not use more state grants and less tax dollars? CPA funds can also help preserve the rural character of Bolton by subsidizing the upkeep of historic town buildings, adding new playing fields, and helping to more gracefully meet state housing mandates.

What about people that cannot afford the surcharge?

While CPA is expected to slow the growth of taxes for all taxpayers, it is the best deal for those least able to pay taxes, since households below a certain income level would not pay the 3% CPA tax surcharge at all. Today this cut-off is a family income level below \$73,280 for a family of 4. Senior citizen families of 2 with an income under \$73,280 would also pay no CPA tax.

How can I find out more about CPA?

You can watch a re-broadcast on channel 10 of a public forum on Bolton's CPA on Thursday night March 22 at 7 pm. You can also read about CPA at www.communitypreservation.org And come to town meeting on April 2nd and you will not have to wait for other articles, as CPA is the only thing on the agenda.

- Ken Swanton

Coolidge Land Back Under the Plow

This past October, I became the leaseholder of the Bolton Conservation Trust-owned land known as the Coolidge APR. This parcel is approximately twenty-three acres of land in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts' Agriculture Preservation Restriction (APR) program. Under the

terms of APR, the state buys the development rights to agricultural land, that is, it essentially pays the owner the difference between the fair-market value and the agricultural value of the land. The owner is then obligated use the land for agricultural purposes.

This agricultural acreage is located near the junction of Berlin and Farm Roads. From approximately 1830 through 1900 it was the site of the town's Poor Farm, which housed "vagrants," according to historical references. The land was most recently owned by Bob Coolidge, who still lives just steps away.

It is my intention to use this land for the production of vegetable crops. I have started by opening up a small piece of the land that fronts Farm Road. This plot is showing itself to be very gravelly, with shallow topsoil. It is likely that efforts in

2007 will be limited to soil improvement through cover-cropping with legumes such as yellow clover and alfalfa.

I will also be researching fencing and irrigation options.

I would like to thank the BCT for the commitment they have made to preserving agricultural land, and for generous lease terms they have provided me with in order that I might succeed in a small agricultural enterprise.

-Jem Mix

Environmental Learning with Four Winds

On Wednesday January 24, approximately 40 volunteers gathered in the Florence Sawyer School cafeteria to study predators and prey in our second environmental learning workshop of the year. "Hunter-Hunted" is the theme of this winter unit. Rob Anderegg of Four Winds Nature Institute traveled from Vermont to instruct our volunteers about the intricate relationship between predators and prey in the natural world. Through activities such as a puppet show, a story about the shifting balance and interdependence of predators and prey told through a felt storyboard, and animal skits the participants understood how hunting animals have instinctive and learned strategies to help them survive in the wild. In comparison, hunted (prey) animals have also developed strategies for their own survival. Parents enter their children's classrooms to present this informative topic after the training workshop. In the spring, volunteers can look forward to learning more about nature's "Adaptations" at the

final Four Winds workshop of the school year. Mark your calendars for March 21!



Amy McLean and Noreen Beck

If you have any questions or would like to learn more about the program, please contact Noreen Beck or Tina Flaherty. The Bolton Conservation Trust generously supports Four Winds.

Animals In Our Backyards

One February morning, about week after a few inches of powdery snow had fallen, I went out to scout around at one of the Nashaway Trackers' project areas on conservation land in Harvard. I was hoping to find tracks of fox, which I had smelled there on a previous outing, and otter, which we suspect make use of the wetland habitat. But within minutes after stepping onto the ice, I noticed something even more interesting, standing out from among the deer, coyote, and squirrel tracks: a trail of feline footprints.

There are a lot of house cats on the loose, but measurement of the footprints, step length and trail width confirmed that this animal was too large to be a house cat. A bobcat! I had seen tracks of the wildcat, as it sometimes called, in Harvard on one occasion last year, and have seen them repeatedly in one area of Bolton, but infrequently enough that it's still an event worthy of celebration. I've never seen the actual animal in the wild. Some expert trackers who have been studying bobcats in Massachusetts for years boast only a few sightings, the most fleeting of glimpses, before the elusive predator fades into the landscape.

A wetland with a lot of shrubby cover, nearby forest and rocky terrain is a good place to look for bobcat tracks. The stealthy feline likes to hunt at the edge of wetland or meadow, lurking in the brush, unseen and unheard by the small prey animals that frequent those habitats, and then retreat for a nap in the quiet and safety of a rocky crevice. So, the wetland where I was tracking was just right for a wildcat, but I hadn't expected to be so lucky.

