



The Steep Rock *VISTA* Fall 2007

Changes on the Board of Trustees

At the Annual Meeting of the Board of Trustees held in May of this year, **Robby Barnett**, **Waddy Davidson**, **Wendell Minor** and **Susie Payne** stepped down from the Board.

Robby Barnett was probably the most important person in the process of updating our trails maps. He knows every trail in our three reservations. In order to verify the locations of the trails, to make our maps as accurate as possible, he walked each one with a hand held GPS unit. He helped enormously with the design of the maps as well as serving on the Stewardship and Picnic Committees.

In addition to serving on the Finance & Investment Committee, and helping with our Annual Appeal, Waddy Davidson was an active member of the Stewardship Committee. He could be counted on to help out at any trail workday.

Wendell Minor designed our beautiful logo, capturing the beauty and essence of the reservations with his simple elegant rendering.

Susie Payne is a veteran of 17 years as a Trustee. First elected in 1990, Susie became Vice President and Chair of the Preservation Committee in 1996. During her tenure as Preservation Committee Chair, Steep Rock realized an unprecedented period of land acquisition through Conservation Easements.

Steep Rock By Laws stipulate that after serving two three year terms, Trustees must step down from the Board and become members of the Council for at least one year, after which they may be reelected to the Board. **Chick Treadway**, **John Herrmann** and **Kirsten Peckerman** were elected to the Board after one year off, and **Joe Gitterman** after four.

Chick Treadway will Chair the Land Preservation Committee, on which he has served for several years.

John Herrmann has remained active on the Investment Committee during his year off and has agreed to be its Chair.

Kirsten Peckerman is a member of several Steep Rock Committees including Trails and Stewardship. She remained active while she was a Council member and we welcome her back as a Trustee.

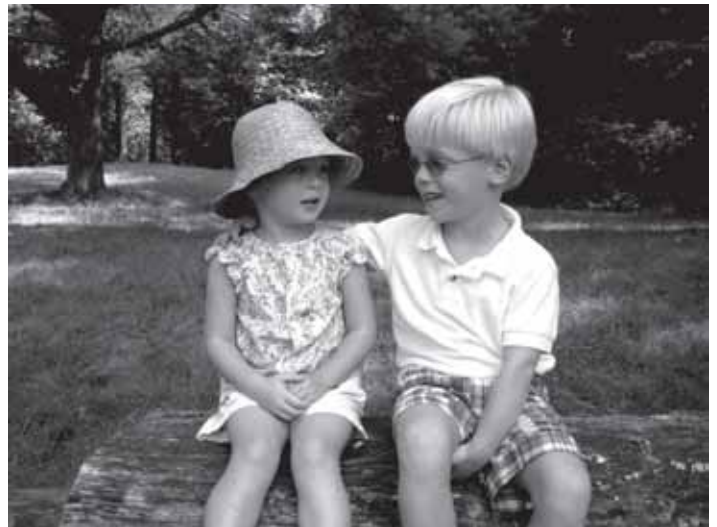
Changes on the Board, cont.

Joe Gitterman returns to the Board after four years as a Council member. He served as a Trustee from 1997—2003.

Kirsten Feldman, a member of the Land Preservation Committee, was elected to her first three year term on the Board, after filling out the term of Benedict Silverman, who resigned in 2006.

Ray Reich joins the Board for the first time. Ray is well known in Washington. He recently retired from teaching at the Gunnery School. He is an active participant in town affairs, most notably on the Parks and Recreation Committee. He's the one selling 4th of July t-shirts in front of the food market. We're delighted to have Ray on the Board.

2007 Picnic



The next generation. Katharine Natalie Dyer Benson, 3 3/4 years old, and John Houldin, 4 years old, share a quiet moment at the Steep Rock Picnic. Hilary Houldin photo.

It was another hot September day, but 400 people showed up for our Annual Picnic anyway. Bill Fairbairn and Jane Conn were co-chairs of the Picnic Committee, and all the current members of the Board of Trustees pitched in to make it a memorable day. Students from the Gunnery School helped us set up tables and came back later in the day to help clean up.

Reed Canary Grass Threatens Macricostas Fields

By Peary Stafford

The Macricostas Preserve, like virtually every natural area in the Northeast, faces a huge threat from a host of invasive plant species. Garlic Mustard, Multiflora Rose, Autumn Olive, Japanese Honeysuckle, Barberry and Winged Euonymus are some of the more familiar alien plants that find our land hospitable and threaten to displace our native species. At Macricostas, we have them all and we're pushing back as hard as we can.

