

ANOTHER SEASON OF BELLS AND BUCKTHORN

Gently ringing sheep bells may not be the first sound you expect to hear when you reach the summertime summit of Putney Mountain – but there they are, lilting in the breeze.

The wearers of those bells are our woolly, voracious friends – rams from the Vermont Shepherd farm – who spent the summer season grazing on invasive buckthorn plants. The rams defoliated and weakened the buckthorn, helping to keep the summit rich with native species.

Our grazing operation is a volunteer-powered effort, as the rams receive daily check-ins and supplemental care from a rotating team of shepherds. It's a fun, family-friendly way to spend time outdoors and be part of a conservation effort that directly benefits our local landscape.

If you would like to be part of Team Shepherd next summer, please contact Bennett Jackson (bennett@putneymountain.org).



PMA ANNUAL MEETING

Please join us January 11, 2026 at 4pm at the Putney Public Library to celebrate the past year and meet your fellow PMA supporters!



WINTER 2025 NEWSLETTER



Memories of the Mountain

In advance of our 80th anniversary in 2026, we recently put out a call for stories of how Putney Mountain has shaped the lives of our community members, and the memories are flooding in. So far we've heard from passionate Hawk Watch volunteers and multiple Putney School alum for whom Putney Mountain was the backdrop for first love and lasting friendships.

We will continue to collect stories through the Spring in preparation for the Putney Mountain Association Story Map. Artist Katie Bachler, who has worked in various locales to inscribe the memories of a particular place onto a single canvas, will guide us in this creation. It's one of the many ways we are celebrating our 80th anniversary milestone.

We invite you to keep making memories on Putney Mountain and to share them with us at www.putneymountain.org.

We also ask for you to consider us as you make your end-of-the year charitable donations. Even in years without land acquisition, your support is essential to enable us to be responsible stewards of the land we conserve. While our passionate volunteers put in countless hours doing stewardship tasks such as our summit grazing program, invasive management and trail cleanup and maintenance, there is only so much we can do. Your donations help us manage projects and tasks better left to professionals. We use our funds to inoculate ash trees against emerald ash borers and to clear out extensive patches of buckthorn and barberry that rise up where the ash trees and beech trees have collapsed. Your generous donations help us to move trails away from vernal ponds and tender habitats and towards the sturdier ridgeline. Each contribution strengthens our shared effort to ensure that this forest continues to thrive—for wildlife, for future generations, and for all who find renewal here.

Together, we nurture Putney Mountain so it can continue to nurture us. Every gift, every hour volunteered, and every story shared helps this ridgeline endure as both a sanctuary and a gathering place.

With gratitude,

— Meg Mott, Chair, Putney Mountain Association

Putney Mountain Association
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Putney Mountain Association

WWW.PUTNEYMOUNTAIN.ORG

ON STEWARDSHIP



Putney Mountain Association has conserved more than 1000 acres along our Ridgeline. This land is home and highway to wildlife, supports forest ecosystems, and welcomes you, our community members, to enjoy its beauty. We will continue to conserve more land whenever we can.

Protecting undeveloped land doesn't end with the deed transfer, nor is it without continuing financial costs. It's easy to think that letting nature take its course would be the best way forward. But conscientious stewardship is more nuanced.

For thousands of years, ecosystems have been affected by the peoples who lived here. In the last 250 years, however, this interaction has become more extreme. Clear-cutting for wood and pasture disrupted old growth. The introduction of non-native plants and pathogens altered the state of forests.

What do we mean when we call a forest "natural?" Is the spread of buckthorn in a swampy clearing natural? Are white pines in an abandoned pasture natural? These are tough questions in the conservation world.

With careful consideration, PMA has opted to prioritize biodiversity. We work to curb invasive plants and allow native plants and the ecosystems built around them to

thrive, or at least persist. These efforts are volunteer led, raising an important question: How do we continue to control invasives as the area we steward expands?

This past spring, we assessed a large infestation of Barberry on one of PMA's northern parcels. Rare and sensitive plants are at risk, and the scale and location required a forceful approach.

We hired Delta Forest Management to cut the barberry back with brush saws. Then we had a decision to make: spray the re-sprouting plants with herbicide or continue with mechanical means. While the concerns about using glyphosate are obvious, there are upsides: it's less expensive and more likely to work. A targeted glyphosate application significantly reduces invasive plants, and the chemical compounds break down quickly. Compared to no treatment, glyphosate is a good option.

