

**Baseline Assessment**  
**for the**  
**Hutchins and Robbins Fields**  
**Conservation Lands**

July 2024 (revised December 2024)



**Prepared by the**  
**Land Stewardship Committee**

**A subcommittee of the**  
**Carlisle Conservation Commission**  
**Carlisle, Massachusetts**

## Foreword

This Baseline Assessment has been prepared by the Land Stewardship Committee (LSC), a subcommittee of the Carlisle Conservation Commission. The LSC, which was formed in January 2006, has a number of core tasks. Two key core tasks are to:

1. Prepare Baseline Assessments of Town-owned conservation properties; and
2. Develop a Management Plan for each of these properties.

The Baseline Assessment involves the collection, evaluation and presentation of information on several topics including:

- The acquisition of the property, including reasons for purchase, costs, funding sources, and associated land use restrictions;
- A detailed description of the property (using maps and figures, where appropriate) covering such topics as: boundaries (and abutters), major features (e.g., fields, woods, ponds, wetlands), topography, agricultural use and soil quality, trails, parking, and signs and displays;
- Historic and current uses of the property;
- A description of previous planning documents or other studies of the property;
- Maintenance activities and current condition of the property; and
- A list of issues to be addressed in the formulation of a Management Plan.

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Comments on the content of this document may be sent to the author, Warren Lyman, at [lymanwj42@hotmail.com](mailto:lymanwj42@hotmail.com).

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**Cover Note:** The engraving on the cover, from the 1800's, is entitled Honest Farmer. The artist has not been identified. Thanks to Julie Durrell for finding the figure.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First, the many detailed articles in the *Carlisle Mosquito*, published during the course of acquisition of the Hutchins and Robbins Fields, were invaluable. Valuable information was also provided by Sylvia Willard, Conservation Administrator, Carlisle's Assessors and Accounting Offices, and Steve Spang (abutter). Members of the Land Stewardship Committee provided helpful review comments on drafts of this report.

Three websites were frequently used in the preparation of this document; they are cited by name only. They are listed below with more information and the web addresses.

Google Earth Pro (<https://www.google.com/earth/versions/>)

“Google Earth is a computer program that renders a 3D representation of Earth based primarily on satellite imagery. The program maps the Earth by superimposing satellite images, aerial photography, and GIS data onto a 3D globe, allowing users to see cities and landscapes from various angles.” [Wikipedia](#)

MassMapper (<https://maps.massgis.digital.mass.gov/MassMapper/MassMapper.html>)

MassMapper is an interactive on-line map for Massachusetts. With MassMapper, users can choose from hundreds of map layers to create a map most relevant for their needs. MassMapper not only displays the map information, but also allows users to query for information about individual features on the map. The user-friendly interface also includes tools for drawing on or adding text to maps. You can save and print PDFs of maps you create.

Middlesex North Registry of Deeds (<https://massrods.com/middlesexnorth/>)

All of the deeds and some other legal documents relating to the Hutchins and Robbins Fields acquisition may be found in this Registry. It's best in this case to search by grantor or grantee name, including Carlisle Land Trust.

Unless otherwise stated, photos in this report are by Warren Lyman.

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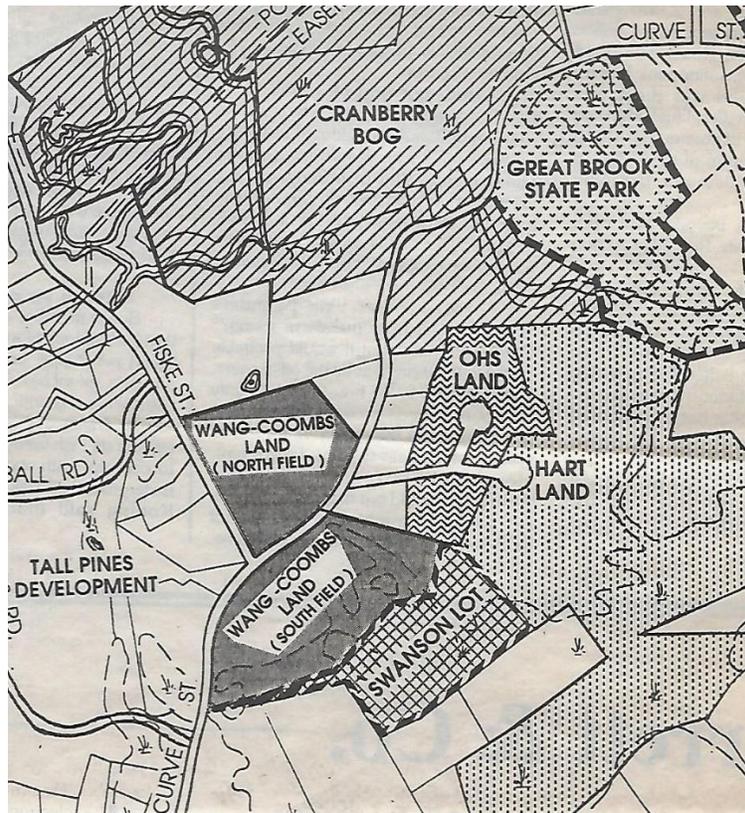
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# 1. INTRODUCTION

The Hutchins Field and Robbins Field conservation lands, totaling 34.45 acres, comprise two parcels on opposite sides of Curve St. at the intersection with Fiske St. When the Town first learned it had an opportunity to purchase the land, in August 1998, it comprised 42.9 acres in two parcels as shown in **Figure 1**. It was referred to as the Wang-Coombs land based on the then owner Juliette Wang Coombs of Brookline, MA. The proximity to other conservation lands as well as State park land is shown in the Figure. The land was undeveloped save for one barn on the south side of Curve St.



**Figure 1. The Wang-Coombs Land in 1998.**  
(Source: *Carlisle Mosquito*, October 2, 1998)

The key feature that made this land attractive to the Town was that it contained a significant amount of Prime Farmland\* with frontage on – and thus vistas from – two roads. Historically, the land (a larger area than in 1998) had been in agriculture since at least the mid-1700s when the major landowners in this area were Thomas Hutchins (land north of Curve St.) and George Robbins (land south of Curve St.). After purchase of the land by the Town, it honored these early

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\*The US Department of Agriculture defines Prime Farmland as land that has the best combination of physical and chemical characteristics for producing food, feed, forage, fiber, and oilseed crops and that is available for these uses.

settlers by naming the land after them. Agricultural use of the land continues to this date.

The Wang-Coombs land in 1998 was registered under Massachusetts Chapter 61A under which the Town forgoes tax revenue, for land in agriculture and some other classes of land, that would otherwise be generated by these lands. When Wang Coombs notified the Town, in August 1998, that she had signed a Purchase and Sale agreement for the land with a developer, it triggered a provision of Chapter 61A that gave the Town the right of first refusal. In this case, the Purchase and Sale agreement called for a purchase price of \$225,000 per developable lot. Since it was estimated that there were 13 developable lots on the two parcels, the Town would have to pay Wang Coombs \$2,925,000 for all the land.

