

## Thank the superhero in our midst

There is a quiet, real-life superhero in our midst, and most of us don't even realize it. It provides Cape Codders with myriad benefits, and helps address most of our pressing problems. It increases our real estate values, attracts tourists, enhances our quality of life and the character of our towns, improves our mental and physical health, saves towns money by reducing flooding and erosion, filters ground- and stormwater, cleans the air, and provides a place for us to walk, run, kayak and fish.

That's more than Superman or Wonder Woman can claim, yet our superhero — conservation land — gets far less glory and adulation.

How many of us walk our dogs or run in the woods, bird-watch in open meadows or salt marshes, or drive past scenic vistas, all without thinking of how it is that those places are available for all of us to enjoy?

Anyone who hasn't been using these places might want to start. Conservation land is like a no-cost health program. Studies have shown that, in addition to the physical benefits, walks in nature — and, for children, unstructured outdoor play — have positive impacts on stress, mental acuity, memory, ADHD and creativity (see, for example, [nwf.org/be-out-there/why-be-out-there/health-benefits.aspx](http://nwf.org/be-out-there/why-be-out-there/health-benefits.aspx) and the references listed there).

A study by The Trust for Public Land found that every dollar invested in conservation land returned \$4 in these natural goods and services. So where do those investment dollars come from? Some are state, federal or town programs. But much of the funding for conservation land is raised from private individuals by local land trusts, nonprofit organizations that exist to preserve local open space for everyone, forever.

Almost every town on Cape Cod has a land trust. For example, The 300 Committee Land Trust of Falmouth, currently celebrating its 30th anniversary, has preserved 2,300 acres, often working in partnership with the town. Most land trusts offer talks, walks and other programs that can introduce Cape Codders and their families to these beautiful places and the natural treasures they hold.

There are other ways to get involved to support these organizations that bring us so much. Memberships are usually very reasonable and provide an important base of support. Those who like to work outside can find out about stewardship days and help maintain the trails. Contact the local land trust to find out what other skills are needed. Consider making more substantial contributions or bequests — there are significant tax benefits, and it's a great investment in community and a way to leave a lasting legacy that will benefit everyone.

And next time you drive past that beautiful view, just take a moment to appreciate the people and organizations that had the foresight to preserve it for all of us. Then park your car, unload the kids, go for a walk! You'll be glad you did.

*— Alison Leschen of Falmouth is a marine scientist and former director of the Waquoit Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve. She now volunteers with The 300 Committee Land Trust of Falmouth and consults with other land trusts on strategic planning.*