

VINEYARD CONSERVATION

WINTER 2021-22

Inside: Standing for Trees • New CR at Tower Hill • Pond Pollution Film • Compost & Climate • Outdoor Refill Stations • Community Art Project



EST. 1965

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Standing for Trees

by *Brendan O'Neill*

While studying environmental law some 40 years ago, one law review article made an especially lasting impression: “*Should Trees Have Standing? Toward Legal Rights for Natural Objects.*” The author of that thin volume, Christopher D. Stone (son of the investigative journalist I.F. Stone), passed away this year at the age of 83.

Professor Stone’s 1972 article was pivotal in the launch of the environmental movement. One passage from its introduction proved so inspirational that, in the most unfair sort of irony, it is today often repeated without attribution: “Until the rightless thing receives its rights, we cannot see it as anything but a thing for the use of ‘us’ – those who are holding rights at the time.” From this observation, he goes on to develop an argument that, to protect what Justice William O. Douglas called “nature’s ecological equilibrium,” the environment should be conferred legal standing – that is, the right to sue for its own protection.

That proposal helped shape policy in countries like New Zealand, where, within national parks, the assemblage of life is conferred “all the rights, powers, duties and liabilities of a legal person.”

Back home – in the United States, and on Martha’s Vineyard – our policymakers are comfortable attaching value to environmental attributes that directly affect humans: clean drinking water, farming potential, pond functioning, scenic beauty. Economists label these attributes “ecosystem services,” and with a bit of effort they can be quantified – and, if their monetary value is greater than that gained from their exploitation, environmentalists have a winning argument. However, there is far less willingness among most to recognize nature for its intrinsic value – to elevate the importance of conserving land or rare species when it is not directly in the service of humanity.

Nature, for Nature’s Sake

For more than 50 years, VCS has taken the position that the land and water of Martha’s Vineyard must be protected for its intrinsic value. Trees have yet to win legal standing here, but we will continue to advocate on their behalf: defending nature, for nature’s sake.

In the face of our current surge in development, the Vineyard’s regulatory environment must adapt and be strengthened. A priority must be placed on allowing our remaining inventory of open land to function ecologically, regardless of whether it is of use to – or even noticed by – humans. The diversity of native animals, plants, and habitats defines this Island. When intact and functioning, our ecological equilibrium supports a particular kind of natural beauty and evokes a unique sense of place. It is an intangible, but very real, value.

And for those who will never be on board with extending legal rights to natural objects, there is the reality of climate change to consider. Protecting land from development reduces carbon emissions today, and long-term carbon sequestration from functional forests and wetlands will be essential if we are to curtail dangerous temperature increases over the coming decades.

Conservationists, town leaders, planners, and regulators all share an obligation to keep habitat areas from becoming so fragmented by develop-



ment that they lose ecological viability. VCS will continue pressing this need for improved planning and regulation, and continue working with landowners and colleagues to protect land through gifts, purchases, and conservation restrictions on private property. We urge our members to spread the word!

Conservation Restrictions – A Lasting Legacy

With sadness, we note the recent passing of author, dedicated conservationist, and friend Alan Emmet. In 2003, Alan and her late husband Richard Emmet donated to the Vineyard Conservation Society a perpetual conservation restriction (CR) on their 16-acre Chappaquonsett property. In their honor, we reflect on their conservation accomplishment.

Just west of Lake Tashmoo, the Emmet property is an elongate parcel stretching from the interior woods to Tisbury's north shore. Importantly, it shares a 700-foot boundary with the Sheriff's Meadow Foundation's Phillips Preserve, expanding the foothold of preserved open space in the area.

A legal requirement for the recording of a conservation restriction is the endorsement of Town and State authorities, which in turn requires demonstration of a qualifying public benefit. In the case of the Emmet CR, that benefit is primarily the protection of diverse wildlife habitats, including salt marsh, barrier beach, freshwater shrub and wooded wetlands, oak and pine woodlands, and open fields. The barrier beach provides habitat for state-listed species, including Piping Plover and Least Tern.

