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THE NORWOTTUCK NETWORK: A CASE STUDY FOR DEMOCRACY

I. Introduction: What is the Norwottuck Network?

The Norwottuck Network is a group of trails and greenway advocates and professionals dedicated to creating a multi-purpose alternative transportation network in

Western Massachusetts. Recently designated by The White House Millennium Council as one of 52 Millennium Legacy Trails, the Norwottuck Network is a fine example of grassroots democracy at work. It also demonstrates just how much the leadership of one motivated individual can accomplish. As the Millennium Trails designation would suggest, the Norwottuck Network represents a new era in planning, networking and organization on a regional scale.

Section II of this paper will discuss the formation of the Norwottuck Network. Section III discusses the initial partnerships formed during the organization of the Network as well as the major trails involved. Section IV discusses the administrative functions of the Network as well as future steps for the fledgling organization. And finally, concluding remarks will be made in Section V.

II. Formation of the Norwottuck Network

The Norwottuck Network began on January 23, 1999 at the first New England Greenway Vision Planning Workshop conducted by the Department of Landscape Architecture and Regional Planning at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. The workshop featured a stellar line-up of speakers and panelists, among them: 1) The Honorable Robert Wygant, U.S. Representative (RI), and 2) David Burwell, President, Rails-To-Trails Conservancy.

In attendance was Barbara Francis a local greenway and trails activist with a particular interest in global warming. Two Federal programs introduced at the workshop inspired Ms. Francis to action: 1) The Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21), and 2) The Millennium Trails Program.

II.1 The New England Greenway Vision Plan. The New England Greenway Vision Plan is a joint effort between the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, Department of Landscape Architecture and Regional Planning and the Boston Society of Landscape Architects. The project brought together hundreds of greenway and trails activists and professionals from all six New England States. Through a series of nine planning workshops conducted throughout the spring of 1999, participants created a Vision Plan for connecting ecological, historical and recreational sites throughout New England and beyond (New England Greenway Vision Plan: <http://www.umass.edu/greenway>).

II.2 The Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21). In his Key Note address to participants of the first New England Greenway Vision Planning Workshop, U.S. Representative Robert Weygand introduced the U.S. Department of Transportation's "Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century" (TEA-21), a continuation of the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991 (ISTEA). These two programs represent the most ambitious transportation initiative in the United States since the development of the Interstate Highway System following World War II. Within TEA-21, Congress guarantees \$198 billion for the fiscal years 1998-2003 (U.S Dept. of Transportation, April, 2000 <http://www.dot.gov/tea21/summary.html>). This record setting investment provides funding for a wide range of transportation projects including not only highway construction and improvement projects, but research, planning and transportation alternatives to the automobile like mass transit, and pedestrian and bicycle routes. The breadth of program eligibility and its compatibility with greenways' multiple purposes, make this program a prime funding target for greenway developers and planners.

II.3. The Millennium Trails Program. In his luncheon Key Note Address to workshop participants, President David Burwell of the Rails-To-Trails Conservancy introduced the White House Millennium Council's Millennium Trails Program. The White House Millennium Trails program is designed to "celebrate, recognize and be a catalyst for creating trails to honor the past and imagine the future." (Millennium Trails program, April, 2000 <http://www.dot.gov/mtp/q&a.html>).

The program has three levels of trail recognition: 1) National Millennium Trails, 2) Millennium Legacy Trails, and 3) Community Trails 2000.

The National Millennium Trail designation recognizes existing or proposed trails of national significance. Sixteen trails received this honor, among them the Appalachian Trail, The Underground Railroad, and the East Coast Greenway Alliance's East Coast Greenway.

Millennium Legacy Trail designation recognizes trails of statewide significance. Fifty-two trails have received this designation: one for each of the fifty states, one for the District of Columbia and one for Puerto Rico. The Norwottuck Network was named the Millennium Legacy Trail for Massachusetts.