The other option was continued mechanical control. It is similar to techniques we've used ourselves - digging, pulling, and cutting back. The downsides are increased cost and reduced certainty that it will work. The extra cost was a consideration, because many other areas need aggressive invasive control.

It's easy to think that letting nature take its course is the best way forward, but conscientious stewardship is more nuanced.

We ultimately opted to continue with mechanical control on this parcel, a lower impact option that gives us an opportunity to reassess in the future. We hope you support that decision, not only in your heart, but also by contributing financially to our work. All of your contributions directly support work like this.

If you would like to get out in the woods as a volunteer steward, email Cat Abbott (catabbott1@gmail.com) or Meg Mott (meg4mott@gmail.com). THANK YOU!

FOREST LESSONS: IN DEFENSE OF GROWING OLD

Nearly all of the forestland stewarded by PMA is secondary forest, meaning it has regenerated after logging or other disturbances. With time, old skid roads heal over, soils stabilize, and native species have a fighting chance against invasive plants. Older forests, roughly defined in the US as more than 150 years old, are rare throughout New England, and in Vermont they make up less than 0.1% of forested land. Putney Mountain is home to many young adult and a few middle-aged forests!

Decay is an essential element in the living systems found in older forests, which are teeming with an astonishing diversity of life. Standing snags provide vital habitat to cavity nesters including woodpeckers, nuthatches, owls, flying squirrels and fishers. Downed trees host myriad species of fungi, mosses, and ferns. Older forests are messy, with blow-downs and tip-up mounds and multi-layered canopies woven with tangles of vines. They're defined by complexity and by relationships between creatures, many occurring underground and out of sight.

Scientists are now recommending that more forests be given time to grow old and messy, because in addition to supporting biodiversity, older forests provide crucial benefits to our local communities. Well-developed soils, deeper duff layers, and decomposing wood absorb water and help reduce run-off during heavy rainfalls. They filter water, intercept toxic air particulates, and buffer temperature swings. The older the forest, the more resilient the system is to stressors such as climate change.

And it gets even better. Spending time in older forests is actually good for our brains. According to neurobiologist Dr. Susan Masino, "Older forests are cooler and wetter and rated as more beautiful. There are direct health benefits like lowered blood pressure and countless studies that show links between time spent in nature and increases in creativity, divergent thinking, and problem-solving and decreases in depression and anxiety." So come enjoy a walk in a Putney Mountain forest on its way to growing old—and consider how protecting and allowing these woods to age is one of the most meaningful gifts we can leave for future generations.

COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHT: RUBY MCADOO



Ruby grew up in the Northeast Kingdom and moved to the foothills of Putney Mountain in 2003. Putney Mountain has served as the backdrop for the various stages of her life. "We bought a house on the lower hill adjacent to Putney Mountain Road, and used to hike up to the summit from our house." When her kids were young, she recalls, the full hike from the house became too challenging, so they pivoted to hiking from the Summit Trailhead. "The slower pace of hiking to the summit helped us notice more of the beauty and treasures along the way. We would often stop at the "Elephant Tree" because it was such a unique natural wonder. Over time the tree became more dilapidated due to the natural process of decomposition. We would have conversations with our two kids about their feelings and observations related to this process and the changes to the tree."

Ruby describes hiking up the final incline to the summit and reaching the clearing. "The dramatic views on both sides are always refreshing and inspiring. When friends come to visit from the city they are astounded by the remote feeling and ease of access to such a beautiful place."

Ruby's mother, Emily McAdoo, moved to the area shortly after Ruby and joined PMA, serving terms as both Treasurer and Chair during times of land acquisition. Says Ruby, "This role helped her integrate into the community of Putney and it was a gift for her to serve on the board."

In addition to enjoying the personal benefits of living so close to this natural landmark, Ruby supports land conservation efforts that connect wildlife and benefit ecosystems. "I value the work that PMA does and have given resources to support its mission, whether it's new land acquisitions or overall operations. My hope is that the work continues—and I recognize that it is not easy work. I appreciate the connection to PMA land through the newsletter and outreach even if I'm not able to frequent the trails as much as I would like."

