



CANTON LAND CONSERVATION TRUST

SPRING 2005
Newsletter

LAND TRUST REACHES FOR THE STARS WITH FULL-MOON HIKE

It is not every day that the stars line up just so to make for a perfect evening. This year we were blessed with two of them. Stars, moon, candlelight and magic illuminated the 2nd Almost Annual Canton Land Trust Full Moon Hikes, February 25 and 26. Our gracious hosts **Charlie and Rhonda DeWeese** offered their 130-acre property and home for the event. If you opted to stay snuggled up on the couch you missed an opportunity that doesn't come along every winter.

Friday night the LCT Trailblazers and their parents blazed the candlelit trail as they were treated to a spectacular show of stars and a full moon rising. They crunched their way in the new dry snow down to the frozen beaver pond lined with luminaries. The candlelight highlighted the dazzling display of Great Blue Heron nests sitting high up in the trees like something out of a Dr. Seuss book. The constellations were easy to see as the kids stepped out into the middle of the pond. Like at the beach, the kids wrote their names in the snow or just lay down to make snow angels while gazing up at the sky. The cold clear weather made the bonfire at the end of the hike even more rewarding – with hot chocolate, cookies and roasted marshmallows. The bright colors of the children's snow gear vied with the colors of their wide eyes and rosy cheeks.

The festivities and clear weather continued into Saturday night for another evening of magic! Along with the hike guests were treated to over 6 varieties of chili (from hot to hotter), hors d'oeuvres and salad, homemade desserts, and libations. The biggest surprise of the evening was entertainment by the Blue Grass band, Railroad Dawgs. The lively crowd went from tapping their feet to swinging on the makeshift dance floor. Laughter was heard well into the night as hikers, illuminated by candles and stars, went back and forth to the frozen beaver pond. Some opted to snowshoe and other X-country skied, but whatever the means, the results were magical.

If you missed the Full Moon Hike this year, look for it next year on a bright snowy full moon night!

Maryellen Mullins

PRESIDENT'S PAGE

THANKS AND PRAISE RICHLY DESERVED

Former Canton Land Trust Director **Arthur Sweeton and his wife Eunice** have generously given the Canton Land Trust two

parcels of land in North Canton. The triangular piece of property formed by the two Sweeton parcels together with the one given to the Land Trust by Joan Kenney in 2002 makes an excellent contiguous addition to the preserved land near the Big Down Marsh, which borders the Barkhamsted Land Trust Preserve. This property was also donated by the Sweetons.

Arthur Sweeton first became familiar with the land given to the Barkhamsted Land Trust when his grandparents bought it. Arthur remembers a portable steam-powered sawmill there; water for the steam was provided by the stream that runs through the property. As a youth, Arthur got to know all the forestland in that area and has many fond memories of it. His grandparents left him the original piece, and when the two North Canton parcels came up for sale (the ones now given to our Land Trust), he purchased them. The land is bordered by Lavander Road to the east and Derby Road to the south. Derby Road is a continuation of Stage Coach Road, an abandoned road that begins on Cherry Brook Road, North Canton.

We are very appreciative of all that the Sweetons have done, and continue to do, for the Land Trust. They serve as an inspirational example and incentive to past and potential benefactors. Their generosity, knowledge, and support have added greatly to the Land Trust's ability to pursue its goals.

HELP LAND TRUST AT NO COST TO YOU

We thank all our members who are already SBC (formerly SNET) **Community Connection Members**. Because of them the amount that SBC contributes to the Canton Land Trust has become quite significant. For those of you who are not SBC Community Connection members, but are SBC All Distance subscribers (or if you switch to SBC), we would be most grateful if you would join. It is very easy to do:

- Call Community Connections number 1 800 635-7638.
- Give the representative your name, phone number, and 3-digit code at the end of the account number on your bill.
- Give our name, Canton Land Conservation Trust, and our group organization number: 3506.

You can also sign up on line; go to www.sbc.com/community. Click Community Service and follow their directions. By doing this, *you will be helping us raise money at absolutely no cost to you*. Some members have been enrolled for well over two years and none have reported any adverse consequences (telemarketing calls etc.). It's a welcome surprise to find a "no strings attached" benefit like this. Thanks in advance for your help.

Betty Stanley

TROUBLE IN THE FOREST

Under the spreading chestnut-tree
The village smithy stands:
The smith, a mighty man is he,
With large and sinewy hands;
And the muscles on his brawny arms
Are strong as iron bands.

