



NATIVE LAND CONSERVANCY



Welcome Spring 2024

Spring Rituals Revisited Paula Peters, NLC Communications and Programs Coordinator

I welcomed the New Year, the spring equinox, nostalgically by visiting the Mashpee River. It is the location of my fondest memories of time spent with my father when he would bring my brothers and me to the herring run. Even as a young child, I knew I was participating in a ritual, something my daddy had done since he was a boy and something his daddy had done with him. A true birthright as much for us as it was for the alewives - the fish returning to the place they were born to spawn and my father returning home to Mashpee to teach his children who they were in the most basic sense. We are Wampanoag and Mashpee sustains us. Each of us, the Wampanoag, and the herring, had participated in this act for thousands of years. It is etched in our DNA.

When we got to the river there were always other people there as if it were a planned gathering, and in a sense, it was, the invitation extended by the fish just as it was to the flock of seagulls that swarmed overhead. My father knew everyone by a nickname and introduced them to us as a cousin. They all laughed and reminisced with no urgency for fishing. Some had nets and buckets and others just sat in their trucks to watch the pageant of patriarchy. On one occasion I remember seeing the river so

black with fish I imagined I could walk across them to the other side. I took off my socks and shoes, rolled up my pants, and waded into the chilly water. My tender feet and skinny legs quickly adapted. As our fathers netted fish, there were other children in the water and for all our splashing about the herring were undeterred on their mission to the pond. They raced between our legs and up the flume to freedom for those that made it, following a scent left three years earlier leading them to their birthplace in Mashpee Pond to lay their eggs.

The less lucky fish were those we were able to grab as slippery as they were and toss to the bank where our fathers would collect them. It was the easiest fishing I ever did but my father would manage to make it feel like such an accomplishment, grabbing the fish and holding it triumphantly in the air declaring "Mashpee turkey!" that quintessential food that sustained us in so many ways.

Back home the occasion was typically celebrated with my dad's best friend Vernon Pocknett as they cleaned and gutted the fish, examining each one for the knowing bulge in the belly with great anticipation for the roe. My dad would say, "ah, look what we have here."

He showed us the amber sack of tiny eggs that he would sauté as a delicacy. As for the herring, some were for the smokehouse some for corning, and some, as bony as it was, for the frying pan. What remained fertilized the garden.

These days I bring my children and grandchildren to the herring run, but it is a very different occasion. The old timers like Vernon and my dad are gone and so too are so many of the fish. In the last two decades, there has been a dramatic decline in herring returning to Mashpee Pond and ponds and lakes all over the state. In addition to being commercially overfished at sea, their river habitats have been altered by overdevelopment, road crossings, and pollution.

For thousands of years, these fish found their way home instinctually and now suffer a migratory crisis manifested in my lifetime. It has caused the state to issue a ban on harvesting herring that applies to anyone who is not a Wampanoag and a group of young Wampanoag tribal members, the Mashpee Native Environmental Ambassadors, to launch a campaign to establish the rights of nature, specifically the rights of herring to freely migrate to the ponds. At NLC we support those efforts and work to restore the river to become a welcoming environment once again for the herring and for our tribal rituals to continue.

NLC HAPPENINGS

Preserving the art of traditional coil pottery

In January, ten Native women from the Hassanamisco Nipmuc, Mashpee Wampanoag, and Aquinnah Wampanoag tribes attended a three-day workshop, Woodland Forms in Clay, in the Native Land Conservancy meeting space taught by the renowned Wampanoag potter, Ramona Nosapocket Peters.

The NLC founder and president introduced the women to clay as a relative, a piece of the earth that is the living spirit of minerals and water touched by the ancestors.

“The elements in the clay are the same as the ones in our bodies. Like the clay we are made up of minerals and water,” Ramona said explaining how the pot ultimately becomes an extension of ourselves with energy fueled by ancestors who inspire the making of the vessel.

Her approach to teaching coil pottery came from a very humble place. She gave all the credit to the clay, the mound of earth cupped in her hands which is the essence of her cultural heritage.

“It will tell you what it wants to be,” she said.

Ramona was impressed that everyone in the group was truly invested in their work and became meditative. “Everyone was very focused,” she said. “I liked how the women were very comfortable being in silence together. They got very focused by the clay in front of them. Silence builds connection and helps them to really listen to the clay.”

