

# 2024 “Mitigate The Mustard”: Volunteer to Help Keep a Northbridge Park and Forest Beautiful

Help the Metacomet Land Trust (MLT) at the Szerlag Farm Preserve, May 11th, 2024.  
Register by April 27, 2024.



*Volunteers help maintain hiking paths for Northbridge residents to enjoy in the Szerlag Farm Preserve during the 2023 Mitigate The Mustard event in Presidential Farm Estates, Northbridge, MA.*

**NORTHBRIDGE, MA** - In Northbridge, over 500 acres of land are permanently conserved and protected to allow native plants and animals of Massachusetts to live and thrive. Join forces with the Metacomet Land Trust (MLT), with members Steven Gniadek and Barbara McNamee, on May 11th, 2024, at 1:00 PM for the second annual environmental conservation action event,



“Mitigate The Mustard” to learn about the Szerlag Farm Preserve, its environment, and the plants and animals—both native and invasive—that call places like Northbridge home. The event will focus on property care and cleanup, trail maintenance, minor projects like sign and birdhouse installation, and nuisance plant education and removal.

The safety of visitors using the Preserve’s trails to hike, walk pets, bike ride, and enjoy the isolated and solitary benches is important in helping to maintain this peaceful, small-town gem.

After a mild and rather windy winter, many sticks, branches, and other natural (and unnatural) litter and debris have fallen on the paths, trails, and access areas. They will need to be tended to in order to keep these remaining, accessible open spaces in Northbridge enjoyable for all.

What is “The Mustard”?



*Steven Gniadek (left) doing a spring emerging plant study of Garlic Mustard in the Szerlag Farm Preserve last year to help forecast the hand-pulling work needed for the Spring 2023 Mitigate The Mustard event (center and right).*

Garlic Mustard, a foreign nuisance plant, and other non-natives will be another focus of the 2024 “Mitigate the Mustard” event to prevent it from encroaching on a pollinator meadow project by MLT, which allows native plants to thrive and bloom, and aid in declining Northbridge pollinator populations. Last year, over 15 volunteers joined the Metacomet Land Trust, and just as many trash bags were filled with Garlic Mustard that was hand pulled by them.

“There are several non-native plants here [at the Szerlag Farm Preserve], but Garlic Mustard is one of the fastest to spread and consume an area when left unchecked,” explains Northbridge native, Steven Gniadek. Steven is an environmental specialist and a member of MLT’s Board of Directors as well as a Stewardship Committee member. “Plants like Garlic Mustard were intentionally brought to the U.S. from other continents long ago, and I feel it’s our responsibility to do our part to intentionally manage their spread.”

Volunteers joined Steven to learn about these types of invasive and non-native plant species with on-site examples, a little science behind this specific invader, and its potential impacts while hand-pulling mature adults and first-year sprouts from the ground in an effort to stop seed production and protect both the MLT pollinator meadow project and Preserve forest understory.

“Most of these types of plant invaders do well in disturbed soil and full sun,” explains Steven. “But Garlic Mustard isn’t picky. It doesn’t discriminate as it consumes available and/or creates space where beneficial, native Massachusetts plants are already living. Thankfully, anyone of any age can easily help stop their spread if they’re taught what to look for.”

### Preservation Efforts: Helping Revive the Eastern Bluebird Population

In addition to trail maintenance and cleanup, other minor projects are also planned for this year’s event, such as installing visitor signage as well as a birdhouse specifically for Eastern Bluebirds.



*A female Eastern Bluebird visits to inspect a nestbox made and erected specifically for them in a Metacomet Land Trust Conservation Preserve in Massachusetts.*

Steven, also a member of the North American Bluebird Society, explains how Bluebirds were once a threatened species of native flycatcher in Massachusetts. “Eastern Bluebird populations plunged in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, when non-native birds like House Sparrows were introduced into the United States. House Sparrows are also cavity-nesters and much more aggressive than Bluebirds, so they quickly took over suitable nest cavities for them,” explains Steven. “But Bluebirds have bounced back in states like Massachusetts, and I think it’s important for people to learn that invasives are not just plants, but can also be animals.”

## Join Us!

Local community members, high school students, and town residents interested in learning more about environmental science, botany, and conservation or who want to simply get outdoors and lend a helping hand are all welcome to participate and help MLT tackle these projects.

Sign-up is limited to a maximum of 20 people, ages 12 and over. Please dress appropriately for working trails and handling dirt and debris. A rain date is scheduled for May 18th.

Refreshments, gloves, sunscreen, and bug/tick spray will be provided. Volunteers are encouraged to bring their own work gloves, rakes, handsaws, or pruners if desired; however, MLT can provide them as needed.

Register yourself or your group by calling or emailing Steven Gniadek by Saturday, April 27th, 2024, and get in on the action!

**CONTACT:** Steven Gniadek, Board of Directors and Stewardship Committee, Metacomet Land Trust (MLT)  
(774) 670-3822, [steven.gniadek@metacometlandtrust.org](mailto:steven.gniadek@metacometlandtrust.org)

**About MLT:** *Established in 1988, Metacomet Land Trust is a non-profit conservation organization dedicated to the protection of open space and natural resources in South Central Massachusetts.*

*MLT works in the communities of Bellingham, Blackstone, Douglas, Franklin, Mendon, Millbury, Millville, Northbridge, Norfolk, Upton, Uxbridge, Sutton, and Wrentham. Working with landowners, municipal and state governments, and other conservation organizations, Metacomet has helped to protect open space and wildlife habitats throughout the region. Currently, they own 669 acres of open space, protect 352 acres of privately owned land through permanent conservation restrictions, and have assisted in the conservation of another 900 acres—land that is now town open space, state parks and forests, and state wildlife management areas.*

*Learn more and get involved at [metacometlandtrust.org](http://metacometlandtrust.org), or follow us on social media like [Facebook](#) or [Instagram](#).*