



Updates from the Trail: October 2023

Katie's Thoughts from the Trail: Ecological Value and Priority Lands

Brewster Conservation Trust has helped protect over 1,600 acres of land, but exactly how is the critical decision made about what land should be protected? The answer is not as simple as it may seem. While some may feel that it would be fantastic for BCT to acquire all available land, BCT simply does not have the funds nor interest in acquiring just any parcel. When making decisions about what land to acquire, BCT's Land Preservation Committee looks at a multitude of factors.

One of these factors includes looking at "conservation priority" maps, many of which are produced by [MassWildlife's Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Program \(NHESP\)](#). These maps showcase which areas throughout Massachusetts present the most conservation value. Ecological components such as certified vernal pools, rare species, and wetlands are all included and are taken into consideration.

BCT's Merchant property, for example, on your average map may seem like a property of little importance. With development surrounding the parcel and an Eversource Utility Right-of-Way running through its center, it is easy to overlook. NHESP maps, however, tell a different story. The maps identify the property as "Priority Habitat for Rare Species".

Containing a variety of important plants, the property is currently being managed to promote the rare



BCT's Merchant property is currently being managed to promote a sandplain grassland habitat

sandplain grassland habitat. Sandplain grasslands are a globally rare and declining habitat due to developmental pressures and fire suppression over time. During a recent volunteer workday at this property, we witnessed much wildlife activity and the rare New England Blazing Star (*Liatris novae-angliae*), an endemic purple flower and State Listed Species of Special Concern, along the ridge.



New England Blazing Star at BCT's Merchant property

BCT is focused on protecting these priority conservation lands and you can help too. The [Town of Brewster's public GIS map](#) is a great tool to use to figure out what kind of features such as wetlands and NHSEP identified areas are on your land and other spaces in Brewster. You may be surprised to find that your property has high conservation value! If you encounter any rare species on your next walk or trek through the woods, please visit [MassWildlife's site](#) to report them. We encourage everyone to act as a citizen scientist and lend a hand in looking after these natural spaces for wildlife and for generations to come.