While she has taught other groups and individuals in the past, none were quite as invested as the women in the workshop. “I see a lot of talent here.” She said “I was so happy to see the skills in this group. It is really important to me that this style of this pottery doesn’t die out. I want the form of our ancestral pots to carry on.”

“I feel so lucky to have been a part of this,” said Trish Keliinui who didn’t want it to end. “This has been great.” We thank our friends at the Cotuit Center for the Arts for firing the pots!

To read more visit our blog:

www.NativeLandConservancy.org/blog



NLC HAPPENINGS

New Land in the Care of NLC

The Native Land Conservancy is excited to announce the recent rescue of 2.5 acres of land in the town of Mashpee. On Friday, February 2nd NLC purchased the title to land located at 88 Payamps Road for \$165,000. Located near John’s Pond in the ancestral homeland of the Mashpee Wampanoag the parcel holds promise for its cultural and ecological value. Bordered on two sides by development it is also bordered by an ancient way and town-owned open space. The purchase of the land by NLC rescues it from certain development most likely clear-cutting to accommodate a cell tower or solar panels.

We look forward to sharing more about this land as we become more familiar with its gifts and stories.



Honor the Ocean on World Oceans Day

NLC will celebrate World Oceans Day with a presentation by Community Scientist and Ocean Steward, Dr. Andrea Bogomolni, “**Honor the Ocean,**” on Sat., June 8 at 6 pm in the NLC community room, 2B Center Street in Mashpee.

Andrea will share stories of our connections locally and globally that unify us in the mission to support healthy oceans that are important for us all.

The Ocean sustains us and nourishes us in so many ways - from feeding our curiosity to feeding our families to creating the air we breathe, the energy we use, and simply by just being - as a place of refuge that we rely on to ground our minds, body, and soul. By understanding these connections that unify us, we can honor the ocean, and our actions can preserve, protect and sustainably make use of the limited resources we ask of the Ocean.

The talk will be followed by socializing and a sampling of the gifts of the sea including chowder and a raw bar.

Space is limited. Go to bit.ly/HonorTheOcean to register.



NLC HAPPENINGS

Spruce up your garden with Native plants

Cape Cod's landscape is threatened by overdevelopment and conventional landscape practices that disconnect people from nature. Join Bob Hoxie, Horticulturist, Garden Designer, and Conservationist for a presentation on ways to use indigenous plantings and sustainable environmental designs to help heal its landscape and reconnect people to the natural world around them.

Bob will be giving his presentation on Nurturing Outdoor Spaces with Indigenous Plantings on Friday, May 3 at 6 pm at the Native Land Conservancy at 2B Center Street in Mashpee.

Space is limited. Use this link bit.ly/3ToKFeo to register.

Volunteers Needed for Land Care Day

Welcome spring by getting a little dirty, but in a good way!

Join the NLC staff at the Wampanoag Common Lands at 266 Bishops Highway in Kingston for our first Land Care Day of the season on Thursday, April 11, from 10 am to 3 pm.

Winter has left its mark with felled branches and there will be plenty of invasive species creeping back into the landscape that will need to be removed. Bring your bug repellent, gloves, and lunch. We will provide light refreshments and good company. Register online at bit.ly/4bY9uVQ.

Nature Walk with Chiefie Mills

Earl "Chiefie" Mills Jr. will lead a nature walk through the pine barrens, wetlands, and cedar swamps that surround the Mashpee Wampanoag reservation. The tour will feature diverse characteristics of the land in its natural state as well as land impacted as a result of man's influence to develop bogs and also areas that have been managed by controlled burns.

Participants will gather for the walk in the Mashpee Wampanoag Government Center at 483 Great Neck Road, Mashpee at 10 am on Saturday, April 20. Space is limited. To register go to bit.ly/ChiefieNatureWalk.



ON THE NLC HORIZON

Honor the Earth Fair celebrates Earth Day

Native Land Conservancy and the Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe Natural Resources Department will co-host the Honor the Earth Fair on Saturday, April 20 at the Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe Government Center at 483 Great Neck Road South, Mashpee. The fair will be free and open to the public from 11 am to 4 pm to celebrate the tributes of the earth from the indigenous perspective and demonstrate the best practices for living in balance with nature including rescuing, preserving, and protecting our shared home.

