



Andover Village
Improvement Society
Andover's Land Trust
Founded 1894

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From the AVIS President

Mike Timko

One of the greatest challenges to conservation land trusts like AVIS is the incursion of invasive species, non-native plants that, without their natural competitors, threaten to take over our woods.

This coming summer, we plan to begin to take on this challenge and we need your help.

The stretch of AVIS land from Ballardvale train station to Central Street at the "Abbott Bridge", the Vale and Shawsheen River Reservations, comprises almost a third of the winding course of the Shawsheen River in Andover. From time to time there have been efforts by the town and other organizations to create a "Shawsheen River Greenway" along the river, a pedestrian corridor, which would include all of that land. While the town has many other priorities, development of such a path is central to AVIS's main purpose.

For the past several years, AVIS has spent a lot of our annual improvement efforts on our part of the Greenway, to the point of now having a complete path, the Vale Trail, which we will be dedicating on April 27th. Please come and see what we have accomplished so far.

As we have completed the trails, bridges and boardwalks we have been aware that too much of the foliage we can see from them is alien and invasive, spoiling the view and, in places, reducing the understory to a mono-culture, a single species, that doesn't even belong there. Tangles of bittersweet are literally blanketing and killing native trees. The result is that native plants, animals and insects are being robbed of their habitat and are being squeezed out.

We have decided to do something about this problem this year. With the help of a grant from the MA Fish and Wildlife, we will be trying to eradicate the worst of the infestations of bittersweet and buckthorn, among others, in these reservations. The grant will allow us to hire a professional team to do the hard parts, like targeted spraying of approved herbicides. To get this grant, AVIS has to contribute some money and quite a bit of volunteer time. It turns out that the best way to attack some of the invasives is to cut them down in early Spring, which does not kill them, and then spray the regrowth at its fullest in late August. This strategy also allows the herbicide spray to be contained to the targets instead of being broadcast and getting into the river.

A call will be going out in the next few months for volunteers to help with the initial work. If you would like to see the path along the river returned to a more natural New England setting, please join us for a day of really productive "green" effort.

Shawsheen River Greenway

Please join us on April 27th for the dedication of the first section of the Andover Greenway. Over the past two years volunteers have been working long hours and using heavy labor to improve both the Vale Reservation and the Shawsheen River Reservation. Four major groups contributed over 1000 hours and have accomplished great things in order to make this section of the river truly a site to behold.

A group of Boy Scouts led by Adam Jones completed a boardwalk in the Vale reservation; a group of adult volunteers led by Dave Doub and David Bunting constructed a truss bridge across a part of the river in the Vale Reservation; and two Boy Scout troops led by Jonathan Yeh and James Aaronson cleared a path and built a boardwalk linking the Vale Reservation with the Shawsheen River Reservation. As a result of this volunteer effort, a continuous path stretches 1.4 miles from the Ballardvale train station to Central Street.

The larger vision of planners is to have a Greenway run the entire length of the Shawsheen River in Andover.

We plan to dedicate this first section of the Greenway, at 2:00 pm on Saturday, April 27, 2013. Rain date will be Sunday, April 28th. A short hike will leave the parking lot at 1:00 to explore the southern end of the Greenway. Those interested in a longer hike should meet at 12:30 pm at the intersection of Central Street and Abbot Bridge Drive to take the approximately 1.4 mile hike through the Shawsheen River Reservation and the Vale Reservation. Both hikes return to the north end of the commuter parking lot where the dedication ceremony begins at 2:00 pm.



A Conversation with Peggy Keck

By Alix Driscoll

TRUST IN AVIS IS PARAMOUNT

AVIS has acquired much land by gift because “Landowners trust AVIS”, says Peggy Keck, AVIS trustee emeritus and Vice President of AVIS for land acquisition for more than two score years. “I was lucky. I got more credit than I deserve for land acquisition because people came to me, offering their land. I didn’t have to work to persuade them.”