Beyond the need to demonstrate significant conservation value, the specific terms of a CR can vary to suit the needs of a given property and the landowner. The Emmet CR prohibits subdivision for development, and any other actions that would undermine its conservation value, including commercial recreational activity, excavation and removal of soil, and other forms of habitat destruction. It requires that driveways consist only of non-impervious materials, and that there be no change in the size or design of the modest dock. The management of invasive species is permitted, as is the right to allow guided walks on the land. Perhaps most important, the owners retain the right to alter or expand the house, but only at the same location, and with not more than a 10% increase to the existing footprint.

Over the course of our five and a half decades, VCS has worked with many property owners to protect their land for future generations with this versatile tool. Please contact us if you are interested in exploring this (or another) conservation option – and thank you, Alan and Dick Emmet, for showing the way!

Fast Facts: Is a CR Right for You?

- A conservation restriction (CR) is a legal tool that allows private landowners to donate (or sell) some or all of the development rights to their property, while retaining ownership of the land itself.
- All CRs must show a public benefit; examples include preservation of habitat, vistas, farm soils, or water supplies. Public access to the property is not necessarily a requirement. One option that VCS has used on multiple occasions is to reserve the right to allow guided public walks.
- The CR is a contract between a property owner (the Grantor) and an IRS-qualified conservation entity (the Grantee), such as the state, a Town, Land Bank, or non-profit organization. The Grantee monitors and enforces the terms of the CR.
- The gift of a CR generates a charitable income tax deduction, and the resulting decrease in assessed value (due to lost development potential) may reduce real estate and/or estate taxes. Some CRs convey all development rights, while others are tailored to allow “reserved rights” of modest development. An appraiser must determine how much value is being donated.
- CRs are permanent – *i.e.*, future landowners are subject to the terms of the agreement. Before passage of the state law creating this tool, analogous development restrictions (“covenants”) lapsed after 30 years. CRs give landowners and the community peace of mind that the land is forever protected.
- More than 5,000 acres, nearly a quarter of all conservation land on Martha's Vineyard, are protected by CRs. Growth projections from our regional planning agency estimate that 80% of the Island's unprotected open space will be lost to development in the coming years. VCS is challenging private property owners to do their part to “**Save What's Left.**” CRs are a powerful tool in that effort.

Preserving Nature, Promoting Agriculture at Tower Hill

New conservation restrictions build on multi-generational generosity

Caroline and Edwin Newhall (“Robin”) Woods had long sought a conservation solution for their Tower Hill property that would both provide permanent protection of the native pitch pine habitat and support local agriculture. Years in the works, 2021 marked the completion of a pair of Conservation Restrictions (CRs) that will do just that. Thanks to the generosity of the landowners, their 35 acres stretching from Katama Road to Katama Bay, just south of Edgartown Harbor, will forever remain Vineyard open space, an oasis in a rapidly suburbanizing area.

The gift comes thirty years after Robin’s parents, Jeanne and Edwin Newhall (“Bob”) Woods, worked with VCS to orchestrate one of the Island’s foundational conservation projects: recording a CR on more than 500 acres of their property in West Tisbury and Chilmark, while simultaneously conveying to the Agricultural Society (at a bargain price, with a new Agricultural Preservation Restriction) the land that would become the site of the new Fairgrounds and Hall. Named in honor of Bob’s mother, the newly designated Frances Newhall Woods Preserve was at the time the largest CR on an individually-owned parcel ever recorded in Massachusetts. Today owned in fee by the

Nature Conservancy, and further “belt-and-suspenders” protected with a CR held by VCS, the Woods Preserve arguably constitutes the largest tract of unfragmented habitat on Martha’s Vineyard.

The Woods’ commitment to Island agriculture goes back many generations. Frances was the granddaughter of the founder of the MV Agricultural Society, West Tisbury icon Henry Laurens Whiting (1821 – 1897). One MVAS annual report from those days recounts that Whiting, a famed topographer with the U.S. Geodetic Survey, “saw the possibilities of increasing the agricultural capacity of the Vineyard, having naturally a good soil, and rich in beds of peat, muck, and in the drifting seaweed.”

