

May 30, 2008

Dear Friends of Sheriff's Meadow Foundation:

It is my great pleasure to introduce myself to you as the new Executive Director of Sheriff's Meadow Foundation. I began work on May 1, 2008, and am truly honored to have been entrusted by the Board with leading Sheriff's Meadow into its 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary year and its second half-century of conservation. I am equally honored to serve an organization that, through your generous support, has succeeded in conserving some 2,637 acres of the island of Martha's Vineyard.

In addition to introducing myself, I am writing today to address directly the issue of removing native plants from two Sheriff's Meadow properties, the Caroline Tuthill Preserve in Edgartown and the Priscilla Hancock Meadow in Chilmark, as described in the May 16, 2008 issue of the *Vineyard Gazette* and in the May 29, 2008 issue of the *Martha's Vineyard Times*. At the Caroline Tuthill Preserve, we have been following our management plan goal of restoring an open meadow along the Edgartown-Vineyard Haven Road, and at the Priscilla Hancock Meadow, we have been working toward our management plan goal of restoring sandplain grasslands. Establishing and maintaining meadows and grasslands requires removing the woody vegetation that inevitably grows in through the process of natural succession. Sheriff's Meadow creates and maintains grassy habitats through techniques that include mowing, prescribed burning and transplanting trees and shrubs. We even hold an event known as "Free Tree Day," where the public is invited to come to Nat's Farm and dig up and take home young cedars that have sprouted up in the field (this year "Free Tree Day" is May 31).

For years, the Foundation has engaged in grassland work through barter exchanges with island landscaping firms. The firm would remove the plants identified by Sheriff's Meadow and, in turn, would mow Foundation properties or perform other services as directed. These projects proceeded through informal, handshake agreements. Such a handshake arrangement was in place this year at the Caroline

Tuthill Preserve and the Priscilla Hancock Meadow where encroaching cedars, pitch pines and huckleberries were removed and transplanted. The handshake agreement was strictly between the Foundation and the landscaping firm. There was no agreement made between the Foundation and the landscaping firm's customer, nor did the Foundation know who the customer was. Those who saw the photographs of sod removal in Oak Bluffs should know that those photographs were not of a Sheriff's Meadow property.

Unfortunately, Sheriff's Meadow Foundation made a number of errors. We did not adequately oversee the work taking place on our lands and failed to obtain permission from the Commonwealth's Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program, even though we do routinely obtain Natural Heritage approval for other plans and projects. Permission from Natural Heritage was required because these properties – along with much of the island of Martha's Vineyard – fall within zones of “priority habitat” for rare and endangered species.

I take these mistakes seriously. To address these problems, I have halted all such informal projects. I have drafted a policy to govern work to be performed on Foundation properties by parties other than staff or supervised volunteers, and that policy is being reviewed by our Property Management Committee and our Board. The policy will require written agreements, consistency with our internal property management plan and that all required state and local approvals be obtained before projects may commence. President Steve Crampton and I have met with Mr. Tim Simmons of the Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program and have pledged our cooperation with whatever restoration measures are required. We have also arranged for him to brief our staff on the new, expanded requirements of his program. Both Vice-President Emily Bramhall and I have inspected the affected properties personally. We have already mapped the affected areas, photographed the sites and are developing a remediation plan. We are investigating this incident thoroughly and will make recommendations to the Board on proceeding further.

The greatest work before me, however, is to regain the trust of our

supporters and the confidence of our community. I intend to run the organization in a manner that regains that trust. I intend to manage the Foundation properties in a manner that regains confidence. And despite the challenges, I am thrilled to be undertaking this work, as I believe there are tremendous opportunities before Sheriff's Meadow.

To begin with, it is my hope to make Sheriff's Meadow Foundation properties into essential elements of island life. To do that, I plan to review all of our fee-owned lands for their potential in three areas - ecology, agriculture and community – and to update our existing management plans accordingly. For all three of these areas, I believe we can build on the good work already done over the past 50 years. From the ecological perspective, I will look at the potential of our properties to host rare species, to shelter wildlife, to serve as a reservoir of native plants, and the like. Perhaps a Sheriff's Meadow swamp could be the first on the island to once again grow upon its sodden substrate the Atlantic white-cedar, a tree known as native to the island only from the pollen record and the records of the Gosnold expedition.

The Sheriff's Meadow Foundation properties also can be reviewed for their agricultural potential. While some of our properties are already being farmed, perhaps there are others that can serve this purpose. There is a groundswell in this nation for locally grown food, the local manifestation of that being the Island Grown Initiative. With real estate prices on the island still high, especially for farming purposes, and with rental property scarce, the land owned by the Foundation could be very helpful to island farmers. Clearly there is also a demand for native plants, and Sheriff's Meadow can also seek to help in this area.

Our lands will also be reviewed for their potential to serve the community. We will strive to connect to the growing network of island walking trails. We will review our signage on the properties that are enjoyed by the public to make sure that people feel as welcome as possible. We can consider the possibility of allowing limited hunting, where suitable, in an effort to help address the problem of Lyme disease. Our lands also have great educational potential; we can create

interpretive trails and develop field programs for the island schools. Scenic vistas, especially along public roads, are something very valuable to the community, and here we can maintain what we already have created and seek opportunities to do more.

Sheriff's Meadow Foundation is a local land trust, and a local land trust is a community organization. Working with our Board, our staff, and all of you, I hope to make the Foundation a growing, thriving – *essential* - element of our island community.

I assure you that I will be working hard to correct the problems of which I have written, working hard to lead Sheriff's Meadow forward, and working hard to earn your trust. I do hope to meet you at one of our events. I would very much appreciate hearing from you; please do share with me any criticism, suggestions or advice. You may reach me by phone at (508) 693-5207 or via email at [moore@sheriffsmeadow.org](mailto:moore@sheriffsmeadow.org).

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Adam R. Moore  
Executive Director