



The Newsletter of the Francestown Land Trust, Inc.

Fall 2019

Scot Heath

Francestown's Essential Conservationist

Scot Heath moved to Francestown in 1984 and soon after initiated a movement that dramatically changed the landscape of the town. From 1985 to the present, Scot has served as the “point-guard” of a dedicated team of conservationists who have arranged for the protection of thousands of acres of undeveloped land in town. As a long-time leader in town recently observed, “it’s hard to picture what Francestown would look like today if Scot Heath had not moved here in 1984.”

There have been two periods of substantial additions to the acreage of protected land in Francestown, roughly 1985-1991 and 2003-2010. Scot directly led the first campaign and worked behind the scenes to motivate and support the second wave. As chair of the Conservation Commission from 1986 to 1991 he negotiated the donations and easements that created the Crotched Mountain Town Forest and simultaneously brought together the team that founded the Francestown Land Trust. At the beginning of that period, the Town owned 33 acres of conserved land, by 1991 town-owned and conservation easements land exceeded 1,000 acres.

Today, the total of conserved land owned by Francestown and FLT or protected by easements held by the Town, FLT or other land trusts, exceeds 5,000 acres. A lot of this acreage is along the Piscataquog River and its headwater streams, includes steep slopes and wetlands, and is accessible only from Class VI or abandoned roads.

When Scot moved to town, he was a recent college graduate and had just began a career as a real estate appraiser. He brought with him a “love at first sight” for Francestown and a passion for protecting land from development “to preserve a way of life” for the citizens of his adopted home. Scot says his land protection ethic is not based in “elitism” or a specific desire to enable any specific cause or activity such as wildlife habitat or hiking. Rather,

Scot believes that “a majority of people must find value in conserving land.” This, he says, can only be achieved by promoting “balanced, multiple use.” For Scot, that includes access for his beloved snowmobiles.

Growing up in Merrimack adjacent to a large acreage owned successively by his Great Grandfather (Bert Gilmore) and Grandfather (Roland Hill), Scot’s land ethic was shaped both by his enjoyment of access to this tract of farm and undeveloped land, and also by how that acreage was whittled away by his family’s inability to protect it from development. The loss of this land led to a permanent change in the way of life of the citizens of Merrimack. Eventually, Scot’s family donated the last 25 acres to the town to create the Gilmore Hill Town Forest.

In 1986, with Scot as the newly minted chair, the ConCom first approached the town for a substantial budget. In 1987, by a secret ballot vote at Town Meeting, a warrant article for a \$10,000 budget for the ConCom

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Scot Heath

Scot Heath *Continued from page 1*

passed for the first time (100-32). This pattern of support by townspeople continued each time Scot proposed such a warrant article from 1988-1991. In 1990, due to Scot's advocacy and the support of the Planning Board led by Abigail Arnold, Frankestown became the first town in the state of New Hampshire to have a land conservation fund included in its Capital Improvement budget.

As ConCom chair, Scot conducted a "letter-writing campaign." Property holdings with promise for conservation were identified and the owners were solicited to consider donations or easements. The map of "targets" was very ambitious. Though almost all of these "asks" did not initially bear fruit, several of them did, and many blossomed years later. When asked about Scot's efforts, his colleagues from that era talk of "persistence" and "focus," as well as "coaxing" and "cajoling." Said one colleague, "there was no one he would not approach; he spent countless hours cultivating relationships that in many cases eventually led owners to make a decision to conserve their land." Scot launched a second letter writing campaign when FLT was formed.

Scot explains that, "the project that got the land protection ball rolling" was preservation of the Lord family farm land which abuts the Lord Town Forest originally established in 1974. Fred and Lillian Harrigan had purchased the Lord farm on Bible Hill and wanted it protected. Complex negotiations ensued. When the Select Board chose not to accept conservation easements that were proposed as part of the Harrigans' and the ConCom's plan, Scot was motivated to start Frankestown Land Conservation, Inc. (later renamed Frankestown Land Trust, or "FLT"). The new land trust was intended to complement the town's ConCom. The Harris Center stepped in and accepted the agricultural easements the ConCom and the Harrigans sought and the balance of the farm was protected.

