

Pinnacle News

Windmill Hill Pinnacle Association
Spring 2021

The Massey Property: Why Its Conservation Matters

The Windmill Hill Pinnacle Association Board of Trustees is profoundly grateful to all the people who have so generously donated to preserve Lily Pond and 615 acres of forest on the Massey property! This remarkable property crosses into the three towns of Brookline, Athens, and Townshend. It lies just west of the Pinnacle ridgeline and directly within view from the Pinnacle summit. The closing date for acquiring the property is April 29, 2021. We are on target for this purchase with the combination of individual donations, bridge loans, and a grant from Fields Pond Foundation. Now our efforts turn to the project goals for the permanent conservation easement, ecological study, trail, and parking area.



This land is important to conserve because its forest offers habitat for bear and moose, and its two pristine ponds are home to beaver colonies, a heron rookery, and several species of ducks. Its wetlands and vernal pools support the endangered Northern bulrush and other uncommon plants. Wood turtles, a species of conservation concern in Vermont, have ideal habitat in the watershed along Grassy Brook. Development is already encroaching into the adjoining valley and ridge, and acquiring the Massey property will permanently protect it from being developed.

The entire property is part of a priority habitat block for the state, and it connects to another large conserved area to the south, and to the Windmill Reserve by the Townline trail across Grassy Brook Road.

This acquisition may be the most ambitious conservation project undertaken by WHPA. It is arguably among the most important, because of its present and potential connections to other large blocks of protected land. It will be an enormous gift to future generations, as our climate changes and many

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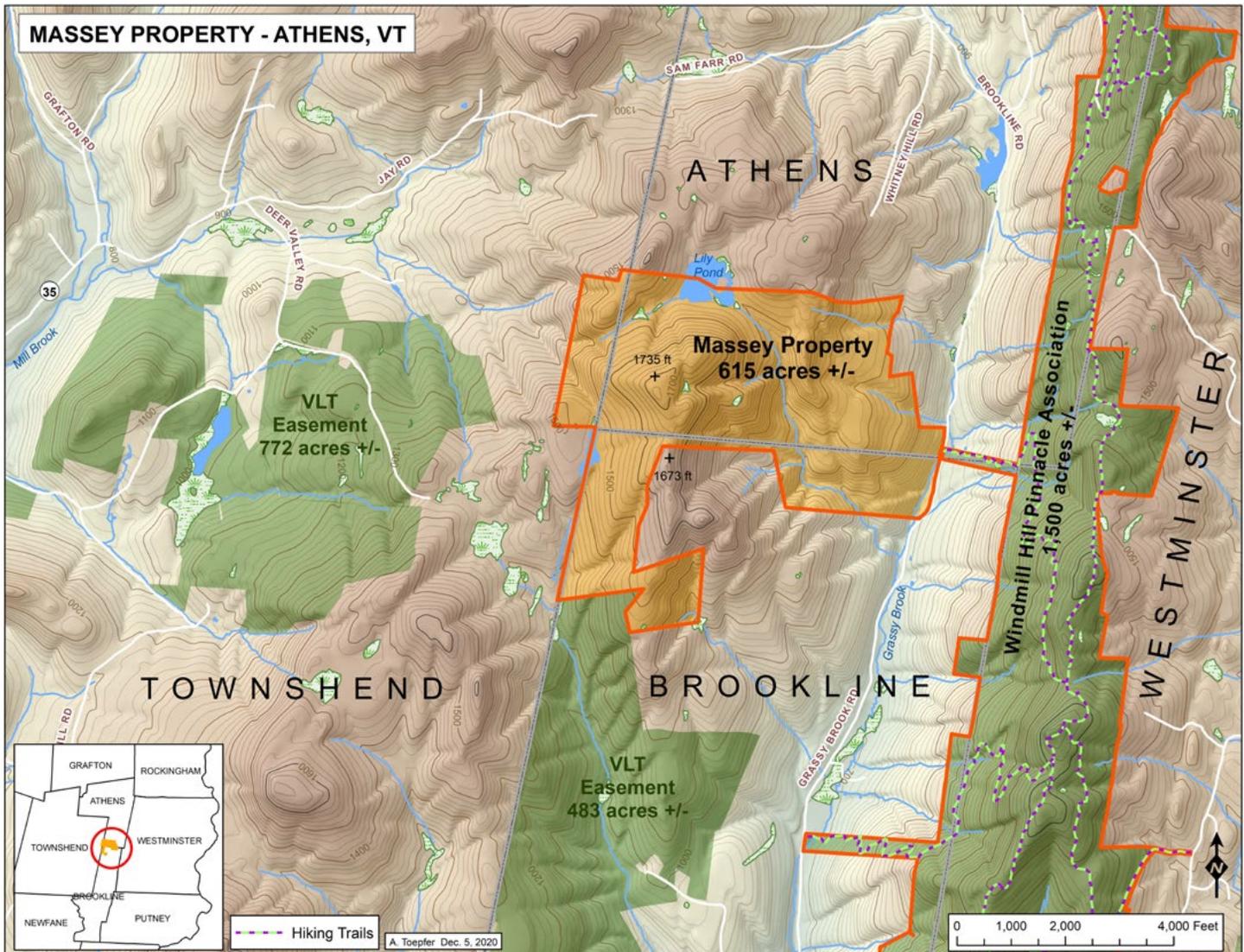
Annual Meeting: Sunday, April 25 at 4 p.m. Online

