



CANTON LAND CONSERVATION TRUST, INC

SPRING 2010
NEWSLETTER

Sounds at Vernal Pools Signal Spring

The days leading up to and including the Easter weekend were nothing short of spectacular weatherwise. Daytime temperatures on the weekend rose to within a single degree of the record for those dates. Spring wildflowers that usually open in late April burst forth and butterflies flitted across lawns. The evenings were not too shabby either, and as I sat at my computer next to an open window the sounds of spring peepers wafted across the road from a small wetland. The spring peeper, or *Pseudocris crucifer* if one cares to be scientific, is our smallest frog, a member of the chorus frog family. Each spring, when temperatures rise into the upper 40's, these tiny frogs roust themselves from winter dormancy and head towards the same bodies of water used by their ancestors for generations. The water body near my house is called a "vernal pool", and it beckons not only the spring peepers, but a sizeable population of wood frogs and small numbers of spotted salamanders. The word "vernal" means spring, and these water bodies are often mere depressions in the woods that fill up with water from melting snow or heavy spring rains. They are ephemeral, meaning that by mid-summer they often have dried up, leaving an area of mud, sticks and dead leaves where the pool had been. Because the pools are dry for more than half the year, fish cannot live in them. Lacking fish predators that would feed heavily on frog eggs or small tadpoles, vernal pools make ideal habitats in which frogs and other creatures can lay their eggs and in which their young can develop. Not only wood frogs and spring peepers, but gray tree frogs, American toads and several salamander species have depended upon vernal pools for long before the first Native Americans set foot upon our soil.

Vernal pools, however, are far less numerous than they were when I first moved to Canton. Besieged by development, pollution, and changes in how we use the land, many of these pools have vanished or are no longer suitable for the frogs and other creatures that depend upon them. Frogs do us a great service, eating millions of insects annually. The Canton Land Conservation Trust properties contain a number of important vernal pools. The Mary B. Conklin and Joe D. Pratt Onion Mountain Preserves and the Uplands property are but some of the Land Trust holdings that include vernal pools. Some of these parcels are home to more unusual amphibians including marbled, and possibly, Jefferson's salamanders. At a time when some leading scientists think that perhaps one in three amphibian species now face extinction, it is imperative that we protect our vernal pools as well as the upland habitats that surround them.

For many of us, the calls of frogs are an important harbinger of spring. Like daylight savings time, robins on the lawn pulling worms, and the first crack of a baseball against a wooden bat, these are things that, in times of uncertainty, tell us that all is right with the world. Frogs also serve as important environmental indicators that provide us with cues as to the health of our land and water. When vernal pools disappear along with their accompanying frog populations, as they sadly have done in some areas of our country, it is not generally considered a good thing. Sitting here, enjoying the sound of the spring peepers, I know that I do not take their calls for granted. I hope that you feel the same.

Submitted by Jay Kaplan

Stewardship Committee Needs Your Help!

Now that spring has arrived and people are returning to the Land Trust's trails, the Land Trust's Stewardship Committee is asking for help from hikers to report any trail maintenance needs. For example, winter blowdowns, storm related damage, trail erosion, safety concerns, reblazing, etc. require prompt attention for the 2010 season. Members of the Committee would appreciate being informed of the problems so that they can be quickly remedied. If you become aware of a maintenance issue on one of the Land Trust's properties, please send an email noting the problem to Mike Gotaski @ m.gotaski@comcast.net. Thank you.

TRAIL NEWS AND UPDATES

- Eagle Scout James Solomon finished his Eagle project of building a new trail on the Sweetheart Mountain property. Stewardship committee members Sarah Faulkner and John Pech were involved in oversight and guidance of the project. The new trail adds approximately 1.5 miles to the Sweetheart Mountain trail system. The new trail is marked with a Yellow blaze with red dot.
- The Stewardship committee has been active in prioritizing 2010 activities to maintain and upgrade CLCT properties. In the Uplands Preserve, Rob Sigman, Ted Cowles, and Doug Williams have been active in boundary marking and performing basic layout for some new trails. Doug Williams and Steve Mitchell have cut the first section of a trail in the Uplands Preserve. Access to the Uplands Preserve is from the cul-de-sac on Uplands Dr. Doug and Steve have started the trail just inside this access point and have continued it several hundred feet from the south property line up and onto a rocky promontory. This outcropping is a nice spot to stop and take in the views to the south and east. There are plans to continue trail building in a large loop around the preserve as well as several interior trails.

CAPEN CABIN

It seems only a short while ago that we reported that the Capen Cabin's pump house was rebuilt as the result of an Eagle Scout project. Now we have two new developments.

Eric Vaillancourt, who assisted Ted Cowles in building the Fred Swan bridge two years ago, has decided to work on his Eagle badge by restoring the "two hole" outhouse on the Capen property. This will be a most interesting and worthwhile project. I won't describe the condition of the building other than to say the floor is not what one would call stable.

The Land Trust has agreed to let Sean McAlindin (son of Board member Scott McAlindin) stay as a temporary resident at the Cabin while doing some writing. He will be acting as an overseer as well as helping with maintenance projects on of the property. In order to provide reliable heat in the cabin the Land Trust has purchased a used Vermont Castings stove. It will be available in the future when scouting or other groups use the building.

