

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

MT. JEFFERSON FIELDS NEED BIRD-FRIENDLY PLAN

I read with interest the article by Christine Smith regarding the debate about fireworks at Hubbardston's Mt. Jefferson Conservation Area. Open Space Committee member Jassy Bratko expressed concern that active bobolink nests would be destroyed should haying take place in early to mid-June.

Fireworks aside, this is ironic. The OSC, with Bratko until recently at the helm since acquisition of the Mt. Jefferson property in 2000, has consistently opposed specific bird protection mea-

sures for the conservation area. The management plan for the property is not bird-friendly. The conservation area fields are managed primarily for farmer hay profit. In fact, haying has been allowed to take place on most of the fields at the farmer's discretion, often in June, on Bratko's watch.

Although one section allowing mowing only after July 1 was set aside in 2013 by a "compromise" suggested by Bratko, bobolink nests are still active at the beginning of July. The OSC was informed that this was an ill-advised

decision but adopted the rule anyway.

Bratko stated that the farmer pays "\$4,500 per year to be able" to hay the fields. I believe the figure is actually lower. There is a license agreement under which the farmer pays the town \$43 per acre — in this case 43 acres per cut. At two mowings per season, the fee total is \$3,698.

In April, Ware River Nature Club, along with MassAudubon's Director of Bird Conservation and state ornithologist Drew Vitz, sent a detailed letter outlining several options for bird-friendly

management of the Mt. Jefferson fields. One option noted that subsidies are available to offset farmer fees and/or loss of income due to delayed mowing to prevent destruction of bobolink nests and young. Anyone interested can view the letter, along with information about grassland birds and local advocacy efforts, in the Conservation section of the warerivernatureclub.org website.

*Wendy Howes,
Grassland Bird Initiative/
Ware River Nature Club,
Hardwick*

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