More than a century and a half later, this year’s new CR gift honors that agricultural possibility, reserving a 10-acre portion for Island farming. As part of the plan, Robin and Caroline (the “Grantors”) retain ownership of a 5.63-acre parcel surrounding the existing 600 square foot cottage (built in the 1920s as a bathing camp for Frances), as well as the right to move the structure and build an additional one. The remainder, nearly 20 acres of permanently conserved habitat, has been conveyed to the Athearn family along with the 10-acre agricultural portion, which they will have the right to



The new Woods CR (shaded in yellow) secures a significant tract of open space in a rapidly suburbanizing area. (Satellite image via Google Earth)



The Woods' 600 sq.ft. "bathing camp" — as it looked in 1924 and today. The more things change, the more they stay the same . . .

Historic photo courtesy Woods family; modern photo by Brendan O'Neill



farm. The CR prohibits retail operations and parking on the farming parcel. VCS will act as the holder, or "Grantee," of the development restrictions.

Reaching a successful conservation outcome for the Woods' land was both motivated and complicated by the fact that the entirety of the property is mapped as habitat for rare species, including the spectacular Imperial Moth (*Eacles imperialis*). Because clearing for agriculture will disturb that habitat, the Massachusetts Endangered Species Act requires conservation "offsets" to mitigate potential impact. For that reason, two separate CRs were necessary: one instrument sets limits on agricultural usage of the farmland, while the other ensures protection of the surrounding pitch pine habitat.

The two-CR solution, in addition to solving a technical problem, demonstrates the donors' commitment to the family tradition of supporting Island agriculture in a very direct way. While the CR on the 10-acre farmland portion counts as a charitable gift for conservation purposes, the larger CR, because it was required by the state as offsetting mitigation, does not (and therefore does not generate tax benefits). We are grateful to Robin and Caroline Woods for continuing their family's multi-generational generosity, and hope their story inspires others. Who will be the next to start their own family tradition of Vineyard conservation?

Welcome Aboard!

Please welcome five additions to the VCS Board of Directors

Jeffrey Agnoli was an English teacher and Guidance Counselor at the MV Regional High School for 25 years, where he today continues part-time work post-retirement. Jeff and his wife Francine have lived on Island since 1988, raising three children here. A gardener, writer, and poet, he currently serves on the Edgartown Master Plan steering committee and as a Martha's Vineyard Commissioner. With his deep and abiding reverence for the natural world, and particular concern regarding climate change, Jeff joined the VCS Board to help it continue to be a force for environmental awareness and positive change.



Retired neuro-radiologist **R. Jonathan Cobb** now teaches anatomy and physiology at William Paterson University in New Jersey. Since building a home on Chappaquiddick with his wife Suzzanne Douglas in 1993, he has taken a strong interest in preserving the traditional rural character of Chappy (as well as on the bigger Island). Our newest addition, Dr. Cobb came on board this August to more fully leverage his love and concern for Vineyard conservation.

A VCS member for over 25 years, **Jack Fruchtman** and his wife Joanne live on Moshup Trail in Aquinnah, where they have been key partners in our decades-long effort to conserve the globally rare heathlands there. Jack is a longtime board member of the Aquinnah-Gay Head Community Association and is a member of several other conservation organizations on the Island. Professor emeritus at Maryland's Towson University, Dr. Fruchtman taught constitutional law and political science and served as the Director of the Program in Law and American Civilization.



Abigail Higgins grew up at Red Farm in West Tisbury and then travelled in Europe and South America. Since returning to the Vineyard, she has served on many boards, including the MV Agricultural Society and as co-founder of You've Got a Friend, Inc. Today, Abigail and her husband Tony live in Christiantown, and she runs a gardening business for private clients. The author of the *MV Times* "Garden Notes" column, Abigail brings her passion for protecting the Island's biodiversity to the broader community. Describing her ecological outlook, she writes, "It's about respecting all life and avoiding over-consumption, trying to find the most harmonious aspect, unencumbered by rubbish as much as possible. However you can, in all aspects of life, you have to try to find that harmoniousness."



