



First Kiosk Installed at Arlington's Great Meadows

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

Annual Report

December 12, 2004
Arlington, Massachusetts

www.FoAGM.org

FoAGM Annual Report: 2003-2004

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 second year, through the Fall of 2004.

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 habitats.

What We Are

The Friends of Arlington's Great Meadows (FoAGM) are a group of residents of Arlington and Lexington, 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.

What We Do

We care for the trails, provide information to guide visitors, organize cleanups, control invasive plants, sponsor nature walks, organize educational programs with local schools, and generally spread the word to the public about this great place.

What We Need

If you are interested in any of the above activities or just want to learn more about these Meadows, we invite you to join us. The best way to reach us or to learn about our activities is to visit the website: www.FoAGM.org Please come.

The cover photo shows the installation of the kiosk near the bikeway opposite the Waldorf School. This is a "recycled" structure that was donated by the Friends of Robbins Farm Park.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

This has been a busy year for Friends of Arlington's Great Meadows. We wish to thank everyone who has helped in one way or another with these efforts.

Resource Stewardship Accomplishments

Stewardship of public open space involves balancing protection of the ecosystem with accommodation of human use. FoAGM seeks to support public access to Great Meadows for education and passive recreation while minimizing the detrimental impact on the natural environment. In her 2001 *Natural Resource Inventory and Stewardship Plan of Arlington's Great Meadows*, Frances Clark writes, "Responsible and safe public use by neighbors, town citizens, and regional visitors is important for the long-term protection of the Great Meadows. Without a certain level of public support and regular use, Great Meadows could be developed, grow up into a successional forest or become an unsafe no-man's land." Clark recommends designing and maintaining a trail system which accommodates the resources and sensitivities of the site as well as public safety and enjoyment. To that end, FoAGM has developed the following goals:

- Enhance opportunities for nature viewing and school group visits.
- Close or relocate unsustainable trails that contribute to environmental degradation through erosion and wetland damage, and restore them to a stable natural state.
- Establish, mark, and map sustainable trail routes through Great Meadows connecting its entrances and points of interest.
- Repair and improve these trails so they can support current and future levels of visitor traffic with minimal maintenance .
- Make trail maps and guides available to visitors.
- Install signs to identify the Great Meadows property, and direct and inform visitors, without excessive "sign pollution".

Actions completed or started in the past year include:

1. **Maintenance:** Held several volunteer workdays to collect trash and clear brush from overgrown trails.
2. **Trail Relocation:** Held a major volunteer workday to relocate a short section of eroded trail near the Bikeway across from the Waldorf School. Added trail markers, erosion control, and transplanted native trees to restore the retired trail to a natural state.
3. **Trees:** Planted donated trees to re-vegetate closed trails with the help of over 50 community service students from Lexington High School.

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4. **Signs:** Installed two signs reading “Arlington’s Great Meadows” near the most popular entrances and about a dozen posts reading “AGM” at other entrances. This work was done by Lexington High School student Alex MacNeil as an Eagle Scout project.
5. **Trail Improvements:** Applied for a grant of over \$11,000 with the state Recreation Trails Program. This grant will fund the construction of approximately 700 feet of much needed trail boardwalks to be constructed in 2005. Our partner the Arlington Land Trust is acting as the fiscal sponsor for this project.
6. **Bird Boxes:** Installed two Owl/Kestrel boxes. These were constructed by Waldorf School students under the direction of woodworking teacher Andy Freeburg.
7. **Kiosk:** Installed a second information kiosk near the East Village nursing home. This was built and installed by Arlington Eagle Scout Dan Reedy.

Invasive Plant Accomplishments

Exotic invasive plants are a significant problem in Arlington’s Great Meadows, as they are in many natural lands throughout the area. These plants are not native to Massachusetts and are therefore not kept in check by the existing animals or diseases. Such plants tend to spread quickly and can soon take over large areas inhabited by native species. Birds and animals which rely on native plants are thus deprived of the food and shelter which they provided. Our goals are:

- Continue with the removal of invasive plants in strategic areas where our efforts can make a difference.
- Restore those areas to native vegetation.