Community Trails 2000 designation recognizes local community trails. The nomination period for Community Trails 2000 status ended May 6, 2000. Awards will be announced on National Trails Day, June 3, 2000.

Although no funding directly follows a Millennium Trail designation, trails do benefit in other ways. Millennium Trail designation increases a trail's visibility, and thus its attractiveness to potential private funders. So far, the cache' of the honor has proven attractive to corporate sponsorship. American Express has provided grants of \$10,000 for twelve Legacy Trails. The Norwottuck Network was one of these grant recipients.

Millennium Trail designation raises a trail organization's profile for Federal funding programs and technical assistance as well. The added credibility of the designation is particularly important for proposed trails and young trail organizations that may not yet have a proven track record. The program also supplies each Millennium Trail with official signage, and links it with the program's database and web site.

II.4 One woman takes charge. Inspired by the compatible missions of TEA-21 and the Millennium Trails program, Barbara Francis, an Amherst resident and New England Greenway Vision Planning workshop participant, formed an exploratory committee to nominate a trail in Western Massachusetts for Millennium Trail status. After numerous discussions, the committee agreed to nominate the Norwottuck Rail Trail linking Northampton and Belchertown, MA, for Community Trails 2000 status.

III. Building Partnerships

Two other greenways and trail planning events in the Spring of 1999 provided more networking opportunities which led to an even more ambitious vision of the Norwottuck Network:

- The development of the Massachusetts State Greenway Plan, organized by MA DEM State Greenway Coordinator, Jennifer Howard
- The Rails-To-Trails Conservancy's Second Annual Greenways and Trails Conference, Pittsburgh, PA (Rails-To-Trails Conservancy.
<http://www.railtrails.org>)

Various discussions and contacts made at these events culminated in the Norwottuck Network, by now comprised of at least a dozen trails and greenway projects extending beyond the Norwottuck Rail Trail to include the entire Pioneer Valley, the Quabbin Reservoir, and the northwestern Berkshire regions of the Commonwealth.

When Community Trails 2000 selection criteria failed to materialize, and as the Millennium Legacy Trail nomination deadline approached, the now-regional greenway network agreed to apply for Millennium Legacy status. On October 21, 1999, First Lady Hillary Clinton announced the Legacy Trail awards. The Norwottuck Network was designated the Millennium Legacy Trail for Massachusetts.

Though the Legacy Trails application listed over twenty collaborators, only the major trail and greenway segments of the Norwottuck Network are discussed here:

1. The Norwottuck Rail Trail
2. The Connecticut River Greenway
3. The Tully Loop Trail
4. The Mohawk-Mahican Trail

See Table 1 for a complete list of Norwottuck Network collaborators.

III.1. The Norwottuck Rail Trail. The Norwottuck Rail Trail is the flagship trail of the Norwottuck Network. Named by Native Americans for “mist on the river” the ten-mile paved trail currently runs from Elwell State Park on Damon Road in Northampton to Warren Wright Road in Belchertown. The trail spans the Connecticut River between Northampton and Hadley via an original 1400-foot long railroad bridge, and passes through open farmland and charming Town Commons (Figure 1). The trail uses the right-of-way of the former Massachusetts Central Railroad which was frequently used by former U.S. President and then Governor of Massachusetts, Calvin Coolidge, on trips between Boston and his home in Northampton (The Norwottuck Network Online: <http://www.hadleyonline.com/railtrail>). See Figure 2 for a map of the Norwottuck Rail Trail.