Graduate of the Boston University School of Management, **T. Ewell Hopkins** has a demonstrated record of community service, advocating for housing, environmental protection, and sustainable economic development for the Island. Currently Chair of the Oak Bluffs Planning Board, he has served on a variety of local and regional boards, including 18 years with Martha's Vineyard Habitat for Humanity, including a stint as President. Today, Ewell works in technology and business development at Oracle. Asked about his personal environmental ethic he writes, "The interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part is a life principle by which I was raised. No societal issue is more important than our relationship with the natural world."

VCS News Round-Up

WINTER WALKS RETURN

The Winter Walks series of interpretive hikes on properties VCS has worked over the years to conserve returns this season with a special emphasis on private land where habitat value has been permanently protected through the use of Conservation Restrictions. We hope to see as many of you as possible; however, due to ongoing concerns surrounding Covid-19, we must limit the total number of participants. Registration will be required, with priority given to current VCS members. So contact us soon! Walks take place the second Saturday of the month and begin at 10:00 am.

November 13: Hidden Gems of West Tisbury

December 11: The CRs of Mill Brook

January 8: Woods Preserve

February 12: Katama Farmland

March 12: Moshup Trail

NEW SHORT FILM: ON OUR WATCH

A collaborative effort from the MV Film Festival and VCS, our new film on the pollution threats facing our coastal ponds is nearing completion. With a particular focus on the south shore Great Ponds, *On Our Watch* uses evocative imagery and compelling interview footage to tell the story of how we got to this dire place – and what we must do to fix the problem. Watch out for the premiere at this spring's Film Festival!

FOOD, COMPOST, AND CLIMATE

As part of their expansive effort to quantify the impact of the available strategies to mitigate climate change, the data analysts at Project Drawdown have come to what will surely be for many a surprising conclusion: the single-most effective measure humanity could take is to reduce our food waste. Along every step of a long supply chain, food production is a carbon-intensive activity – from the fertilizer and fuel used directly on farms (plus the methane emissions from animal agriculture), to the energy and materials needed for transportation, processing, packaging, storage, and marketing. Then consider what it means that much of this food – roughly a third of it – is never actually eaten: not only are the emissions associated with its production entirely unnecessary, but the waste management itself is another major source of emissions.

On Martha's Vineyard we are no exception to the reality of this global problem. Of the 19,000 tons of waste we ship off-Island annually, an estimated 6,500 tons (more than a third) is food waste. That represents 432 tractor-trailers riding the ferry, contributing to fuel use by the Steamship Authority, and then burning their own diesel all the way to a final destination of landfill or incinerator.

This is why VCS is enthusiastic to be a part of the Island-Wide Organics Waste Committee (represented by staffer Jeremy Houser), which is working to implement an Island-wide composting system for both residential and commercial food waste. As a demonstration of concept, a pilot project has been running for several years. In 2021, it is on track to collect 360 tons of food waste, which is being composted at Island Grown Initiative's Thimble Farm using their in-vessel rotary drum machine, followed by windrowing. (IGI is a critical part of this group, along with representatives from town Boards of Health, the MV Refuse District, and private waste haulers.)

Turning 360 tons of waste and potential carbon emissions into valuable, locally produced compost is at once an impressive accomplishment for the project, a significant environmental benefit, and still far short of our goal to process most of the Island's food waste. We understand that significant

capital will be needed, and are currently pursuing multiple options, both in terms of funding mechanism and the infrastructure needed. To that end, the Committee has recently brought on two staffers to lead the effort in this next phase, Project Manager Woody Filley and Project Intern James Robinson. VCS is acting as the fiscal agent for the hires, with funding provided by the Vineyard Vision Fellowship. Many thanks are due to the Vision Fellowship, and warm welcomes to Woody and James!