The event will include organizations with information and exhibits featuring conservation and preservation efforts to promote a healthy environment as well as tribal vendors with cultural crafts. There will also be activities for children, a cultural performance by the Neesh La Singers and Dancers, a plant-based food cooking contest, and a nature walk that will begin at 9:30 am before the fair commences guided by Mashpee Wampanoag Chief, Earl "Chiefie" Mills, Jr.

For more information or to inquire about vending or exhibiting contact Paula Peters at Paula@NativeLandConservancy.org

Taste of The Earth Contest

A highlight of the Honor the Earth Fair will certainly be the Taste of the Earth cooking contest.

One way to Honor the Earth is to recognize a food philosophy that emphasizes respect for life while nourishing the body, mind, and soul by connecting with nature through plant-based food. This contest embraces that idea while challenging foodies to be creative in the quest to satiate the pallet and be kind to the planet.

Cooks of every skill level are invited to participate in the Taste of the Earth (TOTE) culinary competition sponsored by CAI and hosted by Elspeth Hay of the Local Food Report. Chefs will enter their absolute best original plant-based dish for the ultimate prize of an original clay pot trophy created by Wampanoag potter Ramona Peters. Second and third-place winners will receive a hand-carved and inlaid wooden cooking spoon crafted by Nipmuc artisan Andre Strongbearheart Gains. Contestants may go to bit.ly/WCAI to register before the deadline of 4 pm on Monday, April 14, 2024.





NLC SPOTLIGHT ANDRE STRONGBEARHEART GAINES NLC BOARD MEMBER

Andre Strongbearheart Gaines is not formally educated as a botanist, but what he knows about the natural plants that grow in the woodlands of Nipmuck territory in the middle of Massachusetts is sophisticated Traditional Ecological Knowledge that he employs to keep his heritage alive. He has spent years mapping forests and swamps of the Douglas State Forest taking photos and making cultural inventory reports of plants critical to traditional food and medicine. His GPS maps and reports will lead you to plants like fiddleheads, wild ginger, licorice root, blue cohosh, swamp tea, and boneset.

A citizen of the Nipmuck tribe, Andre is a father of three, employed as a carpenter, and lives in Grafton. He is also a vocal activist for tribal concerns and serves as a cultural steward of the tribe. In that role he conducts workshops for tribal youth featuring traditional activities like constructing wetus, burning mishoons (traditional canoes), and brain-tanning animal hides.

"Wherever I go there are always young people around me," says Andre who knows the importance of passing his knowledge on in order for the traditional practices and thinking to continue.

It was that intrinsic respect for his environment that led him to begin a comprehensive investigation of eight existing and historic cedar swamps in the Nipmuck territory and the restoration of one of those swamps in the Douglas State Forest.

"I needed to see what the health of those swamps was and if they could continue to be used to sustain our cultural practices," Andre said.

To do that he had to challenge the state Department of Conservation and Recreation regulations that seemed to prohibit him from taking action to protect and restore the cedar swamp in Douglas State Forest. Armed with Executive Order 126, essentially a federal treaty right that protects tribal hunting, fishing, and foraging rights, Andre and his team of Nipmuck youth went into the state forest to clear dead wood and open up the canopy for more sunlight allowing the healthy cedar to thrive.



Andre stands a top of a wetu constructed at the Nipmuck Cultural Preservation Inc. in Petersham, MA with the help of young Nipmuck men, Daishuan Reddeer Garate and Nantai Mann. "This is why we fight for them," He says.

The result was a remarkable restoration of the health of the cedar swamp that inspired DCR Deputy Commissioner Priscilla Geigis to send a letter to Andre thanking him for his efforts.

"That was nice," said Andre, but falls short of what is necessary.

"Indigenous peoples need to be part of the forest management planning in our traditional homelands." He said "There's always a missing link to the relationship of the land for these organizations unlike for Indigenous peoples connections. Their relationship doesn't allow them to see a dying Forrest like it's their kin, nor does it affect their cultural revitalization or continuity for the Forrest and swamps to be healthy. "

Last year when Andre was asked to serve on the board of the Native Land Conservancy, he was excited to accept the position. Everything about it seemed like a perfect fit.

"To be able to join a collective including so many powerful Indigenous matriarchs is a high honor," he said. "I am doing this work daily, so it only makes sense to be aligned with like-minded traditional people. We don't need to explain to each other the way we feel about the land."

You can learn more about the work Andre is doing by visiting his website NoLooseBraids.com.