Unfortunately, Macricostas is also host to another particularly insidious invasive plant, *Phalaris arundinacea*, or Reed Canary Grass (RCG). In the picture to the right, it forms the light areas that cover the low-lying meadow and extend partially up the hill. *Phalaris* is a rhizomatous plant, meaning that it increases its coverage area by extending its roots, then sprouting shoots from the new root tips. In so doing, it forms thick soil-covering mats of roots that preclude anything else from growing in the area. Additionally, the established plants produce prodigious seed-heads and the wind-carried seeds can easily establish new colonies many yards away from the point of origin. Nothing lives in this stuff; no birds, no insects, no native plants. Not even small mammals can move through the tightly compacted stems. As such, it constitutes one of the gravest threats to the wildlife of the area. Left unchecked, it would turn the meadow into a monocultural hayfield bereft of wildlife.

If that's not enough, one of the heaviest infestations of RCG is taking over the "Boardwalk Meadow" or the area north of Adam's Bridge. That particular spot is probably the most biologically diverse of any area in all the parts of Steep Rock; Bronze Copper, a state-threatened butterfly, and Alder Flycatcher, a state-threatened bird, both depend upon the native vegetation in this area. Unusual plants; Nodding Ladies' Tresses (a native orchid), Closed and Fringed Gentians, and Turtlehead – the host plant for the gorgeous butterfly Baltimore Checkerspot – are also being forced out by the creep of this plant.



Reed Canary Grass threatening to take over the boardwalk field at Macricostas Preserve.

So it's up to us to save this wonderful place and our native wildlife. Fortunately, RCG has an Achilles heel in that, true to its aggressive nature, it sprouts in the Spring before nearly anything else. Our plan is to hit it early (mid-April) without disturbing the other plants in the area or those in the seedbed. This year, we'll take a measured approach; tackling only the areas in the boardwalk area, waiting to see how effective our methods are. Studies on these control methods in Minnesota and Wisconsin suggest that we can beat it back by 75-95% in the first year, but we'll need persistence and determination to get rid of it for good.

Wish us luck! The animals, birds, insects, and plants that are such a wonderful part of Macricostas need your support.



Bronze Copper (female), photographed at the Macricostas Preserve

Treat the earth well. It was not given to you by your parents. It was loaned to you by your children.
Kenyan Proverb

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Fiscal Year October 1, 2006 to September 30, 2007

We are most grateful to the following members for their support during our last fiscal year .

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SR 36ers: The Steep Rock Challenge

The Steep Rock Challenge is to walk all 36 miles of trails in the three preserves (Hidden Valley, Steep Rock and Macricostas) and become a "36er". With a donation of \$36.00 participants will receive a map of each preserve. Participants will mark and date each trail as they walk it and when they have completed the 36 miles, present the maps at the Steep Rock office (860-868-9131). They'll be awarded a Steep Rock 36er cap and listed in our newsletter and on our website.

The money we raise from the challenge will be used to keep our trails in good condition.

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Managing Small Habitats for Wildlife

By Natalie Dyer

The three preserves of Steep Rock are blessed with an incredible diversity of habitat. The rivers, thickets, forests and meadows provide food, water, shelter and space, all for the benefit of our native wildlife. But change is constant and often has a negative impact on our ecosystems and the habitats within them. The Stewardship and Natural Resources Committees are constantly working on ways to become better habitat managers by developing an awareness of these changes, both natural and man-made, and reacting to them.

In Steep Rock near the riding ring, a number of youthful, energetic students from the Taft School in Watertown recently cleared a large area of invasive plants. You may have noticed the enormous piles of Bittersweet, Winged Euonymus, Honeysuckle and the like before they were burned. Many native plants will reseed the cleared area on their own, but we decided to give them a boost by planting native shrubs as well. Shrubs form a critical habitat as they provide cover from predators, nesting sites for songbirds, and food for wildlife throughout the seasons. Near the old foundation we planted Shadblow (*Amelanchier alnifolia*). The blossoms of this shrub are the first to dot the Spring hillsides and they're named for their tendency to bloom about the time that the shad run in the Connecticut rivers. They provide nectar for the early insects and later in the year furnish berries for birds and wildlife.

The bright red stems of the six Red-twig Dogwoods (*Cornus sericea*), planted lower down in a damper area, will be most noticeable in the winter landscape. This species of native Dogwood also possesses high wildlife value, especially for wild turkeys. Nearby are the six Buttonbush shrubs (*Cephalanthus occidentalis*). Buttonbush is a useful nectar plant as the flowers attract bees and such species of butterflies as Tiger Swallowtails and Fritillaries. Their flowerheads provide seeds for ground feeding birds throughout the winter. Undigested seeds from the berries of these shrub species will be spread throughout the preserve by wildlife.

