BROAD BROOK COALITION

Volume 36, Issue #2, Fall 2024

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ABOUT US

Broad Brook Coalition (BBC) is a nonprofit, all-volunteer organization incorporated in 1988 with the mission of preserving open space and promoting affordable housing. Under a memorandum of understanding with the Northampton Conservation Commission, BBC is responsible for the day-to-day management of the 936-acre Fitzgerald Lake Conservation Area. BBC's goals are to maintain and enhance the diversity and integrity of wildlife species and habitat at FLCA, promote outreach and education, and provide public access for passive recreation that is compatible with habitat protection.

Our work in trail maintenance, stewardship, education, and land preservation to expand FLCA is funded by the generous support of our members and occasional grants.

Broad Brook Coalition Annual Meeting

Sunday, Nov. 10 — In Person — 2:00-4:30 p.m.

Members and friends are cordially invited to attend Broad Brook Coalition's annual meeting on Sunday, November 10, at the Florence Civic Center. This year's meeting will be in-person only, with no Zoom link. Light refreshments will be served at the Civic Center starting at 2:00 p.m. Please join us!

This year's annual meeting will offer BBC members a chance to honor and remember our late President, **Bob Zimmermann**, who passed away last May. We are planning an open, informal program that will begin with several presentations in Bob's memory. Guest speakers, including Laurie Sanders from Historic Northampton, Wayne Feiden, former head of Northampton's Planning and Sustainability Department, and other longtime friends and colleagues will pay tribute to Bob's many contributions, not only to Broad Brook Coalition but to conservation work throughout the Pioneer Valley. Following the scheduled presentations there will be an opportunity for those who so wish to add a story or memory of their own.



Bob first joined the BBC Board of Directors in 2002, became Vice-President in 2006, and assumed the presidency in 2011, becoming the longest-serving president in BBC history. Many important projects were carried out at Fitzgerald Lake Conservation Area under Bob's leadership, including the construction of the new bridge at the end of the paved path at North Farms Rd.; the extension of the boardwalk and construction of a new dock; the establishment of native shrub islands in Cooke's Pasture; and the acquisition of many new parcels, expanding the conservation area to nearly 1,000 acres. Bob was devoted to all aspects of conservation work, with a special interest in the control of invasive plants, the cataloguing of native species found in FLCA, and educational outreach to the community. His hard work, steady leadership, and dedication to the preservation of the natural environment will remain an inspiration to us all.

From the BBC Board

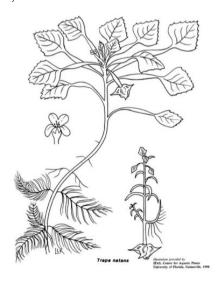
One of the regular tasks Bob Zimmermann performed as BBC President was to write the President's Message for our semiannual newsletters. Twice a year, for the Spring and Fall editions, Bob would pen the newsletter's lead article. His first, on the acquisition of the 100-acre Beaver Brook parcel, appeared in the 2011 Spring edition, the year he became President. Bob would go on to write twenty-six more President's Messages. His last article, titled Watching Out for Birds, led off this year's Spring letter, describing some of the greatest risks wild birds face today, including window strikes, outdoor cats, and the pernicious effects of certain insecticides. In lieu of a President's Message for this newsletter, I thought I would look back through the many pieces he wrote during his presidency and try to give a sense of his interests, his thoughts, and his concerns, as well as the pleasure he clearly found in putting them on paper.



Bob was, of course, a scientist, and though he may not have written a newsletter piece on his academic specialty, molecular biology, his scientific background is evident in many of his articles. He often did extensive research before beginning to write, sometimes footnoting his sources, as in his Spring 2020 article on Vanishing Birds or his Fall 2017 piece speculating on how resilient the Fitzgerald Lake Conservation Area might be to climate change. And in the fall of 2019, in an article titled What's In a Name?, he took a look at the common and scientific names of several local plants and animals. As he explained there, the scientific name for the belted kingfisher— Megaceryle alcyon—is steeped in Greek mythology, referring in part to the goddess Alcyon who was drowned after angering Zeus but was revived by others in the pantheon and turned into a beautiful bird. It's quite a story.