CLIMATE ACTION PLAN

This August, the Martha's Vineyard Commission received a grant from the state's Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness program to create a comprehensive Climate Action Plan. The process to examine the serious issues facing the Vineyard (and Gosnold) due to climate change begins this winter. The Plan is organized around seven thematic areas, within which individual committees (composed of representatives from town, tribal, and county governments, as well as non-profits and the private sector) will identify priority actions to address and adapt to our vulnerabilities. Themes include:

- Land use and natural resources
- Infrastructure and transportation
- Public health and safety
- Food security
- Economic resilience
- Energy transformation
- Gosnold

We are proud to announce that VCS staffer Samantha Look has agreed to serve as the leader of the land use and natural resources working group. Land use is an incredibly important – and expansive – category within climate change issues. As noted above, Project Drawdown ranks “reduced food waste” as the single most powerful strategy to reduce carbon emissions; however, by their own organizational scheme, it is one topic within the broader category of land use (as well as energy use). Whether it is to serve our needs for food, housing, energy, or recreation, the decisions we make regarding how land is used – for conservation or exploitation – are collectively the most important determinant of global carbon emissions.

VCS has long argued that, as an Island, land use decisions will be particularly important to our ability to withstand the impacts of climate change. Today, in the context of the Vineyard's super-heated real estate market, avoiding development in the most vulnerable areas and protecting the open space to sustain functional ecological communities is more important – and more challenging – than ever.

Save the date: May 8-14, 2022 is Climate Week!

Want to learn all about the new Climate Action Plan? Join Island non-profits, businesses, and faith groups next spring and get the inside scoop!

TAKE BACK THE TAP: OUTDOOR REFILL STATIONS

Take Back the Tap is our ongoing initiative to reduce the waste and pollution of disposable plastic water bottles by installing refill stations across the Island. This year's makeover of Edgartown's Church Street bus stop presented the opportunity to install a new hybrid water fountain/bottle filler unit in a perfect location, teeming with thirsty travelers on foot, bike, and



Taking Edgartown's new Church St. refill station out for a spin

bus. Help with the installation from the Town and Vineyard Transit Authority was much appreciated! We are now pushing forward with a new focus on creating more outdoor refill stations. Nine outdoor units are currently on deck, waiting to be installed in the down-Island towns. Being exposed to the elements, these stations are more challenging (and expensive) to install than indoor-only units, but they will be crucial to achieving both our waste reduction and public access goals. And time is of the essence, with a ban on single-use bottles (courtesy of the students of Plastic Free MV) set to go into effect in Oak Bluffs and Tisbury by summer of 2022!

THE ART OF CONSERVATION

In 2021, the Art of Conservation recognized nineteen total works of art with awards. This year's student art and writing competition was part of our larger community art project, "love it. protect it. mv." In June the students were honored with an awards ceremony at Featherstone Center for the Arts, one of four special events held during the month-long "love it. protect it. mv" gallery show.

Among the high school students, First Place awards were given to Caleb Burt (ceramics); Hardy Eville (writing); Olivia MacPherson (animated short); and Parker Bradlee, Reese McCracken, and Shaun Thomas (all photography). Special Distinctions were awarded to Kamar Dehaney (painting); Amity Harris (poetry); Kiera McCarthy and Maria Frangos (ceramics); and Noah Jones, Kimberly Marques, Clare Mone, and Mya O'Neill (photography). Two middle school students also took home prizes: a First Place for River Maxner and a Special Distinction for Mathilda Moehnke, both for drawings. After the judging, VCS staff added three "Staff Picks" – a ceramics work by Silas Abrams, and photos by Jessie Dlabaj and Margaret Sykes (featured on the covers of this newsletter). Check out our website to see all of the amazing work from our talented students!

Special thanks are due to all the wonderful people who help make the contest a success, year after year: the dedicated teachers of MV Regional High School (with special recognition for the hard work of Chris Baer); our excellent judging panel, gallery owner Valerie Francis, photographer Elizabeth Cecil, and painter Gregory Coutinho; our talented and generous framers, Kathy Morris and Heikki Soikkeli; and the Martha's Vineyard Cultural Council for financial support.