Shortly after this first successful negotiation and the Town Meeting's initial approval of a budget for the ConCom, former Governor John King called Scot. King owned 700 acres in Frankestown and wanted to conserve his land. Eventually this complicated project included LCIP (the state's Land Conservation Investment Program, a precursor of today's LCHIP), the Forest Society, and conservation easements on lands owned by Ellen Hill and Harry and Connie Varnum. The synergy of these parties

resulted in 388 acres of land at the base of Crotched Mountain becoming a Town Forest. Later, donations and purchases from Merrill and Schultz brought the size of this forest to 630 acres (today it encompasses 948 acres).

Towns to the east, Weare and New Boston, were experiencing a push for sub-division of land for home building. Citizens of Frankestown were concerned about being prepared for this tide to rise into Frankestown. How best to "manage" the anticipated development pressure was an active debate in town. Scot, as ConCom Chair, collaborated with Abigail Arnold, Planning Board Chair, to draft a proposal for "overlay districts" within the Zoning Ordinance as a means of informing the Town's approval of property-owners' requests for approval to build housing. Essentially, the "overlay district" system of zoning controls the development of land based on its location in a vulnerable area such as a "steep slope," "shoreland," "wetland," etc. This proposal was approved at Town Meeting in 1991.

Family needs led Scot to move out of Frankestown in the early 1990s; he did not become a town resident again until 2012. However, during this extended period, Scot maintained his involvement in land conservation in Frankestown through frequent communication and peppering his colleagues with suggestions. Scot continued to provide many appraisals, at far below-cost, for prospective land donations and conservation easements projects.

Scot didn't miss a beat in re-joining the land conservation team when he moved back to town in 2012 and today serves on the Conservation Commission, the ZBA, and is a vigorous participant in FLT. If one pulls out a file cabinet drawer for the Conservation Commission or FLT one can be assured that nearly every file will have Scot Heath's fingerprints on it. Scot humbly credits a team of colleagues that includes Betsy Hardwick, Abigail Arnold, Ben Haubrich, Barry Wicklow, Jennifer Byington and many others. But colleagues attest that Scot has been land conservationists' "essential man" in Frankestown for 35 years.

Kevin Pobst

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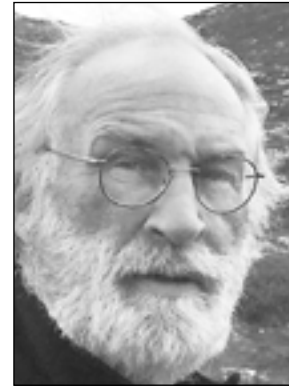
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Founded in 1986

A Letter from the Chair



Dear Neighbors and Friends of the FLT,
This is my first newsletter as newly elected Chair of the Board of Directors of the Frankestown Land Trust. I'm a little intimidated by the position; my first week had me looking up obscure IRS forms and directions for filling them out. Now I'm tasked with composing this letter.

So here goes. The theme for this entire newsletter is appreciation. You'll find it in an article about Scot Heath and the impact of his conservation work over the decades and continuing, behind-the-scenes, today. You'll find it in an article by Susie Spikol describing how minor changes in the environment can lead to the extinction of a species, which in turn, results in environmental change that makes us really miss a seemingly insignificant mollusk and the role it played in the ecosystem.

Recently, I was hosting a concert by a Canadian singer/songwriter, and as part of her set she included a song written by another Canadian, Joni Mitchell: Big Yellow Taxi. You know it.

*They paved paradise
And put up a parking lot
With a pink hotel, a boutique
And a swinging hot spot*

*Don't it always seem to go
That you don't know what you've got
Till it's gone
They paved paradise
And put up a parking lot*

New Director elected to FLT Board

FLT is pleased to welcome Kevin Pobst as the newest addition to the Board of Directors. He was elected at our August 2019 monthly meeting. A relative "newcomer" to Frankestown, Kevin got involved from the very start.

Kevin and his wife Mindy moved to Frankestown in 2015. While Mindy brought her regional involvement in "library-ship" to the George Holmes Bixby Memorial Library Board of Trustees, Kevin brought his experience in regional "conservation-ship" to Frankestown by becoming Frankestown's representative on the Piscataquog River Local Advisory Council



and as an officer in the Scobie Pond Preservation Association. He became a property monitor for the Piscataquog Land Conservancy and completed the University of New Hampshire Extension's Coverts Volunteer training.

Kevin also serves on the boards of Frankestown Improvement and Historical Society (FIHS), the Garden Club, and is an alternate for the Zoning Board Association (ZBA). In his spare time, Kevin writes for *The Frankestown News* and is a member of the Village Store Committee. Last Spring, Kevin was elected to serve as the Town Moderator

beginning in 2020.