Bob was also an avid birder, and it's no surprise that a number of his pieces featured birds in one way or another. He celebrated our local woodpeckers in **Woodpecker World** (Fall 2022), grateful that they remained all winter after the

seasonal migrants had left. A similar article in Spring 2013 discussed the effect a warming climate is having on migration patterns, prompting concerns that arrival times for some migrants may become out of sync with the emerging seeds and insects they depend on. Other topics that he visited regularly over the years highlight the variety of animals and wildflowers to be found at Fitzgerald Lake, including An Abundance of Wildlife at the FLCA (Spring 2023), Floral Mysteries (Spring 2016), and Beaver Exploits (Spring 2012), which contains a description of the newly built "beaver apartment house" that stood for many years along the north shore of the lake until it was finally abandoned this last year.



One of Bob's core interests during his presidency was of course the increasing presence of invasive plants in the conservation area, and he featured them in a number of his messages. In his Spring 2017 article Water Chestnut Wars, he described the threat that this prolific plant posed to bodies of water such as Fitzgerald Lake, and he announced the new approach that BBC had recently adopted to counter it. Instead of holding two pulls a year, volunteers would go out six times during the growing season, at three-week intervals—a policy Bob described as "Pull Early, Pull Often." Judging by the steadily decreasing amounts of water chestnut removed each year since then, this approach seems to be working well. And in a pair of articles written several years apart, Bob addressed the complex issues surrounding the use of pesticides and herbicides in various circumstances. In Why We Use Herbicides to Control Invasive Plants (Fall 2014), Bob acknowledged the concerns that many people have about using herbicides such as glyphosate to treat certain invasives, but made the case that when measures such as hand-pulling

and mowing are inadequate to control a particular infestation, herbicides, when used judiciously by experts, might be "the only practicable alternative." Then, in the fall of 2022, he returned to the subject from a different angle in his piece **Pesticides**, **Pollinators and Beyond**, with an emphasis on the potential harm posed by the widespread use of neonicotinoids and organophosphates such as chlorpyrifos in large-scale agriculture.

Bob also wrote frequently over the years about the value of conservation land to humans and wildlife alike. In Why Conservation Areas? (Fall 2013) he congratulated Northampton on its extensive conservation lands, of which Fitzgerald Lake remains the largest and, with its 9-acre lake and large beaver swamp along Boggy Meadow Rd., the one with the most diverse habitat. Three years later, in Members, Friends, Visitors and Volunteers, he focused on the many kinds of people who come to FLCA for passive recreation hikers and runners, boaters, birders, and fishers as well as the BBC members and volunteers who keep the trails clear, tackle the invasive plants, take part in guided walks, and carry out the city's management plan. And of course, among the regular users of FLCA, it's the dog walkers who probably put in the most miles throughout the year, with dogs on many of those miles off-leash. This was of particular concern to Bob, and in Spring 2021 he addressed the issues in Good Dog Owners Make Good Dogs. A good dog owner himself, Bob understood the impulse to let one's pet roam free, but spelled out the important reasons for not doing so, including problems with dog waste, potential aggressive interactions with other dogs, impacts on resident wildlife, and the fear some people have when they encounter a dog off leash on the trail.

These and Bob's other President's Messages are all available on the BBC website. By clicking the "Newsletter" tab on the home page you can access the entire collection, one of the many legacies that Bob leaves behind after 13 years as Broad Brook Coalition President.

—Dave Pritchard



Fifth-Graders Return to Fitzgerald Lake



For the second year in a row, BBC sponsored a field trip at FLCA in April for Jackson Street Elementary School fifth graders. As before, Yamila Irizarry-Gerould made the initial arrangements with fifth-grade teacher Kieran Slattery, whose enthusiasm for these nature-oriented outings has contributed greatly to their success. Some 45

children piled out of the buses at the North Farms Rd. parking lot on the morning of April 26, along with several parents and attendants, and set off in three groups to the stations set up by BBC board members.

The stations were the same as last year: *vernal pool*, where Brad Timm was waiting with his dip net and plastic basins; *beaver habitat*, where Rich Baker had a list of beaver signs to look for; and *the end of the dock*, where Yamila was ready to focus attention on sensory observation. At the vernal pool students crowded around the basins to see the various invertebrates and tadpoles that Brad dipped from the brown water. Larval caddisflies with their stick houses were a big hit, according to Brad, along with some gelatinous spotted salamander egg masses. At the beaver station there were many signs of beaver activity to be found, including gnawed stumps, wood chips, and a much larger tree whose trunk had been mysteriously girdled by beavers. And there was also plenty to observe at the dock, including a wood turtle shell and deer antler that Tina White had recently found in woods adjacent to FLCA. Red-winged blackbirds were singing their territorial *konk-la-ree* on all sides, a great blue heron was stationed along the far shore, and at least one group was treated to the sight of a majestic osprey hovering over the lake.

