



# Pascommuck post

Summer 2018

Tired of all the “fake” and bad news saturating the air waves and papers lately? Me too! Fortunately, our 2018 newsletter offers a welcome reprieve – down to earth, local, all natural informative articles relating to the trust’s work on saving open space, and thus, our quality of life here in the valley. So, sit back, relax, and take in the big picture of what our small land trust has been doing lately.

## President’s Report

Let’s start with a summary of the more important general trust activities we have been involved in since our last newsletter. The fall and spring plant sales were surprisingly successful. Representative John Scibak attended our February meeting, and offered some insight as to how we could obtain state support for various projects. Dianne McLane created a catchy publicity

flyer for our functions. Thanks to Gerrit Stover, we have been raising revenue by selling an amazing book, “Native Plants for New England Gardens”. Sue Walz has again raised funds via her annual calendar, featuring scenic vistas of Nashawannuck Pond and Mt. Tom. We now have a connection to Amazon Smile, so keep us in mind if you shop on Amazon. Our Annual Meeting in February was well attended, thanks to freelance naturalist Charlie Eiseman, who talked about native plants as insect habitat. Treasurer Brian Dillon set up an endowment for general maintenance, as well as a special account for care of Mutter Field, with the help of grants from Florence Savings Bank and Fields Pond Foundation.



We now have an updated brochure, accompanied by a revised map. Some of us attended the Lathrop Community’s “Free Fifty” celebration last fall, which included a lecture on how they managed to eradicate invasives on 50 acres of open space in their backlands off Florence Road; tours of their nature trails were also given at both of their properties in Easthampton and Northampton. Our volunteer spreadsheet was revised by Linda Bush and Molly Goodwin, making our volunteer program more efficient and effective. Four of us met with Easthampton’s new Mayor to discuss ways the city and PCT can work together on saving open space in the area. The Easthampton Land Protection Collaborative, of which PCT is a member, continues to

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move forward on protecting the Mt. Tom foothills, farmland, and other open space parcels around the city. We're hoping to close on at least one major project soon, so stay tuned. With the help of Fred, Jane, and Forest Andresen and other board members, our presence at the June Cultural Chaos included a display table and two wall mural photo blowups created by Marty Klein and friend Julian.

Properties maintenance is always a challenge. Only one work party was needed so far this year, though, due to an increase in volunteers working on their own specific projects. However, this one work session was enough to kill a dinosaur! Luckily we managed to achieve our goal of freeing up several flowering crabs encroached upon by nasty invasives in the field at Pomeroy Meadows Conservation Area, but we came out scratched, bloodied,



and looking like survivors of a Civil War battle. Three native shrub plantings were added to our properties. Kevin Mulligan completed some major carpentry repairs at Brickyard Brook Conservation Area, Volunteer David Litterer re-painted trail marker blazes at most of our properties. New bird houses made by Craig Goff and Michael Caron were set in place at Old Trolley Line C.A. and Pomeroy Meadows C.A. New entrance, trail, and interpretive signs were installed at various trust locations. Hidden boundary markers were re-located and flagged by Gerrit Stover at Old Trolley Line C.A. Much more could be mentioned, but alas, there's no room left at the Inn.

Keep in mind our fall plant sale in September, date to be announced later. Hey, we need plant donations, folks! Our Treasurer, Brian Dillon, will be stepping down at the end of this year. Should anyone know of somebody who

may be interested in taking on this vital task, please let us know. Marty Klein will be giving a mushroom walk August 4, 10-noon, at the Greenberg Family Forest, Southampton Rd, Westhampton. One last item before I ride off into the sunset. Our volunteers are the backbone of the trust, and we dearly appreciate all the hard work they do. If you are able, please consider offering a bit of your time to our noble cause.

Enjoy our newsletter. Perhaps these articles will encourage you to strap on your hiking boots and head out to our trails. It's a good cure for the blues, and may be just what the doctor ordered.

*John Bator*

# Old Trolley Line

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In 2001 we moved from Florence to our current residence on Lovefield St. It was in September, a few days after 9/11, so our excitement over moving into a new house was somewhat tempered by the events of the day.

During the following months I started exploring the land around us and especially the land behind our property and found that it belonged to the Pascommuck Trust. I have always been interested in land preservation and conservation. During my undergraduate college days I became involved in an on campus ecology group and briefly served on the board of the Fitchburg Conservation Commission as Secretary.

