



BACKGROUND AND HISTORY

Arthur D. Norcross, a native of Monson, Massachusetts, founded the Norcross Wildlife Sanctuary in 1939. An active sportsman and participating sponsor of several Arctic expeditions, Mr. Norcross turned his lifelong interest in wildlife and the out-of-doors to his childhood "stomping grounds:" the wooded hills surrounding Monson and nearby Wales. Using as a core the 100-acre family woodlot/pasture-inherited from his father, A. D. Norcross, in 1916, Mr. Norcross began circa 1930 to gather nearby wooded acres, farmland, wetlands and other parcels. His purpose was to establish the Sanctuary, known locally as Tupper Hill. To assemble acreage, Mr. Norcross bought some parcels outright, traded some parcels and accepted a few gifts of land from sympathetic neighbors.

Founder and manager of the Norcross Greeting Card Company, Mr. Norcross lived virtually all of his working life in New York City, where he died in 1969. In 1965, just four years before his death, he sought to ensure the continuation of the Sanctuary by establishing The Norcross Wildlife Foundation.

Excellent models for some of the future works of the Foundation were to be found in the experience of the Sanctuary. Concomitant with its principal mission of providing healthy, secure habitat for natural fauna and flora, Tupper Hill has a history of providing the public-especially local school children-with extensive natural and environmental education programs. It is also an active center for plant propagation and distribution, with particular emphasis on rare and endangered plants native to the Appalachian range from the Carolinas through the Maritimes.

Always proactive in his pursuit of wildlife protection and conservation, Mr. Norcross put a good deal of time, energy and money into what he described as "rescue work." This involved responding quickly to news of impending habitat destruction, draining of swamps, housing subdivisions, road building, reservoir construction and the like.

"In the vicinity of Belchertown [MA], we removed an entire colony of Hartford or Climbing Fern by truck before the bulldozer and flame throwers did their work and the area was flooded. This colony of Hartford Fern flourishes on the Sanctuary...In fact is increasing."

Probably his most remarkable salvage operation involved rescuing the flora of a parcel in the Pine Barrens of New Jersey and transporting it lock, stock and *Gentiana atum-nalis* (Pine Barren Gentian) to Massachusetts, where it still sits today. White cedars, gentians, cattails, pitcher plants, cranberry bushes, sphagnum moss, grasses and sedges, and several species of orchids all made the trip. Logistically, this was a daunting operation-and a successful one.

Given today's environmental regulations, such a venture might not be possible, but to the forward-thinking Mr. Norcross, a doomed bog in New Jersey, chock full of wildlife, was saved, found a home in Massachusetts, and is available for public education and enjoyment ... forever.

The founder was cautious and thoughtful about constructing roads on the Sanctuary. By reopening old coach roads from pre-Revolutionary times, re-grading 19th Century logging roads and carefully planning new, naturalistic roads, Mr. Norcross established a network of approximately 25 miles of roadways, providing access to all parts of the Sanctuary without intruding on wildlife movement or breeding. The gravel roads, in fact, are frequent egg depositories for Tupper Hill's healthy populations of painted and snapping turtles, and gravel banks for road building are nesting sites for an unusually high population of Eastern spotted turtles.

As his age advanced, Mr. Norcross began to slow down, and by 1964 he could look back with satisfaction on twenty-five years of hard-won returns on the challenging and costly work it took to assemble the approximately 2,500 acres he estimated having under protection at Tupper Hill. Although he established The Norcross Wildlife Foundation in 1965, he did not endow it just then. Instead, with considerable help from his sister, June Norcross Webster (also the artistic force in his greeting-card company), Mr. Norcross continued to underwrite Sanctuary operations and expansion with his own funds.

In the late 1960's, his health failed rapidly, and when he died in 1969, he left the bulk of his estate to the Foundation, along with a well-defined administrative structure for the Foundation and for the Sanctuary, he left very clear bylaws and a document titled *Instructions for the Future*.

Unfortunately, due to a challenge to his will, both the Sanctuary and the Foundation suffered through lean times until his estate could be settled. It took until 1982 before his wishes could start to be carried out.

With the estate settled, there was some catching up to do in terms of postponed improvements and expansion of Sanctuary operations. Grant making was, at the time, also a relatively new activity for the Foundation. And in later years, establishing a loan fund would push the Foundation into yet another business.

How Mr. Norcross regarded the actual grant making process was not entirely apparent. He was clearly interested in placing the money he had worked so hard to accumulate into the hands of groups that would put it to work too, showing tangible, lasting results. He reportedly said: "If you give someone money, a year later you ought to be able to walk up and knock on it."

With these thoughts in mind, the Foundation established a pattern of placing grants with organizations that ask for specific amounts to purchase and protect land, build nature centers and trails, print and distribute educational materials, provide services to clients and conduct ground-level program activities. The Foundation has provided funding for items as mundane but useful as septic systems for one organization and erosion-preventing sandbags for an aboriginal archeological site on the flooding upper Mississippi. Not surprisingly, with the dawn of the technology age, much of our funding over the past 20 years has been in support of technological tools that NGOs use in their daily work such as computers, printers, cameras and GPS units.

Several times over the years, as circumstances arise, such as investment market corrections, the foundation has been forced to make changes in its grant making policy. Generally, the decision has been

to reduce the overall *amount* going out to grantees without diminishing the actual *number* of grants. (The current Grant Policy is described in detail in the GRANTS section of the website.)

With changes in the foundation's financial condition as well as changes in the availability of land for sale, the Board also chose to reduce the amount of funds allocated to land acquisition. Instead, the Foundation became a "land bank", helping others to protect open space, wetlands and deep woods. The foundation's No-interest Loan Fund for Land Protection began in 1999 and has proven to be a boon to grassroots organizations across the nation, especially land trusts all too often faced with pressing deadlines on threatened acreage but without available funds to draw upon. Since its inception, over 100 land protection loans, ranging from \$12,000 to \$250,000, have been made to grassroots organizations across the country. Through 2010, this effort has successfully resulted in the permanent protection of over 33,000 acres. And, during that time, every loan granted has been paid back in full. (Guidelines for the Loan Fund for Land Protection is described in detail in the LOANS section of the website.).

Today, the Directors and staff of the Norcross Wildlife Foundation and the Norcross Wildlife Sanctuary continue what Mr. Norcross created. We think he would be pleased.

- Richard S. Reagan, Board Member and Karen Outlaw, Executive Director