Hannah Proctor



Did You Know?

Trail maps of the Rand Brook Forest, Schott Brennan Falls Reserve, Crotched Mountain and Miller/Dinsmore Brook Conservation Area, as well as the Frankestown Wildlife Action Plan map can be downloaded from francestownlandtrust.org

The Brook Floater Mussel

By Susie Spikol

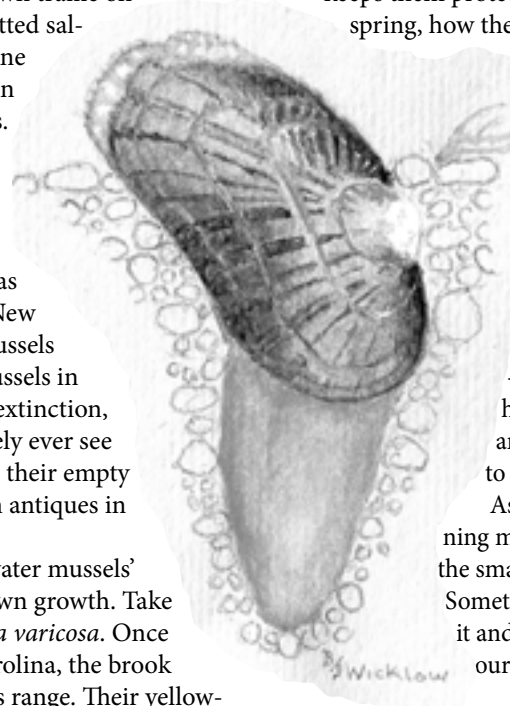
Freshwater mussels are not exactly charismatic. They don't flit gracefully about like a Karner blue butterfly, or munch on clover like a cottontail. They aren't known for their sweet songs like a wood thrush, and they don't close down traffic on the first rainy night of spring like spotted salamanders. They are fish parasites at one stage of their lives, and they don't even taste good like their saltwater cousins.

But America can boast that it is home to the greatest variety of freshwater mussels in the world, so there's that. And if you were wondering what the most imperiled fauna was in North America, according to the New Hampshire's Wildlife Action Plan, mussels take top honors. Many freshwater mussels in the United States are on the verge of extinction, though we've hardly noticed. We barely ever see them, and when we do it's most often their empty shells, licked clean by raccoons, or on antiques in the form of buttons or fancy inlays. In many ways, the story of the freshwater mussels' decline is linked to the story of our own growth. Take the brook floater mussel, *Alasmidonta varicosa*. Once found from Nova Scotia to South Carolina, the brook floater was widespread throughout its range. Their yellowish-green to brownish-black shells could be found snuggled into the clean waters of cobbled stream and river bottoms of New England. But almost two centuries of development along our streams and rivers has led to pollution, sedimentation, increased nutrient loading, and alterations to the natural flow of rivers. These human-driven factors have all taken their toll on this small sensitive mussel. Recently, the New Hampshire Fish and Game Department reported that over 70 percent of the surveyed brook floater populations had less than 30 individuals.

Freshwater mussels have withstood much over the 240 million years they have existed. But now, according to Dr. Barry Wicklow, an aquatic ecologist at St. Anselm College, the brook floater is in trouble. In fact, scientists have petitioned the federal government to consider listing it as an endangered species, an act that would give it protection, make funds available for further study, and perhaps lead to reintroduction plans.

According to Wicklow, who has been studying the brook floater mussel since he discovered a population in the Piscataquog River in 1994, this small bivalve is an essential component of a healthy river. He describes how they do the dirty work of cleaning the water by filtering contaminants and sediments through the simple act of eating and digesting. He points out that they're also a valuable food source to the lower portions of the food chain. He adds, "The more I learn, the more I understand that this fauna – invisible to most people – is not only ecologically important but also astonishing in their diversity and adaptations."

Not that long ago my young son and I were looking at a



mussel collection recently donated to the nature center where I work. He was holding a brook floater shell in his small hand, letting his fingers run over the shimmery inside of the shell while I told him the story of how mussels reproduce: how the females hold the fertilized eggs in a special chamber in their shell that keeps them protected all summer, fall, and winter, and then in spring, how the little larvae get exhaled from the mother and

float through the water in thick strands until a fish swims by and the larva hitch a ride on the fish. For a few weeks, the larva is on the fish, encased in its gills, growing and slowly changing into a mussel in miniscule that is released from the fish to settle into the pebbly bottom of the stream. He listened all the while turning the shell around and around. Finally he looked up and said that he would like to be this mussel one day -- that it sounded like a safe way to be an animal, how good it must feel to live inside a shell so shiny and smooth inside and how much fun it would be to do your growing up on a fish's gill.

