

Waltham Land Trust

is a non-profit corporation dedicated to preserving our community's natural resources for the future through education, open space acquisition and protection.



JOURNAL SPRING 2026

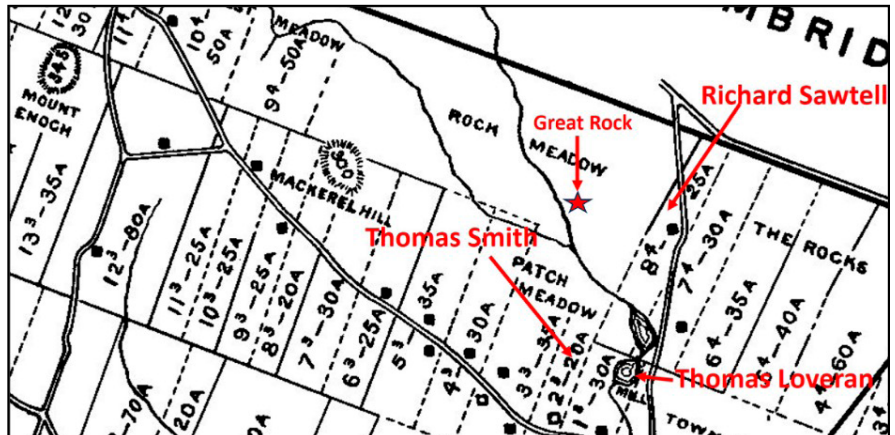
Incident at the Great Rock in Rock Meadow

Marie Daly, WLT founding Board member, Waltham Historical Commission Clerk and member

Rock Meadow, a seventy-one-acre conservation area located between Mill Street and Beaver Brook in Belmont, was historically part of Watertown, Waltham, and Belmont. When Europeans arrived in Watertown in 1630, they identified the area as a meadow, likely maintained for centuries by Native Americans. Beaver Brook forms the current southern border, although the name designation, Rock Meadow, applied to both sides of the brook in colonial land records. Thousands of years earlier, a glacier in the valley between Belmont Hill and Mackerel Hill had deposited what the USGS calls coarse, stratified deposits. The glacier advanced and retreated over the valley, scouring and depositing sand and rocks. As the mile-thick ice sheet melted, streams carrying sand and gravel formed at the bottom. The melt-water accretions, termed eskers formed on the south side of Beaver Brook in the Beaver Brook North Reservation. Among the debris were also large boulders called glacial erratics. A large glacial erratic called the Great Rock in historical records was deposited on the northern edge of Beaver Brook in Rock Meadow. In fact, local historian Phineas Lawrence claimed in 1858 that Rock Meadow was named for the Great Rock. The rock measures about 11 feet in height and 16 feet in width.

The Great Rock was site of a seventeenth-century crime. Ruth Sawtell and Thomas Loveran were accused of fornication in 1674 when local teenagers discovered their dalliance behind the crag. Thomas Loveran had operated the fulling mill at what is now called the Duck Pond at Beaver Brook Reservation. Ruth was the daughter of Richard Sawtell, who lived on Mill Street, on the east side of Rock Meadow.

This was not the first offense for Ruth Sawtell. She and another neighbor, Zachariah Smith, were implicated in the crime of fornication three years earlier.



Location of neighbors, Richard Sawtell, Thomas Loveran, and Thomas Smith on Trapelo Road and Mill Street in 1671

Zachariah Smith was the son of Thomas Smith, who lived along Trapelo Road, near the current site of Briarwood Road. In 1671, Ruth, an unmarried woman, was pregnant out-of-wedlock, and the father of the child was a neighbor, Zachariah Smith. Their premarital liaison was a crime punishable by six lashes and/or a fine. Rhode Island was known to be more lenient, so Zachariah went on the lam heading for Providence.

Zachariah traveled south, most likely on foot. He stayed overnight with Caleb Church at a sawmill situated in what was then Dedham, but is now Walpole. He started out the next morning on the road to Providence. Not long after, some Native Americans discovered his body along the road in what is now Norfolk. He had been killed by gunshot. This murder of Zachariah Smith and the ensuing repercussions contributed to the outbreak of the King Phillip's War, one of the most disastrous wars in colonial history.