Although chestnut sprouts persist throughout our area, where are the majestic trees immortalized by Longfellow in his poem “The Village Blacksmith”? The American chestnut (*Castanea dentate*) is all but absent as a forest tree today. One hundred years ago, the American chestnut was the dominant hardwood tree in Connecticut. Growing to one hundred feet or more and with a diameter exceeding ten feet, American chestnut was called the “redwood of the east.” Much sought after for its wood, chestnut was easily split, structurally strong and decay resistant. Chestnut trees were also a valuable resource for many wildlife species. Early in the twentieth century Oriental chestnut trees, such as the Japanese chestnut (*C. crenata*) were brought into botanical gardens in the northeastern states. These trees carried a fungus that attacked the American chestnuts. Within 40 years, the “**Chestnut Blight**” had spread throughout the chestnut’s range from Maine to Mississippi. It was one of the worst natural disasters in our nation’s history. Oddly enough, the fungus does not kill the trees’ roots and, to this day, chestnut saplings persist in our woods. These trees grow until the smooth bark of the sapling becomes rough, at which time fungal spores, lying dormant in the ground for years, attack the young trees and kill them. On a positive note, recent research has offered promise with the appearance of a non-virulent strain of the fungus that causes remission in infected chestnuts. Injecting this strain into healthy European chestnut trees provided them with an immunity to the lethal strain of the fungus and this approach was successfully employed throughout Europe when the blight eventually arrived there, sparing European chestnuts from the fate that befell the chestnuts here. To date, this approach has not worked in North America although scientists continue to work at developing a blight-resistant hybrid between American and European chestnuts. These efforts offer hope that some day American chestnuts may again grow tall in Connecticut woodlands, although this magnificent tree may never again return to its dominant place in the forest.

Along with the saga of the chestnut, most of us are familiar with the story of the American elm (*Ulmus Americana*). This stately tree once shaded the streets of Connecticut cities and towns (New Haven is still called The Elm City) and was a common tree along the streets of Collinsville. **Dutch Elm Disease**, a fungus carried on the back of a bark beetle has killed some 77 million American elms since its accidental introduction from Europe in 1930.

Sadly, chestnut and elm are not the only common forest trees now under attack. Much has been written about the **hemlock wooly adelgid** since it first appeared in Connecticut. Originally from Japan, this small insect has been in the American west since the 1920s, apparently doing no damage to western hemlocks. It was first noticed in the east in the mid Atlantic states where it began attacking Carolina hemlocks. Moving north, it was

noticed in 1985, when eastern hemlock (*Tsuga Canadensis*) trees in the lower Connecticut River valley began to lose their needles and die. Since 1985 the adelgids have moved throughout Connecticut and north into Massachusetts. It is anticipated that the insect will eventually cover the entire range of the eastern hemlock, even continuing north into Canada. The eastern hemlock is a valuable tree species that shades stream banks throughout our area. As an example of the intricate interrelationships that exist within the natural world, fishermen are greatly concerned that a loss of streamside hemlocks will cause a rise in stream temperatures in northwest Connecticut. Those streams are prime spawning grounds for native trout that require colder water temperatures for their eggs and young. It may not be obvious that a crucial relationship exists between an introduced insect from Japan that preys on hemlock needles and the health of trout fisheries. Yet this is just one of the many examples of how we can inadvertently affect the world in which we live.

Much as the demise of the American chestnut changed our landscape, the loss of the eastern hemlock could be as great a loss to the forests here in northwest Connecticut. Fortunately, it appears that some hemlock trees seem to be resistant to the adelgid. Where several large hemlocks in a forest patch may succumb, neighboring trees may show no effects! Scientists at the Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station have had limited success with the release of small beetles that are predators of the adelgid in their native Japan, but this has not worked over very large areas. Homeowners may protect individual trees or hemlock hedgerows in and around their yards by contacting a licensed arborist to treat their trees. This must be done annually. Unfortunately, current methods of treatment are not successful in a forest situation, and scientists continue to seek other natural methods with which to combat the adelgid.

