Friends of Upton State Forest Newsletter
Ellen Arnold, Editor

http://www.friendsofuptonstateforest.org
friends@friendsofuptonstateforest.org
Like us on Facebook!

Volume 9, Number 2 Spring 2014

President's Message

By: *Bill Taylor*

As part of the Friends mission to preserve, enhance and protect the resources of Upton State Forest our Program Committee has arranged over 100 programs to foster appreciation, interest and stewardship of the forest. We have explored the forest in all seasons, hunted for antlers, and visited letterboxes, "Hiked Through History", and "Discovered" plants, animals, ecosystems and cultural resources. It is our belief that the more visitors know about the forest, the more they will enjoy and care for it.

Programs are offered by members of State agencies, authors, educators and dedicated amateurs, some on their own time and for free or for a nominal fee. Other costs include space rental and refreshments. Three workshops, with significant costs, were funded with grants from the Upton Cultural Council.

To date, we have not charged for any of the programs. Later this year, we will start charging non-members for Friends programs to help defray the cost of the presentations, and allow us to consider more costly presentations. This will help ensure that we can continue to present a wide range of interesting, informative programs.

Finally, the Friends want to thank Marcella Stasa for all the work she has done on the Program Committee. She is stepping down in May and the Friends and the Program Committee will miss her contributions. Thanks Marcella!

Park Serve Day
Saturday, April 26, 2014
Registration at 8:30 AM
Work 9AM to about noon

Many hands make light work so please join us for the annual DCR spring work party. Meet at the Headquarters Building at Upton State Forest near the intersection of Westborough and Southborough Roads. (GPS 205 Westboro Rd). We provide a light lunch for volunteers. A liability waiver is required. Youth over 12 are welcome with a parent's signature. **Youth groups are required to pre register**. Bring tools such as rakes, shovels and loppers. **No power tools.** Dress for work and the weather. Don't forget gloves, sunscreen, and insect repellant. Water will be provided. Contact news@friendsofuptonstateforest.org with questions, or to pre register. For more info about Park Serve Day go to http://www.mass.gov/eea/agencies/dcr

Tom's Journal

FUSF members, Tom and Cathy Dodd visit Upton State Forest looking for birds and other wildlife. Tom has shared his bird list and winter journal with us. There are excerpts from his journal throughout this newsletter. The entire journal can be viewed at www.friendsofuptonstateforest.org.

What are you seeing at the forest?

Spring Programs

We are very excited about our lineup of spring programs, walkabouts and hikes. Details and descriptions are on pages 5 and 6 of this newsletter.

Wood Duck Box Update

By H W Heusmann

H W Heusmann has been the waterfowl biologist for the Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife (DFW) since 1970. He moved to Upton near the former Phillips Wildlife Lab at Upton State Forest (USF) in 1977.

E. Arnold photo

As the current waterfowl biologist for the DFW, I read with interest the recent articles by Joe Nava on the history of the Division's wood duck nest box program. When I first started using USF to cross-country ski and walk my dogs, the swamp along CCC Way was just that, a swamp, wet in some years and dry in others.

In the 1980's, Philip Harrington, a teenager who lived near me, put up some homemade wood duck boxes in the swamp. He reported the boxes were used, but they only lasted a couple of years. After beaver moved into the swamp and water levels rose, I considered erecting a few Division boxes there. I found some old field notes referring to nest boxes on a beaver flowage in USF from the 1950's and figured that USF must have been that site.

I erected two of the standard, tunnel guard equipped boxes to inhibit raccoon predation that Joe Nava described. After two years, the boxes had not been used, so last winter I erected a box that is extra deep without the tunnel guard. It has an extra layer of wood around the entrance hole, which is further protected with a sheet metal plate that has a 3"x 4" elliptical hole to prevent raccoons from gnawing the entrance hole larger. It also has an extra long cover making it difficult for a raccoon on the roof to reach in and wave its paw around, frightening the nesting hen. We use this design in areas where wood ducks are reluctant to enter boxes equipped with the 9-inch long tunnels. Wood ducks will more readily enter the new boxes, but abandonment rates are higher than for the tunnel boxes, perhaps because they are more exposed to the weather. Once ducks start to use the deep boxes and a nesting population becomes established, we add additional tunnel boxes and often wood ducks will begin using them.

When I checked the boxes this winter, neither of the tunnel-equipped boxes were used, but the deep box had a number of wood duck and hooded merganser (another cavity nester) eggs. It was a dump nest and the eggs were never incubated. Knowing ducks were using the area, I attached another deep box to the back of one of the tunnel boxes and we will see what happens this spring.

Incidentally, the boxes are erected on reclaimed U-channel signposts that Upton DPW saves for us when they replace damaged or used posts. Back when Joe Nava was putting up boxes, they used cedar poles cut here in Massachusetts. So did I when I started, but over the past ten years or so beaver have become so prevalent that they frequently chew down the wood poles and we have had to resort to metal posts.