No one witnessed the homicide, and three Native Americans were seen walking along the same road shortly after Zachariah headed out from the sawmill. Colonial authorities accused, tried, and hanged for the crime of murder an indigenous man, Ascooke, also known by the English name, Nehemiah. His head was then placed on a pole on Boston Common. Ascooke was the son of a Nipmuc sachem, Matoonas, who by 1675, lived in the Praying Village of Packachoag, at what is now the site of Holy Cross College in

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WLT's 26th Annual Meeting

Diana Young, WLT Program Committee Chair

As a corporation, the Waltham Land Trust holds an annual meeting to elect directors and act on official business, but we also like to tell our members about the prior twelve months. [You can watch the meeting on YouTube at [2025 11 18 WLT Annual Meeting 2025](#)]

WLT Executive Director Sonja Wadman presented some of the year's activities including our wonderful stewards' work, Save Waltham Wildlife's agreement with Brandeis to stop using SGAR rodenticides, the progress at Wellington Fields, and our newest acquisition on Hardy Pond. Sonja also presented the *Inge Uhler Environmentalist of the Year* award to Michele Gzrenda, the Conservation Director for the town of Lincoln. Michele is a Waltham resident and the leader of several walks and presentations since becoming a member of the Land Trust. She is a key member and leader in Save Waltham Wildlife.



The Brandeis Waltham Climate Study Team, a group of science, environment, sociology, and English professors and research assistants, explained their in-process project titled Building Collective Resilience via Collective Memory. The team is interviewing Waltham residents to understand past and current flooding as well as flooding fixes and problems needing fixing.



They are creating maps that show resident quotes with the places discussed. This information will be overlaid with the FEMA flood maps as well as economic data. Their presentation is included in the YouTube video of the meeting. Read more about the study elsewhere in this *Journal*.

Sonja presented Laurel Carpenter's presentation on the Massachusetts Central Rail Trail (MCRT). Waltham now has 2.5 miles of its 3-mile section complete, with the last 0.5-mile section on the eastern end still incomplete as it is so close to the active rail line. The Linden Street and Jones Road sections are now open as are the Weston, Wayland, and Sudbury sections. The dedicated section across Route 128 is not started but people can cross the highway on Main Street to connect with the Weston section.

WLT Treasurer Marc Rudnick presented the financial report showing that the 2025 was a banner year largely due to a \$75K earmark from Senator Mike Barrett and an extremely generous gift from an anonymous donor. The Land Trust had a profit of \$142,423 and net assets of \$383,011.

WLT President Nadene Stein conducted the business meeting in which we elected new directors Tom Benavides, Barbara Marriot, and Meghan Sullivan and reelected John Dieckmann, Anna Richardson and Mark Sivers. We also thanked departing Board member Barbara Jacobs. Read the biographies of our newest Board members elsewhere in this *Journal*.

Immediately after the official meeting, we adjourned for Toscanini's ice cream, complements of Sally Wetzler and Marc Rudnick, and some great conversation.

WLT's New Board Members

Tom Benavides

Tom works as an electrical engineer. In Waltham, he contributes to a number of community groups with a focus on housing, transportation, and open access to



information. Tom's projects include founding Waltham Inclusive Neighborhoods, creating and maintaining walthampolitics.com, organizing for the Greater Boston Interfaith Organization's Housing Justice Campaign, and being a founding member of The Waltham Times.

Meghan Sullivan

A tree hugger from a young age, Meghan has always had a love for the outdoors. Meghan has spent the last eight years working in the conservation field focusing on invasive plant species and land management, shorebird and songbird monitoring, vegetation surveys, and implementation of the Wetlands Protection Act. She moved to Waltham in 2021 and enjoys exploring its green spaces, usually with her binoculars in hand!



Barb Marriott

Barb has lived on "the island" in Waltham for 30 years, with her husband and two daughters. She knows how fortunate she is to live in this special place along the Charles River, near DCR wooded areas and the Charles River Trail, and works to protect and preserve it. Barb has been a WLT Volunteer Steward on the South Side of Waltham for several years and has participated nearly every Charles River Cleanup for 26 years.



Currently retired from working as an Art Therapist, Barb enjoys spending her time making pottery, taking walks, enjoying art, cooking, tending plants, picking up trash, and getting involved in "Island business."

Growing up in upstate New York, Barb spent every summer of her youth on a small lake, boating, fishing, sailing, swimming, hiking, exploring, and picking wildflowers and berries. As a teen, Barb hiked some of the Adirondack peaks. Her love of nature, and advocacy for the environment started early—participating in the first Earth Day ever in 1970!—and continues today.