Eventually I contacted the Trust and attended a board meeting and became a property monitor for Old Trolley Line. I met with Gerrit Stover who oriented me to the land and what to look out for. Since then we have cleaned up discarded junk near the property and have put up property markers and vehicle prohibition signs. During my early days as monitor there were a number of ATV's going through the property. Since then, that activity has appeared to have ceased.

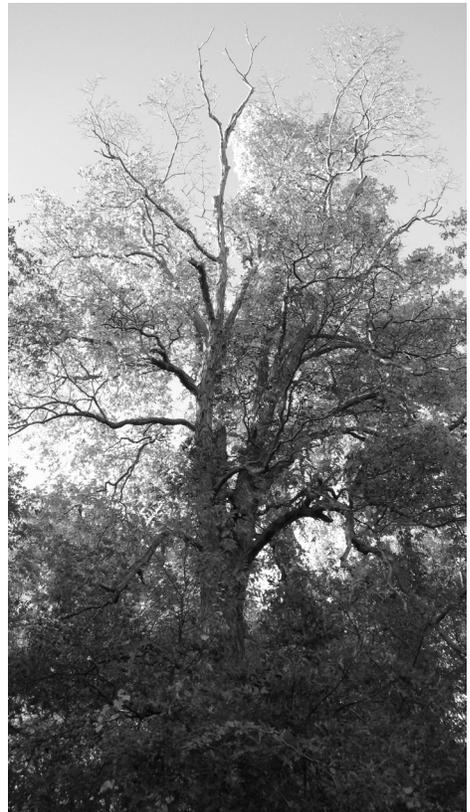
As I became familiar with the property and its various habitats, I became enchanted with a large Shagbark Hickory tree that sat on a small rise and towered over the area as a giant sentinel. There were dead limbs coming off the tree and it appeared to be near the end of its lifespan. At one point there were a number of Oriental Bittersweet vines climbing up the trunk and stressing it. I endeavored to remove the vines but to no avail. After one winter I went out to the property only to discover that the giant tree had fallen. When I climbed up on the fallen giant I could see that the vines were still covering it. The remaining trunk was hollow as the heartwood was completely gone.

Another favorite spot on the property is a copse of small Birch trees adjacent to a forest and bordering a small meadow. Their white bark is a pleasant contrast to all the greenery and they never seem to get any bigger as if they needed an adult to tell them how to grow up. Entering the copse one is surrounded by the small trees giving a sense of serenity and sanctuary.

There is a diversity of habitats on the property, small ponds and vernal pools. The sound of peepers from the property can be heard at our house signaling another change of season. The open fields afford a view of wildlife passing through. On any given day, deer and coyote can be seen. Fox and bobcats have also been observed passing through. They often end up coming through our backyard.

Bluebirds can be regularly seen on the property as there are a number of nesting boxes being maintained. There are a number of other birds (Cardinals, Barn Swallows, Owls, and Herons) to be seen making it a birdwatchers paradise.

We feel very privileged to live near such an open preserved land trust property with it's various environs. There is currently no signage indicating the existence of the PCT property except for the property markers as well as the maps and brochures available on our website. That anonymity is about to change as Gerritt Stover's article will attest.



*Michael Caron*

# Nature's Internet

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Think of mushrooms like icebergs.

Those fleshy growths you see in the soil or on trees are only a small part of the big picture. They are the fruits of the fungus organism and appear when conditions are optimal for their growth - moisture, temperature, season, etc.

It's when you start to understand the hidden parts that this story gets really interesting. That unseen organism is composed of masses of thin threads known as a mycelium. Those threads function like a kind of underground internet, connecting to the roots of different plants. Around 90% of land plants have mutually-beneficial relationships (symbiosis) with fungi in this way. The fungi don't photosynthesize like plants but they do need sugars to make energy. And plants are often unable to obtain vital nutrients from the soil.