The easiest and most dramatic place to see the impact of invasives in AGM is to look at the large area of Japanese knotweed along the bikeway from Sickle Brook towards the Waldorf School. In the summer and fall this thick vegetation reaches six to eight feet tall, completely eliminating all other plants as well as totally blocking the view of the meadows from the bikeway.

In the past year the Friends of Arlington’s Great Meadows, with the help of numerous volunteers from Arlington and Lexington, have worked to remove invasive plants, including garlic mustard, Japanese knotweed, black swallowwort, and purple loosestrife, and to dispose of them properly so they do not spread to other areas. Specific activities included the following:

1. **Garlic Mustard:** Removed garlic mustard plants along the western and eastern sides of AGM, including a significant amount along the bikeway. This took place over four dates in April and May, and on one date, about 50 to 60 volunteers, mostly from Lexington High School, worked on this project.

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2. **Japanese Knotweed:** Submitted to the Lexington Conservation Commission a proposal for combating Japanese knotweed along the bikeway. The proposal includes two different methods on separate plots so the results can be evaluated for future more extensive control. In both plots the invasive plants will be replaced with native vegetation.
3. **Black Swallowwort:** Removed and cut this vine several times this last summer. This plant is related to milkweed, grows in several locations, and has the potential to spread much more widely.
4. **Purple Loosestrife:** Removed purple loosestrife from an area of AGM. Large portions of the wetlands there are covered with this invasive plant. As a replacement, planted native swamp milkweed plants that FoAGM member Andrea Golden grew from seeds she collected at AGM the previous year. At last report the milkweed was doing well but the purple loosestrife will need additional removal to prevent further encroachment.

Educational and Outreach Accomplishments

Our primary educational goals are:

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

During this year we have been involved in the following activities.

1. **General Meeting:** Held a public meeting in January at which Dave Brown, a professional naturalist and teacher, gave a very well-attended talk about animal tracking in wetland areas. The event was cosponsored by Walden Keeping Track.
2. **Nature/Birding Walks:** Dave Brown's lecture was followed by an animal tracking walk in January cosponsored and led by members of Walden Keeping Track. A high point was finding the tracks of grey fox. In April, FoAGM and the Menotomy Bird Club led two walks to observe the woodcock courtship rituals at dusk. In June, Chris Floyd led a very successful walk on "Breeding Birds of Arlington's Great Meadow" also co-sponsored by the Menotomy Bird Club and Citizens for Lexington Conservation (CLC). As part of a Mass Audubon effort we documented nesting orioles in the meadow. Our August walk explored different types of insects found in the variety of habitats in the meadow, and in October Laurel Carpenter led a walk focusing on "Fruits, Nuts and Seeds." Later in October Chris Floyd led a walk on the Fall Migration in Northeast Lexington at AGM as well as a couple of other sites. This was cosponsored by CLC and Menotomy Bird Club.

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3. **School Programs:** Gave vernal pool presentations to seven 1st -3rd grade classes at the Brackett School in Arlington last fall. This was carried out by Sandra Ruggiero, a science teacher at the Waldorf High School, and her 11th grade students. In April and May the same elementary and high school students met at Infinity Pond in AGM to study the aquatic life. The elementary classes received a "Vernal Pool Field Guide" for their classrooms, and each student was given a "Great Meadows Tour Guide" so they could return with their families for a self-guided walk. This program was funded by a grant from the Vernal Pool Association at Reading High School. It was written up in the Arlington Advocate, the Minuteman, and the Torch, the Waldorf High School newsletter. Two members of FoAGM spoke to an Arlington High School class about invasive plants in AGM, after which the students participated in invasive plant control workshops. Andrea Golden took an Arlington High School class on a walk at AGM on May 24. They looked at plants, pond life, and found a wood duckling on the Waldorf soccer field, which was turned over to a wildlife specialist in Concord.
4. **Community Outreach:** Provided literature at the Mystic River Herring Run and at Lexington Discovery Day in May. We were represented at Arlington Town Day on September 11, and had an interactive booth with interesting plant specimens at Lexington's East Village Fair on October 2.
Last fall Andrea Golden led a well-attended Girl Scout trip to AGM.
Also last fall several members of FoAGM spoke at the Arlington Land Trust (ALT) annual meeting about the work our group is doing.
Early in the spring we made a presentation at the East Village Nursing Home about current plants in season in the Great Meadows. The most popular specimen was the inchworm who came along for the ride.
5. **Ongoing Educational Activities:** FoAGM is educating people about the Great Meadows and our activities via the FoAGM web site as well as by the kiosk near the Minuteman Bikeway entrance. Special topics have included invasive plants and updates on trail work.
FoAGM reprinted and continues to distribute a revised AGM trail guide.