HELP WLT GO PAPERLESS!

Join the 130 Land Trust members who have selected to have their *Journals* sent to them electronically. By opting out of the mailed hard copy, these supporters are helping WLT reduce our carbon footprint and save on costs associated with printing, postage, and transportation. Furthermore, the electronic version of the *Journal* will be available to you before the mail arrives, and the underlined hyperlinks are clickable.

Please send an email with your name to swadman@walthamlandtrust.org, with the subject header "Electronic *Journal*" if you'd like the next *Journal* emailed to you. Please remember that receiving *The Journal* is a privilege of membership. Be sure you are up to date with your dues so you don't miss the Fall 2026 *Journal*!

More about the “Building Climate Resilience” Project

Danielle Jacques, Sarah Mayorga, Rachel McKane, Sara Shostak

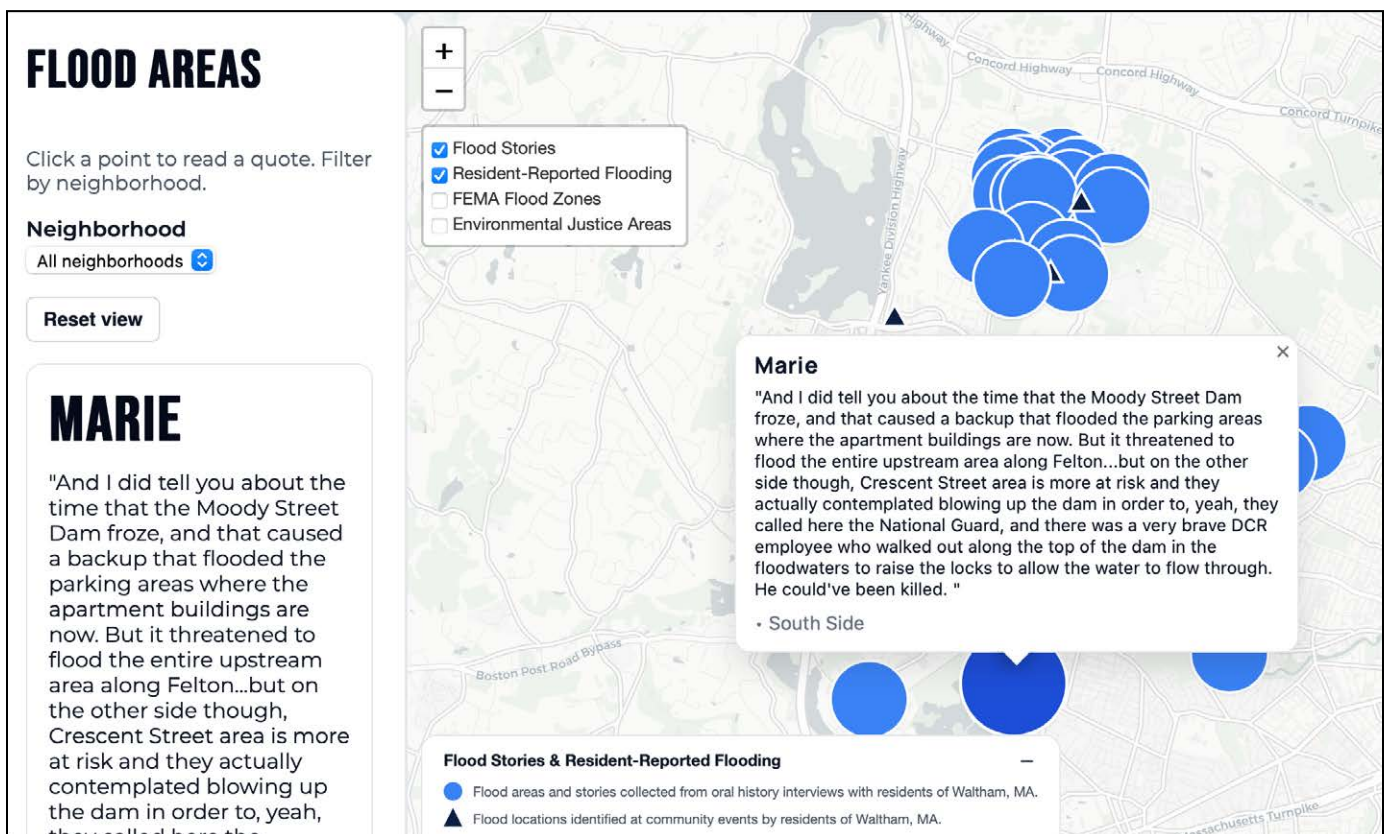
Waltham has a long, complicated history with flooding. Waltham’s industrial past and rapid development over the 20th century reshaped the land in ways that continue to determine how water flows through the city today. As climate change is expected to increase both the volume and unpredictability of precipitation across New England, understanding the impact of Waltham’s past and present flooding offers critical insights for future mitigation and adaptation strategies. [Our research](#) demonstrates that Waltham residents hold invaluable knowledge of flooding that official maps are not designed to capture, and that our understanding of flooding must center the experiences of the people most directly affected by it.

