



NATIVE LAND CONSERVANCY



Welcome Spring - Vernal Equinox 2022

Cultural Respect and our revitalized relationship with the DCLT
New land, Ancient land - Wampanoag Common Lands at Kingston
Land Stewardship and Restoration Projects

THOUGHTS FROM THE VC AND DIRECTOR

The first signs of Spring are here with river herring sightings in early March in many of our rivers and streams on Cape. This time of year is special as it kicks off the new year; a new year of life. The river herring are incredibly hardy and travel our rivers making that important trip back to the freshwater lakes and ponds. It's the annual return to their birthplaces for spawning to produce the next generation of alewives and bluebacks. An average female produces upwards of 100,000 eggs each time she spawns. After spawning, herring make the long trip back to the Atlantic ocean to carry out the rest of their adult lives in sea water. It's an important time as we native folks are busy tidying up our fishing wiers, ready to catch and harvest our vernal staple, the river herring. Some like it pickled, baked or fried, and some simply eat the roe, always a delicacy in Wampanoag culture.



Leslie Jonas
Vice-chairwoman
Native Land Conservancy

With the arrival of spring, we greet the plants that flower first, like the trout lily, with its hanging yellow petals. These flowers nourish the insects that are dormant in winter, like the mining bee that only emerges above ground for a few weeks a year. We welcome back the chorus of familiar bird songs, like the cardinal with its cheery whistles and rolling trill. The ample energy of spring is shared throughout networks of plant, animals and people, reminding us of our interconnection. This spring, it is clear the NLC must channel its energy into growth. We began the year with our largest land donation yet – 32.4 acres donated by the Muddy Pond Trust! We have renamed this land the Wampanoag Common Lands at Kingston in honor of our commitment to steward this land in sound conservation, and in protection of indigenous lifeways. This purposeful gift is impeccably timed. With 15 structures recently removed from the land, it is primed for restoration and stewardship.

Last spring, we were tangled in the uncertainty of the pandemic. Undoubtedly, there remains difficult times ahead for our inner circles and beyond. This spring, we carry forward lessons of deft care for one another and resilience. In the coming months, we have planned events to safely gather our community. We have set our intentions on revitalizing our connections to each other and Mother Nature.

And so, hearing spring's call to action we will indeed grow – our land, our stewardship, and our connection to our community of all living beings.



Diana Ruiz, Director
Native Land Conservancy

CULTURAL RESPECT

Renewed Cultural Respect In Dennis

On December 9, 2021, a legal document was recorded at the Barnstable registry of deeds to guarantee indigenous cultural access to private conservation lands in Dennis, Massachusetts. Local conservation groups, the Dennis Conservation Land Trust (DCLT) and the NLC, established a Cultural Respect Easement to protect traditional ceremonies and practices on all of DCLT's 440 acres.

The partnership between the two nonprofits began in 2016 with a temporary cultural respect agreement for a single preserve. Since then, the relationship has deepened, leading DCLT to extend cultural access to all of its preserves, forever.

The Board of the NLC celebrated this unprompted move as demonstrating true partnership and commitment to advancing indigenous cultural access movement at large.

NLC President, Ramona Peters, said, "A Cultural Respect Easement is the closest expression of land repatriation to indigenous people achieved without an actual transfer of deed. It offers assurance for us to safely access areas of our ancestral homelands to exercise spiritual and cultural practices. Respect for our culture includes respect for our relationship with the earth, especially in areas where our ancestors prayed, danced, toiled, lived and were buried."

National Recognition for Cultural Respect

Last fall, the Land Trust Alliance, a national association of land protection groups, amplified words from NLC founder and President, Ramona Peters. In the *Saving Land* magazine article, Ramona discusses how the NLC partners with other organizations to expand indigenous cultural access to places of particular importance. She further describes how Cultural Respect Easements provide a legal framework to guarantee cultural access indefinitely and how Massachusetts recently included indigenous cultural landscapes as a land conservation value for conservation restrictions. Read the full article here: <https://www.landtrustalliance.org/news/land-can-bring-peace>



LAND CONSERVATION

The Wampanoag Common Lands at Kingston

On January 25, 2022, through the dedication of many individuals and groups in the community, including Muddy Pond Trust the NLC was gifted 32.4 acres of pine barrens in Kingston, MA. We have named the site the Wampanoag Common Lands to reflect our vision to protect not only land, water, and wildlife, but also native lifeways. This preserve will provide a space for the Wampanoag community to gather and connect with their ancestral homelands – without disturbance. In the months and year to come, the NLC has plans to develop programs to perpetuate Wampanoag cultural practices, like constructing *wetus* traditional lodges and craft making. The proximity of this site to the place of first contact between the Wampanoag Nation and English colonists adds historic significance to the return of this land to its original guardians.