STATE FOREST CONCERNS

At 5,173 acres, the Manuel Correllus State Forest (MCSF) is by far the largest tract of protected open space on Martha's Vineyard. Perhaps more important, it is also one of the most ecologically diverse places in the entire Commonwealth, home to 38 state-listed species (one also federally listed) and six Priority Natural Communities. Our State Forest may be under-appreciated by many, but it is truly the centerpiece of Vineyard conservation.

That is why we were deeply concerned when the unpermitted construction of 25 miles of mountain bike trails, disturbing 32 acres of habitat and badly fragmenting the Forest, came to light last year. The VCS board reviewed available facts and took the following position by unanimous vote:

No one is above the law. Rules must be followed, particularly those designed to protect habitat and the environment. VCS does not condone unauthorized trail cutting and use of those trails in the MCSF. Unpermitted trail use must cease, illegal trails must be closed, and habitat restored. Responsible parties must shoulder the costs, issue an explanation, and describe what safeguards will be put in place to avoid recurrence. Third-party monitors should ensure compliance.

The state announced plans to restore the illegal trails in March; that work, which will be a substantial undertaking, began in earnest this summer.

CHILMARK STREAM RESTORATION

This spring, VCS submitted testimony in support of Sheriff's Meadow Foundation's (SMF) proposed ecological restoration project at the Mill Brook headwaters in Chilmark. Some 60 years ago, an earthen dam filled the wetlands there, creating an impoundment and an access road through what is today SMF's Roth Woodlands Sanctuary. The organization has secured state grants to install an upgraded culvert, which would allow the wetland system to restore itself and reduce the risk of dam failure in extreme weather events. The project does present potential drawbacks, which have been thoughtfully articulated by its opponents throughout the review process. However, after careful consideration, VCS ultimately came down in favor of supporting the project, keeping with our longstanding goals of wetland and stream restoration and impoundment removal wherever reasonable.

PASSINGS

This fall, VCS lost two beloved and highly effective Board members.

Arnie Reisman served on the VCS Board until 2020, where, as Chair of our Nominating Committee, his commitment to the environment and depth of knowledge of the community were vital in bringing aboard many of the Directors serving today. **William Stewart** was a long-serving volunteer, and then Board member and officer until 2008. During his service on the Board, William was deeply involved in writing and editing content for the organization, including an award-winning history of the Newhall Woods family's conservation philanthropy.

In addition to their more tangible contributions to VCS, both were appreciated for their unique sense of humor and way with words, making any occasion more delightful. We will miss them greatly, and the Island is much richer for their contributions.



Earth Day stalwart Bruce Golden (shown with friend Doug Plath to his right) did yeoman's work during his seven years on the VCS Board, serving as its Clerk, and volunteering every year to lead the Beach Clean-Up group at Menemsha — even when we forgot to get him a proper sign. Thank you, Bruce!

love it protect it mv

a celebration of nature and open space

The past year has made clear that our Island's open space — the forests, fields, and waters that sustain the natural world — are also vital to nourishing the human spirit. But, if we truly **love** these places, then we must **protect** them.

In recognition of this, last fall VCS launched our first-ever community art project. Titled “love it. protect it. mv,” the concept was to encourage residents and visitors alike to reflect on the natural world, and what it means to them.

The breadth and beauty of the hundreds of community contributions was truly inspirational. We share highlights from the collection on the following pages; others can be found on our website and social media pages. Thank you to every member of the community who helped create this tribute to our shared Island environment: a powerful statement of the vital need for Vineyard conservation.

Aerial photo by Mya O'Neill, shoreline near Moshup Trail



By June of 2021, the “love it. protect it. mv” project had been running for eight months as an entirely on-line affair, collecting and sharing hundreds of submissions, including poems, essays, paintings, drawings, photography, sculpture, jewelry, furniture, and stained glass. With the sense that the pandemic was finally loosening its grip, it was time to pursue what we had hoped for all along — an in-person event to bring the community together around a shared appreciation of nature and open space.