*symbiosis*

So, in these mycorrhizal associations, plants provide fungi with food in the form of carbohydrates. And, in exchange, the fungi help the plants suck up water, and provide nutrients like phosphorus and nitrogen, via their mycelia. Mycorrhizae help individual plants to grow. Fungal networks also boost their host plants' immune systems. That's because, when a fungus colonizes a plant's roots, it triggers the production of defense-related chemicals. These make future immune system responses quicker and more efficient,

By linking to these networks, plants can help out their neighbors by sharing nutrients and information – or sabotage unwelcome plants by spreading toxic chemicals through the network. The “wood wide web.”

Back in 1997, a Canadian researcher found one of the first pieces of evidence. She showed that Douglas firs and birch trees can transfer carbon between them via mycelia. Others have since shown that plants can exchange nitrogen and phosphorus as well, by the same route.



Mature, donor trees help out small, younger ones using this fungal internet. Absent this, it's believed many seedlings wouldn't survive. In the 1997 study, seedlings in the shade – which are likely to be short of food - received more carbon from donor or “hub” trees. In other studies, it was found that bean seedlings that were not themselves under attack by aphids, but were connected to those that were, via fungal mycelia, activated their anti-aphid chemical defenses. Those without mycelial connections did not. Seedlings with access to the networks had higher survival rates, numbers of leaves, and greater heights than seedlings isolated from the mycorrhizal networks.

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These fungal networks make communication between plants, including those of different species, faster, and more effective. The fungal internet exemplifies one of the great lessons of ecology: seemingly separate organisms are often connected, and may depend on each other. The wood wide web is a crucial part of how these connections form.



Forests with a robust mycorrhizal network show improved survival of seedlings, which get nutrients from older plants, and improved defense against infections. Furthermore, because of the wide array of nutrients that are exchanged, different plant species can pass what they have in excess and receive what they lack.

Research suggests that trees don't just compete for survival, but also cooperate and share resources using these underground fungal networks.

Nature might not be all about a ruthless "survival of the fittest", as we've long believed. So, the next time you notice a mushroom, go deep and appreciate the important roles that fungi play in nature. Without them, the world would be a vastly different place than what we see.

*Marty Klein*

## Volunteers and New Members Needed

The Trust is looking for new members. If you are interested in joining the PCT and/or simply volunteering your time for various work parties doing cleanup and trail maintenance, please contact Molly Goodwin at [goodmol@hotmail.com](mailto:goodmol@hotmail.com).

# Old Trolley Line and its surroundings: Conservation History

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In the early 2000s, Pascommuck Conservation Trust cooperated with several partners to protect a buffer of undeveloped -- but severely threatened -- properties next to Mass Audubon's ecological jewel, Arcadia Wildlife Sanctuary.

In 2001, the 42-acre property of the Pond brothers, with fields both north and south of Clapp Street next to the trolley line were saved from development by the Trust. In 2002, permanently secured under a state Agricultural Preservation Restriction, the land was traded to the 300-year-farming family the Pomeroy in exchange for protection of their 80-acre home farm in the Wyben section of Westfield. Director Mark Noonan of Westfield's own land trust, Winding River Land Conservancy, was key to that exchange.

In another 'founding family' transaction engineered by Pascommuck, Jairus and William Burt committed to selling the development rights for their 29 acres, just next door at the corner of Clapp and Fort Hill Road. The state completed that acquisition in 2004, thus protecting not only prime farmland, but also a key historic site and breathtaking views over the farm fields to Mount Tom. That scene is still there to be enjoyed by everyone who drives that road, whether or not they know to thank Pascommuck.



But the first link in this chain of farm properties conserved by the Trust was a 19-acre portion of the former Ed Sparko farm. The farmhouse and barn can still be seen near the intersection of Lovefield Street and the Manhan Rail Trail, next to new houses on what used to be part of the farm. In 2000, after a year of negotiation with Sparko's heirs, Pascommuck was able to buy the backland across the trolley line, and continues to own this tract, which adjoins a City wellhead area running along the Manhan. A portion of the Pond property consisting of wetlands and woods next to the trolley line was later added to the conservation area while a triangle of the best farmland was added to the Pond/Pomeroy agricultural property.