III.2 The Connecticut River Greenway State Park. The Norwottuck Rail Trail is part of the larger Connecticut River Greenway State Park, managed by the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Management (MA DEM). One of the Commonwealth’s

newest State Parks, the Connecticut River Greenway is a linear park paralleling the Connecticut River for the 69-mile portion that flows through Massachusetts. The park

Photo and Map of The Norwottuck Rail Trail



Figure 1. CT River Bridge between Hadley & Northampton
Source: <http://www.state.ma.us/dem/parks/nwrt.htm>

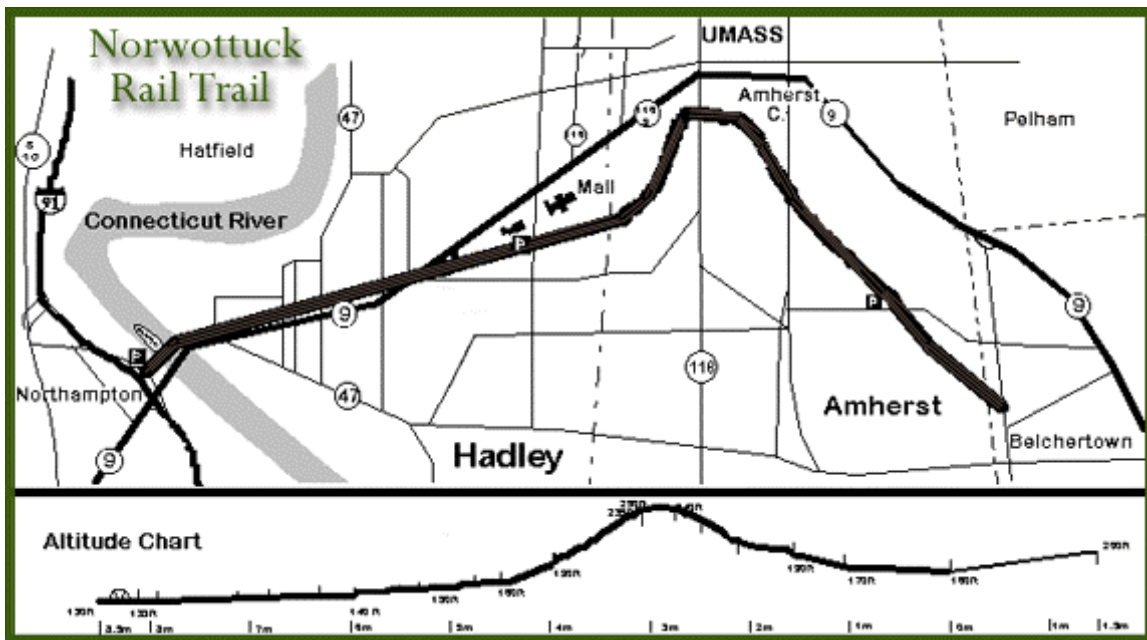


Figure 2. Map of the Norwottuck Rail Trail.

Source: <http://www.hadleyonline.com/railtrail> connects key ecological areas, historical sites and recreational amenities. The park includes seven public boat launches, a 13-mile water trail from Montague to Hatfield, six miles of multi-purpose trails and unlimited scenic views from natural areas such as Mount Toby (1,269 ft. elev.) and Mount Sugarloaf (653 ft. elev.) (L.L. Bean Outdoors Online, April, 2000 <http://www.llbean.com/parksearch/parks/html/483lls.htm>).

III.3 The Tully Loop Trail.

The Tully Loop Trail is located in the North Quabbin region of Central Massachusetts. This 20-mile trail links private and public lands in the towns of Orange, Warwick, Royalston and Athol. Approximately half of the trail is intended for foot traffic only. The other half is a multi-purpose trail that allows mountain bikes, horses and snowmobiles.

The trail began in 1990 with a conversation between two people working on adjacent lands: Dick O'Brien, Director Central Region, Trustees of Reservations, and Rick Magee, Interpretive Coordinator of the New England District, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE). During this conversation, the two men realized that they and their employers had the same vision: a trail around Tully Lake that linked the USACE property with the adjacent Trustees' Doane's Falls Reservation. Once they realized they were in agreement, the trail went forward, and support has been building ever since.

