

Hubbardston Open Space Committee
Hubbardston, MA 01452

June 15, 2017

Dear Ms. Howes, Mr. Atwood, and Mr. Vitz:

We appreciate your letter of April 18th expressing your interest in efforts to protect the grassland birds, in particular the Bobolink, on Hubbardston's Mt. Jefferson conservation area fields and your explanation of the options available to achieve this. As custodians, together with the Hubbardston Conservation Committee that has jurisdiction over this property, we have a vested and personal interest to insure we do our best to manage the Mt. Jefferson area to the benefit of all, including the wildlife. The fact that so many from the town and state worked tirelessly to make this a conservation area speaks to that desire.

Your letter is correct that Mt. Jefferson was specifically established as a multi-use public area and also that the town has contracts for haying the grass fields there, so there are economic considerations as well. But in fact, Hubbardston does currently have an agreement with the contractor to delay haying until at least July 1st in the only two contiguous Mt. Jefferson fields that are close to large enough to support Bobolink nesting in an effort to protect them until after their chicks have fledged. While not included in the formal agreement, we have also asked them to delay haying in the other smaller fields as long as possible and they often have, in the past, respected that request and not cut these fields until well into July.

Mass Audubon, Dr. Allan Strong, University of Vermont Professor of Environmental Studies who works with the Bobolink Project; and prominent New England grassland bird researcher Jamie Sydorak have suggested that fields of ten acres or more are preferred by the area-dependent and edge-sensitive Bobolink. These acreages are also supported in many other publications from renowned organizations such as Cornell. The studies and publications identify that even much larger areas are required to sustain other grassland bird species.

It is also true as you stated that there are differing opinions on when it is safe to hay fields to insure that the young birds have fledged. Dr. Strong of the Bobolink Project believes from his research that it would be so after July 4th, while Mass Audubon, Ms. Sydorak, and the Ware River Nature Club consider a date after July 15th.

These factors of field size and date were taken into consideration when reaching the agreement with the hay contractor to delay cutting the largest Mt. Jefferson fields. We will continue to request these factors be considered when future contracts are negotiated for haying the fields.

Kind regards,


Bob Hatch

Chairman

Hubbardston Open Space Committee