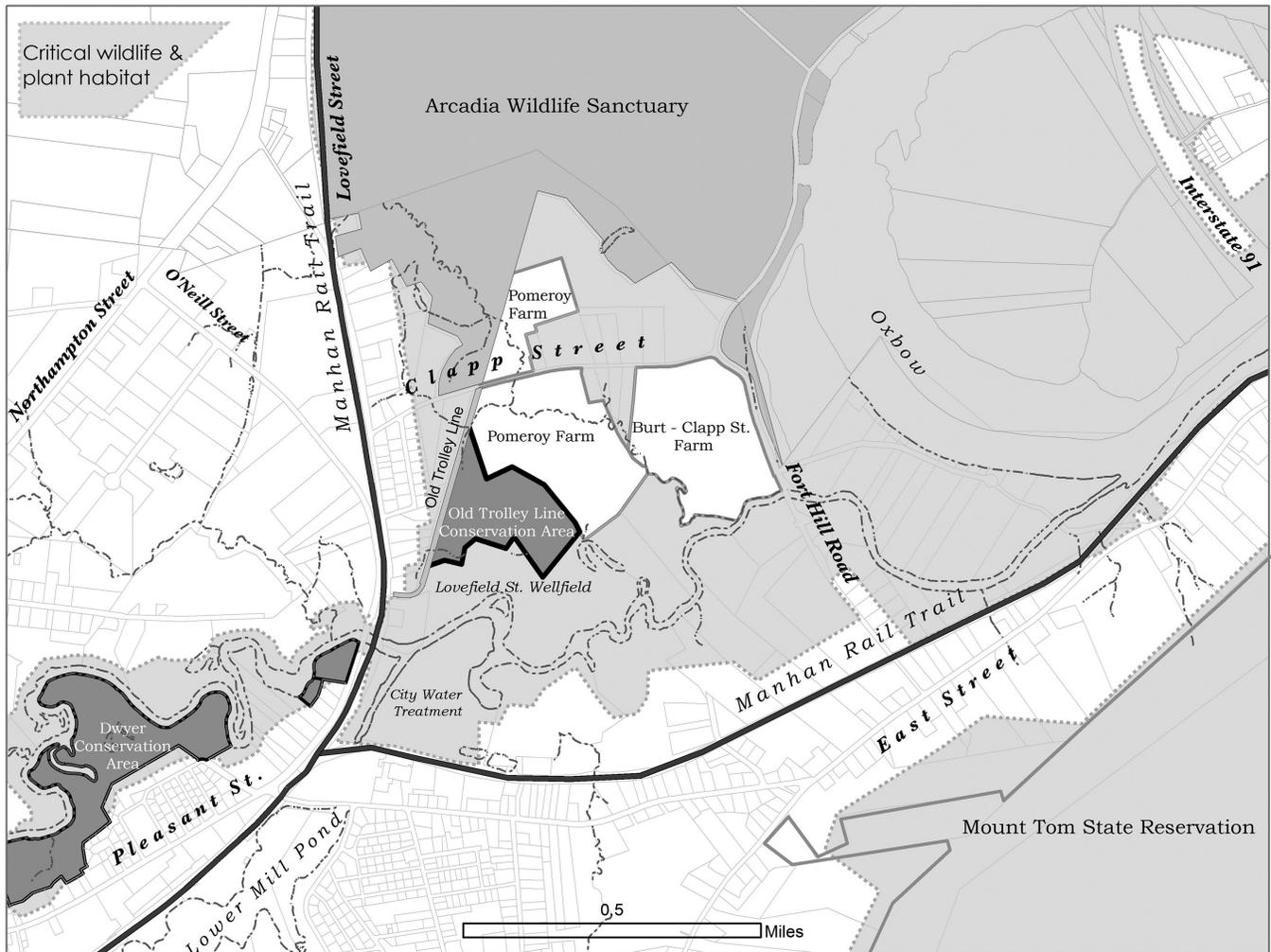
Because access with vehicles is difficult, and because the Sparko land contains a rich web of ancient oxbows of the nearby Manhan River, Pascommuck decided to dedicate the property to plant and animal habitat. The Trust hires Arcadia's property manager to mow each fall, keeping open the fields for birds and insects dependent on meadow vegetation. The small

hidden ponds attract migrating wildfowl, and deer and the occasional migrating bear make appearances. Just a few weeks ago, an ermine (a small weasel) was spotted by Arcadia's director, Jonah Keane.