Three planning documents released in early 1997 emphasized the need for regional partnerships in open space planning. These documents and the discussions they generated served as the catalyst for forming the North Quabbin Regional Landscape Partnership. The documents are:

- Harvard Forest's "History and Importance of Land Use and Protection in the North Quabbin Region of MA (USA)" (Golodetz & Foster)
- MA DEM's "Guidelines for Operations and Land Stewardship (Backman)

- “Plan for the Second Decade” (Mount Grace Land Conservation Trust)

In addition to the players already mentioned, an impressive and diverse array of new partners joined the Tully Loop Trail effort including:

- Charles Tracy, National Park Service River & Trails Conservation Assistance
- Ralph Taylor, MA Division of Fisheries and Wildlife CT Valley District
- Jennifer Howard, MA DEM Greenways Coordinator
- Appalachian Mountain Club

The North Quabbin Regional Landscape Partnership’s success is due in part to its ability to recognize and use the strengths and resources of each partner organization. During one of the first organizational meetings, each partner gave a ten-minute presentation outlining their organization’s mission, its vision for the Tully Mountain area as well as its land holdings in the region. At this initial workshop, the framework for an even more extensive 20-mile double loop trail emerged.

By 1998, the Tully Trail was formally underway. Numerous trail building days were scheduled during 1999. Hundreds of local residents plus Americorps volunteers, the Boy Scouts, and YMCA campers turned out to move the trail forward a few miles each time. Thanks to a DEM Greenways and Trails Demonstration Grant acquired by Shaun Bennett of Mount Grace Land Conservation Trust, the North Quabbin Regional Landscape Partnership was able to hire Gary Culver as part-time volunteer coordinator to orchestrate the work and all those willing hands. By the fall of 1999, most of the trail was completed. Some trail building and blazing will continue into the summer of 2000.

The Tully Loop Trail is a powerful example of cooperative effort yielding spectacular results in a relatively short period of time. By sharing knowledge, resources and momentum, a diverse group of partners were able to assure the enjoyment of many future generations in the region. See Figure 3 for a map of the Tully Trail.

III.4 The Mohawk-Mahican Trail. The Norwottuck Network branches into the Berkshire Region of Massachusetts via the Mohawk-Mahican Trail that runs from Deerfield to Williamstown through the Deerfield River Valley. The trail's long history began as a Native American footpath and trade route linking the Mohawk Tribes from the mountains of Eastern New York with the salmon-rich waters of the Deerfield and Connecticut Rivers to the east.

A still-loyal American Patriot, Benedict Arnold, used the Mohawk Trail to raid the arsenal at Fort Ticonderoga, NY. After recruiting troops from Deerfield, Arnold and his men stormed the English Fort and returned to Boston with cannon and artillery for the Yankee cause.

With increasing traffic from horse-drawn vehicles and the automobile, the footpath was gradually widened and shifted from its original route. In 1914, The Commonwealth officially designated the western stretch of Route 2 from Erving to the New York State Line



Figure 3. The Tully Loop Trail Map. Adapted from Townsend, 2000.

as the Mohawk Trail. Tourist businesses sprang up along the route to supply motorists with gas, food, lodging and not-so-authentic Indian souvenirs (The Mohawk Trail Region, 1999-2000 p34). Today the Route 2 version of the Mohawk Trail is being considered for Scenic Road status, in which case it would be eligible for TEA-21 Scenic Byways funds.

Remnants of the original footpaths still exist and can be accessed via the Mohawk Trail State Forest. The Hoosic and Deerfield River Watershed Associations in partnership with The Appalachian Mountain Club, The Franklin Regional Council of Governments, Historic Deerfield and numerous other local and regional groups have completed approximately 17 miles of trail. Supported by ISTEA funds, the entire trail makes potential connections with larger scale long-distance trails and greenways such as the Appalachian Trail, The Catamount Trail in Vermont, The Taconic Crest Trail bordering NY, MA and VT, and the Hudson River Greenway should the trail be expanded to Saratoga, NY.¹ See Figures 4 and 5 for a photo and map of the Mohawk Auto Route.