Ecologically, the Wampanoag Common Lands is ripe for restoration. With 15 structures recently removed from the land, it is a blank canvas of potential. The NLC will work with restoration and cultural experts to restore the land, which was formerly Camp Mishannock, a Catholic summer camp, and before that a dairy farm. Restoration plans will promote threatened species, like the Plymouth gentian, support populations of native plants for sustainable harvest for traditional uses, and allow key ecological features such as vernal pools to heal from the impacts of intensive human use. We are delighted to accept this meaningful gift and the responsibility to restore and maintain a healthy native landscape.

Mills Lots - Keeping Native Land in Native Hands

On November 17, 2021, the NLC acquired, nearly 1 acre of land from Jeffrey Mills in Mashpee. This land joins 0.20 acres nearby protected by the NLC in 2019 through another Mills family member, Emma Jo Mills Brennan. The Mills family are Mashpee Wampanoag. Protecting these lands exemplifies the NLC's dedication to conserving natural places land and upholding unbroken native access to ancestral homelands. We are moved by the Mills family's forethought and dedication to protecting this land.

Importantly, this land abuts Santuit Pond. Santuit Pond is known for a long history of water quality issues including algae blooms owed to high phosphorus and nitrogen loads. Unfortunately, this illustrates a common pattern of increasing development and pond pollution that threatens water systems on Cape Cod. Ownership of this shoreline property provides the NLC a stronger advocacy position for the health of this valuable pond.



NLC EVENTS

Land stewardship - UMASS Boston and the NLC

One Saturday in October of 2021, 8 students from UMASS Boston's Indigenous Women's Leadership and Self-Determination in North America class under the professorship of Dr. Amy E Den Ouden, visited the NLC here on Cape. Prof. Den Ouden is a cultural anthropologist, who has worked with and for Indigenous communities in the Northeast for over thirty years. Each Spring and Fall, we invite her class to join us for land clean-ups and stewardship projects. NLC Vice-chair, Leslie Jonas, co-taught the course with Prof. Den Ouden which introduced students to Indigenous women's leadership in multiple, interwoven arenas. This Oct. trip, the class came dressed and prepared to assist and support the NLC in the stewardship and clean up efforts of our rescued land on Cotuit Road in Sandwich. We spent hours removing debris, cutting back invasives and discarding pollution from the edge of the road. We moved felled tree debris into the woods, opening the area up for easier access to Wakeby Pond. After the cleanup, our group spent a few hours at the Mashpee Indian museum for lunch outdoors, and a museum exhibit history presentation by David Weeden, the Tribe's Historic Preservation Officer. We closed the day with Wetu storytelling by Bear Clan Mother, Anita Peters. The entire day made for a truly rich experience for the students, and the class left that afternoon with a better understanding of the tribe's history here in MA.



Hamblin Bogs, Marstons Mills Restoration

In 2021, the NLC was invited by Inter-Fluve of Boston to join them in their restoration efforts of the Hamblin Bogs in Marstons Mills. Interfluve joined efforts with the Barnstable Clean Water Coalition (BCWC) whose aim was to restore the Hamblin Bogs to a more naturally functioning ecosystem and reverse the legacy impact of cranberry farming. For the past few years, the BCWC have been evaluating the potential for restoring hydrologic and hydraulic processes and habitat connectivity as well as improving nutrient attenuation. The BCWC contracted with Inter-Fluve in 2021 to collect relevant field data and develop conceptual designs that will help visualize feasible restoration designs. Interfluve invited the NLC for historic indigenous input. Leslie Jonas, and Ramona Peters, provided insight into the Wampanoag history of the area. "Prior to [European settlement] (1600s), when the wetlands were in a more natural state, there were Wampanoag village sites due to our relationship with and to the natural lands and water there. Our people lived in villages in the surrounding areas, and foraged the wild cranberries, or hunted some of the awaahsak (all creatures): frogs, eels, rabbit, deer, raccoon, along with other wildlife. We visited the natural spring water sources there - nupuhsupaq - streams and vernal pools for water". L.Jonas