The achievements that Peggy is particularly proud about were the early gifts to AVIS of the Burns, Collins and Wilkinson reservations. “Christine Forsythe was adopted by the Burns family and she wanted to leave behind a memorial to her loving family.” Helen Dooley Collins donated family land that gave her happy memories of her family’s rural history and cow pastures. And the Wilkinsons were concerned about taxes but they did not want to sell or see the land developed. These were not rich people. All three parcels came from people who cared about the land, valued it as open space, and trusted AVIS to care for and preserve it for future generations to enjoy.” For Peggy, these wonderful gifts are among the most meaningful accomplishments and a great tribute to AVIS.

Peggy added that trust is developed in part because AVIS has an all-volunteer corps of trustees, wardens and workers. No one serves for personal benefit or financial gain.

In addition, in 2012 Gladys Sakowich shared, “We are so pleased about the way you people are heading,” as she and her husband, Tony, donated nine acres of open space to AVIS to become the Sakowich Reservation off Oriole Drive.

A TALE OF POLE HILL

Throughout its long history, AVIS has closely cooperated with town boards, especially the Conservation Commission, which AVIS has strongly supported since its inception five decades ago, and the Planning Board. When working with Deena Hammond, a strong environmentalist and assistant to the Conservation Commission, on the Open Space Plan, it became clear that Pole Hill, off Tewksbury Street, should

be preserved as open space. The area had been historically a popular recreation site with a dance hall, “The Grove,” picnicking, and it was a canoeing destination. It bordered the Shawsheen River and was an important part of the watershed. When it was approved for development, and development on the Tewksbury side had even begun, Peggy and Deena tried to think of a way to preserve the riverside. It occurred to Peggy that swapping the land might be possible because there were the many flat, sandy “tea lots” near South School which were far better suited for development. What were the “tea lots”? Originally this large tract of land was owned by a tea company,

TOWN-AVIS BONDING

Five decades ago AVIS was a prime mover for the first bonding article for the Town to purchase land. At that time, as Peggy explained, there were many acres of open space and farms, and no real urgency to preserve land. Foresighted Town Manager Dick Bowen asked for \$500,000 for bonding to purchase land, which he halved to \$250,000. “AVIS’s Harold Rafton was tireless” lobbying every citizen and businessman he could reach and many other groups, such as garden clubs, the League of Women Voters, and the Boy Scouts to get their support for the effort. Bob Henderson, head of the Conservation Commis-

sion, made an outstanding presentation at Town Meeting; the vote was unanimous. This was significant.” Peggy said. “This meant this awakened Andover’s interest in preserving land.”

Looking forward, Peggy realizes that “we need to continue to preserve open space; population density will increase as changing life styles and new development patterns such as Smart Growth affect future growth. We should continue to purchase every piece of open space available,” because she strongly believes that “development is costly and open space is not”.



Peggy Keck with AVIS Trustees Alix Driscoll and Rob Ciampa. Photo by Rob Ciampa.

which gave away coupons for 25 square foot lots of land in Andover with the purchase of tea. These small lots were basically worthless and over the years taxes went unpaid, owners were unknown and the land was in limbo. The swap would only work if the developer and the Town would agree to it and the Town would agree to clear the titles to the land through court proceedings. Miraculously, the developer was amenable, the Selectmen agreed to it, and as a result the now 34-acre Pole Hill reservation was traded for the “tea lots”. “That was one of my proudest accomplishments,” said Peggy.

She also commented that it is common for AVIS to cooperate with the Town in many ways that are mutually beneficial. A good example is the easement granted by AVIS to extend the sewer line to serve the Wood Hill and High Plain Road schools in exchange for transferring the part of the Indian Ridge Trail behind the High School to AVIS.

