Message from the President

DINGLEY DELL CONSERVED!

I continue to be in awe over your generosity in support of Opacum’s effort to conserve Dingley Dell! With your help, Opacum is now the proud caretaker of this new public conservation property, The Clayton and Margaret Thomas Nature Preserve. A local committee led by our volunteer Directors from Brimfield will be leading the effort to develop the trails, parking and interpretive signage on this property. It will be a truly wonderful addition to Brimfield, Brimfield State Forest and for the surrounding communities – again – thank you!!

In addition to the many new conservation projects we are undertaking, we are also busy monitoring and stewarding our properties, making sure that the almost 2,000 acres of conservation land spread over 22 parcels entrusted to us are protected in their natural state. Opacum Land Trust is working on many fronts, but our work and success ultimately comes down to the efforts of our members, volunteers and donors – to you. So please support this work by donating to our spring appeal (which automatically renews your membership), by coming to our events, and joining us as a volunteer.

I look forward to seeing you!
Howie Fife, Jr.
Together, we did it!

With your help, Opacum Land Trust has permanently conserved the 76 acres of wooded hillside known as Dingley Dell, and which will become the Clayton and Margaret Thomas Nature Preserve. Though not yet developed with trails and parking, please keep an eye out for our e-newsletter about tours we will lead there and volunteer opportunities to help with the trail development over the next year. I cannot thank our volunteer Board of Directors enough for all their hard work, as well as our many other volunteers, members, donors and corporate sponsors.

The beautiful rural character of our region is a big part of what makes it a special place to live and to visit – and our Tour Opacum Bike Ride for Land Conservation is an effort to encourage a large group of locals and visitors to our region to ride our back roads and fall in love with our towns as a place to live or to visit. I am very pleased to let you know that the Sturbridge Tourism Association is supporting this year’s marketing and operational expenses for Tour Opacum with a generous grant. And I am thrilled to tell you that Southbridge Credit Union has agreed to be our lead sponsor for the event – ensuring that we have the local financial support to continue to grow Tour Opacum into a major annual event.

Thinking more deeply about the special place we call home, Opacum is pleased to announce that our annual fall dinner, what we are now calling “Fall for Opacum”, will feature Landscape Historian, Geologist and author Robert Thorson, whose books on stone walls and the New England landscape are among my favorites. Drawing on his extensive research on Walden Pond and his new guidebook to this national landmark, his talk will highlight for us the reasons why we can and should appreciate the special places that surround us – our very own “Waldens”.

As always – thank you for your support!

Opacum’s Volunteer Board of Directors and Officers

President
Howard Fife, Jr.,
Vice President
Leslie A. Duthie
Treasurer
Jennifer Morrison-Dominquez,
Clerk
Jennifer Ohop
Directors
Glenn Colburn
Mark L. Conners
Robert A. Corry
Christopher DeBruin
Scott Gerrish
Alan F. Smith

Staff
Exec. Director
Ed Hood
Exec. Assistant
Anne Renaud-Jones
Our Forest for the Birds:
A Special Tour at Opacum’s Morneau Farm in Southbridge

With the birding day “half gone” (for birders, anyway), Scott Gerrish, a licensed professional forester and Opacum Land Trust board member, Bill Cormier, birder and owner of The Bird Store and More (Sturbridge), and Chris Capone, a Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation service forester, lead 20 Opacum members and friends in a program focusing on managing forests “for the Birds”. Opacum’s Morneau Farm is not open to the public, except for special guided programs such as this, so it was a special treat to have a guided tour of the property.

The walk focused on Opacum’s recent timber harvesting at the Morneau Farm, 120 acres of which is covered in forest. On the east side of the property our management plan included a five-acre “clear cut” to mimic a natural “set back” of the forest’s ecological clock; changing a mostly middle age forest back to an open, early successional stage. Early successional stage forest land has a greater variety of habitat and food sources than a mature forest and provides needed diversity to habitat types within the surrounding mature regional forest.

On the west side of the property Opacum conducted a more traditional selective harvest, removing diseased Hemlock and poor-quality trees. The goal here was to develop a diverse mix of forest species types and age classes, while increasing the diversity of wildlife habitat. Mast (food) producing trees were “released” by harvesting adjacent trees that were inhibiting their growth and seed, nut or fruit production.
Our State Senator Anne Gobi energizes the crowd and discussed the Public Lands Protection Act and the importance of community engagement, along with providing more information about her work as Chair of the Massachusetts Legislature’s Joint Committee on Environment, Natural Resources and Agriculture.