To facilitate the rapid response required under Chapter 61A rules, the Town transferred its right of first refusal to the Carlisle Land Trust\* (CLT) which had more flexibility to act. To lower the cost to the Town, the CLT carved out a wooded (non-agricultural) section of about 8.5 acres, comprising three lots, that the Town would not buy (cutting \$675,000 off the purchase price) and which Wang Coombs could sell privately. At the May 1999 Annual Town Meeting, voters approved the purchase of the remaining 34.45 acres of the Wang-Coombs land, and simultaneously authorized the Town to seek from the State an Agricultural Preservation Restriction (APR) on the land for which it expected a partial reimbursement of the purchase cost. The Town's purchase of its 34.45 acres was completed by June 1999 and – after an application to the State – a payment of \$320,000 was received from the State, in January 2001 after a permanent APR was placed on the land. The total cost to the Town for the purchase, after subtracting the APR reimbursement, was \$1,930,000.

The APR states its purpose as follows: “By obtaining this Agricultural Preservation Restriction, it is the intent of the Commonwealth to perpetually protect and preserve agricultural lands, encourage sound soil management practices in accordance with normally accepted agricultural practices, preserve natural resources, maintain land in active agricultural use, and ensure affordable resale values of agricultural land.” While strongly encouraging agriculture on the land, it is not mandated by the APR. The Town Meeting vote to purchase the land, and the land deeds recorded, do state the intended use of the land was for agriculture and conservation. While trails are allowed by the APR, it does state the following regarding other uses: “No use or activity [is allowed] that is inconsistent with the Statement of Purpose (listed above).”

Other than the agricultural fields, the Robbins Field parcel contains a significant portion of woodland which contains some wetland areas, including at least one certified vernal pool. At least one species of special concern had been identified on the land. There are no trails on the property and only limited road-side parking. While other passive recreational activities are allowed on the land (excluding the agricultural areas during the growing season), limited access and off-season field conditions (often wet and with furrows) make it difficult.

Maintenance requirements for this property are minimal consisting mainly of oversight of the agricultural activities, including these regulated by the conditions of the APR, and maintenance of the four conservation signs on the property.

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\*The Carlisle Land Trust was formed and is operated to benefit and carry out the purposes of the Carlisle Conservation Foundation.

## 2. LAND ACQUISITION\*

### Initiating Actions and Town Notification

The Town's acquisition of Hutchins Field and Robbins Field in 1999 can be considered a single event even though the two parcels involved were on opposite sides of Curve St., required different considerations, and the two deeds involved were signed on separate dates. Both parcels were owned by Juliette Wang, and both were enrolled in the State's Chapter 61A agricultural land protection program which provides property tax breaks if the land stays in agriculture. In the event of a proposed sale of the land to a developer, the Town has a right of first refusal to purchase the Chapter 61A land; that is, the Town has a right to purchase the land on the same terms and for the same price stated in the purchase and sale agreement between the owner and the developer. In 1988, Wang (then Juliette Wang Coombs of Brookline, MA) had purchased the two parcels, presumably for investment purposes, for \$1,500,000. At that time the two parcels were referred to as "A" (now Robbins) and "2" (now Hutchins) on referenced plans.

In 1998 Wang decided to sell her land. On August 12, 1998, she signed a Purchase and Sale Agreement with Brian E Hebb Builders, Inc. (Littleton, MA) to purchase the land (42.9 acres) in two parcels, "for residential purposes," for a price of \$225,000 per developable lot. The number of potential building lots (approval not required) was not known at that time, but in January 1999 a Plot Plan by Acton Management, Inc. (Ayer, MA) showed a possible seven 2-acre lots on Hutchins and six 2-acre lots on Robbins. If all 13 lots could be developed, then Ms. Wang would receive \$2,925,000 for the land. (By the end of 1999, she had received a total of \$3,004,900 for all sales of the land involved, not all of which were to the Town of Carlisle.)

On August 27, 1998, the Town received a letter, dated August 25<sup>th</sup>, from Wilson & Orcutt, P.C. (Acton, MA) informing the Town, in accordance with MGL Ch 61A, of Juliette Wang's intent to sell the property to Brian E. Hebb Builders, Inc., for conversion to residential use. The law allowed the Town 120 days from the receipt of this letter to decide if it wanted to exercise its right of first refusal.

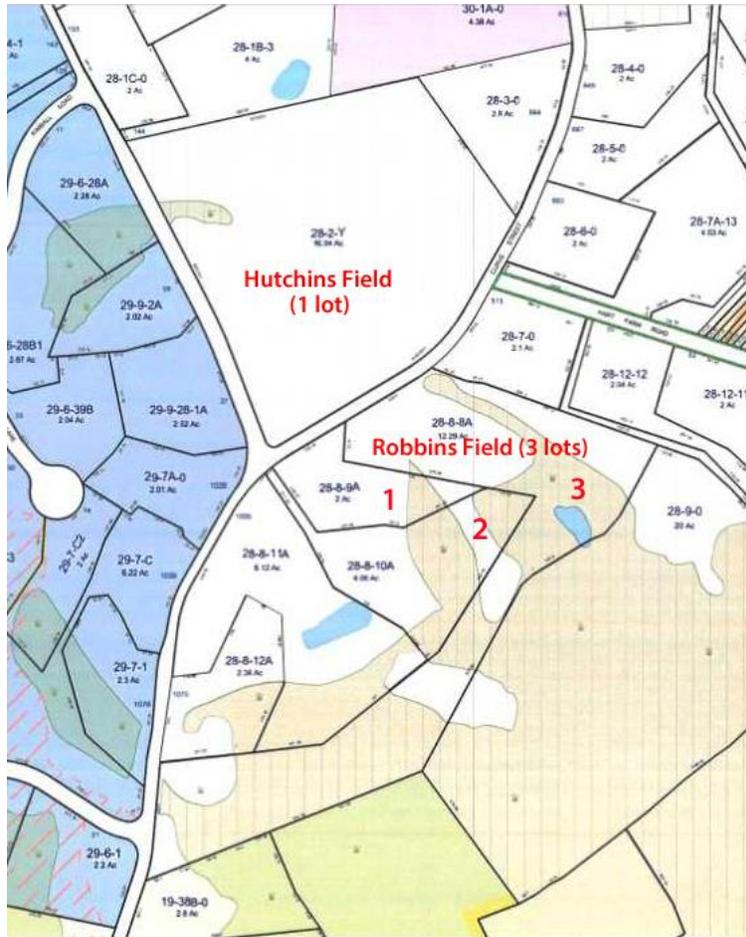
In June 1999, Stamski and McNary, Inc. (Acton, MA) prepared a revised plan of land for the Robbins property also showing six potential building lots. It is this plan that was later used to decide which three lots, that were not in agricultural use, could be sold to private concerns. One of the lots to be purchased by the Town ("8A", current Assessors lot #: 28-8-8A) is a wrap-around lot, enclosing, with Curve St., the other five lots and having two sections of frontage on Curve St. Two of these five encircled lots were later combined into one: Assessors lot # 28-8-11A. (See **Figure 2**.)

### The Town's Response

There was early and strong support - from almost all key Town boards and committees, and from

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\*The primary sources of information for this section included files in the Conservation Administrator's office, Mosquito articles, the Middlesex North Registry of Deeds, and Carlisle's 1999 Annual Town Report. Additional information was provided by Town citizens involved in the negotiations of the purchase.