Interestingly enough, there is evidence that several thousand years ago, hemlocks may have been absent from Connecticut forests for a period of several hundred years. Such information is provided by **paleobotanists**, scientists who study the presence or absence of pollen grains in sediments found beneath a lake or some other body of water. These pollen grains can be dated and provide a long-running record of Connecticut tree species over thousands of years since the end of the last Ice Age. One wonders what may have affected the hemlocks in that earlier time and how they came to return as a dominant tree in our forests.

Today there is concern over a number of our forest tree species including ash, dogwood, American beech, sugar maple, and sycamore. Connecticut is also on the lookout for the **Asian long-horned beetle**, an insect pest that was discovered in New York City in 1996 and is capable of doing much damage to a variety of tree species. Perhaps the greatest concern, however, is for our oak trees. These “heirs” to the American chestnut are now the dominant hardwood trees in our forests. Large numbers of oaks have been dying in California’s coastal counties. The epidemic, referred to as **Sudden Oak Death**, was first seen on oaks in Marin County (north of San Francisco) in 1995. In 2000 University of California researchers isolated a previously unknown fungus-like organism from dying trees. Relatives of this “fungus” caused the infamous Irish potato famine. This new species has been officially named *Phytophthora ramorum*. Although it can be spread

through infected wood or soil, the most important way in which humans move this pathogen around is by moving infected plants. Last year the pathogen was found on rhododendrons brought into Connecticut as nursery stock. Although there have been no reports of sudden oak death in Connecticut forests to date, scientists and foresters are on the lookout for this west coast invader.

Our forests provide us with a great many products. They are important to us as well as to the many creatures that call them home. There is no guarantee that our forests will remain unchanged in years to come. In fact, change is a part of the forest's natural history. Connecticut's forests have been changing for thousands of years. As one dominant species declines, another takes its place. This spring, take a walk along one of the beautiful Land Trust trails and look at the hemlocks and oaks. Can you imagine what this forest might look like twenty, fifty, or one hundred years into the future?

What would this forest look like if one or more of today's tree species were suddenly removed from this habitat? Now take the next step; take a walk in someone else's shoes. Try to imagine how people felt two generations ago as they watched their elm and chestnut trees disappear from the landscape.

Jay Kaplan

RELATED EVENTS

FREE LECTURES AT ROARING BROOK NATURE CENTER

If you felt enlightened by "Trouble in the Forest," by Jay Kaplan, these lectures may appeal:

Animal Encounters in the Farmington Valley: Snakes, Bobcats and Bears, Oh My!

Thursday, April 14, 7:30 PM

Our Gardens and Our Health

Thursday, May 19, 7:30 PM

The lectures listed above are part of the Nature Center's ongoing program **Health Concerns and Risks in the Farmington Valley**, funded by the Canton Community Health Fund.

Ted Cowles



JOEL STAUB MEMORIAL BENCH

When you walk the Ray Smith Trail in the Mary Conklin Preserve this spring, rest a moment on the attractive pink granite bench alongside the bridge and babbling brook.

Joel and Carolyn Staub moved to Canton in 1985 because of its wonderful woodlands. When Joel heard that the Land Trust was planning a trail in the Preserve, he offered his trusty chain saw to help with the heavy work of cutting and clearing. After the trail's completion he and Carolyn walked and snow shod there many times along with their faithful golden retriever Mrs. Honey Bear.

When Joel died suddenly in 2002 Carolyn decided to provide an appropriate memorial that would remind us of Joel's love of the Canton woodlands, streams, and mountain laurel. A durable bench on the Ray Smith Trail seemed the perfect remembrance.

LETTER BOX NOTES

Dick Swibold

On several of the CLCT trails we have placed boxes with paper binders and pencils inside to encourage visitors to write personal comments they might want to express. A couple of weeks ago, while walking in the

Mary Conklin Preserve, **Chris Williams** found a binder that had gotten wet. It had frozen into an ice block of personal thoughts. She brought it home and thawed it out. In it she found a truly poignant thank you note to Mary Conklin; it illustrates how much gifts made to the Land Trust are appreciated on a personal level. The note reads as follows:

*8/24/04, a perfect summer day. Warm sun, cool breeze. My name is **Melissa Washburn**. My dad built the big gray house with the pointy roof at 147 Indian Hill Road. I lived there for the first 19 years of my life. Mary Conklin and my father were good friends and I grew up exploring these woods. Being able to return to them and experience the sounds and smells of my young life is an incredible blessing.*

They say you can never go home again and I've found that to be true for the most part. However, I have found a sense of peace on these beautifully maintained trails that feels a lot like home. I also find comfort in knowing that I will be able to return here for years to come (thanks to Mary's unwillingness to allow this forest to be developed) and experience this home-ness whenever I come back.