Another habitat project is the butterfly garden planted this past spring near the parking area in the Macricostas Preserve, much to the delight of many species of butterflies and those who observe them. Shrubs such as Butterflybush, Buttonbush, Pepperbush and Bluebeard (*Caryopteris*) as well as annuals and perennials provide a plentiful supply of nectar for these colorful insects.



Three monarchs visiting The butterfly garden at the Macricostas Preserve. The garden was planted this spring and has been such a success that we plan to enlarge it. Peary Stafford photo.

Most of the flowers are broad-headed and better suited for butterflies that feed while perching. Bee Brook provides water and the adjacent meadows have many of the native plants necessary for feeding the larvae when they hatch. The garden has been such a success that there is talk of expansion.

To learn more about habitat restoration, Susan Branson, Clark Gifford and I attended a workshop at Sessions Woods Wildlife Management Area in Burlington Connecticut in June. It was led by wildlife biologist Peter Picone who stressed the importance of removing the invasive plants and replacing them with natives that have co-evolved with the wildlife dependent on them. He showed us many examples of native trees, shrubs and vines that provide for wildlife throughout the four seasons. He emphasized the importance of mimicking nature's structural diversity, vertically as well as horizontally, for the greatest diversity of habitats.

The four layers of the forest ecosystem consist of the upper canopy trees, smaller trees, shrubs, and mosses, ferns and groundcovers below. Horizontally, there should be a gradual progression of plants, and shrubs from fields and meadows to the forest. Peter pointed out examples of such structure when guiding us through Sessions Wood's Backyard Wildlife Habitat Area and demonstrated how natural communities can be restored even in the small landscapes of homeowners. We encourage you to take advantage of the many resources available to learn about backyard habitat restoration and to make our piece of the world a more balanced part of the natural community. (Google Backyard Wildlife Habitats for information)

As Aldo Leopold wrote in "The Sand County Almanac" published back in 1949, "When we see the land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect."

Monarch Tagging Day at Macricostas Preserve

The weather wasn't exactly cooperative on the morning of September 22, but the parents, children and grandchildren, more than 25 in all, who came to the Macricostas Preserve still found some monarch butterflies to tag and release.

Rich Chyinski from the CT Butterfly Association and Steep Rock Trustee Peary Stafford described the procedure, showed how to catch the butterflies and then tagged the ones that participants caught. After the butterflies were tagged, the children released them.

This program is sponsored by the University of Kansas and is designed to track and promote awareness of monarch migration. Check out their website for more information on this fascinating natural phenomenon. (www.monarchwatch.org)



Participants in the butterfly tagging program watch intently as Rich Chyinski tags a Monarch.



Pointing to a Monarch that's been tagged and released.

Plans For Middle Field Restoration Continues

By Clark Gifford, Land Manager

For those of you who don't know, Middle Field is located in the center of the clamshell and can be seen from the top of Steep Rock. In the early 1900's this area was pasture. It had almost completely reverted back to forest, when in the late 1990's the Steep Rock Association began to turn the area back into a field. This fall the project continues.

To continue the transition from forest back to field we have a few more things to do. When the trees were cut down, the stumps were left in place, and much of the brush was chipped and spread throughout the area. There are still over a hundred stumps in the field, making it difficult to maintain. The first step, using our new backhoe, is to remove the stumps. Very little to nothing is growing where the wood chips were spread, so we will remove the chips to expose soil where herbaceous plants and shrubs can take root.

Along with the stumps and chips, there are multiple piles of 16 to 20 foot logs. These logs will be used to construct "wildlife piles" around the outside of the field near the forest edge. These piles will benefit many species of wildlife including rabbit, raccoons, opossums, turkeys and other types of birds. It also benefits predators that are in search of the animals that use these piles.

Once the stumps are removed, the chips picked up, and the log piles relocated, we will then wait and see what grows in the newly disturbed areas. We will monitor the area for both invasive and native species. We will encourage native plants to grow and flourish. If invasive species move in, we will remove them. The end result will be a field comprised of native grasses, shrubs and wildflowers that can provide food and shelter for wildlife through all four seasons.



Middle Field, Steep Rock Reservation

Steep Rock Association

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Washington Horse Show 2007

The return of the Washington Horse Show this year was a resounding success. Seventy-five riders entered the competition. The jumping classes were held in and outside the riding ring, providing a beautiful site for the many spectators who attended. This year's show had some exciting new additions. There were pairs classes (two riders) and hunt team classes (three riders) ridden over the outside jumping course, and a Steep Rock Challenge class that tested the competitors' trail riding skills. More than one hundred people enjoyed a delicious lunch served under a ringside tent.

Marguerite Starr and Sue Judge, Co-Chairs of the show, and Sarah Dalton-Morris, the Show Manager, were thrilled with its success and are already making plans for next year.



A competitor is awarded her 1st place blue ribbon at the 2007 Washington Horse Show.

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