ENVISIONING ANDOVER

Looking back over six decades of service to AVIS and to the Town, Peggy shares, “I was guided by the early Master Plan for the town in the early 1960s, which envisioned a strong, compact, Town center and business district, surrounded by a semi-urban residential area. As you moved out from the center, lots would become larger and the outskirts would remain semi-rural. This plan would provide a visual separation from neighboring towns and establish the residential character of Andover by prohibiting commercial strip development on the main roads into town.” Peggy said this vision had been very helpful in making decisions over the years.

Looking far forward, Peggy predicts the death of malls and the revitalization of downtown business districts as more people turn to the Internet for shopping and look to downtown to provide their everyday

needs. "Therefore downtowns must become stronger and cater to local people".

REVIVE THE OPEN SPACE TASK FORCE

In conclusion, Peggy urges the re-activation of the Open Space Task Force, appointed by the Town Manager, to identify parcels which are too important to the Town not to protect. She thinks the Task Force can strategize how to fund these parcels. This group was launched by former Selectman, Mary French, and a number of significant purchases were made by the Conservation Commission, including the Reichhold parcels along the Shawsheen River, as a result of its recommendations.

Peggy Keck has served AVIS for decades as Vice President for land acquisition, working for years with landowners to protect their land, adding several reservations to the AVIS family. She has wisely guided AVIS as the town has grown rapidly. Peggy was a prime mover behind the first Open Space Bonding Article at Town Meeting in 1967 and a six decades-long supporter of acquisition of open space. She was long-serving member and chair of the Planning Board; advocate of trails to connect parcels of conserved land. In 2005 the Town celebrated her extraordinary service with the Virginia Cole Community Service Award. That same year AVIS re-named the Rocky Hill Reservation as the Peggy Keck Reservation in her honor. Approximately 208 acres and 41 parcels were conveyed to AVIS while Peggy was in charge of land acquisition.

Volunteer Opportunities

INVASIVE SPECIES CONTROL

Thanks to the great work of Trustee Amy Janovsky and others, AVIS has been selected for a grant from the Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife, Landowner Incentive Program (LIP), to begin the first of many stages of land management. We will start by eliminating some of the invasive species from the Shawsheen River and Vale Reservations. There will be a couple of opportunities for volunteers to help trim back buckthorn and bittersweet, among others. Times are not certain yet, so watch the website for information or contact John Hess at hess.john@att.net.

AVIS MAP AND THE 21ST CENTURY

The AVIS map is still a very useful tool and it shows the extent of AVIS properties throughout Andover. However, several new acquisitions are not shown on the map. It was prepared by hand by our former President Nat Smith. AVIS Trustees would like to find a volunteer or volunteers to help update the map and perhaps to use GIS or other systems to make it digital. If you would be able to give us a hand or if you know someone who might, please contact John Hess at hess.john@att.net.

Join Us for the Annual Meeting

A Century of AVIS: Some People from the Journey - Please join us for the Annual Meeting on March 12, 2013. Many Andover residents are aware of the wonderful 1980 book by Juliet Haines Mofford, "AVIS, A History in Conservation". Our speakers, Gail Ralston, Jane Cairns, and John Hess, will attempt to bring to life some of the fascinating personalities who have influenced the history of AVIS and the conservation movement in town. Our guest speakers are representatives of the Andover Historical Society who have done research into the history of AVIS and the history of conservation in Andover. The meeting will be at the Philips Academy Log Cabin, 6:00 PM. See Calendar and/or WebSite for details.



A group of hikers pauses to listen to David Dargie (far left) during the 44th Annual Rafton Reservation Hike, 1/27/13. Photo by Mike Timko.

January Hike on Taft and Ward Reservations

By Fred Snell, Trustee

On January 6, 2013, a mild Sunday afternoon, I led a group of a dozen hikers through the AVIS Amy Gordon Taft Reservation and across Salem Street to the Charles W. Ward Reservation belonging to Trustees of Reservations. We climbed to the top of Holt Hill, the highest point in Essex County, where we saw the panoramic view from the Boston skyline to the power plant stacks in Salem, MA. This hike was sponsored by the Andover Committee of the AMC, which runs many hikes in the area. See the AMC Boston Chapter website for the current schedule.