Our State Representative Todd Smola, seen here with volunteer Anna Ozolins, updated us on his efforts to support environmental legislation in the State House and praised the work of Opacum Land Trust.

The 2018 Annual Meeting & Pancake Breakfast was held on March 31st at the Holland Community Center. With close to 100 in attendance, we caught up on all of the hard work the Opacum Directors, volunteers and staff have been doing, saw old friends, met new ones and checked out some great new Opacum Land Trust items.

Thank you to everyone who helped: Walt Ohop, Glen Clark and Mike Jones in the kitchen; to Anna Ozolins for all of her help organizing the event and the raffles; and to Anne Hall and many others for their hard work helping make this wonderful event happen. Thanks to our long-standing supporters who contribute generously to this event:

Tip Top Country Store, Shaw’s, BigY, Stop&Shop, WalMart; Carol and Ken Erling, Fern Hollow Farm, Maple Ledge Farm, and The Bird Store & More (Thanks Dezzie!!)

Opacum vice president Leslie Duthie, Anne-Renaud Jones and volunteer William Hood help sell Opacum items.

Kids from the Roots In Nature group joined us for pancakes before heading outdoors for their hike.

Long time members and friends share breakfast and news of Opacum events and projects.

Kitchen crew Walt Ohop and Glenn Clark
**Community Engagement**

**Roots in Nature**

As Opacum Land Trust grows, it is seeking new ways to engage with the many communities it serves. There are many formal and informal groups in our towns that seek to help others and improve the quality of life for all.

One of Opacum’s volunteers is Becky delaGorgendiere, a leader with the community non-profit, *Roots in Nature* that runs a small co-operative homeschool and other programs that focus on getting kids and their parents outdoors and into nature. If you were at our annual meeting and pancake breakfast, they were the group of happy youngsters sitting up front. On March 27th, Becky and other parents led their kids to Opacum Woods in Sturbridge to pick up trash and explore. They dragged an old metal bed frame out of the woods where Board President Howie Fife was able to pick it up and take to recycling. The kids got to explore the late winter landscape of Opacum Woods, including the rock shelter site, pictured here. Thank you to *Roots In Nature*!

“Our hope is that kids want to spend more time with us in nature and less time inside using screens. Parents are always talking about how their children are more easy going and relaxed after attending Roots in Nature events. They’re also surprised that they feel the benefits too”.

Becky delaGorgendiere

Find more information on Roots in Nature:
- RootsinNature.org
- www.facebook.com/RootsinNature.org
- www.facebook.com/groups/RootsInNature

**We Cleaned Up Holland!**

Last year, Holland resident Anne Hall organized and inspired the first ever town wide clean-up event. Over 70 people showed up and the results were quite obvious.

This year, she again shared her passion for this small town, partnering with the Holland Highway Department, the Holland Police Department and the Holland Fire Department. Additionally, she was armed with a $500 Grant from The Last Green Valley and the support of Opacum Land Trust.

Anne’s goal was not only to clean up this pretty little town, but also to increase morale and spirit in this community wide effort, and build awareness of The Last Green Valley and Opacum Land Trust. Participants were treated to a pizza party afterwards, a reward for their hard work.

Thank you to ALL volunteers!

*Keeping The Last Green Valley Clean and Green!*

Anne Hall whipped up *more than 85 volunteers* for a 2nd successful Clean Up Holland Earth Day event. *Among the folks digging for roadside trash were none-other than Todd Smola and Anne Gobi.*

*A total of 2.5 tons of garbage was picked up!* Keep up the good work Anne!
Opacum Land Trust is partnering with Southbridge Bicycle, Rapscallion Brewery and Hyland Orchard for our 2nd annual Bike Ride for Land Conservation, scheduled for Sunday, July 8th, 2018.

We are thrilled to announce the generous sponsorship of the Southbridge Credit Union, as well as a grant from the Sturbridge Tourist Association for us to increase our marketing efforts. We hope to more than double our ridership in 2018.

The ride is designed for all levels of ability, with a choice of four route lengths—all through the heart of Opacum’s service area.

All routes start and end at Rapscallion Brewery, where riders are synchronized to wrap up between 1:30 and 2:00pm. THEN we’ll celebrate all afternoon with live music from the Tony Soul project, food and craft beer at the beautiful Hyland Orchard Pavilion. Join us for the after-party - bring along lawn chairs and blankets to enjoy the music and festivities, or try a round of Disc Golf on Rapscallion’s 18-hole course.

Rapscallion Brewery is creating a special “Opacum Ale” for the occasion – celebrating the land trust’s namesake, *Ambystoma Opacum*, the blue marbled salamander, a rare and threatened species that inhabits this region. Proceeds from the sale of Opacum Ale will be donated to Opacum Land Trust to support its land conservation work.