Thank you! And be well.

Melissa (Old Town, Maine)

A few frozen pages later, Chris found this brief but equally enthusiastic message:

10/10/04 This is so awesome – Thank you, Mary Conklin!

These very personal sentiments reassure Land Trust members that preservation of the natural world is worthy of our efforts. People clearly need these special places and appreciate them.

WHAT? CLEAR CUT?

In the summer of 1999 the Canton Land Trust decided to make a “selective cutting” on a portion of the 100 acre Wilson Smith Tree Farm on Doyle Road. Part of the area under consideration consisted of a several-acre stand of white pine. It had been severely decimated by a windstorm that had taken off the tops of most of the tall pines. Our consulting forester, **Jim Gillespie**, advised us that because of severe damage the forest was unlikely to recover as before, and that on this four-acre section it should be “clear cut,” thus creating a more “even age forest.”

Jim also thought it would be a good idea to enclose this cleared area with a solar-powered electric fence consisting of seven tiers of wire. The fence would screen the area from a large number of hungry deer and it would allow both Jim and the CLCT to observe and follow the natural unhindered growth of young forest. Jim offered to supply the solar components and to install the fence at his expense and with his labor. It was completed in 1999. The new growth seems to be thriving, just as Jim said it would.

In a recent article in The Hartford Courant, Jim presented strong arguments for preserving the diversity of Connecticut forests. During the past three decades expanding development has significantly reduced the state’s forests, and many of our forests today consist mainly of mature hardwoods. “The forest is a habitat for a diverse mix of wildlife. What is not well known is the importance of forests of differing ages for specific wildlife. Young forests, for example, provide more cover and food, such as berries, for many species and especially birds,” he said.

Our young forest at the Tree Farm has seen dramatic growth during the past 5 years. When you hike the Charlotte Craig Trail, take notice of this new growth in the cleared area to your left as you climb the lower section of the trail.

Ted Cowles

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PHOTO CONTEST

A short trip westward on Route 44 from the new Shoppes to the construction of the commuter parking lot and the intersection reconfiguration with Route 179 will show you that there are a lot of changes going on in Canton. There are also a great number of natural changes taking place on the Land

Trust trails every day. Spring will become summer, longer days will bring shorter nights, and tadpoles will become frogs.



Chris Williams

The photo contest theme this year celebrates change. The Land Trust is asking photographers to explore the changes, obvious and subtle, that are evolving all around us. The photo selected as best in show will be awarded a traditional symbol and gauge of change -- a sundial.

We are also looking for a photo to don the cover of our forthcoming brochure. That photo may not necessarily be the photo judged best in show.

All photos must be 8 x 10 and accompanied by a self-addressed stamped envelope for entries' return. Please send to: CLCT, Box 41, Canton Center, CT 06020-0041. Deadline for submission is September 7, 2005. See our website for more details.

This year's juror is **David Girardin**. He began his career as an armed forces photographer and continued his education at the New York School of Photography. After many years of studio work, his interest turned to the natural world. His work has appeared in many magazines and he has exhibited at the Connecticut Audubon in Sharon, the White Memorial in Litchfield, and most recently at the Ethel Walker School, Simsbury.

THIS NEWS JUST IN: **Brad Gilchrist**, the local cartoonist who created our appealing Trail Blazer Workbook, is currently at work on a cartoon that concentrates on the environment. He plans to launch it on the internet on Earth Day, 2005, and hopes that it will be picked up for syndication. Watch for it and join us in wishing him good luck.

SPRING CALENDAR 2005

- April 6,13,20,27 4:30** Work parties will meet every Wed. afternoon at 4:30 for maintenance, construction and miscellaneous spring cleanup at Land Trust properties. Call Betty Stanley 693-2074 for location and details.
- April and May** Trail Blazer activity will be announced via flyers at Canton Schools.
- May 7 9 - 1** Volunteers needed at Smith Xmas Tree Farm for clearing and cleanup.
- 14 9 - 1** Plant seedlings.
- June 5** Annual hike, meeting, supper. Details TBA via website.
- June and July 5:00** Miscellaneous work at various sites as required. Check website for locations and dates.