BBC is pleased at the success of these two field trips after our initial attempts were stymied by Covid. And we're especially glad to know that Jackson Street Elementary is finding them enjoyable and valuable. Following is an excerpt from the email that Kieran sent after this year's outing. We give warm thanks to Kieran, the other Jackson Street teachers and staff, and of course the lively, inquisitive students who made this experience possible.

Dear BBC board members,

I can't thank you enough for such an incredible experience on Friday. Our fifth graders had an amazing time and learned so much. Our students were so fascinated by everything you exposed them to, including information you shared, items you pointed out, and questions you answered. The best gift you gave them was the opportunity to explore and inquire about their literal backyard. Some students had been to Fitzgerald frequently, and some had never stepped foot on the land. However, every single student walked away having seen it in a new light and having gained awareness. To me, that's one of the signs of a successful and inclusive field trip: When every student, no matter their past experience with a situation/place, walks away having been exposed to an equal amount of new knowledge and experiences.

Warmly, Kieran

P.S. Thank you also for paying for our bus. It may not seem like much, but we have so few resources to pay for experiences like this, and your generous donation (coupled with the haste with which you sent the check!!) is so deeply appreciated.











Blue-Green Algae at Fitzgerald Lake: Attention, Dog Walkers



A patch of cyanobacteria found in Fitzgerald Lake in August

This summer, blue-green algae was spotted at Fitzgerald Lake. What Is it, how can you recognize it, and what harm can it do?

For starters, blue-green algae are not algae at all but rather photosynthetic bacteria—called cyanobacteria—and there are a lot of them. According to Wikipedia, they are "probably the most numerous taxon to have ever existed on Earth," and can be found in a wide range of habitats throughout the globe. There are many benign types, like spirulina, which is marketed as a nutritional supplement. But there are also highly toxic cyanobacteria, and they can pose serious health risks when present in bodies of water.

Toxic types are not identifiable just by looking at them, and are not always visible as conspicuous patches. Overgrowth, or blooms—which when visible can look like a patch of pea soup or swirls of blue-green paint—occur more often with increased nutrient levels and prolonged warm temperatures. Not many people swim or wade in Fitzgerald Lake, and they would probably avoid a slimy, blue-green surface patch even if they did,

so the greatest risk at FLCA is usually to dogs. The toxins can target either the liver or the nervous system. Signs of poisoning can be vomiting, diarrhea, dehydration, or salivating; other symptoms may include lethargy, convulsions, seizures, or blue mucous membranes. The toxins usually act w ithin a short time of exposure. There is no specific antidote, but supportive care can help save the dog. You need to get your dog emergency treatment if you notice any of these symptoms after possible exposure. If you're not sure, or if the signs are mild, it's a good idea to hose the dog off thoroughly.

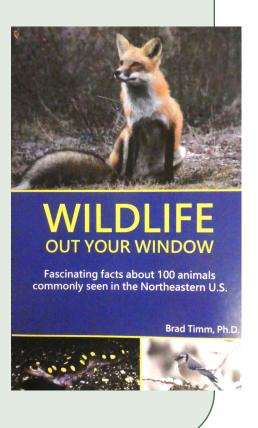
BBC sent an email advisory to the membership this summer after cyanobacteria blooms were spotted in the lake, and we posted notices at the kiosks as well. Easthampton closed one pond this summer because of concerns about toxic algae. But there is no regular monitoring at FLCA for cyanobacteria, and visitors—especially dog walkers—should be aware that with a warming climate and increasing levels of nutrients in the lake, the likelihood of these blooms will only increase. As far as dogs are concerned, especially during the hot summer months, the best advice is probably just to keep them out of the water.