Register at BikeReg.com or contact us for more information at info@opacumlt.org. Share our Facebook event or download a flyer at OpacumLT.org.

Mary Trifone

Long-time Opacum Land Trust supporter Mary M. Trifone, 98, passed away earlier this year, ending a beautiful life journey filled with a love of family, friends, nature, community and deep faith. Born in Southbridge in 1919, Mary was the last surviving of eight children born to Vincenzo and Nunziata Vecchia.

Mary touched countless lives through her community and volunteer work. She was particularly proud of her more than 20 years with the Girl Scouts, where she was chairwoman of a 14 Troop Council. Mary was a close friend of Claire Birtz, and through her participation in the creation of Opacum’s Claire Birtz Sanctuary in Southbridge, became a supporter of our work. She asked that in lieu of flowers, that donations in her memory may be made to Opacum Land Trust.
Many of us have a personal place in Nature where we find refuge, inspiration, or just pleasantly pass the time. Typically, it’s an ordinary place defined by our local landscape of rock, water, sky, and woods. There we can join other wild creatures to “re-create” our earthly sense of place.

For our Fall dinner this year we are honored to feature guest speaker Dr. Robert M. Thorson, whose topic will be “Where’s Your Walden? Following Thoreau’s example of finding a local refuge in nature”

Dr. Thorson will connect his lifetime of scholarship in the subjects of Henry Thoreau, geology, and New England’s landscape to the special character of our region.

Writing the first-ever *The Guide to Walden Pond* has helped Professor Thorson understand how Thoreau created his “sense” of place. He stayed local, merging history, Nature, landscape, and literature into a unified aesthetic.

Dr. Thorson is a professor of geology at the University of Connecticut, the author of seven books, a columnist and leader of the “Stone Wall Initiative”, documenting and researching one of the defining elements of the New England landscape. His new book, *The Guide to Walden Pond*, was published in March, providing explorers and readers a new opportunity to learn deeply about the natural and cultural history of this iconic American place.

Please join us for our annual “Fall for Opacum” dinner – September 19th at the Publick House in Sturbridge. Tickets go on sale in July, or you may reserve your seats now by contacting Anne Renaud-Jones.

Phone: 508-347-9144, or email: Membership@OpacumLT.org,
Upcoming Opacum Events
Find us on Facebook, Call 508-347-9144 or email us at info@opacumlt.org

Tuesday, June 26th; 6:00 to 8:00pm:
Wild Edible Plants with Russ Cohen
This is a very popular program. Reserve a spot now! Join Russ Cohen, expert forager and author of Wild Plants I Have Known...and Eaten, for this early evening ramble to learn about dozens of wild edible plant species. There is no charge for this event, but we do limit participation to insure an enjoyable experience. Because this location is still undecided, we will provide directions to those who RSVP. Call 508-347-9144 or email Anne at membership@opacumlt.org.

Sunday, July 8th: Our 2nd Annual TourOpacum Bike Ride for Land Conservation.
Mark your calendars and spread the word. See page 6 for details.

Wednesday, September 29th:
Our “Fall for Opacum” Dinner at the Publick House featuring Dr. Robert M. Thorson.
Mark your calendars and spread the word. See page 7 for details.

Calling Bill Cormier an “experienced birder” is a gross understatement. A generous and loyal supporter of Opacum, Bill joined us on Saturday, May 5th for our special tour Opacum’s Morneau Farm in Southbridge, helping participants to identify the species present that day. The following are the many birds he heard or saw at the Morneau Farm on Saturday, May 5th: American Crow, American Goldfinch, American Robin, Black-and-white Warbler, Black-capped Chickadee, Black-throated Blue Warbler, Blue Jay, Blue-grey Gnat Catcher, Blue-headed Vireo, Blue-winged Warbler, Brown Creeper, Brown-headed Cowbird, Chipping Sparrow, Common Raven, Common Yellowthroat, Cooper’s Hawk, Downy Woodpecker, Eastern Phoebe, Eastern Towhee, European Starling, Gray Catbird, Great Crested Flycatcher, Hermit Thrush, House Sparrow, Mourning Dove, Northern Cardinal, Ovenbird, Pileated Woodpecker, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Red-shouldered Hawk, Red-tailed Hawk, Red-winged Blackbird, Savannah Sparrow, Song Sparrow, Tree Swallow, Turkey Vulture, White-breasted Nuthatch, Wild Turkey. Thanks Bill!