IV. Mission and Objectives of the Norwottuck Network

Section III discussed the history and physical location of some of the major trails that make up the Norwottuck Network. The current section discusses the behind-the-scenes administrative aspects that are the primary function of the Norwottuck Network.

Photo and Map of the Mohawk Trail

¹ (Millennium Legacy Trail application support letter from Lauren Stevens, Executive Director of the Hoosic River Watershed Association.)



Figure 4. Vintage postcard shows Mount Greylock, one of the many scenic vistas along the Mohawk Trail.
Source: <http://www.berkshireweb.com/mohawktrail/index.html>

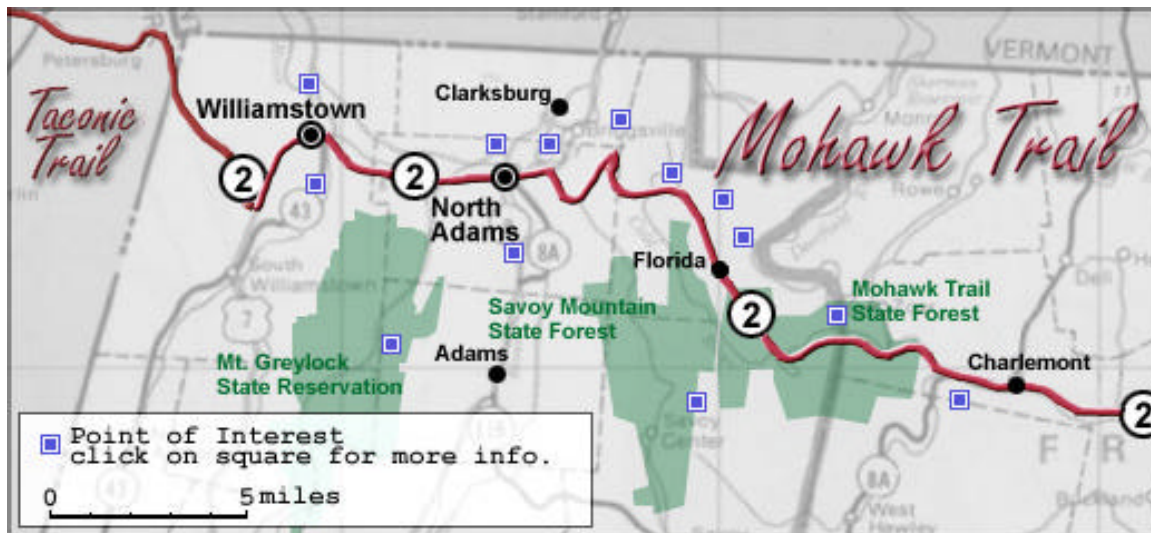


Figure 5. The Mohawk Trail Scenic Auto Route. Source: The Berkshire Web.
<http://www.berkshireweb.com/mohawktrail/index.html>

Possessing a \$10,000 seed grant from American Express, dozens of supporters and a clear and admirable mission, the future of the Norwottuck Network is bright. For the Network to fulfill its critical organizational function, however, a formal management and fiscal structure must be established.

Primarily a “Match-making” organization for trails and greenway planners and advocates in Western Massachusetts, the Norwottuck Network is intended to be a catalyst for regional trails and greenways. The physical development of the trails within the Norwottuck Network is to be managed and implemented by the individual trail organizations themselves.