—Tina White, Dave Pritchard

Book Pick: Wildlife Out Your Window: Fascinating facts about 100 animals commonly seen in the Northeastern U.S.– Brad Timm

I delighted out loud multiple times on the first page alone of this book, learning a half dozen things about an animal with which I thought I was familiar! Perhaps you, too, did not know that belted kingfishers have two toes on their feet that, along with their bills, help them dig their six-foot deep burrow nests in the bank of a body of water!? Such is the wonder of Brad's book; the mouths of both nature lovers experienced and newb alike will fall open at the myriad facts contained within. As a bird nerd, I was quite pleased that it started with facts about winged creatures; it is then organized into sections on mammals of various sizes, amphibians, and reptiles. The appendices contain helpful lists for those wishing to support wildlife, with tips for providing safe and diverse habitats and minimizing light pollution. Checklists and a notes section are great additions, especially for young adventurers. The book is accessible, with clear photos, informative descriptions, and bulleted factoids. Frequenters of Fitzgerald Lake will want to pocket this on their next visit, since so many of the animals described so wonderfully by Brad make their homes in the conservation area. I know I will experience the beavers at the lake differently next time, now that I have learned that their teeth grow continuously throughout their lives and that they have transparent eyelids that act as goggles underwater. I will look at the wood frog with new awe, knowing that 30% of its body may freeze and turn to ice in the winter, or listen to the chickadee's usual call with a new ear, knowing that more "dee" sounds means a higher threat level from predators. This is but a smattering of the fascinating and joyful facts you will learn from Wildlife Out Your Window!

—Yamila Irizarry-Gerould



Those Amazing Lichens

These photos were taken by Molly Hale, an amateur but passionate lichenologist and Florence resident who has given several walk 'n talks at FLCA. Since early 2023 she has been documenting the lichens of the Northampton Conservation Areas. All the photos below are from this project, with many of them from FLCA. A lichen is a marvelously intricate entanglement of a fungus and an algae, each of which change form when combined and help each other survive. Other components such as bacteria and yeast are also essential, though not yet well understood, parts of this conglomerate. Lichens, which grow on rocks, bark, dead wood, soil, and moss, come in many forms including those shown below. Next time you explore outdoors grab a magnifier and see how many different ones you can find!



Warty beard lichen

Mapledust lichen



Toadskin lichen



Many-forked cladonia



Speckled shield lichen



Smokey-eyed lichen



Brown cobblestone lichen



Gray reindeer lichen



Hammered shield lichen



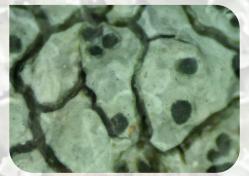
Pink earth



British soldiers



Yellow-green ribbon lichen



Cinder lichen



Southern powdered ruffle lichen



Mealy pixie-cup



Peppered rock-shield



Sand-loving Iceland lichen



Streamside stippleback



Common gold-dust lichen



Lichenothelia sp.

2024 Walks and Talks

BBC held a full schedule of walk programs this year—no masks! no limits on attendance! All were well attended, and two were on topics that we've never covered before: lichens and medicinal plants. A big thank-you to all our walk leaders and to those who turned out to learn something new (or to be reminded of things you thought you knew but have since forgotten).

Those Amazing Lichens | Molly Hale | April 13 / May 4

Naturalist Molly Hale has led many walks for BBC, but this is the first time she has focused on lichens. Lichens are easy to find, growing on wood, bark, rock, and other substrates, but not so easy to describe. To say that they are an association between a fungus and a photosymbiont, such as an alga or cyanobacteria, is just the beginning. Molly came equipped with an informative handout and several hand lenses so everyone could get a good look at the features she was pointing out. Photos in the handout of the Big Three Macrolichens (Common Greenshield, Rough Speckled Shield Lichen, Hammered Shield Lichen) and the Big Three Crustose Lichens (Smokey-eyed Boulder Lichen, Common Script Lichen, Mapledust Lichen) were a great help for beginners.



Spring Nature Walk | Rich Baker | April 27

The end of April in the Northeast is when spring is just getting going with new leaves, returning bird song, and the lovely spring ephemerals. Rich Baker, a conservation biologist, planned this walk as an open-ended stroll along the path at North Farms Rd. to see what struck the eye and piqued participants' interest. Trout lilies and jack-in-the-pulpits could be seen along the paved path, skunk cabbage lined the boardwalk, and painted turtles were hauled out on stumps in the lake to warm their bodies after overwintering in the mud. Redwinged blackbirds, several warblers, and a distant winter wren, among others, provided birdsong. This was a great way to greet the spring and talk about habitat, life cycles, and the remarkable adaptations nature has devised.