To document this knowledge, we have taken two approaches. The first is in-depth oral history interviews with Waltham residents about their experiences with flooding. Residents have spoken with us about the city’s industrial past, how development has transformed the flow of water in their neighborhoods, neighborhood change and community cohesion, and a long tradition

of environmental awareness and activism in Waltham. The second approach involves gathering community knowledge through a series of events, including the WLT’s annual meeting, where participants marked flood locations on a map and described their “flood stories.” Together, these methods reveal where flooding is concentrated across the city and surface the rich personal narratives through which residents make sense of environmental challenges in the city, including, but not limited to flooding.

We are still looking to speak with residents of Waltham, particularly those who live in the Chemistry, Bleachery, and Southside neighborhoods, who have stories to share about flooding in their area. We are also planning a public event at the Waltham Public Library this spring, so please look out for that announcement! In the coming months, we will be launching a public website with an interactive map of flood locations alongside an archive of residents’ experiences and stories. If you are interested in participating or would like more information, please reach out to us at: waltham-study@brandeis.edu

This project is supported by a grant from [Mass Humanities](#) and the [Massachusetts Cultural Council](#).



Interactive map of flood locations with residents’ experiences

22nd Annual Green Space Blues Jam Returns to Stonehurst May 15

Scott Shurr, Special Events Committee

Secure your tickets now for the 22nd Annual Green Space Blues Jam, to be held on Friday, May 15, from 7:30 to 10:30 p.m. We are thrilled to return again to a favorite venue of ours, Stonehurst the Robert Treat Paine Estate, a National Historic Landmark with over 100 acres of public open space designed by architect Henry Hobson Richardson and landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted, now owned by the City of Waltham. We hope for excellent weather so we can celebrate our many successes from the last year and mingle with supporters outside on the lovely grounds.

This year, we will be entertained by Michelle “Evil Gal” Willson with Shinichi Otsu on keyboards.

A writer in the respected Allmusic.com said of Michelle Willson: “Her singing is like a strong cup of Joe — it beelines to the gut and jolts the system.” And that’s putting it mildly. Michelle is a force of nature — an emotional ball of talent that inspires with her original songs but also takes you on a journey through what she calls “the lost music” of vintage soul/R&B legends like Dinah Washington, Ruth Brown and Etta James. As she says, “They were all different, but the one thing they shared was intensity. And that’s what I’m trying to bring, too.”

Shinichi Otsu graduated Magma Cum Laude from Berklee College of Music and is now an Assistant Professor in the piano department. He played in the musical, RENT, and has also performed and has also worked with Jaimoe from The Allman Brothers Band, Jay Geils, Sam Butera, The Wildest, Marty Allen, Tommy Tune, Jean Carne, Jody Williams, Ronnie Earl, Duke Robillard and Michelle Willson. He opened for Robert Cray, Dr. John, Al Martino, Roberta Flack, John Scofield, and The Sun Ra Arkestra. He has released seven of his own albums at iTunes and Amazon, and was selected for 2012 Musical Top Ten (ranked #6) by the Boston-based music magazine, The Noise.



Enjoy professionally-made snacks and desserts, as well as beer from Boston Beer Company, StormAlong hard cider, wine, and non-alcoholic drinks. The event also offers a variety of donated items to bid on from the online auction, which runs from Wednesday, May 13, to Sunday, May 17.

Speaking of the auction, we are seeking items like

gift cards, tickets to cultural and sporting events, and other fun experiences. The deadline for telling us about your auction item(s) is Monday, May 4. Please complete the auction form at walthamlandtrust.org/donate-auction-item if you can help.

