

# The Steep Rock *VISTA*

The Newsletter of the Steep Rock Association

Spring 1999

## Letter from the President

My hat is off to all of you who helped make 1998 a banner year for Steep Rock. Thanks in great part to your membership contributions, we were able to:

- Refurbish a quarter of a mile of eroding river.
- Construct two new parking areas, and
- Reinforce the bridge in Hidden Valley.

You'll see pictures of several of these projects throughout this issue of *VISTA*.

Our plans for this year include:

- Restoring the badly eroded Mitchell Hole Trail.
- Continuing to open up the Middle Field, so that when you look down from the top of Steep Rock, you will get a sense of what that pasture looked like 50 years ago.
- Open up some magnificent vistas at the Lookout in Hidden Valley.

If you haven't already done so, I hope you'll take the time to renew your membership for this year. If you aren't a member, please join us. You'll find a membership form on Page 3.

*John Millington, President*

## More Adelgid Found Beetles are Reproducing

There are now three locations in Steep Rock where the adelgid have been spotted: at the top of Steep Rock, in the Clam Shell, and near the Hauser Bridge. They are significant and well established infestations. None has been seen in Hidden Valley.

The beetles released by Mark McClure from the Ct. Agricultural Experiment Station, have been reproducing and are slowly dispersing from the release site. McClure will be out in the reservation in early spring to see whether they've survived the winter. →



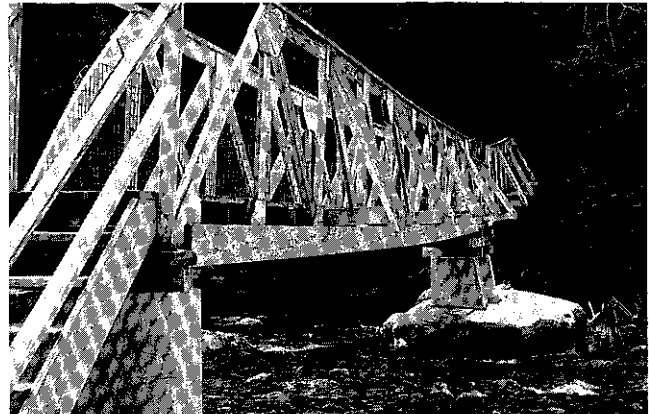
*Hemlock woolly adelgid egg sacs.*

## HV Bridge and Approach Redesigned and Repaired

The original supporting beams of the Hidden Valley bridge over the Shepaug River weren't strong enough to support the bridge over a long period of time, and by last fall, a noticeable "sag" had developed in one section.

Eliot Johnson, his brother Nick Johnson, and Chris Campbell, from Walter Johnson Construction Company repaired the bridge. First they raised the bridge back to its original height, then they bolted 50 foot long laminated beams to the main beams.

The path to the bridge from the west side is steep and susceptible to erosion. Denny Johnson (no relation to Eliot and Nick) and our Forester, Vinnie Forese redesigned the approach. They built a series of steps — 80 in all (see photo last page) - creating a safe passage-way down to the bridge.



*View of Hidden Valley bridge showing reinforced understructure.  
Photo of steps approaching bridge on last page.*

## Adelgid, *cont.*

Results of experiments releasing beetles last year in other parts of the state were very encouraging. Populations of adelgid were reduced anywhere from 47% to 100%, sometimes in as little as five months. We simply don't know if the beetles will be effective in controlling such a large infestation as is now established in Steep Rock.

As always at this time of year, we ask that you keep a sharp lookout for the egg cases of the adelgid. One sign that should make you suspicious is: If there is no snow left on the ground, but the hemlock looks like it still has snow on its branches, that's probably the egg cases of the adelgid. See the photo at left.

## Back to the FAQ's (Frequently Asked Questions)

In 1995 we began devoting a section of the newsletter to answering often asked questions. That year, we published the following article written by Trustee Ted Clark. We reprint it here because it remains a timely subject.