As I hold the brook floater shell in my hand, running my thumb over its rough outside shell, I imagine the small soft body that once called this shell home. Something maternal in me flares. I want to curl around it and protect it for my own child, for its children, for our planet.

Susie Spikol is Community Program Director for the Harris Center for Conservation Education in Hancock, New Hampshire. Reprinted here with permission of Northern Woodlands and Susie Spikol. The illustration for this column was drawn by FLT director Barry Wicklow.

UPDATE: Since the July publication of this article, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service published a 12-month petition finding that the brook floater (*Alasmidonta varicosa*), a freshwater mussel, does not at this time warrant listing under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). The finding will be part of a batched Federal Register notice for eight species.

The Service completed a review of the best available science on the species, documented in a peer and partner reviewed Species Status Assessment (SSA) report, and found that most populations do have access to the stream habitat they need for long-term survival. The mussel is currently found in 14 of the 16 states and 15 Canadian watersheds where it was found historically, and stable populations can be found throughout its current range. Over time, changes in temperature and precipitation patterns may degrade the clean, flowing streams brook floaters depend upon, as will development and competition from invasive species. The Service concluded that despite these projected threats, the brook floater is expected to maintain enough healthy populations across its range to withstand future disturbances. This makes the species' risk of extinction sufficiently low that it does not meet the definition of an endangered or threatened species.

Ready to enjoy the benefits of hiking? Rand Brook Forest is a great place to start

My first involvement with the Francestown Land Trust was walking along with Ray James on his easement monitoring duties. These walks ranged from short strolls along town roads, to vigorous bushwhacking with water hazards perambulating large tracts of land. In either case, I found myself returning home pleasantly invigorated and inspired. When I took over Ray's duties, I used the easement monitoring outings as a way to force myself to take some time to be alone in the woods, do some mushroom hunting, and appreciate my surroundings.

This time of year, the weather and scenery are particularly conducive to getting outside, either for a short walk to enjoy the views, or for an extended hike to get the heart pumping. In addition to appreciating nature, there are health benefits as well. Getting outside and going hiking can help reduce the chance of heart disease, lower blood pressure, lift your spirits as endorphins are released by the body, and strengthen your bones and muscles. And, if you're lucky, you may get to see some of the abundant wildlife in our area. Bear, bobcat, fox, coyote, fisher, beaver, porcupine, deer, as well as many smaller mammals, reptiles and birds—all inhabit our properties.

Rand Brook Forest is a great place to get acquainted with FLT's trails—a map and directions are available at: francestownlandtrust.org/maps. Forest Trail and Rand Brook Forest Road



Cellar hole, Rand Brook Forest field near Driscoll Hill Rd.

are accessed from the Old County Road South trailhead. Both lead through forests in various stages of succession up to a large field maintained by FLT. Look for the Allegheny mound ant hills along the road. They bite! At the top corner of the field, you get a beautiful view of Rose and Lyndeborough Mountains.

From this point, at the intersection of Forest Trail and Driscoll Hill Road, there are many choices. One option would be to return to the trailhead the way you came or make a loop using the alternate trail; there are also a few out and back alternatives of roughly one mile in length. One of these is the Draper Farm Trail, which winds through the woods to the site of one of the oldest residences in town where you will find cellar holes and an old barn foundation. Or, from the intersection of Forest Trail and Driscoll Hill Road, you could head north on Driscoll Hill Road, crossing Brennan Brook to the intersection with Birdsall Road. Or you could head south to the bridge abutment where Driscoll Hill Road crossed Rand Brook, passing the foundation of Schoolhouse #9 and at least one other cellar hole as you wind down to the brook.

For the especially hardy, there's always the option of crossing Rand Brook and continuing across Russell Station Road to the summit of Rose Mountain, which is known for its views and stone cairns. If you opt to climb the mountain, you'll want to pack a lunch and plan on a four-hour round trip.