May 4 is also the deadline for sponsors. Please consider supporting our biggest, most important fundraiser of the year beyond buying tickets (which come with sponsorship) by pledging to donate at least \$250 to help us offset the cost of putting on the event, plus all of our other activities throughout the year. Find sponsorship details at walthamlandtrust.org/green-space-blues-jam#sponsorship

Tickets are \$75 for WLT members, \$85 for non-members, plus we have a \$40 ticket for people 40 years old and younger. The price at the door will be \$85 for all (except for those 40 and under). Buy your ticket now at walthamlandtrust.org/gsbj-2026



Incident at the Great Rock continued from page 1

Worcester. Embittered by the execution of his son, Matoonas led other Nipmuc sachems to join forces with the Wampanoags and the Narragansetts in a war against the English settlers of southern New England. Matoonas led successful attacks against Mendon and Brookfield, but was eventually captured and executed in 1675.

King Philip's War was one the most devastating wars in American history. Six hundred English soldiers were killed; and fifty percent of colonial settlements in Massachusetts were heavily damaged or destroyed. English forces killed or sold into slavery thousands of Native Americans and destroyed most of their villages. Many peaceful Native Americans were forced into a concentration camp on Deer Island, where most died of exposure and malnutrition.

After the murder of Zachariah Smith, who had fathered Ruth Sawtell's baby, Ruth's father, Richard Sawtell, sued the estate of Zachariah Smith for child support. The jury returned a verdict for the plaintiff, Richard Sawtell, and awarded him 19 shillings plus child support. The lawsuit most likely resulted in a contentious relationship between the neighboring Smith and Sawtell families, and may have influenced Jonathan Smith and Moses Whitney, the accusers of Thomas Loveran and Ruth Sawtell three years later.

To be continued in the Fall 2026 Journal...

Seeking a New Board Member/Treasurer

The Board of Directors of the Waltham Land Trust is seeking a committed and detail-oriented individual to join our board as Treasurer. This is a key leadership role supporting our mission to conserve and steward Waltham's open spaces. The Treasurer works closely with our Finance Committee, board, staff, bookkeeper, and tax filers to ensure the organization's financial integrity. Core responsibilities include budget preparation, overseeing bookkeeper, creating financial statements, managing banking and payroll reporting, and maintaining organized financial records. We'd really benefit from someone with accounting or non-profit finance experience to replace our retiring long-time Treasurer, who would provide support to a new director in this transition.

The time commitment is manageable, with responsibilities spread across the year (including fiscal and calendar year-end tasks like reporting, audits, and compliance filings). If you are looking to apply your skills in service of a respected community organization while helping guide our financial future, we encourage you to contact WLT Executive Director Sonja at swadman@walthamlandtrust.org about joining the Waltham Land Trust board as Treasurer.

Indian Assault at Ayer's Inn [Brookfield], August 4th 1675



Upcoming Events with the Waltham Land Trust

Annual Volunteer Trail Stewards Lunch and Training

Saturday, April 18, 12:00 - 4:00 p.m.

Prospect Hill Park Lodge, 314 Totten Pond Road

Register now at [walthamlandtrust free training](https://walthamlandtrust.org/free-training).

Participate in our free, annual training for volunteer trail and land restoration stewards that covers native/invasive plants and trail sustainability. Co-hosted with City of Waltham Ranger Adam Green, the workshop features classroom and “in the field” instruction. Lunch and tools provided. Registration required.

Charles River Earth Day Cleanup

Saturday, April 25, 10:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.

THIS EVENT IS AT CAPACITY

Jake n JOES Fundraiser

Wednesday, April 29, 11:30 a.m. - 11:30 p.m.

Jake n JOES Grille, 79 Market Place

Help WLT earn some money by enjoying food and drinks at this casual, sports-themed restaurant with plenty of indoor and outdoor seating. We get 20% when you tell them to “flag your check for the fundraiser” when ordering in person. For take out orders, add from column “FUNDRAISER” to the cart and double-check that the fundraiser code has been added.

Insects for Beginners

Thursday, April 30, 6:30 - 8:00 p.m.

Waltham Public Library Lecture Hall, 735 Main Street

Insects are amazing animals! Want to know how to tell a butterfly from a moth? A bee from a fly? Or a katydid from a grasshopper? To learn more about these fascinating animals, essential to life on earth, join us for our fun and educational program. Led by Mass Audubon educator and insect enthusiast, Linda Graetz, this informative talk will focus on seven common insect groups. You’ll learn about their amazing physical and behavioral diversity—how they live and how they are inextricably bound to the health of our planet.