#### OLD TROLLEY LINE CONSERVATION AREA: THE FUTURE

Pascommuck continues to focus management of Old Trolley Line Conservation Area on preserving its habitat value. However, the Trust recently decided that part of the property can be opened to visitors without damaging that resource. Over the past two years, a plan has been devised for a modest trail network. Access to the Conservation Area over Mass Audubon's trolley line right-of-way (which Audubon purchased from Smith College years ago) is under negotiation. Keep your eye open for an announcement: With permitting and creation of a bridge and signage Pascommuck hopes the trails will be open by fall 2018.

*Gerrit Stover*



# Let's All Do the Timberdoodle Dance

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One twilight evening in late March, my daughter and I arrived at our East Street home and heard a strange, nasal *peent* from the neighboring field on the slopes of Mount Tom, followed by irregular twittering and whistling sounds. “Do you hear that?” I asked.

Her eyes widened, and she laughed, then started doing the timberdoodle dance: knees bent and together, arms folded like wings, she hopped to face one direction or another, buzzing “*peent!*” between hops. Then she sprang up, arms flapping, “*Tweet tweet tweet tweet tweet!*” before crouching again. So I joined in, too, the two of us up in the back yard, celebrating the return of the American woodcock to the neighborhood after a long winter. And in the air, the woodcock swirled his spiraling, whistling flight, barely visible in the rapidly fading light.

Witnessing the springtime antics of the woodcock is one of the great pleasures of the seasonal cycle, but like many natural history spectacles you have to be in the right place at the right time. Imagine my surprise, then, when I first heard a *peent* right near my house! On reflection it shouldn't have been surprising, as for years the neighboring property, with a vacant house, was taking on a more suitable character for woodcock and other birds associated with old fields and young forests. The eastern towhee's “Drink-your-tea!” song had been a frequent morning sound for several years, and it was joined over time by prairie warbler, field sparrow, indigo bunting, gray catbird, and others. As a group, these young-forest birds are of substantial conservation concern, as they have generally been experiencing steep long term population declines, mainly due to habitat loss.



As these uncommon birds increasingly found a home on the neighboring land, it seemed inevitable that someday this party would stop. After all, the vacant house, high on the slope of Mt. Nonotuck, commands a superb view across the Oxbow and the valley, toward the hilltowns in the distance. Surely the property would be redeveloped, and indeed this spring the landowner presented preliminary development plans to the City. If this land is developed, all the white-tailed deer, eastern coyote, red fox, black bear, bobcat, moose, wild turkey, various hawks, owls, and other birds (in addition to the woodcock and its associates) that have used this land over the years would have to go somewhere else.

Perhaps, though, the property can be conserved after all! After discussions with the landowner, efforts led by Mark Wamsley of the Kestrel Trust, in partnership with PCT, the City of Easthampton, and others, have succeeded this summer in securing an option to purchase the property, dependent on the success of a major fundraising campaign. The current conservation plan includes Kestrel owning a portion of the land, while the City takes on the

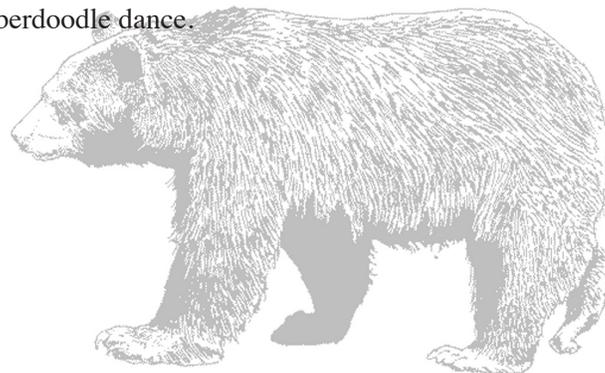
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rest, as a new trailhead for public access to the New England National Scenic Trail and Mount Tom State Reservation. Important fundraising milestones include procuring state grants and support from the Easthampton Community Preservation Committee, as well as private donations.

As mentioned, this conservation project is exciting not only because of its wildlife habitat value, but because the property facilitates public access to the northern end of the Reservation. Easthampton residents have long entered the Reservation via various social trails off East Street, or the informal New England Trail access under the powerlines off Underwood Avenue. A new, formal trailhead off East Street, with an accessible trail climbing to the valley vista, and a connector to the New England Trail, will be a tremendous recreational asset for the area.

