



Infinity Pond in early spring – a vernal pool in AGM.

**The Friends of
Arlington's Great Meadows**

Annual Report

September, 2003
Arlington, Massachusetts

www.FoAGM.org

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What is Arlington's Great Meadows?

Arlington's Great Meadows (AGM) is a 183-acre parcel of land owned by the Town of Arlington and located in adjacent East Lexington. It has long been enjoyed by area residents as a place of natural beauty offering diverse natural habitats, including extensive wetlands, upland forests, meadows, vernal pools, and other natural communities. It is home to a vast array of animals, birds, amphibians, and plants of a great many species, and it is a stopping-off place for many species of birds during their annual migrations. As the largest natural, undeveloped space in Arlington or Lexington, it is a treasure worth protecting and improving.

Who are The Friends of Arlington's Great Meadows?

The Friends are a group of residents of Arlington, Lexington and beyond, who care deeply about Arlington's Great Meadows. We are committed to the preservation and stewardship of this remarkable natural landscape by working together with officials of the towns of Arlington and Lexington and with citizens everywhere who care about it.

In 1997, the Arlington Conservation Commission engaged botanist and naturalist Frances Clark to complete a study of AGM— a detailed description of its features, an inventory of its animal and plant species, and recommendations for its protection and enhancement. The report was completed in July of 2001, and the Arlington Conservation Commission held a number of open meetings to present its findings. The report strengthened the interest of people who already love AGM and stimulated interest in many other citizens who had not been aware of this beautiful natural space in our midst. One of the recommendations of the report was that a group be established with representatives from Arlington and Lexington to protect and manage AGM.

A small number of Arlington and Lexington residents organized and advertised the first meeting of The Friends of Arlington's Great Meadows, which was held at the Arlington Community Safety Building on March 12, 2002, and attended by approximately 75 people. From this beginning, the Friends have worked in a variety of ways to protect and enhance AGM and to encourage its use for education of people of all ages and for the enjoyment of being in nature.

The purpose of this Annual Report is to inform the Arlington Board of Selectmen and the citizens of Arlington, Lexington and beyond, about the activities and accomplishments of the Friends of Arlington's Great Meadows in its first year and through the summer of 2003.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Getting Started:

1. Established a Steering Committee including residents of Arlington and Lexington. The Committee has met regularly since then.
2. Created a mailing list of interested people. This has been used to keep members of the Friends and other interested people informed of meetings and other activities.
3. Created a Yahoo email discussion group for the public.
4. Created a web site, **FoAGM.org** (more on that later).
5. Held meetings of the general membership and other interested people every two to four months.

This rest of this report will describe accomplishments in each of three areas in which we have organized our work: (1) Legal and Organizational, (2) Resource Management , and (3) Education.

Legal and Organizational Accomplishments

1. Researched legal issues and ownership status, including a meeting with Arlington Town Counsel, John Maher. AGM is classified as “surplus municipal land”.
2. Met with the Arlington Board of Selectmen:
 - On June 24, 2003, members of FoAGM attended a meeting of the Board of Selectmen at which Lexington Christian Academy, which abuts AGM, requested permission to continue using AGM for cross country meets and to do some maintenance of the trails for that purpose. The Board approved LCA’s request, with agreement that any management issues such as trail maintenance be done in conjunction with the Friends of Arlington’s Great Meadows.
 - In the Summer of 2002, the FoAGM Steering Committee wrote to the Arlington Board of Selectmen proposing projects to carry out at AGM. On November 25, 2002 members of FoAGM attended the Board of Selectmen’s meeting and discussed the proposal with them. The specifics were as follows:

Proposed Resource Management Activities for 2002 and 2003

- Carry out regular cleanups.
- Work with the Lexington Christian Academy on their use of AGM for cross country running.
- Create a detailed map of natural and historic resources and trails.
- Maintain the major trails.
- Install signs identifying Great Meadows as Arlington public land.
- Enhance bird habitat and provide birdhouses as needed.

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- Develop and implement a plan for the management of non-native invasive plants.

Proposed Educational Activities for 2002 and 2003

- Establish a regular series of informational walks.
 - Organize field trips and other events with schools.
 - Produce a self-guiding trail booklet.
 - Start a wildlife population monitoring program.
 - Identify and document vernal pools.
3. Investigated Lexington zoning regarding AGM. Essentially all of the wetlands are zoned as a wetland protection area.
 4. Collected various historical documents related to the legal status and possible legal protection of the area.
 5. Explored the possibility of seeking "Area of Critical Environmental Concern" (ACEC) status for AGM. This appears not to be feasible.
 6. Began exploring possible approaches to obtain non-profit status or fiscal sponsorship for FoAGM.
 7. Communicated and developed relationships with organizations such as the Arlington Public Schools, the Mystic River Watershed Association, Citizens for Lexington Conservation, the Menotomy Bird Club, the Lexington Land Acquisition Committee, the Arlington Land Trust, the Trustees of Reservations, the Arlington Open Space Committee, the Lexington Bicycle Advisory Committee, and the Arlington Conservation Commission.

Resource Management Accomplishments

1. Held several cleanup events in AGM to remove trash ranging from litter and broken bottles to four car engines, the rusted parts of an ancient car, a snowmobile left in Sickle Brook long ago, a heating oil tank, and much construction debris. Volunteers, including coaches and students from Lexington Christian Academy and Lexington High School, and members of FoAGM assisted in this difficult work. Beverly Healthcare East Village, a nursing home which abuts AGM, contributed by allowing the trash to be amassed in its parking lot prior to pick-up by the Lexington DPW.
2. Created a preliminary plan to control invasive plant species which are choking out native plants in AGM, and organized several volunteer events to remove and destroy garlic mustard, black swallowwort, and Japanese knotweed. Groups of Lexington High School students joined FoAGM members in these events.
3. Created a stewardship plan which led to the proposal approved by the Board of Selectmen, as mentioned above.