**Figure 2. Hutchins and Robbins Fields with a Focus on the Lots of Robbins Field. (Source: Town Assessors Map.)**

Note: Lot 28-8-11A was created from two lots after purchase by the Town.

individuals in Carlisle - for the acquisition of the Wang properties which had ranked high (“Priority 1”) in a listing of desired properties to protect in the Town’s most recent Open Space and Recreation Plan. Key criteria included significant acreage, preservation of Carlisle’s rural character and valuable farmland, protection of Core Habitat on the Robbins land for the blue-spotted salamander (a species of special concern), vistas along two rural roads, and the avoidance of construction problems (e.g., mounded leach fields) which would be required by the high groundwater table in the area. Town board evaluations started by September leading to support for purchase from the Conservation Commission, Planning Board, and Select Board. The Finance Committee’s approval came later with some pressure from the Select Board. By April 1999, Town Meeting Warrant Articles covering the purchase of the Wang properties had been drafted.

In December 1998, the Town transferred its right of first refusal to the Carlisle Land Trust “for the purpose of maintaining the major portion of the property in use as agricultural or horticultural land... without further conditions.”\* The Trust, with the help of twelve Carlisle citizens,

\*Footnote on next page

guaranteed the \$250,000 deposit required to hold the property while proposals were drafted for referral to the voters at the 1999 Annual Town Meeting. The initial plan was for the Trust to purchase all the Wang land. The Trust would later re-sell most of the land (10 of 13 lots), the ones with agricultural value, to the Town, and retain three lots on Robbins Field (designated 1A, 11A and 12A, about 8.5 acres) for private sale with the proceeds covering the Trust's cost for the purchase of those lots. These three lots, referred to as ANR\*\* lots, had no agricultural land on them, and their removal from the sale to the Town effectively lowered the Town's purchase costs by \$675,000. This plan for the Trust's role was not carried out except for the removal of the three lots from the sale to the Town. The right of first refusal – for all lots except 1A, 11A and 12A - was transferred back to the Town on November 20, 1999. The right of first refusal for two of the three retained lots was later transferred to the purchasers of those lots.

In April 1999, the Carlisle Land Trust received an Appraisal Report and Valuation Analysis (34 pages + addenda) for the Wang land from Avery Associates (Acton, MA) which estimated the market value of the land to be \$2,925,000. This is the same value obtained from the \$225,000/lot estimate provided by Acton Management, Inc. (described above in the second paragraph).

At the May 4, 1999, Annual Town Meeting:

- Under Article 14, on a vote of YES 331 and NO 27, the Town voted to purchase the Wang properties “for conservation purposes...and/or for agricultural use to be managed by the Conservation Commission.”
- Under Article 15, on a vote of YES 329 and NO 5, the Town voted to borrow the necessary funds for the purchase (\$2,150,000), and to seek partial reimbursement via the State's “Agricultural Preservation Restriction” Program. (The Town eventually received \$320,000. See Section 3.)

The total amount of land authorized to be purchased by the Town by these votes was 34.45 acres, 16.00 acres for Hutchins Field and 18.45 acres for Robbins Field.

The origin of the \$2,150,000 value in Article 15 above is unknown and may, in fact, be a mistake. Ten lots were to be purchased by the Town; if Town officials had logically picked the value of \$225,000 “per developable lot” stated in the purchase and sale agreement between Wang and Brian E Hebb Builders, Inc. in 1998, then the Article 15 value should have been \$2,250,000. In fact, this is the total value obtained by summing up the “Consideration” values in the Hutchins and Robbins deeds (see below). Based on emails between Town officials and the Carlisle Land Trust in August and September of 2000\*\*\*, the additional \$100,000 needed to make up the purchase price was supplied by the Trust with the funds variously described as a development fee (received for two of the three lots sold privately) or a gift.

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\*“Notice of Assignment of Right of First Refusal to Purchase Land,” issued by Carlisle's Board of Selectmen, December 1, 1998. Available online in the Middlesex North Registry of Deeds.

\*\*ANR: Approval Not Required

\*\*\*Available in the Conservation Commission files for the property.

The quitclaim deeds for the two properties sold to the Town by Juliette Wang (then living in Falmouth, MA) contain the following details:

**Hutchins Field:** Purchase of Lots 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7 as shown on a plan entitled, “Land in Carlisle, Mass. Surveyed for Acton Management, Inc.” dated January 1999 by David E. Ross Associates, Civil Engineers. Consideration: \$1,575,000. Executed May 18, 1999. Acceptance of deed by the Conservation Commission, “for conservation and agricultural purposes,” on

June 24, 1999. The deed is restricted by one easement related to the presence of a septic leach field, on a 50-foot by 50-foot square parcel in Hutchins field, on the east side of Fiske St. (See Middlesex North Registry of Deeds, Book 2118, Page 16.) The septic system serves the home across Fiske St. from the easement.

**Robbins Field:** Purchase of Lots 8A, 9A, and 10A as shown on a plan entitled, “Land in Carlisle, Mass.,, dated June 16, 1999, by Stamski and McNary, Inc., Civil Engineers.” Consideration: \$675,000. Executed: September 22, 1999. Acceptance of deed by the Conservation Commission, “for conservation and agricultural purposes,” on November 18, 1999.

Assuming then that the Town’s final payments to Wang totaled \$2,250,000, this translates into an initial cost to the Town of \$65,312 per acre (\$225,000 pr lot). If the \$320,000 received in January 2001, allowing the State to secure the Agriculture Preservation Rights, is included, the initial cost to the Town is reduced to \$56,023 per acre (\$193,000 per lot).

Of the six lots identified by the June 1999 Plan of Land by Stamski and McNary, only the three listed above were included in the Robbins purchase. The remaining three lots (1A, 11A and 12A) were not included and on September 22, 1999, were sold separately by Wang as follows:

- Lot 1A, for \$225,000 to John Swanson (Carlisle, MA)
- Lot 11A for \$279,900 to David & Terri Long (Chelmsford, MA)
- Lot 12A for \$250,000 to Altair Associates, Inc. (Concord, MA)

In November 1999, The Carlisle Land Trust granted and released “all our rights, title and interest” for the lots purchased, to the latter two purchasers listed above. No similar release was needed for Swanson’s purchase as he had a separate right of first refusal, dated June 1, 1988, for the lot he bought. The conflicting rights of first refusal held by Swanson and the Town were settled following a June 1999 lawsuit Swanson filed against Wang, the Town and the Carlisle Land Trust relating to the validity of the Town’s right of first refusal associated with the land he was to purchase. The lawsuit was dismissed “with prejudice and without costs” (except for claims for any attorney’s fees by Wang) in August 1999.\*

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\*Information obtained from: (1) the Minutes of the Board of Selectmen meetings in 1999; (2) the Middlesex North Registry of Deeds; and (3) the Carlisle Mosquito.

### 3. RENAMING OF THE PURCHASED LAND\*

After purchase there was a desire in Carlisle to rename the recently purchased “Wang Coombs” land by choosing historic family names of individuals who had lived in the area. One document suggests it was Jim Davis, formerly of East St. and a Carlisle Most Honored Citizen, who recommended the Hutchins and Robbins names. This renaming was accomplished at Carlisle’s November 9, 2000, Special Town Meeting where, under Article 9, voters approved the renaming of the parcel on the north side of Curve St. to “Hutchins Field” and the parcel on the south side of Curve St. to “Robbins Field.”

The individuals honored by the renaming are **Thomas Hutchins** and **George Robbins**, both 17<sup>th</sup> century, large landowners in the area, with Hutchins’ land on the north side of Curve St. and Robbins’ land on the south side. At the time that Hutchins and Robbins acquired their lands, all their lands were in a part of Chelmsford that later was incorporated into the Town of Carlisle.