As Ted explains, a Conservation Easement is a way a property owner can preserve his land. Steep Rock encourages this method of land preservation for several reasons, not the least of which is, because the land is still privately owned, it does not come off the tax rolls.

Although many of the Conservation Easements Steep Rock now oversees were originally in a farm or forest tax classification, and therefore assessed at a very low rate, we are sensitive to the Town's concern about its property tax revenues.

Another point to keep in mind is that, since land under easement is still privately owned, even though Steep Rock is named as the Grantee, the public is not granted access.

Steep Rock has prepared a booklet explaining how to make a donation of land or easement to Steep Rock. If you'd like a copy, just call the office - 868-9131.

## What Is A Conservation Easement? Reprinted from *VISTA*, Spring 1995

In legal terms, an "easement" is a right which you have over somebody else's land. A common example is a right-of-way: a right you may have to cross the land owned by another.

A "conservation" easement, as the name implies, is defined by Connecticut statute as an easement "whose purpose is to retain land or water areas predominantly in their natural, scenic or open condition or in agricultural, farming, forest or open space use". In short it is a promise to maintain land predominantly in its natural condition - a promise that is beneficial to the public and which usually rewards the landowner with income tax and estate tax benefits. To be eligible for tax benefits the easement must be given in perpetuity to a governmental body or to "a charitable corporation or trust whose purposes include conservation of land or water areas".

*Continued on next page..*

## Easements, *cont.*

Our own Steep Rock Association is qualified to accept such gifts. In fact Steep Rock now holds conservation easements protecting over 750 acres of Washington's forests, farms and open lands. For you as a landowner, a conservation easement has the following advantages:

1. You will still own your land.
2. You will get an income tax deduction for your gift of the easement.
3. You will reduce the value of your estate by giving away your land's development value, so your land can pass to your heirs with lower estate taxes.
4. You will have the satisfaction of preserving your land in its natural condition in perpetuity.

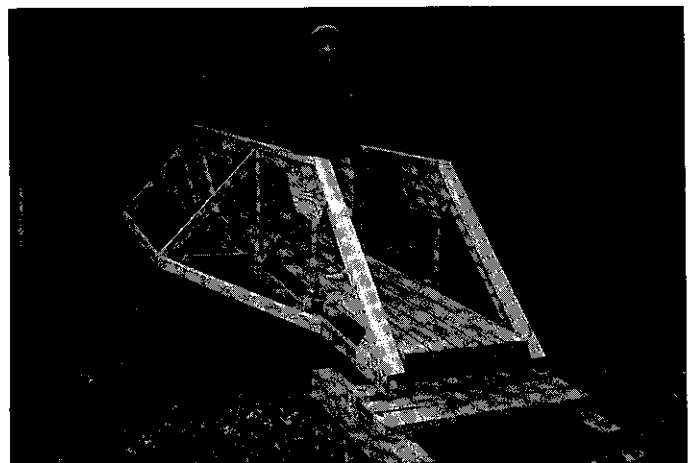
Before taking any steps to make such a gift, however you should consult a lawyer to make sure you comply with all statutory provisions.

*By Ted Clark, Steep Rock Trustee*

## Eagle Scout Project: Foot Bridge in Steep Rock

Matt Szejewski, a member of Washington Boy Scout Troop 487 and a senior at Shepaug High School, fulfilled the requirements for becoming an Eagle Scout when he built a bridge for us on one of the major trails to the top of Steep Rock. The existing bridge, over a small stream that feeds into the Shepaug, was rotting, unstable, and in Matt's words, "could fall apart at any time". His project, which we heartily endorsed was to dismantle the existing, unsafe bridge and build a new one.

The result is a stunning structure, sound and safe and beautiful to look at. It's a valuable addition to the Steep Rock Reservation and we thank Matt and everyone who helped him.



*Matt Szejewski on the bridge he built  
for his Eagle Scout project.*

## They're Back! Goshawk Follow-Up

Well, we were wrong, and the Goshawk mystery remains a mystery. In last spring's *VISTA*, we told you that no goshawk sightings were reported, and that the remains of what we thought was a Goshawk were found alongside the railroad bed in Hidden Valley.