Having worked together many times on Winter Walks and other events, we once again turned to our friends at Featherstone Center for the Arts (FCA), in hopes of collaborating on a gallery show and live event. Thanks to their artistic vision, the show came out better than we could have imagined, with VCS and FCA working together to curate and present a large collection. Seventy-six visual artists, seventeen

poets and writers, and eighteen young artists from our student contest were all on display for three weeks this summer in the spectacular Francine Kelly Gallery.

Thanks to FCA's support of the project, we were able to host not just one, but *four* events at their beautiful campus: the awards presentation for the Art of Conservation (see pg. 7); an afternoon reading with twelve poets; an engaging “Conservation Conversation” with artist Cindy Kane, writer Geraldine Brooks, and the Executive Directors of FCA and VCS, Ann Smith and Brendan O'Neill; and finally, our Annual Meeting of the Membership, featuring special guest Emily Molden, Executive Director of the Nantucket Land Council. The setting of rolling hills and groves of shade trees was the perfect backdrop to celebrate nature, open space, and the power of art to bring us together.



Top left: Sam Look, creator and organizer of the “love it. protect it. mv” project, welcomes the guests. Below left: Cindy Kane and Geraldine Brooks discuss the intersections of art, writing, and environmental advocacy. Far left: poet (and Board Member) Jeff Agnoli



steps up to emcee the poetry reading. Right: Emily Molden, Executive Director of the Nantucket Land Council, joined our Brendan O'Neill for a dialogue on island conservation issues; Many thanks are due to Executive Director Ann Smith (top right), and Posie Haeger, Kate Hancock, Frank Crenney, and all of the rest of the FCA staff, for helping make it all happen!





Walking Our Way Home

It seemed important to keep track
of our Land Bank hikes then,
way back in the beginning,
when March inflicted
its thousand cuts.

Making our way through
the Walking Trails Guidebook,
checking off Fulling Mill Brook,
Katama Trails, Quansoo,
Menemsha Hills, Waskosims,
marveling at the great rock,
the stone walls dressed in lacy lichen,
espying an egret or a swan
in the lagoon, and imbued
with an urgency that did not match
the verdure and splendor in our path.

What did we hope for?

To walk through the ancient ways
and rustling forests, and return,
as to Narnia, to find the world at peace,
sanity restored, and nary a mention of a mask.

—Christine G. Burke



OPEN HOUSE

In November, the forest feels
downhearted.

Someone left all the doors
and windows open!

Fall is in foreclosure:
the heat has been turned off,
the light evicted, leaves fallen
like fading “for sale” signs.

Some tenants won’t move.
Junco and sparrows
pick off weed seeds.
One robin brightens a hackberry.

I sit alone on a stone bench.
the old hermit, Han Shan,
sits down with me.
We scribble poems on dead leaves.

—Warren D. Woessner



memory

written in veins of leaves
on lines of rough bark
sung from many branches
spoken in the whispers of lovers
heard in the rippling streams

a forest is a story teller
of death and rebirth
of hope and new growth
rooted in truth that
the only constant is change

even when leaves fall
and birds escape the cold
and lovers may not return
the majestic oaks stand strong
saplings take root
between moss covered rocks
pungent pine scent fills the air
a forest

remembers the promise of spring
survives another season

—Eleanor Bates



Forests

From the small, sometimes unseen, details, to the grandeur and mystery of the trees, our forests can be both intimate and expansive. Top left: “Midsummer Trees at Featherstone” by Lynn Hoeft. Top right: “Into the Woods” by Donna Straw. Center: “Tradewinds Preserve” by Scout K. Austin. Left: “Sanctuary” by Kay Frank.

Not More/More

Not more
profits
not more outrage
not more products
not more cages
not more choices
not more thoughtlessness
not more noises
not more selfishness
not more indulgence
not more division
not more ignorance
not more exclusion
not more deals
not more woes . . .

Only

more fields
more meadows

—*Jeff Agnoli*



Nature Walk, Winter

meadow blah
air cold
as a mother's
scold
uphill
path bends
weary
breathe
deeply
think
hear a
what?
perhaps
my wheezes
walk
walk on
reach pond
sit? no,
cold sand
clear water's
quiet lap
seeks
my eyes
nonetheless
want home
want
always want
where I'm not

—*Ellen Martin Story*



Milkweed Meadow

On the dirt road to the farm lined with oaks
leaves have fallen to cushion my walk.

