

December 11, 2013

To the Editor:

Hubbardston's Board of Selectmen missed another chance to do the right thing when it recently put the Mt. Jefferson Conservation Area hay lease out to bid. Basing the winning bid simply on highest dollar amount was easy. The Board didn't have to get involved with tough decisions.

Our group told the BOS that there were responsible farmers in the area who would be willing to mow the fields at the Mt. Jefferson Conservation Area **AND** protect nesting Bobolinks and other wildlife. We were also willing to make a financial contribution to offset any perceived loss of income.

But the bird-friendly farmers and our group were shut out of the process by a very cumbersome RFP that didn't give any consideration to bird/wildlife protection or ecosystem health. Although the BOS was not required to factor wildlife conservation considerations into its decision, it certainly could have done so.

The Board missed the opportunity to hire a farmer who would have made everyone happy, a win-win situation. Hubbardston's Open Space Committee wouldn't support this. For some unfathomable reason, the Chair has always been opposed to any bird protection initiatives on the property.

The winning bid on this hay lease was \$43 per acre, per cutting. This is more than twice the going rate and more than 3X what was being paid in years past. How ironic that the extra money being spent on the bid per acre is almost the same as the amount that would be forfeited by delaying the first cut to protect nesting birds.

For the next five years, first cut will be at the farmer's discretion, generally at the height of the nesting season. The Bobolinks don't stand much of a chance.

The BOS, OSC, and the farmer say it's about the money. But anyone who takes a close look will see that it's not about money at all.

What a disappointment that our BOS didn't step up to help our imperiled native birds.

Wendy Howes
Hubbardston Nature Club