Stay tuned for more news on this exciting project, and please consider supporting Kestrel Trust, PCT, and the City in the effort to conserve this land. With hard work and support from funders and the public, everyone will be able to enjoy the spring flight of the woodcock here, and can even join in the timberdoodle dance.

*Tom Lautzenheiser*



*recognition*

**Karina Paterson** this year's recipient of the Pascommuck Conservation Trust \$250.00 Scholarship

*“ I have always had such awe for the world around me. Even just driving down the street and seeing the lush green trees in the summer, the blossoming flowers in spring, and the stunning reds and oranges in the fall can make my day! This vast world that we live in is so extremely beautiful and full of mysteries yet to be discovered. Yet, there are those out there who take advantage of the resources the Earth provides and treat the Earth as though it is not our home, but a trash can. By studying environmental science in college, I intend to learn more about our planet and the way it functions and interacts with its inhabitants and vice versa. I then plan to pursue law school and one day become an environmental lawyer. I would like my children and grandchildren one day to have that same awe of the world, but also to have what we need to preserve our environment. I always knew I would end up in the science field and after long consideration and research, I truly believe that in order for me to make such a real difference I should pursue this field that I am so passionate about.”*

# Spring Plant Sale

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This year the Pascommuck Trust Spring Plant Sale was held on Saturday, May 12<sup>th</sup> at the Big E Supermarket parking lot and a ‘wonderful’ day it was. When all the tables were set up and the plants unloaded for the 8AM start of the sale, it was 54 degrees. Somehow when the rain started at 10:30AM, the temperature actually started going down! By noon it had dropped to 48 degrees and by then the plants and the volunteers were thoroughly soaked and it was decided to call off the sale an hour early and pack up. Even with all the soggy weather, we still had customers checking out the plants but it was too cold and wet to continue.

Despite the unpleasant weather, the Trust made \$255 from the raffle items and \$799 from the plant sales for a total of \$1,054. Included was a total of \$200 received from the sale of the *Native Plants for New England Gardens* book donated to the Trust by Gerrit Stover.

A very special thank you to Sue Bishop and Terry Perrea for providing, once again, some excellent raffle items. Sue and Terry have been donating these items to the Trust for its plant sales for a long time now and we very much appreciate it. The raffle items were won by: 1<sup>st</sup> Prize – Ed Procon, 2<sup>nd</sup> – Ed S. and 3<sup>rd</sup> Don McQuillan.

Thanks also to the Trust volunteers who worked the sale: John Bator, Dawn Ackley, Jane Andresen, Linda Bush, Michael Caron, Sue Walz, Ed Procon, Gerrit Stover, Tom Lautzenheiser, Marty Klein, and Bobbe O’Brien. Also thank you to Darren McQuillan and Bob Smith who helped offloading all the plants for the sale.

The many wonderful garden and house plants were donated by: Valerie McQuillan, Cindy Mitchell, Jessie Vishaway, Marlies Stoddard, Lyn Heady, Bill and Brigitta Fuhrmann, Sean Porth, Bobbe O’Brien, Jane Andresen, Suzette Jones, John and Pat Counter, Peter Jez, Kathleen Nash, Harriet Tatro and Marianne Huber. Special thanks to Shirley Smith who purchased six trays of pretty and colorful annuals and donated them to the Trust Plant Sale. Thank you to everyone listed here as well as those unnamed who dropped off plants in the starting chaos. Thank you!

*Bobbe O’Brien*

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# PASCOMMUCK CONSERVATION TRUST, INC. ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP DRIVE 2018

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## PLEASE CHECK YOUR DESIRED MEMBERSHIP LEVEL

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Supporter (\$6)      | <input type="checkbox"/> Patron (\$75)     |
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## MAKE AN ADDITIONAL DONATION FOR:

Unrestricted \$ \_\_\_\_\_  
Mutter Field Stewardship Fund \$ \_\_\_\_\_

## PLEASE INDICATE VOLUNTEER INTERESTS

- Donate plants for plant sale
- Prepare plants for plant sale
- Donate prizes for raffles
- Setup/take down at plant sale
- Monitor a Trust area near me
- Grant Writing /Fundraising
- Land Conservation  
(Landowner contacts, Planning, etc.)
- Trail/Property Maintenance



**THANK YOU!**

MAIL THIS FORM WITH YOUR CHECK TO:

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