All WHPA members and supporters are invited to attend our annual meeting on Sunday, April 25 at 4 p.m., held online via Zoom. [Get the link by RSVPing here](#). Board president Silos Roberts will share news and updates on our conservation work. Afterward, stay for the premiere of two engaging videos! The first video features interviews with Rosalyn Shaoul and Libby Mills, WHPA board members who wrote a book on the organization's history, and was produced by fellow board member Jennifer Latham. The second video is a short documentary made by Wendy Wallas, featuring interviews with WHPA founders. [Reserve your copy of the book now](#) by making a special donation of \$25 or more to WHPA.

Conserving the Massey Property *(continued from p. 1)*

species (including our own) seek new habitat. Its conservation will guarantee that the land stays undeveloped so the beaver can build and the heron can nest. Not to mention our own pleasure in seeing the familiar green hillside in the foreground as we look from the Pinnacle summit toward Stratton and beyond.

Fundraising continues to be an enormous undertaking, with a total goal of \$791,000. So far, the response has been tremendously heartening and more than half the goal has been pledged in donations! [Donations are still needed here](#). We are now submitting grant applications to complete the funding required to meet the full conservation goals. We deeply appreciate the support from the Vermont Land Trust, the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board, Fields Pond Foundation, Windham Foundation, the Open Space Institute, and Vermont Fish and Wildlife staff. The advice of profession-



als such as Judy Anderson has been invaluable as we continue our efforts to complete the conservation of this special property.

The history of the property

This land was formerly owned by the late Jim Massey of Westminster West, who over the years acquired many contiguous parcels to put together the full spread of this 615-acre property. When Jim died four years ago, the land was inherited by his nephews in Ohio, who chose to carry out their uncle's wish that the land be conserved. To do that, they were willing to drop the purchase price from

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Conserving the Massey Property *(continued from p. 2)*

the appraised value of \$615,000 to \$500,000—still a hefty number for the Pinnacle, but the challenge is being met.

Long-term goals and provisions for the land

For the ongoing protection of this high-priority land, WHPA will secure a conservation easement with the Vermont Land Trust to preserve the land in perpetuity. We will manage and protect this property primarily for wildlife, non-motorized recreational use, and ecological health. An ecological study will be conducted this summer to provide crucial information about the natural systems, habitats, and species present in the forest, ponds, and streams. Vermont Fish and Wildlife biologists and botanists have explored the property and written letters supporting the conservation of this land.

Trail planning for low-impact use will be informed by the ecological study, to protect sensitive areas. A parking area trailhead will be installed for public access to both the Massey property and the Townline Trail. WHPA plans to lead a guided walk on the property in summer 2021.

The WHPA Management Plan for the property will focus on management strategies that promote diverse, healthy, and mature forests that store significant amounts of carbon as trees grow older and larger, which helps to mitigate the impacts of climate change.

WHPA invests into a stewardship endowment for each property acquired, to generate interest for payment of annual property taxes and insurance costs. The stewardship endowment goal is \$135 per acre for this property, at \$83,000 needed. Planned giving commitments support the protection of all these lands into the future. [Learn more about planned giving and other ways to support our work.](#)

Field Note: Leatherwood, an Early Bloomer in Vermont Woods

By Andy Toepfer

Among the earliest Vermont plants to bloom in our area is one many people are unaware of. Leatherwood (*Dirca palustris*), also known as Eastern leatherwood, often blooms in March. The photo included with this article was taken on March 24. Most people walking the woods in mid- to late March are not looking for flowering shrubs, and this one only blooms for a few days. It is a small and remarkably beautiful flower with the best viewing from only a few inches away.