Spring Bird Walk | Lesley Farlow and Steve Winn | May 18

Lesley and Steve, longtime Hampshire Bird Club members, returned for a third year to lead this popular walk. With Cooke Ave. closed for paving, they started instead at the Marian St. entrance and walked a loop down to the beaver swamp, then along Boggy Meadow Rd. to the lake and the bird blind. Forty-five species were counted in all, the most numerous of which, to no one's surprise, was the loud-mouthed red-eyed vireo, with 19 individuals. Highlights included three green herons, a willow flycatcher, a fish crow, and nine different warblers, among them a Louisiana waterthrush, a magnolia warbler, seven yellow warblers, and a Wilson's warbler.

Wild Edibles and Medicinal Plants | Hannah Jacobson-Hardy | June 15 Although BBC sponsored an edible plant walk some years ago, this is our first walk to feature wild medicinal plants. There was considerable interest in this topic and a large turnout. Hannah began by explaining the ethics of sustainable harvesting in the wild: Leave the first plant you see, and never take more than ten percent in one spot. She described the medicinal properties of more then 20 plants found along the North Farms Rd. path and boardwalk, including the use of jewelweed to relieve poison ivy rash and of elderberry to boost the immune system. Burdock root, hemlock tips, witch hazel flowers—each has its properties and its lore. This walk proved to be a great addition to BBC's repertoire.



Bark: Get to Know Your Trees | Michael Woitech | September 7

Michael has given his bark walk at FLCA several times, but this is the first time he's done it with all the leaves still on the trees. For most people, leaves are probably easier to use in identifying a tree than its bark. But Michael's interest in bark goes deeper than simple identification, and his focus on this walk was how bark forms, what its structure is, and the role it plays in a tree's survival. For example, young bark is typically smooth but often develops cracks and ridges in older trees. As Michael explained, this can be due to the pressure from internal growth acting on the outer bark, or to expansion and contraction when bark is warmed by the winter sun and then frozen at night. As attendees of this walk learned, there's a lot more to bark than just as an aid to tree ID.



The Role of Fungi in the Forest Ecosystem | Peter Russell | September 8 This is another BBC walk back by popular demand. Some 24 people attended this walk led by new board member Peter Russell, who is also a member of the Pioneer Valley Mycological Society. As before, the emphasis was on learning about the various types of mushrooms and their ecological roles rather than on edibility. Some are decomposers, some partner with algae to form lichens, and others are mycorrhizal, forming complex symbiotic associations with plants by colonizing their roots. Among the boletes and polypores, the brittlegills and milkcaps and shrimp-of-the-woods, Peter pointed to a small white Amanita that he identified as a destroying angel, one of the deadliest of mushrooms—a reminder of how strange and fascinating the world of fungi can be.



BBC Has a New Logo

After many years using the same black-and-white line drawing as our logo, the board decided last spring it was time for a reset. The old logo featured a stream flowing toward some distant hills, with a deer on one side and a house on the other. After some lively discussion, we decided that we needed a completely new look. Although Broad Brook flows into and out of Fitzgerald Lake, it's not the brook that most people associate us with but rather the lake and the wildlife it harbors. With this in mind, we came up with a few ideas and brought them to graphic designer Sarah Baker to start the process. After several rounds of sketches, we narrowed things down to a stylized lake scene with trees along the far shore, a great blue heron silhouetted overhead, and a beaver plying the water. Thank you, Sarah, for bearing with us through the process and for the evocative image you came up with. We're delighted with it, and hope our members and friends will be too.





A great egret photographed near the dock in mid September. Great egrets typically breed along the coast but disperse inland after fledging.

BBC Grateful for Recent Gifts

BBC has been the recipient of several generous memorial donations in recent months.

We would especially like to thank all who contributed in memory of **Bob Zimmermann**. Your contributions are a tribute to Bob's long dedication to Broad Brook's mission. And sincere thanks as well to those who donated in memory of **Bruce Callahan** and **Eli Knapp Abrams**, for both of whom Fitzgerald Lake Conservation Area was a special place. Finally we wish to acknowledge the generous bequest from the estate of **Peter N. Rowe**, a longtime BBC member and dedicated volunteer. We are deeply grateful for such generosity.