More common in Central and Western Massachusetts, bobcats are considered rare,

if not absent, in the eastern third of the state. We aren't sure why that is, but it has been suggested that the scarcity of suitable rocky ledges for cover limits their range expansion further east. I find this unlikely to be the whole story, since bobcats are well able to make use of other types of cover, such as dense thickets, brush piles, hollow logs, etc., elsewhere in the country where



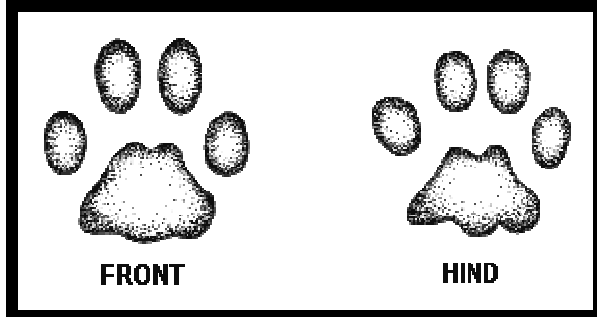
Bobcat (*Felis Rufus*)

in northern states, where winters are cold and prey less abundant, bobcats require much larger home ranges in order to find enough food. Fragmentation of habitat, as caused by development, probably has a substantial impact on bobcats in the north, which could explain why they are rare in eastern Massachusetts. In warm climates where prey is abundant year round, the wildcat can make a living on much less land and seems better able to adapt to a fragmented landscape. In some parts of the south, in fact, the bobcat is abundant even near densely populated suburbs. It is generally absent, though, in urban areas.

I continued to follow the trail of cat tracks across the wetland, looking, er, eh, sniffing, for signs or urine spraying, a behavior the bobcat shares with its domesticated cousin. I found none. Either a female, I thought,

since females spray less often than males, or a transient bobcat who wanted to pass through the area undetected by a resident cat.

Male and female bobcats differ not only in scent marking behavior, but also in diet. The approximately 20 pound female preys almost exclusively on small animals, such as rodents and rabbits. The male, too, consumes plenty of small prey, but also hunts larger animals, including deer. He usually takes fawns or weakened adults, but is known to kill healthy adult deer, occasionally, as well. This is an amazing accomplishment, given his average weight of about 30 pounds, and solitary hunting style. But this difference in male and female diet gives them a decided survival advantage. It reduces competition for food between the sexes, allowing male and female home ranges to overlap, making better use of habitat, and facilitating mating.



Bobcat tracks

Once at the other side of the wetland, I lost the trail in a muddle of deer and coyote tracks. Trying to recover it, I continued on and reached bare ice, then bare land. The trail was gone. Just as the bobcat itself so adeptly slips from view as it meanders through the landscape, so now did its tracks vanish.

I celebrated the privilege of but a brief glimpse into this wildcat's travels, as I paused to take in the beauty of the surrounding expanse, and consider its future. Will this property still be bobcat habitat in 50 years? How will we manage the protected lands of Bolton and Harvard? How safely can animals such as the bobcat travel from one such protected refuge to another? To what extent will development in these towns reduce connectivity of conserved lands, and what can we do to maintain or improve it as development progresses? How we answer these questions, how much we understand that our own future is inextricably linked to that of wild creatures, and how much we are willing to take action to ensure their future, and ultimately our own, will determine whether this elusive feline will continue to eke out a living here, or quietly slip away, receding to towns further west, into ever shrinking habitat, in ever shrinking numbers.

Janet Pesaturo

BCT Annual Meeting

Naturalist Marcia Wilson of *Eyes on Owls* will be our guest presenter at this year's annual meeting. The program will start at 3:00 P.M. with Marcia leading a walk through the Powder Hill Conservation area to acquaint us with the owl habitats in our own forest. Then we will head back to Davis Hall for a short Annual Meeting, followed by Marcia's presentation

of "Who's Watching You? Owls of the World." The program will end with dinner catered by J's at the Winery. Please RSVP by March 20th so we can properly prepare for food and seating.

Phone: (978) 779-2754 or (978) 779-6954 to make your reservation for a wonderful evening.

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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Bolton Conservation Trust 2007 Annual Meeting

March 25, 2007, 3:00PM, Davis Hall, First Parish of Bolton

Bolton Conservation Trust, Inc.
P.O. Box 14
Bolton, MA 01740

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