

Beacon Hill Byline – By Mary Rogeness

May 27, 1993

### The sale of Gasek Farm

Last Friday I had the privilege of accompanying several members of the Longmeadow Conservation Commission to a long-awaited real estate closing. As a result of that closing, the meadow farmland of Louis and Ruth Gasek has become the property of me town of Longmeadow, protected and preserved for the benefit of wildlife and the passive recreational enjoyment of area residents. The transformation of the property from farm to sanctuary spanned seven years, and it sometimes confounded the buyers and sellers alike.

I entered the picture two weeks ago when a commission member phoned me in complete frustration to ask why the Division of Capital Planning was holding up the process. On the day I asked that question in Boston, the bureaucrats completed their work, and events from that point moved quickly. The closing shows what accomplishments can come from the dedication of a core of hard workers. Today I would like to recognize and applaud those individuals.

Efforts to purchase the riverbank property began when the Longmeadow Conservation Commission, the Nature Conservancy, the Valley Land Fund, Inc., and the Department of Environmental Management formed a coalition. That coalition sponsored the Friends of the Meadows Preservation Drive in order to take advantage of a window of opportunity to purchase this portion of the 100-year flood plain of the Connecticut River. They succeeded in assembling \$375,000, a substantial sum at my time, particularly in the recent recessionary climate. They navigated the relationships among governmental agencies and private foundations. They persevered and succeeded. More than 100 acres of prime riverfront habitat is now secured for resident and migratory birds, for the hikers, cross country skiers and birders who continue to use the site for passive recreation.

Here are some of the accomplishments of the coalition. In order to make the purchase possible, the Nature Conservancy used its organizational structure to obtain an option to buy the property, The group acquired \$20,000 from the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Management to purchase restrictions for future use of the land. That was a critical feature which ensures private donors that the property will retain its conservation land in perpetuity. An additional \$100,000 came from the Federal Land and Water Conservation Fund, and the balance from fundraising efforts of the Friends of the Meadows.

The townspeople who were there from the first idea to the closing last week are Chairman Ed Childs, Nancy Rogers and Ann Southworth of the Conservation Commission; Attorney Craig Brown, who volunteered innumerable hours of his time for the project. Private and institutional donors were there in spirit. Terry Blunt of the Department of Environmental Management appeared briefly. A tireless campaigner for the environment, he did not stay for the formal signing, but rushed off on another challenge.

My thanks to all the participants. I am not a “morning person,” so I am not likely to see the birds at Gasek Farm. I will be there when the sun is overhead. But I wish the birders among you many happy days on the meadows for many years to come.