Tom's Journal

January 11, 2014

Raven

A Raven flew directly overhead, only fifty feet above me. It made its "rauukkk" call a few times as it flew. It seemingly pirouetted on one wing and dropped down into the upper branches of a large oak tree. It had noticed a leaf and stick nest, maybe gray squirrel. I watched as the raven quietly studied the nest and then it started meticulously pulling the nest apart. A few sticks and leaves were being removed and they slowly trickled down to the forest floor, one stick and leaf at a time. After less than a minute, another raven, not within sight, called and the marauder responded. Within a few seconds, it abandoned its quarry and flew off to join its mate. (I read on the Mass Wildlife's website that gray squirrels can breed twice a year, between Jan and Feb, and then during May through July. So maybe this was an active nest, but maybe the offspring were just too young to make much detected movement or noise, so the Raven gave up quickly.)

Membership Report

We are pleased to welcome the following new members. Harolyn & William Thiemke of Mendon, John & Nancy Simone of Upton, and Edward & Alexis Cotterell of Northbridge.

If you have not renewed for 2014 you will be receiving a reminder letter in April. We would appreciate having you renew now to save us the postage. Your membership is important on two levels. First, it makes a statement to public officials that people do care about our state forest. Second, your dues pay for the expenses involved in maintaining a nonprofit organization and help us to provide good quality programming.

Thank you to Joan Varney for her donation in memory of her father, Joe Gorman who served as an educator at the Upton CCC Camp.

Tom's Journal

January 18, 2014
Mink

Walking along Southboro Rd at 7AM, I heard some splashing in the water where a road culvert connects the northern and southern swamp. I thought it might be a mallard taking advantage of the only open water. I walked up quietly to see and was surprised to find that it was a mink swimming downstream. I saw its deep rich brown/black sleek body swim effortlessly downstream and disappear into the cattails. After a few seconds, I decided to squeak through pursed lips. I was quietly excited to see the mink respond by sticking just its head between the cattails and look directly at me. After only a few seconds, it disappeared without a sound.

Snowflakes

Later, I came upon some snowflakes, seemingly floating in mid-air in a vertical line. After further study, I realized that these small snowflakes (maybe 5-10) were caught on a spider web or caterpillar silken thread. I wondered about what made the thread, and when. In the past, Cathy has pointed out small spiders walking atop the snow in the winter. So, there are spiders about at this time of year.

January 25, 2014
Bluebirds

Walking along CCC Way, I noticed a lone, eastern bluebird perched ten feet up in the branches of a small dead tree over the vernal pool near the parking lot. I had heard one earlier calling a soft whistled "tru-ly". I then noticed that there were at least four. I suspect maybe two pairs, but couldn't tell because of their movements. I noted that one dropped down to a small trickle of open water drinking. It was 9degF this morning, so it had to be water breaking out from the ground. Others appeared to be feeding on the fruits of either Burning Bush (euonymus spp) or Multi-flora rose, both non-native invasives. I watched as they stretched to get the fruits, or with some effort, flutter in place to get a small hanging fruit. I caught a glimpse of one of the males – a beautiful blue, with contrasting white and brown. They flew off quietly into the thicker woods.

CCC Legacy

If you are looking for information about the CCC Legacy check out http://www/ccclegacy.org/. Located at Camp Roosevelt in Virginia, this is a dedicated group of volunteers working to preserve and share the Legacy.

Snow Cleared From Roofs

It has been a tough winter here in the northeast with the cold temperatures and plenty of snow. At one point, with freezing rain predicted, our park supervisor, Val Stegemoen raised concerns about the snow depth already on the roofs at the CCC Camp. His report triggered implementation of the snow policy for clearing the roofs. We want to thank Val, members of his staff and DCR for their timely action.

Preservation Update

By Kevin Allen

DCR received two bids for the structural repair work at the CCC Camp Headquarters Building. Now they are drawing up the contract, with the hope of having the work begin in early April. The planned work will build off the foundation work performed last year to secure the structural integrity of the building, as well as the historic integrity. Specifically, the ceilings will be exposed to the rafters once again, while the knotty pine wall sheathing will be retained in the main hall. The goal is to have the work completed by the end of June.

Watch for tweets of status reports during Preservation Month in May.

Interpretive Plan

DCR has completed a draft of an Interpretive Plan for Upton State Forest and the CCC Camp. The board has just received a copy to review and will be meeting with DCR to share our thoughts. Developing a plan was one of the stipulations in the Memorandum of Agreement after the loss of the North Barn. We are appreciative of the time and thought that went into the draft.

Tom's Journal

February 23, 2014
Birds singing and drumming
It seems that all of the birds were singing today – a change from the past weeks. Chickadees were singing their "fee-bee" song, cardinals, tufted titmouse, white-breasted nuthatches were all singing and downy woodpeckers were drumming. Finally, winter's back has been broken!

Quarterly Quote

"Nature is painting for us, day after day, pictures of infinite beauty if only we have the eyes to see them." John Ruskin

SCA Project

During a FUSF National Public Lands Day work party in 2007, several water bars were placed on Park Rd to help control erosion. They have deteriorated, so members of the Student Conservation Association will be visiting Upton this summer to replace them with stone. We are pleased to have the SCA back at Upton, and thank park staff for arranging to have them come. If you see them working, say hi and thank them for helping preserve our trail system.