22nd Annual Green Space Blues Jam

Online auction Wednesday, May 13 - Sunday, May 17

In-person gala Friday, May 15, 7:30 - 10:30 p.m.

Stonehurst, 100 Robert Treat Paine Drive

Attend the Land Trust’s major fundraiser with lots of indoor and outdoor space at one of our favorite venues, Stonehurst! Featuring live music with blues vocalist Michelle Willson and keyboardist Shinichi Otsu. Tickets are \$40 for folks under 40 years old, \$85

for the general public, and \$75 for WLT members (\$85 at the door), and include snacks, desserts, beer, wine, hard cider, and non-alcoholic beverages. Items from the online auction will be at the gala.

Waltham RiverBeat

Saturday, June 20, time tbd

Moody Street between Crescent/Pine and railroad tracks

The Waltham Land Trust is a partner organization in this reboot of Waltham Riverfest, which will be a multifaceted celebration of what makes downtown Waltham great: the Charles River, a diverse culture, and a vibrant artist community. We’ll have multi-cultural music and food, activities on the river (including nature and history walks led by WLT), and art being sold and produced in-person. WLT’s outreach table will also be there, along with those of other non-profits.

Wellington Fields Lemonade Social

Saturday, July 18, 2:00 - 4:00 p.m.

Park across Trapelo Road on neighborhood streets

Enjoy a cool lemonade and snacks, and meet the WLT stewards working to restore this historic site. Walk the paths through the Wellington Fields or explore the yard around the Wellington House. We might also have lawn games! Parking is across Trapelo Road on neighborhood streets such as Sherwood Lane, Abbot Rd. If you have mobility issues, you can park at Wellington House. Bad weather date 7/25, same time.

Cedar Hill Walk

Date and details to be determined

WLT member Lesley Sneddon has written another wonderful guide, this time for the Girl Scout’s Camp Cedar Hill that was once owned by Cornelia Warren. The book describes the plant communities found at the Camp and includes photos of the most prominent among them, providing a way to learn botany and ecology without overwhelming. A walk through the camp is being planned, date TBD, by WLT member and aspiring naturalist, Betty MacKenzie.

The WLT is selling Lesley’s book, *The Natural History of the Cornelia Warren Estate: Camp Cedar Hill, Girl Scouts of Eastern Massachusetts* through our website’s [Store](#). Separate from an organized walk, please seek permission in advance before visiting Cedar Hill. Visitors are not allowed during summer day camp, school vacations, and other major activities. You can call to ask GSEMA Customer Care at 844-306-4736 or email customercare@gsema.org.

WALTHAM



Waltham Land Trust
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www.walthamlandtrust.org
*Protecting Waltham's land...
forever.*

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An electronic file (pdf) of this newsletter will be available on our web site, <www.walthamlandtrust.org>.

Officers: Nadene Stein (President), Rita Cramer (Vice Pres.), Anna Richardson (Clerk), Marc Rudnick (Treasurer)

Directors: Tom Benavides, Marie Daly, John Dieckmann, Deb Herman, Barbara Marriott, Nat May, Daniel Melnechuk, Debbie von Rechenberg, Mark Sivers, Meghan Sullivan, Diana Young

Executive Director: Sonja Wadman

Published material represents the views of the authors and not necessarily those of the Waltham Land Trust.

Waltham Land Trust's Mission

To create a legacy of land conservation in Waltham by promoting, protecting, restoring, and acquiring open space.

We envision growth in public appreciation of natural resources, preservation and restoration of native habitat, and increased biodiversity to foster a healthier environment.

• SPECIAL GIFT MEMBERSHIP •

Have a friend, neighbor, or relative you think would enjoy being part of the Waltham Land Trust? Why not give them a gift membership? **We are offering a special promotion for a limited time: 6 months for only \$10!** (The normal price of an individual membership is 12 months for \$25). **Support open space for a birthday or special occasion!**

To renew or join, visit our web site:
walthamlandtrust.org
or call 781-893-3355

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Please send any comments to the return address, or email to
<info@walthamlandtrust.org>.

If you're not already a WLT member and have received this complimentary copy, please consider [joining](#) today!

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