The building was constructed in the 1930's by several notable leaders in the greater Hartford community and used as a "getaway" on weekends. Built in a rustic Adirondack type style it is rather unique in that it has pocket windows which slide horizontally into the walls

March 23, 2010 Annual Dinner

On March 23, 2010, the Canton Land Conservation Trust held its annual Members' Dinner at the La Trattoria Restaurant in Canton. Margery Winters, a Naturalist at the Roaring Brook Nature Center was the guest speaker. She delivered a very informative and interesting presentation entitled "Saving our Wild Areas—One Yard at a Time." Margery addressed various issues involving residential land use, including over use of fertilizers and weed killers.

The Members' Dinner also included a silent auction. About 30 prizes were auctioned. The prizes were donated by Canton merchants, restaurants and Land Trust members. The Land Trust gratefully thanks our donors for their gifts.

The assembled members enjoyed themselves while supporting the Land Trust's mission.

WHIP Grant will Aid in Field Maintenance

The Land Trust will be enhancing and maintaining open fields on two of its properties using matching grant funding obtained through the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP), a program administered by the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).

We will be working on fields at the Mary Conklin and Sun Wind and Woodland Preserves off Indian Hill and Breezy Hill Roads, respectively. Our work will take place over several years, and we will be reimbursed for the expense as each phase of the project is completed. This spring we plan to remove trees that have grown into the fields, prepare seedbeds where necessary and plant warm season grasses. Later in the year we will remove invasive species that are proliferating around the edges of the fields, including winged euonymus, Japanese barberry and oriental bittersweet. After August 1, the fields will be mowed. Control of invasives is a three year process, and the field mowing will take place each year.

We have been interviewing contractors experienced in WHIP projects and hope to start the work in the next month. The grant contract is a great opportunity for us to do needed maintenance at a reduced cost to the Land Trust.

Trailblazers

Mother Nature did her best to challenge us this year. We managed to get some great hiking in but we also canceled a few outings due to weather. We were disappointed to lose the Annual Full Moon Hike, with over 300 luminaries ready and gallons of chili already prepared, but trail and road conditions were just not suitable for a dark winter evening gathering. Our annual Sledding day at Cherry Brook Farm also was lost. While we did get some snow this year, it seemed like it was never in the right place at the right time.

We did have some great days, including having fun orienteering and hiking with Santa at the Winsor Woods. Most recently the kids were treated to the daytime version of the full moon hike. The Smith Family was kind enough to allow us to hike to their beautiful horse farm on a mild day in March. A gentle hike through the Breezy Hill Farm was rewarded with not only seeing the horses, but also a glimpse of a cowboy, cowgirl, sheep, moose and bear. Mother Nature cooperated fully this time with warm weather and sunshine.

As the Trailblazer season comes to a close, spring sports, outdoor outings and school trips have begun. We hope that you will keep your Trailblazer Activity Book handy and get out your colorful headbands and enjoy the many trails of the Canton Land Trust.

Please remember to check for ticks after the warm weather hikes and as always "Take nothing but pictures, and leave nothing but footprints".



I'd like to volunteer my time and talents to the Canton Land Conservation Trust. What could I do?

- Join a Work Party! You might help build a new trail, mark an existing one, assist with trail maintenance, or build footbridges or other structures.
- Design or supervise a woodland game or experience for adults or children.
- Write articles for publication in local newspapers, our newsletter or our website.
- Walk borders of a parcel and post CLCT boundary markers.
- Create, edit or enhance maps of our trails or properties.
- Find notable flora on our properties and tell about them.
- Lead or participate in a search for and abatement of evasive plants.
- Lecture on a topic of conservation.
- Research history or condition of any of our properties and report.
- Update our catalog of large property holdings in Canton that may have notable conservation values.
- Prepare or contribute to photographic slide shows or essays of our properties.
- Run or contribute to a blog of current animal sightings on our properties.
- Make signs or banners for CLCT events, trails or properties.
- Design, lead or staff fund raising activities.
- Follow developments of or participate in activities of a particular state, regional or national conservation organization and alert CLCT officers of items of pertinence.
- Lead a hike using your particular area of expertise—birds, wild flowers, amphibians, notable trees etc.
- Tell us about speakers who would interest you for an evening meeting or our annual meeting.

Find us at www.cantonlandtrust.org



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SPRING/SUMMER 2010 CALENDAR

- Sat. April 24** 9:00am Prepare ground and place flags/plot for Christmas tree seedlings
Smith Tree Farm Doyle Rd
- Sat. May 1** 9:00am Plant Christmas Tree seedlings--Event in conjunction with
Trailblazers seedling planting event
Smith Tree Farm Doyle Rd
- Sat. May 1** 9:00am Work Party/trail maintenance
Meet at Cherry Brook Grocery
- Sun. June 6** 2:00pm Walk and talk by "Wildman" Steve Brill
4:00pm Annual Meeting and Potluck
Roaring Brook Nature Center, Gracey Road