As we walked across the Taft Reservation, we saw many reminders of its agricultural past, from a man-made pond used for watering cattle, to many stone walls including what appears to be a foundation for a barn with walls ten feet high near Salem Street.

We saw the work in progress on the portion of the Ward Reservation facing Salem Street where the Trustees of Reservation are restoring about 15 acres of woodland back to grasslands that were there about 50 years ago. This will help maintain a diversity of plants and wildlife that requires open field space. This restoration is about two percent of the 705 acre Ward Reservation.

The 62 acre Taft Reservation was acquired over a period of years from the late 1960's though the 1990's. The first 30 acres was a gift from Rebekah Taft, a former AVIS Trustee and daughter of Reverend Arthur Taft who purchased the property from the Gray family in 1932. The gift was named for her mother, Amy Gordon Taft. Nineteen more acres were purchased by AVIS in 1997 and 13 acres came from conservation land from the Coventry Lane subdivision.



Photos by Fred Snell

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Spring 2013 Calendar

March 12, 6:00 PM

Annual Meeting

Philips Academy Log Cabin in the Wildlife Sanctuary, 212 Highland Road, Andover. We will start at 6:00 PM for a social hour and the meal will begin at 7:00 PM. The meeting and speakers will start at 7:45 PM and is open to the public at no cost. There is a charge of \$28 for the meal. For dinner reservations, contact Libby Poland at 978-475-6159 or wolcott5@comcast.net.

March 24th, 1:00-3:30 PM

Vale/Shawsheen Work Party

Shawsheen River Reservation

We'll meet at the entrance on Central Street adjacent to the Horn Bridge. Parking is available on Abbotts Bridge Road. Volunteers should wear gloves and plan to use loppers (provided). We will be cutting invasive plants such as buckthorn and bittersweet. For questions, please contact Amy Janovsky at 978-475-8655.

April 6, 9:00 AM - 1:00

Stanley Reservation Work Party
Cutting of invasive plants: Oriental Bittersweet and Honeysuckle. Park on Spring Grove Road near the cemetery side entrance. For questions, please contact David Dargie at 978-996-4475 or david@dargie.com

April 13, 9:00 AM - 12:00 PM

Vale Reservation Work Party
Meet at trail entrance. Park at the MBTA parking lot on Andover Street. For questions, please contact Dave Doub at 978-470-3703 or davedoub@verizon.net.

April 20, 9:00 AM - 12:00 PM

West Parish Meadow Work Party
Cutting of invasive plants: Honeysuckle. Park at West Parish Church on Reservation Road. The trailhead is to the right of the playground. For questions, please contact Fred Snell at 978-686-3647 or fredsnell@gmail.com

April 27, 1:00 PM

Shawsheen River Greenway Dedication.

Meet at the Ballardvale Commuter Rail Parking Lot for a hike to the Truss Bridge and return for the Ceremony (Ceremony to start at 2:00 pm at the Vale Reservation entrance near the Commuter Rail Parking Lot). Those interested in a longer hike should meet at 12:30 pm at the intersection of Central Street and Abbot Bridge Drive to take the approximately 1.4 mile hike through the Shawsheen River Reservation and the Vale Reservation to join the ceremony. Rain Date: April 28th.

For additional AVIS events, see avisandover.org. For AMC walks, see amcboston.org/andover. To check for other hikes, visit andovertrails.org.



Mike Timko	President
Rob Ciampa	Membership
John Hess	Editor
Lindsey Timko	Designer

The AVIS Update is a biannual publication of the Andover Village Improvement Society. The mission of AVIS is to acquire and preserve Andover land in its natural state. More than 1,000 acres of land are managed by AVIS and are open to all for passive recreation.

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