Conservation News in Brief

Invasive Control

BBC hired Lincoln Fish of Bay State Forestry to treat invasive plants in Cooke's Pasture this summer. Lincoln and a three-person crew visited Cooke's on July 2 and 3 to treat glossy buckthorn, spotted knapweed, black swallowwort, and Japanese bittersweet. We have been treating these plants in Cooke's Pasture for a number of years in an ongoing program to keep them from becoming established. In addition, we hired Matt Verson of Vegetation Management to treat two recently discovered patches of phragmites in the beaver swamp along Boggy Meadow Road. Matt completed this work on October 3. Both Lincoln and Matt are Massachusetts licensed herbicide applicators. We will continue to monitor both these sites to see how effective these treatments will be.

Water Chestnut in Fitzgerald Lake

Volunteer crews in kayaks and canoes crisscrossed the lake again this summer to pull invasive water chestnut plants. We have been pulling water chestnut since at least 2005 and have made considerable progress. Nevertheless, it is probably unrealistic to think that we can ever eliminate it entirely. If you missed any of the five pulls we organized this summer, don't worry, we'll be back out there next year. Look for the announcement in the next Spring newsletter to find the dates we'll be out pulling.

Species Spotlight

(This is the twelfth in a series of articles featuring species of animals and plants that are readily found in the Fitzgerald Lake Conservation Area. A fuller version of this article will be placed on the BBC website, broadbrookcoalition.org.)

Common Name: Bobcat **Scientific Name:** *Lynx rufus*

Physical Description: The Bobcat is a relatively robust-bodied feline, about twice the size of an average house cat. Males weigh ~20 lbs. and females ~15 lbs. Their coat is typically tan to grayish-brown with a chestnut-red tone mixed in, providing great camouflage. Their body is covered with a black spotted pattern and they have black bars mainly on their forelegs. The underparts of the belly and chin are a muted white. Their large ears have tall black tufts at the top. They are named for their short, "bobbed" tail which averages ~6 inches long.

Longevity: They can live up to ~12 years in the wild, but most live 4–5 years.

Distribution: Bobcats are found throughout almost the entirety of the lower 48 U.S. states with the exception of some relatively small isolated pockets in the upper-Midwest. Their range extends into southern Canada and throughout much of Mexico.

Habitat: Bobcats are mainly found in forested areas, around swamps and areas with rocky ledges. They also are quite common in suburban areas that contain sizable woodland/forest tracts.

Reproduction: A female has ~1-4 kittens in her litter. She gives birth in early-spring and raises them herself. This typically occurs in a den which can be in a rock crevice or cave, under a rocky ledge, in a brush pile, or in a hollowed-out tree. The young often stay as a group with their mother for 8–12 months, after which they strike out on their own to set up their own territory elsewhere.

Diet: Their diet is made up mostly of smalland medium-sized mammals including rabbits, squirrels, mice, skunks, and opossums. They also eat birds, snakes, and other animals of those general size that they encounter.

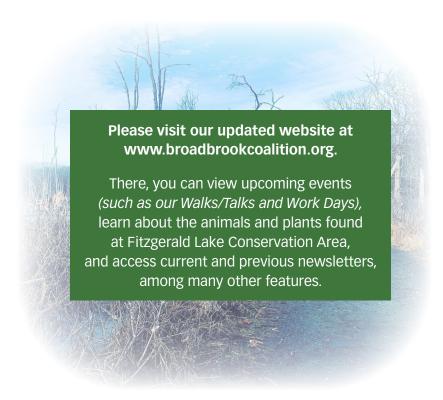
Conservation and Management: Bobcats are quite common throughout their expansive range. They are very wary of humans and have great camouflage, and as a result are rarely seen, even in areas where they are fairly numerous. The best way of documenting them is by finding their tracks in the snow or mud.



Interesting Facts:

- They are the only wild cat species we have in Massachusetts.
 Mountain lions were extirpated from Massachusetts in the early-to-mid 1800s, and Canada Lynx are found much farther north in New England.
- They are good swimmers and tree climbers, though they spend the great majority of their time on the ground.

—Brad Timm



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www.broadbrookcoalition.org

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