The Ct. Agricultural Experiment station identified the remains as those of an immature red-tailed hawk, not a goshawk. And we never got any reports of goshawk activity for all of last spring and summer. So we just don't know what happened to the birds last year.

### ACTIVITY REPORTED THIS YEAR

Already this year though, one regular hiker has been warned. A "small hawklike bird" called repeatedly at her when she walked one of the paths along the ridgeline west of the Shepaug. And as we went to press, there was a report of a dive-bombing attack – this one without the usual warning call. So watch out!

The most dangerous trails, where the birds patrol regularly, will be closed and we'll place signs at each end. Be on your guard on all trails, though, and if you get caught, remember the trick of raising a stick above your head. The birds attack the highest point of the intruder.

Remember! Goshawks (*Accipiter gentilis*) begin their courtship and nestbuilding in early April – earlier if the weather has been mild. "Our" goshawks have nested in the same area, on the ridgeline above the west side of the river for several years. The birds are year round residents, but don't become aggressive until courting and nest building time.

When eggs are in the nest the hawk may only circle above and call out warnings. When there are fledglings, the birds will attack by repeatedly swooping down upon intruders – we call it "dive bombing".

## Closed: To Mountain Bikes and Horses During Spring Thaw

We are continuing the practice of closing the Reservations to mountain bikes, horseback riding and camping during the spring thaw. Signs announcing the closing went up on March 1.

Trails are particularly susceptible to erosion and damage during the freezing and thawing periods that regularly occur in early spring. Many of Steep Rock's trails are in a fragile condition already. They are eroding and showing signs of overuse and abuse.

Prohibiting the uses that create the most wear and tear during this brief but critical time period will prevent further erosion.

The winter was relatively mild, but with no snow cover, the frost may have gone deep. Depending on the weather, the restrictions may be in place as long as two months.

### RESTRICTIONS CONTINUE

When Steep, Rock and Hidden Valley reopen, mountain bikes and horses will continue to be restricted.

- **In Steep Rock**, mountain bikes are allowed ONLY on Tunnel Road and the Railroad Bed on the East side of the Shepaug River.
- No bikes are allowed on the West side of the river.
- **In Hidden Valley**, bikers may ride ONLY on the section of the vanSinderen trail (yellow blazed) from its beginning at the barway on the east side of the Shepaug River until the trail reaches the Railroad Bed; then along the Railroad Bed to the property line barway.
- No bikes are allowed on the West side of the river.
- In both Steep Rock and Hidden Valley trails that prohibit horses are posted.

## Annual Membership Drive Began September 1, 1998

Steep Rock's Membership Drive corresponds to our fiscal year- September 1 to August 31. If you haven't renewed your membership yet, or if you want to become a member, we welcome you. A contribution of any size entitles you to membership for one year. The funds raised help us to maintain the Reservations. Clip and use this form to send in your donation.

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
PO Box /Street \_\_\_\_\_  
Town \_\_\_\_\_  
State, Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Send To:  
Steep Rock Association  
PO Box 279  
Washington Depot, CT 06794

# Attorney General and DEP Commissioner Step in on Shepaug River Case

Last November, Attorney General Blumenthal and DEP Commissioner Rocque asked the parties in the suit to help them "facilitate a settlement". Over the next several months, meetings were held at the DEP's headquarters in Hartford.

On Friday, March 12, 1999, the two sides met with Judge Beverly Hodgson and reported that although not much progress had been made, they were willing to continue the sessions with the AG's office and the DEP.

While the meetings are continuing, however, the litigation proceedings will be restored. A trial date of Dec. 8, 1999 has been scheduled.

Look for the next issue of the *Shepaug Current*, the River Association's newsletter, for more details and up-



*The ultimate bumper sticker!*



*Steps approaching the footbridge over the Shepaug River in Hidden Valley.  
See story, page 1.*

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