Larry Ames



Trail Etiquette

Following a few unwritten rules can help make your hike and the hike for others more pleasant. Among some commonly observed practices are:

- **Hike quietly.** Speak in low voices and turn your cell phone down, if not off. Enjoy the sounds of nature and let others do the same.
- **Don't toss your trash.** Not even biodegradable items such as banana peels. It is not good for animals to eat non-native foods and who wants to look at your old banana peel while it ever-so-slowly decomposes? If you packed it in, pack it back out.
- **When bringing a pet on a hike, be sure to keep it on a leash and under control.** Protect sensitive wildlife - and don't forget to remove pet waste from the trail!
- **Leave what you find.** The only souvenirs a hiker should come home with are photographs and happy memories. (And an improved fitness level!)
- **Help preserve the trail by staying on the trail.** Walk through the mud or puddle and not around it, unless you can do so without going off the trail. Widening a trail by going around puddles, etc. is bad for trail sustainability. Just because it looks easy to cut the corner off of a switchback doesn't mean it is a good idea.

An evening of compelling facts at Annual FLT Meeting

After a social reception and a short business meeting, an audience of more than 40 were treated to a thought-provoking talk at Annual Meeting of the Francestown Land Trust on June 6, 2019.

Keynote speaker and professor of Biology at Boston University, Dr. Richard B. Primack presented "Walden Warming: Climate Change Comes to Thoreau's Woods." For more than 20 years, Dr. Primack and his research team have been amassing a rich portfolio of natural observations comparing those made by Henry David Thoreau in the 1850s to now.

Thoreau made meticulous observations about the natural world around Walden Pond in Concord, Massachusetts more than 150 years ago. Dr. Primack uses these observations as a starting point to examine the effects of warming temperatures and other aspects of

climate change on plants and animals.

During an evening of interesting facts, a complex picture of the intense connection between plants and insects and birds emerged, and a window was opened into the disruption of this natural flow that is now unfolding before us.

At the end of the evening, Dr. Primack offered three suggestions from the conclusion of his book about what each of us can do: Observe Nature, Live Simply, and Take Action—both locally and globally.

Francestown Land Trust has donated a signed copy of Dr. Primack's book *Walden Warming: Climate Change Comes to Thoreau's Woods* to the George Holmes Bixby Memorial Library—it's a good read!



**FRANCESTOWN
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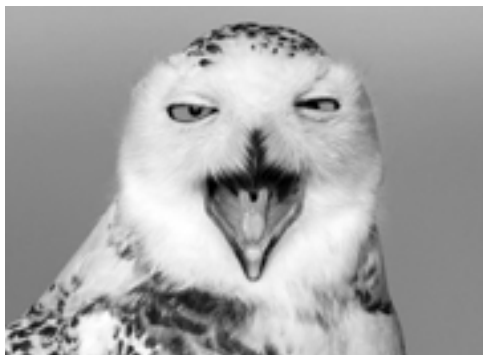
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Owls of the World: Whooooo's watching you?

**The Joan Hanchett Nature Series
Friday, November 8, 2019 at 6:30pm
Francestown Town Hall, second floor**

Naturalist Marcia Wilson and wildlife photographer Mark Wilson are a charismatic team who teach, study, photograph, and share their passion for the natural world.

Everyone loves owls! Yet, how many of us have ever seen a live owl up close? Perhaps you've glimpsed the shadowy form of a Great Horned Owl in the headlights as you've traveled a back road at night. Ever scanned a frozen saltmarsh or farmer's meadow in winter, hoping to find that Arctic hunter, the Snowy Owl? How about a mob of noisy crows circling a white pine tree—have they found an owl? You probably know that most owls thrive on eating small rodents like mice and voles with some owls taking insects, ducks, snakes, fish, frogs or bats. But did you know that one owl even relishes a meal of skunk? Some owls such as Great Horned, Barred and Eastern Screech Owls are more common than you might think. Boreal owls and Great Gray owls, a



rare find here, are found on other continents, too. Others, like Snowy Owls, Eurasian eagle owls, and familiar Barn Owls often appear in popular movies and nature programs.

Come find out more!

Mark and Marcia will share the field marks, signs and naturalist's skills that you can use to find wild owls without disturbing them, while introducing you to six live owls up close. Everyone is treated to a hooting lesson, as well as tips on how to attract and protect owls near you. Autographed copies of Mark's book *Owling: Enter the World of the Mysterious Birds of the Night* will be available for

purchase the evening of the program.

The Joan Hanchett Nature Series is a free program for adults and children of all ages. It is sponsored by Francestown Land Trust, George Holmes Bixby Memorial Library, Francestown News, and the Francestown Conservation Commission.

**Join our email list to learn about our upcoming events.
Contact us at info@francestownlandtrust.org to be added to this list.**