Thomas Hutchins lived at the present Swanson house (currently 1056 Curve St.) on land that included the present Cranberry Bog. He presumably was engaged in farming but is also reported to have been active in civic and religious affairs.

George Robbins was one of the first settlers in what was then the southern part of Chelmsford, in the Great Brook meadows. About 1653 he acquired a grant, about 800 acres, in the “South End” of Chelmsford, now Carlisle. The grant included most of the land on the inside of Curve St. and beyond. He lived at the George Senkler house (now 523 Curve St.), was married three times, and had eleven children. The George Robbins family operated mills on their property on Great Brook for several generations. The last was a grist mill.

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\*The historic information in this section is primarily from “Carlisle It’s History and Heritage,” by Ruth Chamberlin Wilkins, published by the Carlisle Historical Society, Inc., Carlisle Massachusetts, 1976.

## 4. AGRICULTURAL PRESERVATION RESTRICTION\*

### Introduction

Well before the Hutchins and Robbins acquisition vote at the May 1999 Annual Town Meeting, a decision was made to seek partial reimbursement for the purchase cost by putting a Massachusetts Agricultural Preservation Restriction (APR) on the land. In February 1999, the Carlisle Selectmen, with the support of the Carlisle Land Trust, applied for the APR status from the State's Department of Food and Agriculture (Boston, MA). The vote authorizing the request for an APR was approved under Article 15 at the May 1999 Town Meeting.

The formal granting of the APR was done with a Purchase and Sale Agreement, signed December 12, 2000, in which: "...the Town of Carlisle...agrees to sell and the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Department of Food and Agriculture...agrees to buy...an Agricultural Preservation Restriction...on the Premises [approximately 37.5 acres] described herein." The purchase price of \$320,000 was to be paid at the time of closing. The funds were received in January 2001.

Attached to the 7-page Purchase and Sale Agreement is Exhibit B (6 pages): "Option to Purchase Real Estate at Agricultural Value." Also attached is a 14-page description of the APR program. Some details of these documents are provided in the subsections below.

### Description of the Agricultural Preservation Restriction

As part of the purchase of the Hutchins and Robbins Fields, the Town of Carlisle, in return for \$320,000 received, granted to the State of Massachusetts, in perpetuity, an Agricultural Preservation Restriction (APR), together with an "Option to Purchase at Agricultural Value." The APR also grants all development rights, with few exemptions, to the State. The formal APR, signed on December 12, 2000, is contained in a document (available in Town Office) that includes a statement of purpose, definitions, and descriptions of retained rights (allowed uses), prohibited uses, an approval process for certain uses, and enforcement procedures. Some of this information is summarized below.

#### Statement of Purpose

Quoting the APR: "By obtaining this Agricultural Preservation Restriction, it is the intent of the Commonwealth to perpetually protect and preserve agricultural lands, encourage sound soil management practices in accordance with normally accepted agricultural practices, preserve natural resources, maintain land in active agricultural use, and ensure affordable resale values of agricultural land."

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\*The primary sources of information for this Section 4 are: (a) the Hutchins and Robbins files in the Conservation Administrator's office; and (b) the Carlisle Mosquito. A full electronic copy of the APR is available on the website of the Middlesex North Registry of Deeds in Book 11288, Page 277.

### Key Definitions

A key definition of the APR is for the term Agricultural Use. Quoting the APR in part, the definition states: “[T]he raising of animals, including but not limited to, dairy cattle, beef cattle, poultry, sheep, swine, horses, ponies, mules, goats, bees and fur-bearing animals, for the purposes of selling such animals or a product derived from such animals in the regular course of business...and also horticultural uses, including but not limited to, the raising of fruits, vegetables, berries, nuts and other foods for human consumption, feed for animals, tobacco, flowers, sod, trees, nursery, or greenhouse products, and ornamental plants and shrubs for the purpose of selling such products in the regular course of business...”

The definition for Temporary Structure (mentioned below) is: “[A] structure that does not have a permanent foundation or does not substantially alter or otherwise affect the soil profile.”

### Retained Rights

Under the APR, Carlisle retains “the customary rights and privileges of ownership not inconsistent with the Statement of Purpose, including but not limited to, the right to:

- 1) Privacy and the right to carry out regular agricultural practices.
- 2) The maintenance and use of existing trails and farm and wood roads on the premises.
- 3) The installation and maintenance of utilities for the purpose of provided services to the property for agricultural use.
- 4) The construction or placement of temporary structures for agricultural use.
- 5) The construction of new trails consistent with the agricultural use of the property.”

### Prohibited Uses

The APR lists the following restrictions:

- 1) No use or activity that is inconsistent with the Statement of Purpose (listed above).
- 2) No non-agriculturally related temporary or permanent structure, residential building, tennis court, inground swimming pool, commercial recreational horse riding or boarding facility, golf course, golf range or airport landing strip.
- 3) No placing of refuse, trash, junk, vehicle bodies or parts, hazardous wastes or other substances.
- 4) No use for transferring development rights or generating permissible lot yield of any property.

### Activities Requiring Prior Written Approval

The APR lists six activities requiring prior written permission. The following four seem pertinent:

- 1) The construction or placing of permanent structures for agricultural purposes.
- 2) Any excavation, dredging, depositing or removal of any soil, mineral resources or other natural deposits.
- 3) The use of the premises for non-agricultural uses for which the Town receives payment or any other type of compensation.

- 4) The construction or placement of an asphalt driveway, road, parking lot, utility pole, tower, conduit or line in support of a temporary or permanent structure or improvement for the benefit of the premises only.

#### Abandonment of Agriculture Prohibited

It is an objective of the APR to “maintain land in active agricultural use.” To this end, the APR, in Section F, states that “The Grantor [Carlisle] agrees... that the Premises shall remain in active agricultural use, and the land shall not be abandoned, except in accordance with [an approved] USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service Farm Management Plan.” Abandonment is defined in the APR as “land that has not been actively utilized for agricultural uses for a period exceeding three years unless the non-activity is recommended by a current USDA/NRCS plan.”

#### Enforcement

Carlisle is required to allow the State to “enter the premises” at reasonable times for inspections, and for enforcing any restrictions.

#### **Option to Purchase Real Estate at Agricultural Value (Exhibit B)**

In this document, also signed December 12, 2000, “The Town of Carlisle...for good and valuable consideration [i.e., the \$320,000] ...do hereby grant an Option to Purchase Real Estate at Agricultural Value.. to the Department of Food and Agriculture...for purchase of land located at Curve Street and Fiske Street...described in Exhibit A [the APR] of this instrument.”

The document states that “The intent of this Option is to ensure that the premises remains affordable for agricultural production and that its market value for other uses does not preclude its profitable use for agriculture.” A key provision of the document states that: “The [Town] agrees that no sale of the Premises to any third party will occur without first offering the Premises to the [Department of Food and Agriculture] ...at the full and fair market value of the Premises for commercial agricultural production...” or, if greater, a value determined by an appraisal. Other details of Exhibit B provide guidance on the Option to Purchase under a variety of circumstances. This limitation on the State’s ability to initiate a purchase under this Option is further described in paragraph “F” of the Option, as follows: “Grantee [Department of Food and Agriculture] may not exercise its Option or any other rights within this Option unless Grantor [the Town] first receives an offer to purchase the premises from a third party.”