NLC EVENTS/NEWS

Wampanoag Day at Highfield in Falmouth

Last September, the NLC participated in the Wampanoag Cultural Celebration at Highfield Hall & Gardens. Alongside native vendors and interactive cultural demonstrations and lessons, such as corn husk dolls, and bead making, the NLC shared its services and mission. Thank you to our volunteers: Lauren Ainsworth, Hazel Harding Currence, Leslie Jonas, and Gail Melix!

Crantoberfest

October 2021, the NLC showcased its work at the 8th Annual Crantoberfest in Middleborough. Festivities included a Cranberry Bakeoff, children's costume parade, and live music. *Kutaputunumuw* to our wonderful volunteers: Lauren Ainsworth, Hazel Harding Currence, Marlene Lopez, and Gail Melix!

Upcoming Events

Herring Run Festival

Join us on April 9, 11am – 4pm, at Oliver Mill Park, Rt. 44 & Plymouth St., Middleborough. Be sure to catch interactive singing and dancing by the Wampanoag Nation Singers and Dancers at 11:10am.

Nemasket River Village Celebration

Make your way over from the Herring Run Festival to the formerly named Ja Mar Turkey Farm at 483 & 491 Plymouth St., Middleborough on April 9, 1 – 4pm. Gather to commemorate the installation of an informational kiosk at this ancient Wampanoag village site. Get closer to this land where the NLC holds a conservation restriction and a cultural respect easement. Listen to brief talks by NLC President Ramona Peters, representatives from the Town of Middleborough and The Archeological Conservancy. The Wampanoag Nation Singers and Dancers will light up this event too!

Internship Opportunity

With support from the NLC, the Northeast Wilderness Trust (NEWT) is hosting a summer internship program for Wampanoag young adults. The intern will be paid \$6,000 including travel/tech stipend and a completion award. The intern will choose a project based on NEWT's Muddy Pond Wilderness Preserve or the NLC's Wampanoag Common Lands in Kingston. Suggested projects include topics in education, communications, stewardship, ecological research, and habitat restoration. Original project ideas encouraged! The brief application is due Mar 31st:

<https://newildernesstrust.org/rewildingintern/>





NLC SPOTLIGHT HAZEL HARDING CURRENCE

HAZEL HARDING CURRENCE, HERRING POND WAMPANOAG ELDER NLC BOARD DIRECTOR

Herring Pond Wampanoag tribal elder, and NLC Board Director, Hazel Harding Currence, was born and raised in Herring Pond Wampanoag Territory, her hometown of Bourne. Her father, Maurice "Buster" Harding was active in the tribe, had many friends in Mashpee and played a vital role in Hazel's life. From an early age, Hazel was always a protector of Wampanoag homelands and still to this day as an active member of the NLC's stewardship and restoration projects. Married to her husband, Sam, for almost 60 years, Hazel ensures that he's a big part of all of stewardship work with which she's engaged. She is an active member of the Wampanoag Consulting Alliance, a group of traditional Wampanoag nation tribal members who meet to share on the nation's current affairs, land issues that affect one another's communities and the Wampanoag nation as a whole. In her younger years, Hazel was a sports guru, as she was officiated, coached, and played for over 30 years in softball, basketball and even football.



Following her ancestor's footsteps, Hazel is a Herring Pond tribal council member and actively involved with the Tribe's day to day tribal business and community affairs as a genealogy/enrollment committee member and a member of the election committee. Hazel is proud of her two sons, Troy, (Herring Pond Medicine Man) and Samuel, and the apples of her eye her grandchildren, Kendall, Savonn, Raelynn and Samira.



Hazel is a well-respected NLC Board Director and Herring Pond Wampanoag tribal elder, and we celebrate her in our 7th edition 2022 Vernal Equinox Newsletter.