



# Friends of Alewife Reservation 2009 Newsletter



## Highlights from the Past Year

Hula Hoop Water Dances

Wildlife walks with tracker Dave Brown

National Day of Service volunteers at North Trail



*Tracks seen during wildlife walk*

Massachusetts Park Serve Day volunteer clean-up, South Trail

Mycology walk with Larry Millman

Bird walks led by Tim Factor, Carol Thrope and William Ackerly

MIT Int'l Students Volunteer Group



*Fungi Foraging*

Cambridge Science Festival

BostonCares and Millennium volunteers

Dear Friends,

It has been a busy year for Friends of Alewife Reservation. In addition to the usual education and volunteer events, FAR has been fighting to save the Silver Maple Forest. In this newsletter and attached letter you will find an update on the trial as well as a recent meeting with state officials to discuss the issue. Also highlighted in the newsletter is the upcoming summer ecology camp, now entering its 3<sup>rd</sup> year. We hope you will enjoy reading about our activities over the past year and will continue to stay involved with FAR in the years to come. We ask for your financial support in this fund-raising newsletter. Half of a \$100 dollar donation will go to the next stage of the silver maple forest trial. The other part will go to our Camp.

Ellen Mass

President, Friends of Alewife Reservation

## FAR Ecology Camp Kicks Off Third Annual Summer

By Katherine Walsh, Ecology Camp Coordinator

Friends of Alewife Reservation is collaborating with the 2009 Mayor's Summer Youth Employment Program (MSYEP) to work with fifteen youth for learning projects and workshops at Alewife Reservation. As the recently hired 2009 FAR Summer Ecology Camp Supervisor, I will collaborate with professional and volunteer instructors in teaching water quality testing, tree and trail maintenance, invasive species removal, wildlife tracking, birding, art presentation and plant identification. In addition to an educational and training experience, the youth will continue FAR's mission of stewardship of the reservation and advocating for its future preservation for the DCR. Camper youth from Cambridge Rindge and Latin High School will venture on field trips, including one to the Harvard Museum of Natural History. They will also go to Blue Heron Farm in Lincoln to witness sustainable agricultural practices which will be compared with two sessions on edible wild plants with Russ Cohen for an understanding of plant growth and nutrition. Ecology Camp youth will be taking photos and writing journal reflections in the creation of a Wiki web project which documents their work and expresses their full personal experience. By implementing these goals for FAR and the broader community, I hope our youth will gain a greater appreciation of the need to preserve and protect our urban wilds, and possibly, to pursue a future in an environmental field.

*Ecology Camp Youth Activities 2008*



## Wildlife Protection Ends DEP Forest Trial of Belmont Uplands

by Ellen Mass, President Friends of Alewife Reservation

A healthy ambling coyote was viewed by FAR member Bill Ackerley in the silver maple forest. Jennifer Griffith (Arlington) sighted one on the upper floodplain "uplands". Both views were a foreshadowing of the now completed trial between the silver maple forest and 300 proposed housing units. The wildlife evidence presented last Monday at DEP regional headquarters after three and a half day sessions held by Judge Beverly Coles Roby is promising. On a site visit to the area, the Judge was shown a coyote den by Chuck Katuska, consultant and witness. A destroyed Canada Goose nest was found with broken egg shells. The ecological connection between nest and coyote den is sufficient reason to preserve the forest, benefiting Cambridge, Belmont, and Arlington. Since the geese population is unmanageable, and coyote are sighted in residential neighborhoods, natural predator balance "in the wild" is healthy for us all.

"Why is this upper floodplain site significant?" asked the Judge. "On this isolated site, upper floodplain habitats allow wild life to secure feeding, breeding and over-wintering habitat functions protected by regulations," said Katuska. The Judge asked, "Do these animals have other places to go?" Katuska: "There are always displacement habitats, but no areas where their life cycles can be provided for in proximity to this site."

The Belmont Conservation Commission drew its opposition directly from the regulations (310 CMR 10.60(3)) requiring that "wildlife habitat characteristics of the replacement area . . . shall be similar to that of the lost areas, insofar as necessary to maintain the wildlife habitat functions of the lost areas."

"Among functions of any wildlife habitat are those of providing food and cover. The rules provide for preservation of this function by requiring the Commission to consider interspersion and diversity of vegetation, water, and other wildlife habitat characteristics of the replacement area", stated the Commission.

Intervener attorney Bracken cross-examined DEP Reviewer Rachel Freed who superceded the BCC, thus siding with the development case questioning her refusal to read, or request, wildlife reports submitted to the Commission by Charles Katuska, Patrick Fairbairn and Dave Brown. Freed stated she was not required to evaluate upper floodplain. She admitted additional reports but did not read them. The building design footprint is heavily situated on the "upper flood plain" composed primarily of silver maple trees.

The silver maple forest is a small river floodplain forest regularly inundated with water that moves into the lowlands bordering a river. Sadly, it is a disappearing ecological treasure. As small as it is, the Belmont Uplands still provides valuable floodwater storage. Alewife woods and marshes serve as an important stopover for migrating birds and as habitat for a local wildlife populations, ranging from muskrats and minks to foxes, deer and otter.



*Volunteers from Millennium clear a trail in preparation for the Summer Ecology Camp*



*Water Dances at Little River*

## FAR: Education and Advocacy

by Hilary Thrasher, FAR Office Coordinator/Intern

During the course of my six months at FAR I have had the opportunity to see the varied ways in which FAR stewards the reservation, including arts and community, education, maintenance, and advocacy. All of these elements are essential to appreciate and protect the urban wild at Alewife.

One of the most creative events that took place at the reservation this spring was the Hula Hoop water dances, performed by ArtForce! Cambridge. Phyllis Labanowski designed the luminescent hula hoop dance and light show to take place by the waters of Little River, in honor of these waters and the trees that they nourish. As the sun set all ages participated, celebrating this wild area.

Educational events included a fungi foraging walk led by Larry Millman, which introduced attendees to little-seen elements of the reservation that are lurking on the surface.

On the advocacy front was the recent meeting at the state Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs. 20 community leaders attended, including a science teacher, minister, local politicians such as Rep. Brownsberger, and local residents. Each participant spoke for a few minutes from his or her own perspective about the importance of the Silver Maple Forest. FAR hopes this meeting is the beginning of a dialogue with the state about creative solutions to this issue.

Soon after the EOEEA meeting, several FAR members attended the Democratic State Convention to collect signatures for an amendment to the party platform concerning preservation of urban wilds.