## 5. ENVIRONMENTAL DESCRIPTION OF THE PROPERTY

### Introduction

As shown in Figure 2 (Section 1) and **Figure 3** (aerial photo - right), the Hutchins and Robbins land (~ 35 acres) consists of two parcels on opposite sides of Curve St.: (1) a 16.94-acre lot on the northwest side of the street, “Hutchins Field,” which is essentially all agricultural land; and (2) three contiguous lots totaling 18.35 acres on the southeast side of the street, “Robbins Field,” which is roughly 20% agricultural land and 80% woodland. Robbins Field has frontage on Curve St. at two locations.

### Topography

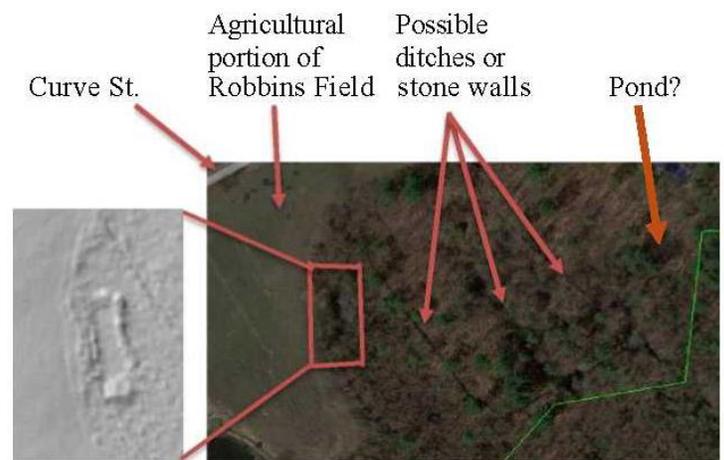
Both parcels are quite flat, with no topographic relief save for that related to vernal pools, wetlands, and likely drainage ditches or old ponds in the wooded portion of Robbins Field. A Plan of Land prepared in 1998 by David E. Ross Associates, Inc. (Ayer, MA) showed a high elevation of around 200 ft. near the northwestern corner of Hutchins Field and a low elevation of about 191 ft. around the southern border of Robbins Field. This nine-foot elevation difference over the approximate distance of 1,600 ft. between these two locations indicates an average soil

slope of 0.6 percent.

**Figure 4**, a Google Earth Pro historical aerial image from April 2017, shows three possible former drainage ditches or stone walls, trending from the northwest to the southeast, on the wooded portion of the Robbins Field land. This suggests the surrounding land was historically in agriculture. The location of a possible, small woodland pond is also shown; the possibility of a second pond is supported by a LIDAR image of the site.



**Figure 3. Aerial Image of Hutchins and Robbins Fields Properties** (Source: MassMapper 2021 image. Lot lines shown in purple.)



**Figure 4. Portion of Robbins Field with Unknown Structures.** (Source: Google aerial photo from 2017; LIDAR from MassMapper.)

## Land Types and Water Features

It is roughly estimated that about 21 acres of the combined parcels is comprised of agricultural fields with the remaining 14 acres consisting of woodlands, significant portions containing wetlands and at least one vernal pool. A small portion (~ 2,500 ft.<sup>2</sup>) of Hutchins Field, protected by an easement, is part of the septic system of a private residence on the opposite side of Fiske St. One depiction of the extent of wetlands on the parcels was shown in Figure 2 (Section 2). Engineering plans prepared near the time of sale of the land to Carlisle show somewhat different depictions of the wetland boundaries. The location of the one certified vernal pool is shown in **Figure 5**.



**Figure 5. Vernal Pool Location**  
(Source: MassMapper)

## Soils

As shown in **Figure 6** (following page), seven different soil types are present on the Hutchins and Robbins Fields. According to MassMapper, all field areas are considered Prime Farmland,\* and all except two have slopes of 1% or less. Definitions of the soil types are as follows:

- Deerfield 256A – Loamy sand, 0 – 3% slopes
- Windsor 255A – Loamy sand, 0 – 3% slopes
- Hinckley 253A – Loamy sand, 0 – 3% slopes
- Hinckley 253B – Gravelly sandy loam, 3 – 8% slopes
- Hinckley 253D – Loamy sand, 15 – 25% slopes
- Freetown 52A – Muck, 0 – 1% slopes
- Swansea 51A – Muck, 0 – 1% slopes

Because of the high water table in the area, and areas classified as wetlands, portions of both fields commonly have muddy soils or standing water following rainy periods.

## Surface Waters and Flood Hazard Areas

There are no significant surface waters on Hutchins & Robbins Fields, although Figure 2 (Section 2) shows a pond on the eastern side of Robbins Field. There may be other small ponds in the wooded portions of Robbins Field (see Figure 4), and there is one certified vernal pool on the Robbins Field land (see Figure 5). Significant areas of standing water are likely present in the wetland areas and in the presumed drainage ditches in the wooded portion of Robbins Field.

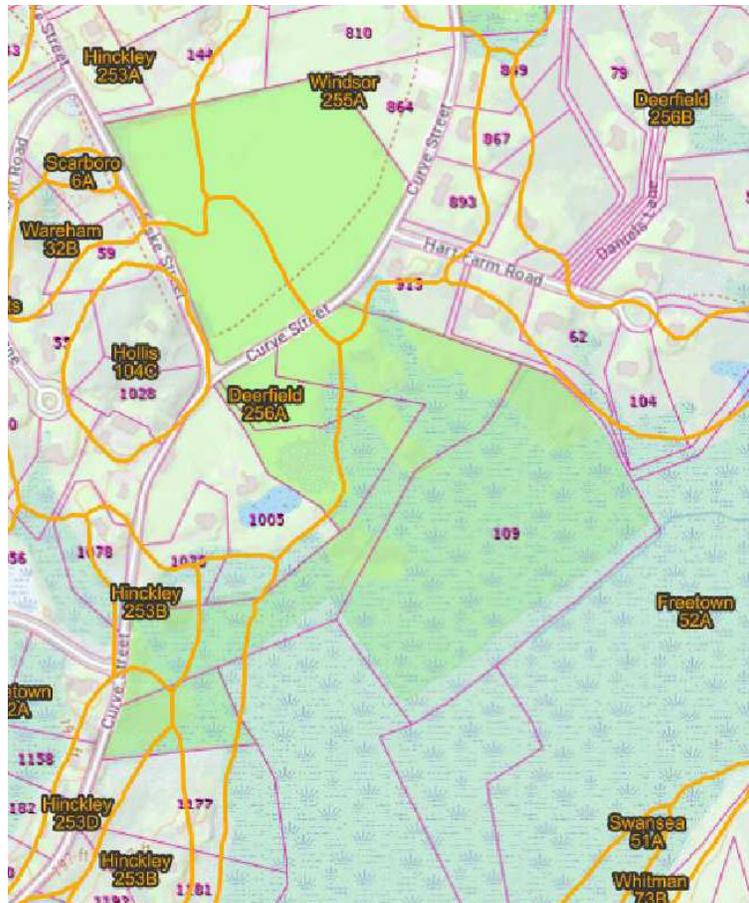
As shown in **Figure 7**, a significant portion of the Robbins Field land is in a flood hazard area based on a 2% annual chance of flooding.