Do you recognize anyone from this 2007 photo of the crew on Park Road?

Ranger Walkabout
With National Park Service
Ranger Chuck Arning
Thursday, June 26, 6:30 PM

Join Ranger Chuck Arning and Friends of Upton State Forest (FUSF) for a walk through the former Civilian Conservation Corps Camp in Upton State Forest. The story of how the CCC's built the physical foundations of our park system, both state and national, is impressive, especially during the time of the Great Depression. FUSF and the DCR have done an outstanding job of preserving CCC sites throughout Massachusetts making sure stories of these men, and their communities, stay with us. This should be a fun night with a lot of sunlight so please join us. Questions: 401-762-0250 x5502 or **Chuck_Arning@nps.gov.**

Historic Resources Committee Report

By *Ellen Arnold*

Here in New England there is history all around us. Some of it is hidden in plain sight. Members of the Resource Inventory Subcommittee have been locating and documenting much of it. Now that the interpretive plan is underway, we are looking forward to working with DCR to determine the best way to share it, while still protecting it.

We will be bringing back the Hiking Through History series to explore some of those places hidden in plain sight. For more than 40 years I have driven by Leclaire Square, knowing it was a memorial monument. Shame on me because I never took the time to learn about the man it memorializes. I knew a little about the Bradish Cemetery, a final resting place for early North Upton settlers, but never thought about what impact they had on the land we know as Upton State Forest.

Hiking Through History

For all hikes, we ask that you dress for the weather and wear appropriate footgear. Kids are welcome when accompanied by an adult. A liability waiver is required for hikes. Please leave pets at home. Don't forget sunscreen, insect repellant and water. Check with the hike sponsor in case of inclement weather. There is no charge. Meet at the Headquarters building at Upton State Forest near the intersection of Westborough and Southborough Roads (GPS 205 Westboro Rd).

Hidden History
Sunday, June 22, 2014, 1:00 PM
Rain date June 29

Explore history hidden in plain sight with FUSF and DCR as we hike through the state forest to the Bradish Cemetery and Leclaire Square. Learn about Revolutionary War soldiers, early North Upton settlers, and Leclaire Square and its connection to the horrific WWII Battle of Leyte Gulf.

This is a moderate, two to three hour hike with some hills and uneven footing. A liability waiver is required. Children are welcome when accompanied by an adult. Direct questions to: **news@friendsofuptonstateforest.org** or 508-529-6610.

Program Committee Report

Our committee works to have a balance of programs, both indoors and out, that are interesting and enjoyable. The ultimate goal is to encourage people to understand, enjoy, share, and protect the resources of Upton State Forest. For the past several years, Marcella Stasa has contributed a great deal to that goal. We echo Bill's thank you, and look forward to working with her in other ways.

Stone by Stone
Presented by Robert Thorson

May 4, 2014, 10:00 AM
At Upton VFW
15 Milford St, Upton

Field Trip, 12:45 PM
Taft Street Trailhead
At Peppercorn Hill

We are excited to partner with Upton Open Space Committee, Upton Cultural Council and Metacomet Land Trust to bring this daylong workshop to Upton.

Robert Thorson is a noted author, geologist, and advocate for preservation of historic landscapes. He has written several books about stonewalls and landforms of New England. Since publishing his first book, he has given over 500 talks at venues from small historical societies to the NASA Engineering Colloquium in Washington, DC. He is currently a professor at the University of Connecticut, as well as writing for several publications.

The day will begin with a presentation at the Upton VFW at 10 AM, followed by a question and answer period. There will be an opportunity to purchase Thorson's books and have them signed following the AM program. Bring a brown bag lunch and join us for the afternoon field trip to Peppercorn Hill.

This program is free and open to all. Reservations are not required for the morning session. Space is limited for the field trip so you will need to pre-register for that. Registration will begin on April 15 until full. If we reach our limit, we will give priority to those that attended the morning session. Don't forget water, sunscreen, and insect repellant. Please leave pets at home. A liability waiver is required for the field trip. To pre-register, send an email, April 15 or after to **uptonopenspaceevents@charter.net**.

Annual Potluck Supper and Program
May 16, United Parish Vestry
Supper at 6:00 PM
Program at 7:00 PM

"Half an Hour a Day
Across Massachusetts"
Presented by John J. Galluzzo

In 2011, John Galluzzo, author, historian and naturalist, searched out open space and walked for a half hour each day, eventually visiting each, and every town in Massachusetts. His book is the story of this journey through 351 towns in 365 days. Through rain, heat, and snow, his sense of humor and appreciation for nature and history makes it an enjoyable read. Copies of his book will be offered for sale.

The public is welcome to come to the potluck at 6:00 or join us at 7:00 for this free program. Please RSVP for supper to **news@friendsofuptonstateforest.org** or 508-529-6610.

Friends of Upton State Forest
Board of Director Meetings
7:00 PM
Upton Police Station
Training Room
April 21, May 19, June 21, July 18