Leatherwood in bloom. Photo: Andy Toepfer

The shrub grows 4-6 feet tall, and like many of the most interesting plants we find in our woods, it is poisonous! No part of this plant should be eaten, and some people have allergic reactions to touching the bark. Preparations from this plant are used in some homeopathy treatments, notably as a gastrointestinal irritant.

With simple oval alternate leaves, knobby stems, and gray bark, the way to learn to identify this plant is to grab the stem (perhaps with gloves, in case of an allergic reaction) and bend it. The stems are like rubber, very flexible and unlike any other woody stems I am familiar with. The plant may have been used by indigenous peoples, but as the wood is said to become very brittle as it dries, its rubbery character will disappear.

There are two sites on WHPA lands where I have found leatherwood. If you would like to see it for yourself, it is not far from the Radford-Smith Trailhead in Brookline. You will encounter it a few hundred feet east of the footbridge. As with all plants on WHPA lands, do not cut or remove them, please just look. If you want to find leatherwood on your own lands, do not get your hopes set too high. It is an uncommon shrub and I know of only one other site off WHPA lands. Your best chance is to find it in rich soils with other hardwoods, fairly well-shaded, and the literature says in wetter soils. Two of the three sites I know are dry but all have rich soils, so the wetter soils may not be an indicator.

If you find new locations for leatherwood while hiking the WHPA trails, let us know by emailing WHPAtrails@gmail.com.

Join Us for Online Launch of WHPA History Book

On April 25 at 4 p.m., as part of WHPA's annual meeting, join Rosalyn Shaoul and Libby Mills for the online launch of their new book, *The Windmill Hill Pinnacle Association's Story: How did they get all that land?* [RSVP here to get the link for the event.](#)

Board members Shaoul and Mills have written a rich history of the land acquisitions that created the Pinnacle Ridgeline reserve. They based this on research and extensive interviews with the founders and leaders of the Windmill Hill Pinnacle Association. The book tells an extraordinary story of how the WHPA, founded in 1992 by a group of dedicated volunteers, has worked to conserve nearly 2,100 acres in the present day. The book includes historic maps, personal stories, photos, and art.

Video producer Jennifer Latham and other WHPA board members created a short video interview with Shaoul and Mills sharing their insights and experiences. The April 25 event is the online premiere of this video. This will be followed by a screening of a 16-minute documentary by Wendy Wallas—an interpreter, community



John Gregg interviewing Libby Mills and Rosalyn Shaoul.

radio station founder, and Putney resident—featuring interviews with the founders, including Alison Latham, Beverly Major, and Ellen Zimmerman, plus re-discovered valuable historical video footage featuring other WHPA founders. After the screenings, Rosalyn and Libby will host a Q&A where attendees are invited to ask questions.

You can [reserve a copy of the book now](#) with a special donation of \$25 or more to WHPA.

A Salute to Joan Weir for Her Dedication to Conservation in Southeast Vermont

By Camilla Roberts

Joan Weir has been a steady and savvy workhorse for conservation of farms and woodlands in southeastern Vermont during her many years of service with the Vermont Land Trust. Her retirement in 2020 is both a loss and a cause to express our respect for her dedication to conservation in this area.

Joan Weir managed the Vermont Land Trust functions in the southeastern office in Brattleboro for decades, and has been the go-to person for advice, connections to sources of help, and answers to the slew of questions that emerge for every conservation project. She has communicated and assisted countless private individual property owners in navigating the process of conserving their land, both farms and woodlands. The con-

servation organizations in the area over the years have sought out Joan's expertise and depth of experience with projects large and small, seeking her assistance on acquisition strategy, preparing grants, and the formalities of placing the conservation easements to protect these special places in perpetuity.

Every conservation project is unique and typically becomes complicated very fast. Joan was able to steady the navigation of tricky waters with her experienced perspective. Often she became deeply involved with fundraising, preparing grants, and figuring out special considerations of the easement conditions.

In appreciation for all that you have done for the land here, we salute you, Joan!

Thank you to donors who gave in honor or memory of a special person! [See the full list on our website here.](#)

We have a new email address. Please send all communications to WHPAtrails@gmail.com.



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