## Trails

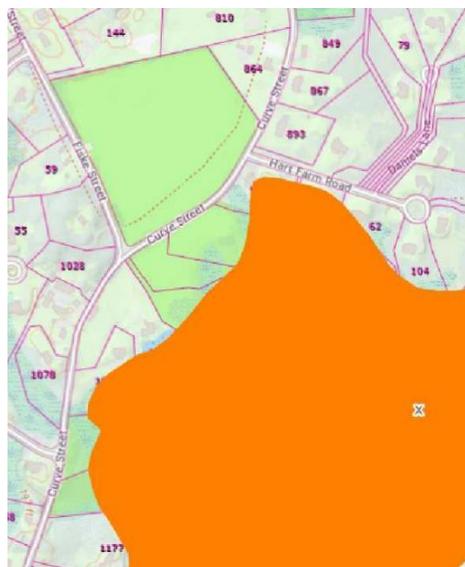
There are no maintained trails on Hutchins and Robbins Fields although trails are allowed by the

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\*The US Department of Agriculture defines Prime Farmland as land that has the best combination of physical and chemical characteristics for producing food, feed, forage, fiber, and oilseed crops and that is available for these uses.



**Figure 6. Soil Types Identified on Hutchins and Robbins Fields**  
(Source: MassMapper)



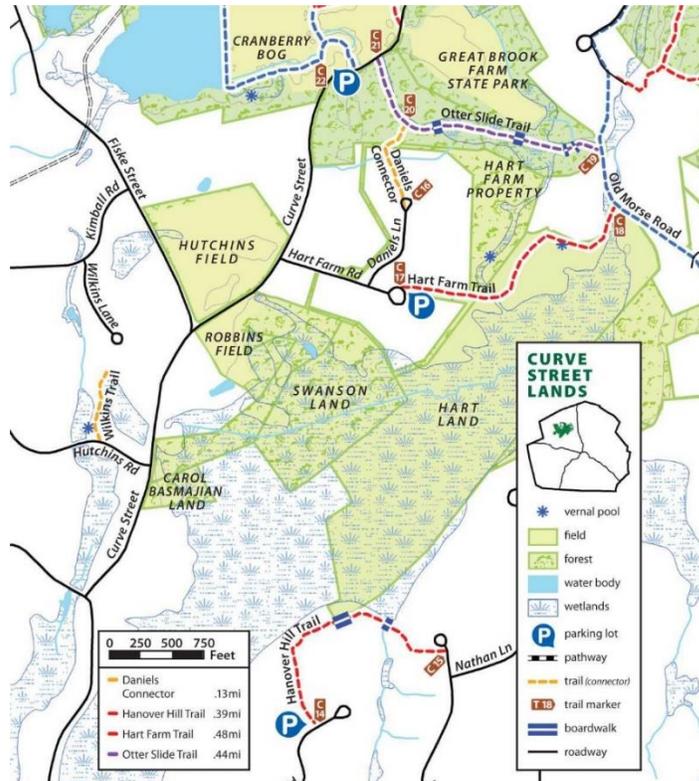
**FEMA National Flood Hazard Layer Polygons**

- 1% Annual Chance Flood Hazard
- ▨ Regulatory Floodway
- Area of Undetermined Flood Hazard
- 0.2% Annual Chance Flood Hazard
- ▩ Area with Reduced Risk Due to Levee
- Area Not Included

**Property Tax Parcels**

**Figure 7. Flood Hazard Zone Based on 2% Annual Chance of Flooding**  
(Source: MassMapper)

Agricultural Preservation Restriction on the land, and the Hart Farm conservation land provides a potential trail link between Hart Farm Rd. and the northernmost Robbins Field lot (**Figure 8**).



**Figure 8. Trails in the Area of Hutchins and Robbins Fields**  
 (Source: Carlisle Trails Committee maps available at [Trails Committee | Carlisle, MA \(carlislema.gov\)](http://Trails Committee | Carlisle, MA (carlislema.gov)))

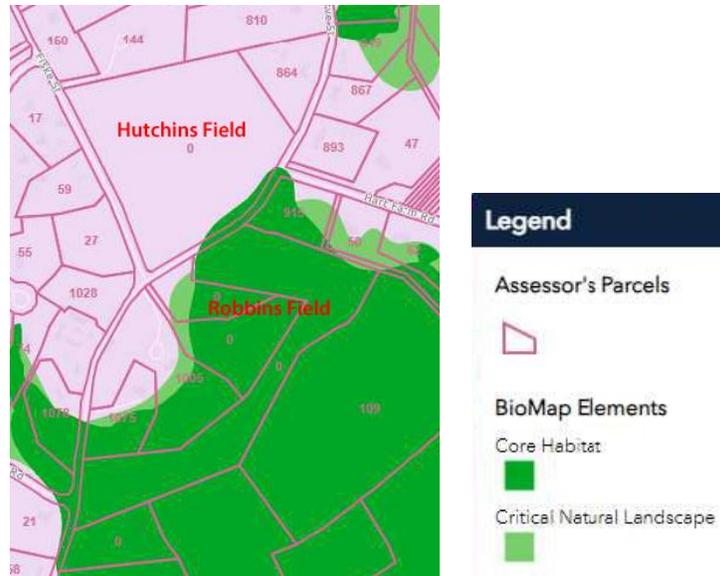
## Flora & Fauna

There have apparently been no studies of the flora and fauna on the Hutchins & Robbins Fields land. However, because of at least one spotting of the blue-spotted salamander on the Robbins Field land (as well as other observations and considerations), essentially all that land is considered Core Habitat\* by the BioMap project, the result of an ongoing collaboration between MassWildlife and the Massachusetts chapter of The Nature Conservancy. (**Figure 9**)

## Nearby Protected Lands

Hutchins and Robbins Fields have a significant number of other conservation lands that are contiguous or are linked to by the contiguous conservation lands. Most are shown in the Carlisle

\*Core Habitat identifies key areas to ensure the long-term persistence of species of conservation concern, exemplary natural communities, and intact ecosystems across the Commonwealth.



**Figure 9. Core Habitat as Assessed by the BioMap Project**  
(Source: MassMapper)

Trails Committee map of the area (see Figure 8). Included are the following:

Contiguous Conservation Lands

- Carlisle’s Swanson Land (20 acres)
- Carlisle’s Hart Farm Conservation Land (13.5 acres)
- Carlisle Conservation Foundation’s Carol Basmajian Land (2.8 acres)

Linked Conservation, Park, or Unrestricted Lands

- Carlisle’s Hart Land (65 acres) – Unrestricted Town land
- Carlisle’s Cranberry Bog (151 acres) – Conservation land
- Chelmsford’s Cranberry Bog Reservation (165 acres) – Conservation land
- Great Brook Farm State Park (975 acres) – Park land
- Chelmsford’s Thanksgiving Forest (45 acres) – Town forest

In total, these lands provide 1,472 acres of contiguous properties with significant conservation, recreational, and agricultural value.

**Photographs of the Site**

2024 Photos by J. Banach and J. Weiss, MA Department of Agricultural Resources

A series of 14 ground level photos (most of field edges) and two aerial photos are contained in the DAR’s report (MDAR Agricultural Preservation Restriction Monitoring Report) on their November 4, 2024, inspection of the Hutchins and Robbins Fields properties. A copy is available in the files of the Conservation Administrator in Town Hall.

2023 Photos by W. Lyman, Land Stewardship Committee

A limited number of photos of the two agricultural areas both during the peak growing season and shortly after harvest are provided in **Appendix A**.