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4. Installed an information kiosk near the bikeway across from the Waldorf School. Coaches from Lexington Christian Academy and students from Lexington High School assisted in this project.
5. Created a large map that details over 500 natural and manmade features in AGM.

Educational Accomplishments

1. Created and gave educational presentations for general meetings of FoAGM on current happenings in nature at AGM. Some of the topics included vernal pools and the animals which use them, woodcocks, invasive plants, and winter weeds.
2. Created a web site, **FoAGM.org**, rich in information about AGM and the Friends. In addition to upcoming activities of FoAGM, there is information about the natural wonders that happen at AGM from season to season, including remarkable photographs of nature.
3. Sponsored a number of educational nature excursions in AGM including a botany walk, an evening walk to see woodcock courting rituals, a walk to track animals in winter (coyote, fisher, weasel, and many other tracks were seen), an insect identification walk, and a Biodiversity Days walk. Also, cooperated with organizations such as Citizens for Lexington Conservation (CLC) and the Menotomy Bird Club in other walks.
4. Initiated articles about AGM which have appeared in the Boston Globe, the Arlington Advocate, and the Lexington Minuteman.
5. Responded to a letter in the Arlington Advocate from a citizen recommending the sale of AGM. Our response demonstrated the misunderstandings underlying his proposal, such as the fact that much of AGM is protected wetland, which cannot be developed.
6. Published and distributed a revision of the Great Meadows Guide
7. Successfully carried out the first Arlington public school visit to AGM. In May, 2003, first graders from Brackett School with their teacher, Mrs. Pope, made a field trip to AGM with help from FoAGM members and other volunteers.
8. Created a picture album of plant and insect species in AGM.
9. Organized an educational display and staffed information tables about AGM at Arlington Town Day, Lexington Discovery Day, Lexington's East Village Fair, and the Mystic River Herring Run.
10. Established a relationship with the Waldorf School where its high school students are trying get Peat Pond certified as a vernal pool. The students have received a grant to offer vernal pool presentations and field trips in elementary schools in Arlington. They began this project with a pilot presentation at the Waldorf elementary school.
11. Assisted some other nature education groups in having outings in AGM.
12. Provided maps and lists of species for the AGM information kiosk at the Minuteman Bikeway entrance.

Some of our Plans for the Future

Legal and Organizational:

1. Work with the Arlington Land Trust to develop ways in which our organizations can cooperate to the benefit of both, including the benefits of non-profit status.
2. Research and pursue ways in which AGM can be preserved as a natural area.

Resource Management

1. Continue invasive plant control and develop a more detailed program to accomplish this.
2. Continue regular collection of litter and trash.
3. Install entrance signs and boundary markers (a volunteer project of a Lexington Eagle Scout).
4. Devise a way to better utilize and supervise high school students doing community service, and proactively recruit them to work in AGM.
5. Hold the first organized trail maintenance day (in the fall of 2003).

Educational

1. Continue and expand the number and topics of nature walks at AGM, for people of all ages.
2. Further develop the use of AGM by Arlington Schools and others for nature and environmental education.

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Financial Report

The Friends of Arlington's Great Meadows has worked for its first year with very little money. Some people attending meetings have made donations which amounted to \$135.00. No dues have been sought or collected. Mostly, when expenses occurred, such as equipment to be rented, refreshments for meetings, or supplies of various kinds, members of the group have paid for these items out of their own pockets.

Recently the Steering Committee voted to spend \$75.00 from the donations received at meetings for the printing of more copies of the Great Meadows Guide. Our assets now total \$60.00.

For several months the FoAGM Steering Committee has been discussing ways to obtain non-profit status or fiscal sponsorship so that grants and tax-deductible donations can be sought. We expect to make significant progress on this the coming months.

Acknowledgements

Many individuals and groups outside AGM have provided guidance, encouragement, physical labor, and other assistance. We would like to thank them here.

Arlington Board of Selectmen
Arlington Conservation Commission
Arlington Land Trust
Lexington DPW
The Waldorf School, high school students and faculty
Lexington Christian Academy, coaches and students
Students of Lexington High School
Beverly Healthcare East Village
Citizens for Lexington Conservation
Friends of Robbins Farm

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The Committees of FoAGM

Education Committee

Sandra Ruggiero, Co-Chair
Andrea Golden, Co-Chair
Maryanne King
Julie King
Roly Chaput

Invasive Plants Committee

Anne Gibbs, Chair
Andrea Golden
Betty Wright
Don Miller

Legal Committee

David White, Chair
Scott Kirschner
Nathaniel Stevens
Eileen Entin
John Bartenstein

Resource Management Committee

Mike Tabaczynski, Chair
Anne Gibbs
Betty Wright
Don Miller

We, the FoAGM Steering Committee, wish to thank those listed above and the many others who helped The Friends of Arlington's Great Meadows become established and achieve many accomplishments since our first meeting in March, 2002. We look forward to protecting and providing stewardship for this varied and beautiful piece of natural land which we are lucky to have so close by. We hope our work will mean that we and all future generations can enjoy it and learn from it.

Respectfully submitted,

The Steering Committee

John Bartenstein

Don Miller

Mike Tabaczynski

Andrea Golden

Bob Morse

David White

Scott Kirschner

Sandra Ruggiero

Approved by the Steering Committee on 9/17/03.