Legal and Organizational Accomplishments

Our goals for this year were:

- Work with the Arlington Land Trust to develop ways in which our organizations can cooperate for mutual benefit.
- Research and pursue ways in which AGM can be preserved as a natural area.

Our accomplishments during this year have been:

1. **FoAGM Organizational Structure:** Approved a set of bylaws and formally appointed members to the Steering Committee in October 2004.

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2. **Tax-Deductible Donation Fund:** Formed a partnership with the Arlington Land Trust (ALT) and established a tax-deductible fund for contributions for FoAGM activities. To date we have received donations of over \$2000.

3. **Arlington Board of Selectmen:** Continued to maintain contact with the Selectmen. In September of 2003 we sent to the Arlington Selectmen copies of our first annual report.

Met with the Selectmen in October 2003 and received their support for a Recreational Trails Grant application to improve trails and build boardwalks in AGM.

4. **Other Organizations:** 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.

Some of our Plans for the Future

Some of our major goals for the coming year are:

- Install a boardwalk across wetland areas to connect the northern and southern portions of AGM.
- Sponsor a number of nature walks for the public at AGM.
- Improve the marking of major trails and produce a matching trail map.
- Expand the involvement of Arlington schools in educational nature activities at AGM.
- Selectively control invasive plants to improve the wildlife habitat and also to enhance visitor experiences.
- Increase public awareness and appreciation for AGM.

Financial Report

During this second year, the Friends of Arlington's Great Meadows formed a partnership with the Arlington Land Trust (ALT), a nonprofit charitable organization, which generously offered to manage funds on our behalf. We extend our sincere appreciation to the ALT for working with us in making this possible. Citizens who care about AGM can now make tax-deductible contributions to the FoAGM Fund to support conservation, stewardship, and education projects. The Fund received a total of \$2,148 in donations in the past year, including corporate matching gifts. \$46.56 was spent on miscellaneous trail maintenance expenses, and \$150 paid for a professional animal tracking speaker at a well attended January meeting. The current balance of the fund is \$1,951.44.

FoAGM would like to extend a warm thank you to all who thoughtfully contributed to the preservation of one of the most valuable resources in Arlington and Lexington. Those desiring to make a tax deductible donation can make a check out to "ALT FoAGM Fund" and mail it to FoAGM, Box 492, Arlington, MA 02476, or use a credit card online at www.networkforgood.org (Enter "arlington land" in the search field and select state of MA. Select Arlington Land Trust and enter "FoAGM" as a designation.)

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
Lexington Board of Selectmen
Arlington Conservation Commission
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Lexington Department of Public Works
The Waldorf School students and faculty
Students of Arlington High School
Students of Lexington High School
Arlington Land Trust
Beverly Healthcare East Village
Citizens for Lexington Conservation
Menotomy Bird Club
New England Mountain Bike Association
Friend Lumber
Lexington Bicycle Advisory Committee
The Lynn Woods Reservation Park Ranger
Walden Keeping Track
Boy Scouts of America

The Committees of FoAGM

Education Committee

Sandra Ruggiero, Co-Chair
Andrea Golden, Co-Chair
Laurel Carpenter

Invasive Plants Committee

Don Miller, Chair
Anne Gibbs
Andrea Golden
Betty Wright

Legal Committee

David White, Chair
Nathaniel Stevens
John Bartenstein

Resource Management Committee

Mike Tabaczynski, Chair
Anne Gibbs
Betty Wright
Don Miller
Roly Chaput

We, the FoAGM Steering Committee, wish to thank those listed above and the many others who helped The Friends of Arlington's Great Meadows to 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
David White

Laurel Carpenter
Sandra Ruggiero

Andrea Golden
Mike Tabaczynski

Approved by the Steering Committee on December 12, 2004.