2001 Photos by Mass. Department of Food and Agriculture

A total of 50 photos were taken on August 2, 2001, by Gowdy & Farrell, Inc. (a real estate firm) on behalf of the Department of Food and Agriculture as part of a required Monitoring Inspection Report for properties obtaining an Agricultural Preservation Restriction. Each photo is numbered and has a descriptive caption. In addition to views of the agricultural fields, the photos provide roadside and property-line views, and woodland views. Copies of these photos (4" x 6" color prints) are available in the Conservation Administrator's office in Town Hall.

## 6. HISTORIC AND CURRENT USES OF THE SITE

### Historic Uses

The limited evidence suggests that major portions of both Hutchins and Robbins Fields properties, especially the former, have been used for agricultural purposes since at least the mid-1700s, and possibly since the mid-1600s. Some evidence for the dates comes from recent metal-detecting finds by Patrick Lacchia (Bedford, MA) who provided his findings and related information to the Carlisle Historical Society which published an article.\* The article contains the following statements about the articles found in the fields:

- “One of the earliest pieces is a cast copper alloy, English style buckle, which has been dated to 1620-1690.”
- “A number of items in the collection date to the mid-1700s....”

An interesting 1920 quote about early agriculture in Carlisle is:\*\*

“Carlisle is an agricultural town, and the land gives good returns for the efforts of the husbandman. Being located but eighteen miles from Boston, and nine miles from Lowell, good markets are within easy access by team or truck.”

There is no evidence of former homes on the land; one barn was present on the land south of Curve St. (but on a lot not purchased by the Town) at the time the Town did purchase other lots.

In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, based on aerial photographs taken in, or somewhat before, 1937 by Bradford Washburn, it appears that a very large portion of the land around the Hutchins and Robbins Fields was in agriculture at that time (**Figure 10**, next page). The “open fields” shown in the map were clearly for agriculture; they cover extensive land on both sides of Curve St. and – above Curve St. - are continuous between Fiske St. and the Cranberry Bog. Below Curve St. the Robbins Field land is seen to be devoid of the forested areas that exist now

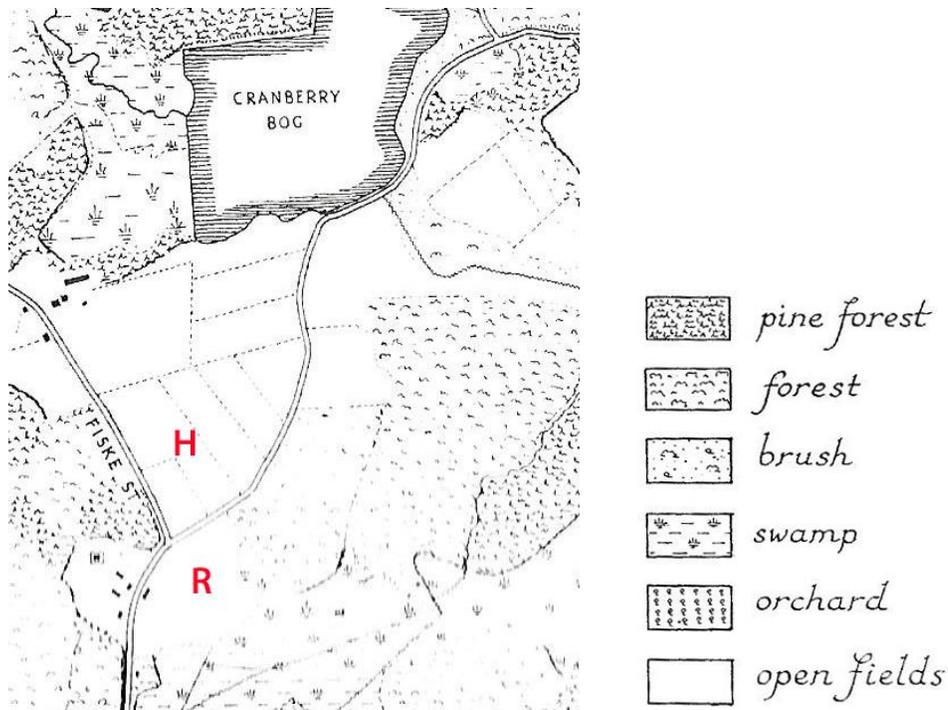
### Current Uses

In the open areas, local agriculture remains the only significant use during the growing season. Starting in 2000, the year after the land was purchased by the Town, farmers using the fields under a Town-issued license have been required to submit annually two forms: (1) one describing what they planned to grow, and the planned use of any pesticides (including herbicides) and soil amendments; and (2) the other reporting on the actual use and other information at the end of each growing season. The 1-page forms are submitted to the Conservation Commission for review and annual discussion in an open meeting. A summary of the available information is presented in **Appendix A**.

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\* “Buried Treasure in a Carlisle Field,” by John Troast III. Published in the **Carlisle Historical Society Newsletter** – Spring 2023.

\*\*“History of the Town of Carlisle, 1754-1920,” by Sidney A Bull. The Murray Printing Company, Cambridge, Mass., 1920.



**Figure 10. Depiction of Surface Features and Vegetation Types Around the Hutchins (H) and Robbins (R) Fields: 1937**

Source: Institute of Geographical Exploration, Harvard University, 1937. Illustration prepared by Erwin Raisz and Walter Webster from photographs by Bradford Washburn.

In the recent (24-year) agricultural history described in Appendix A, the major crops have been corn, hay (including grass), and alfalfa, plus occasional plantings of timothy and clover. Winter rye cover crops are occasionally reported. The most common herbicide used was Glyphosate, followed by Prowl and Atrazine. Both manure and inorganic fertilizers were commonly used. Readers should use caution using or quoting specific information in Appendix A as: (1) the handwritten replies on submitted forms were not always legible; and (2) the information provided is sometimes confusing or contradictory. The information should only be used to get a broad view of the use of the fields in the last 24 years.

Steve Spang, an abutter to the Hutchins Fields since 1974, remembers that winter squash and cabbage used to be grown there, presumably before 2000. He also reports that in off season, the fields have served citizens for activities such as cross-country skiing, model airplane flying, kite flying, horseback riding, hiking, baseball practice, and as a signature vista in Town.\* In recent years, metal detecting has also been carried out on both Hutchins and Robbins Fields lands.

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\*Personal communication from Steve Spang, Fiske St. resident, March 22, 2024.

## **7. ISSUES TO BE ADDRESSED IN A MANAGEMENT PLAN**

### **Maintaining the Land in Agriculture**

The Agricultural Preservation Restriction (APR) that the Town placed on the Hutchins and Robbins Fields properties includes a strict requirement that the land remain in active agricultural use and not be abandoned. Thus, the Town must make it a high priority to adhere to this requirement. This will also help strengthen the Town's commitment to help preserve meaningful agriculture in Carlisle. Because the soils are considered Prime Farmland (see Section 5), it should be possible to continue to find qualified farmers.

### **Oversight of Agricultural Use**

Any agricultural use of the fields will be subject to obligations and restrictions by both State (APR) and Town rules, the latter being incorporated in the Agricultural License Agreement that the farmer must agree to. A summary of the APR obligations and restrictions was provided in Section 4. Examples of an APR restriction include: (1) the prohibition on the installation of non-agriculturally related temporary or permanent structure. (Prior written approval is needed for an agriculturally-related, permanent structure.) and (2) no paved road, driveway, parking lot or utility structures without prior written approval. Examples of Carlisle's Agricultural License Agreement include: (1) reporting to the Town, before the growing season, the intended use of the land and the pesticides and soil amendments the farmer plans on using; (2) periodic field-edge clearing to control the encroachment of forests into the field; and (3) submission of a post-harvest report on the actual crop(s) grown, pesticides or herbicides used, soil amendments added, and other information. The Land Stewards and/or Conservation Administrator should conduct sufficient field visits to ensure compliance with both State and local rules.