Nearby a pine cone hangs from a fallen branch.
I pick it up and savor the smell of pitch on my fingers.

The open meadow is filled with milkweed ponds gone to seed.
I watch their fluffy feathers float near me, marvel how soft they are
how they have left the compact comfort of the pod
to burst open into the sky, to greet this fall day.

A gentle breeze carries them far beyond the meadow.
I hope they might land on protected soil.

They are on their own journey
to create more milkweed next summer to delight
and fortify monarchs, our fellow travelers
who will also grace the earth with fleeting beauty.

—*Eleanor Bates*



Meadows & Fields

From picturesque farms that sustain our local food economy, to the native grasslands that support the Island's unique biodiversity, meadows and fields are some of the most iconic spaces on Martha's Vineyard. Top to bottom: "Nat's Farm, September" by Katherine Gagnon; "Pecoy Point" by Alex Elvin; "Sunset Clouds Allen Farm" by Marjorie Mason; "Morning Glory Glow" by Rachael Cassiani.



Zacks

The lure of South Beach
 on a beautiful day
 the crest of September
 snow kingdom's December
 blue windward and leeward in May
 the lure that the curlew
 and sanderling know
 of wildness and bluster
 of limbo and luster
 sun chasing the tail of the blow
 when life is intense
 or contentious in town
 too calm at the harbor
 too rich by the arbor
 the lawn in this heat turning brown
 the lure like a rainbow

He claimed there should be
 stormcast to tease us,
 catches us, frees us—
 Come, Love, let us race to the sea!

—Rose Styron

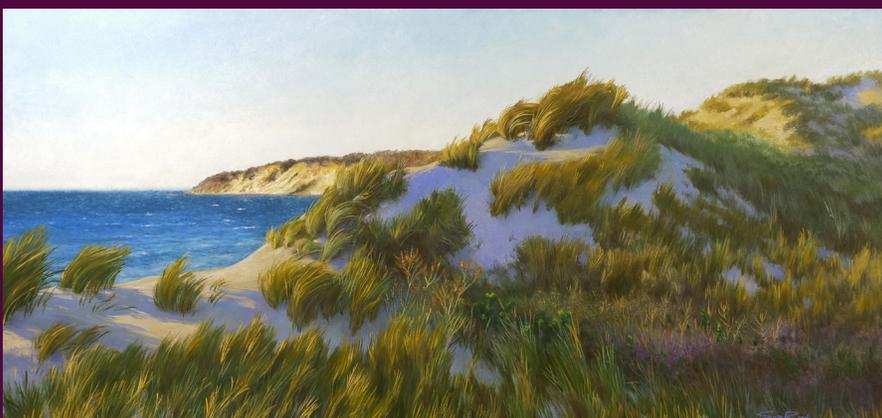


MY ISLAND FLOATS

My island knows no bounds yet grows them
 The sea around it moves in waves of contradiction
 Birthing and burying while roiling and calming
 Washing feet of fishermen since they started keeping time
 Ferrying travelers of every stripe, scale, skin
 Buoying fleets of exploration, exile, warfare
 Witnessing baptisms and shipwrecks by fiery light
 Carrying life, death, the undegradable
 Until they stop keeping time

No one changes the water
 No one cleans the bowl
 My island floats, fixed off a callous coast

—Arnie Reisman



Shorelines

The shoreline of Martha's Vineyard is different from those of other popular destinations on the east coast – the human footprint is lighter here, better able to share space with nature. Top to bottom: untitled by Anthony Salamone; "Tashmoo Flats" by Susie White; "Wave I" by Donna Gordon; "Whispering Dunes" by Sean Roach.



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Front cover: "Green Dew," photograph by Margaret Sykes
Below: "The State Beach Ripple Effect," photograph by Jessie Dlabaj
Two favorites from the Art of Conservation, the VCS high school art contest