Presently, Treasurer, Barbara Francis, has identified four objectives as the next steps toward fulfilling the Network’s mission:

- Incorporate as a Non-Profit organization
- Explore funding opportunities
- Expand partnerships
- Promote the organization

IV.1. Incorporation. The Norwottuck Network has applied to the Internal Revenue Service for 501C-3 Non-profit status. The Network Officers are as follows:

- President, Arthur Swift, Chair, Norwottuck Rail Trail
- Vice President, Craig Della Penna, Rails-To-Trails Conservancy
- Secretary, Neils LaCour, Amherst Planning Department
- Treasurer, Barbara Francis, Amherst Solid Waste Committee
- Business Director, John Coull, Amherst Chamber of Commerce
- Donor Relations Director, Robert Kusner

The Network’s stated mission is to: 1) Promote low impact tourism; 2) Develop recreational facilities, and 3) Provide for alternative modes of transportation.

IV.2. Exploring funding opportunities. The Norwottuck Network is one of twelve Millennium Trails to receive a \$10,000 grant from American Express. Implicit in the grant is the potential for additional funding if the original grant money significantly impacts the trail’s success. It is also hoped that other corporate donors will follow the American Express’s example. In the interim, however, other revenue sources must be located.

Because of the Central Artery Project in Boston, Massachusetts has the lowest rate of TEA-21 expenditures for transportation enhancements of all fifty states (Conservation Law

Fund, 2000 p 1). Popularly referred to as “The Big Dig,” the project is siphoning transportation funds from the rest of the state. As a result, TEA-21 has not proven to be the boon to trails and greenway development in Massachusetts as it has in other parts of the country. Thus the Norwottuck Network is targeting private foundations in its development plan.

Because of the Network’s mission to provide alternative transportation that does not create atmospheric emissions, it is pursuing foundations with a global warming agenda. The Pugh Charitable Trust is such an organization. Because of the health benefits of human-powered transportation and recreation, the Insurance and Health Care industries are also thought to be an appropriate and yet-untapped potential source of revenue.

IV.3 Promoting the Norwottuck Network. All Millennium Trails are encouraged to hold a “Kick-off” event to celebrate and promote the trail’s Millennium designation. The Norwottuck Network will use part of the \$10,000 American Express grant to organize just such an event. A series of Alternative Transportation workshops and bike rides will take place May 17-22, 2000 in the Pioneer Valley. The May 17th workshop will feature nationally recognized trail organizer David Engwicht. Workshop participants will assemble at Smith College, in Northampton, ride a portion of the Norwottuck Rail Trail and return for the workshop. Related events will take place throughout the week in Springfield, Holyoke and Amherst.

IV.4. Strengthening existing partnerships and forming new ones. The partnership between the Norwottuck Network and Department of Landscape Architecture and Regional Planning at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, remains strong and productive. Led by Assistant Professor Robert Ryan and Professor Annaliese Bischoff, Senior Landscape

Architecture students developed plans for key linkages that could potentially create a Five College Bikeway linking U Mass, Amherst, Hampshire, Mount Holyoke and Smith Colleges. The students' work will be used as promotional tools. As promotional events raise the profile of the Norwottuck Network, more trail advocates are expected to join the group.

V. Conclusion

The New Millennium is often characterized as "the Dawn of the Information Age." Innovations in information technology have made it possible to transcend physical and political boundaries like never before. People with common interests are organizing to share information, paving the way for a new era of collaboration and unity.

The Norwottuck Network is just such an organization. With these new tools in place, it becomes easier for an individual to orchestrate change. In Western Massachusetts, this individual came in the form of Barbara Francis. One person, inspired by an idea whose time has come, has managed through tireless contact, both personal and virtual, to bring together people with, if not similar, at least compatible goals, who had never interacted before. By creating a web of resources and experience, the collective vision of the Norwottuck Network is made so much more powerful than the individual efforts of which the Network is comprised.

What greater act of Democracy than reinforcing the idea that every individual has the right, the privilege, the duty and the capability of making a difference in the world? If people like Barbara Francis, her supporters and other organizations like the Norwottuck Network continue to nurture their ideals, then future generations just may have the opportunity to characterize the 21st Century as "The Green Age."