Note that the use of the fields for community gardens, as practiced in Carlisle, does not strictly meet the APR's definition of "Agricultural Use" which requires that the agricultural use be "for the purpose of selling such [agricultural] products in the regular course of business..." However, the use for community gardens should be considered consistent with the APR's Statement of Purpose, especially if no commercial farmer could be found. In fact, some limited use of APR lands for non-commercial agriculture is occasionally allowed at other locations.\*

### **Non-Agricultural Use**

Outside of the growing and harvesting periods for the fields, the field portions of the land would technically be available for passive recreation activities that are consistent with the Conservation Commission's land use regulations and with the APR rule that there be "No use or activity that is inconsistent with the Statement of Purpose..." (listed in Section 3). However, the conditions of the fields (e.g., furrows, mud, cut corn stalks) would make many uses difficult. Some uses, e.g.,

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\*Personal communication to Warren Lyman (LSC) from Jill Banach, APR Stewardship Planner, Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources, November 20, 2024.

metal detecting, do require a permit. The wooded portions of the two parcels would be available for passive recreational use, but the extensive wetlands and lack of trails would make such difficult.

### **Sign Maintenance**

The combined properties currently have four conservation signs that need checking and occasional maintenance. Each parcel has one routed wood “Property Sign;” photos are provided in Appendix A. Hutchins Field also has two “Secondary Conservation Sign(s);” these are 12” X 18” aluminum signs that identify the land as conservation land and provide a summary of the pertinent land use regulations. One key maintenance task is yearly brush cutting around each sign to maintain good visibility of the signs.

### **Trails**

There is an old trail on the north side of Robbins Field, but the Trails Committee has officially abandoned it. At some point, this status should be reconsidered.

### **Biota and Habitat Assessment**

It would be useful to conduct a habitat and/or biota assessment of the non-agricultural portions of the two parcels. One particular focus should be on identifying additional vernal pools that could be certified.

### **Trash Removal**

Several trash items have been observed on the Robbins Field parcel. They should be removed.

## APPENDIX A

### PHOTOGRAPHS OF HUTCHINS AND ROBBINS FIELDS



Hutchins Field. View to North from Curve Street (9-3-23).



Hutchins Field. View to Northwest from Curve Street (9-3-23).



Hutchins Field. View to North from Entrance at Corner of Curve and Fiske Streets (9-3-23). Note: Secondary conservation sign is on tree at left.



Hutchins Field. View to North from Curve St. (9-28-23).



Robbins Field. View to Southeast from Curve St. (9-28-23).



Robbins Field. View to East from Curve St. (9-28-23).  
Note: Unharvested corn at the rear is in a historically wet area.

## APPENDIX B

### AGRICULTURAL USE OF HUTCHINS AND ROBBINS FIELDS: 2000 - 2023

#### Recent Agricultural Use of Hutchins and Robbins Fields

Notes: a. Integrated Pest Management (IPM) used unless otherwise noted.  
b. Each line of the table presents information from a specific Carlsile Agricultural Land Use Report Form

Year	Field <sup>1</sup> : Crop	Listed Farmer	Pesticides Used <sup>2</sup>	Soil Amend-ments <sup>3</sup>	Comments on Yield <sup>4</sup>	In-Kind Service <sup>5</sup>	Cover Crop
2023	H&R: Corn	Great Brook Dairy	A, G, C	M, I	E	MFE	
2022	H&R: Corn	Great Brook Dairy	P, A, G	M, I	L	MFE	
	H&R: Hay	" " "		M, I	L	MFE	
2021	H&R: Corn	Great Brook Dairy	P, A, G	M, I	E	MFE	Yes
	H&R: Hay	" " "		M, I	E/L	MFE	
2020	H&R: Corn	Great Brook Dairy	P, A	M	G	MFE	
2019	H&R: Corn	Great Brook Dairy	P, A, G	M, I	G	MFE	
	H: Hay	" " "		M	E	MFE, NTSF	
2018	H&R: Corn	Great Brook Dairy	P, A	M, I, C	E	MFE	Yes
2017	H: Corn	Great Brook Dairy	P, A	M, I	E	MFE	Yes
	R: Corn	" " "	P, A	M, I	E	MFE	Yes
2016	H&R: Corn	Great Brook Dairy	B	M, I	L	MFE	
	R: Corn	" " "	B	I	L		
2015	No report in ConsCom file						
2014	H&R: Corn & Alfalfa	Great Brook Dairy	B	M, I	G		
2013	H: Corn & Hay	Great Brook Dairy	G	M, I	G		
	R: Corn	" " "					
2012	H: Corn & Hay	Mark Duffy	G	M, I	E		
	R: Hay	" "		M, I	L		
2011	H: Corn & Hay	Mark Duffy	G	Lime, I	E		
	R: Hay	" "		Lime, M, I	E		
2010	H: Corn & Hay	Mark Duffy	G	Lime, M, I, C	L		
	R: Hay	" "		I	E		
2009	H: Corn	Mark Duffy	G	M, I	E		
	H&R: Timothy, Clover & Alfalfa	John Valentine		Lime	E		
2008	H: Corn	Mark Duffy	G	M, I	G		
	H&R: Alfalfa & grass	John Valentine		I			

Table continues on next page.

**Recent Agricultural Use of Hutchins and Robbins Fields (cont.)**

Year	Field <sup>1</sup> : Crop	Listed Farmer	Pesticides Used <sup>2</sup>	Soil Amend-ments <sup>3</sup>	Comments on Yield <sup>4</sup>	In-Kind Service <sup>5</sup>	Cover Crop
2007	H: Alfalfa & grasses	John Valentine	G (corn)	I	E		Yes
	H: Corn	Mark Duffy	G	M, C	E		
2006	H: Corn	Mark Duffy	G	M, I	E		
	H: Alfalfa & grasses	John Valentine					
	R: Alfalfa & grasses	John Valentine			L		
2005	No report in ConsComn file						
2004	H&R: Alfalfa & Corn <sup>6</sup>	John Valentine	I (Alfalfa)		E		
			P, G (corn)		E		
2003	H&R: Alfalfa & grasses	John Valentine	I		G(H), E(R)	MFE	
2002	No report in ConsCom file						
2001	H&R: Corn <sup>6</sup>	John Valentine	O	M,I, bone meal	G		Yes
	H&R: Alfalfa & Corn <sup>6</sup>	John Valentine		I			Yes
2000	H&R: Alfalfa, grasses, Corn, <sup>6</sup> Clover & Alfalfa	John Valentine	O (corn) M (corn)	I (all crops)	E		

1. H = Hutchins Field; R = Robbins Field; H&R = report covers both fields
2. P = Prowl; A = Atrazine; G = Glyphosate (or Roundup); B = Bullzeye; C = Capreno; O = Other
3. M = Manure (or composted manure); I = Inorganic fertilizer; C = Corn starter
4. G = Greater than expected; E = Equal to expected; L = Less than expected
5. MFE = Mowed Field Edge; NTSF = No-Till Seed Field
6. Corn crop presumably grown by Mark Duffy.