



Canton Land Conservation Trust, Inc.

Fall 1999
Newsletter

HAVE YOU MET OUR NEW NEIGHBORS?

By Jay Kaplan

For Canton's early settlers, living amidst wild creatures, including wolves, catamounts (cougars) and bears, was a normal part of pioneer existence. As the great unbroken expanse of woodlands fell before the plow, however, these large animals slowly disappeared from colonial Connecticut. Native wildlife retreated to remnant patches of forest. A system of bounties and unregulated hunting slowly eradicated much of what was considered "vermin". The last timber wolf was shot near Bridgeport in 1839, and cougars, bears and numerous other animals likewise had disappeared by the end of the nineteenth century. Horses and cows were the most commonly seen large mammals.

In 1999, Connecticut holds more forest acreage than it did in 1899, or 1799 for that matter. During the last half of the nineteenth century, thousands of New England farmers, including many in the Farmington Valley area, pulled up stakes and headed west to a promise of better soil and an easier life. With the soil no longer being tilled, the forest slowly reclaimed Connecticut's abandoned orchards and pasture lands. Before long, our woodlands began to resemble the pre-colonial forest and, like the ancient forests, they offered suitable habitat for large animals!

Today's suburban neighborhoods have replaced the family farm as the standard living unit here in southern New England. The larger, wooded lots now preferred by many new home buyers provide ample room for woodland wildlife, and many residents enjoy viewing animals from their back decks and windows. It's a fairly safe bet, however, that few of our citizens moved to Canton to experience bears ransacking their backyards or moose wandering in front of the family minivan. Yet, the past few months have provided just such "entertainment" for numerous Canton residents.

Just what are these and other wild animals doing in our nice little town? And what can we expect from them in the future? As the black bear populations of Massachusetts and New York have grown, individual bears have begun to cross state lines into Connecticut, where large forested areas fulfill their need for food and shelter. According to Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection biologists, our current estimated bear population stands at 30-60. Some of these bears live in Canton. That's right, they're not passing through, they live here!

The good news is that black bears are usually shy, retiring creatures that pose little threat to people. People should never feed or harass them, nor should one come between a mother and her cub. It is true that bears can be destructive, particularly to bee hives and bird feeding stations, and should our local bear population grow, these incidents will become more common. Let's face it, with several large woodland refuges scattered around town, the bears are here to stay so we might as well get used to living with them. It's one of the extra benefits of living here in a less developed part of northwest Connecticut.

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Moose are a different story. In September, there were numerous reports of a moose along several roads in western sections of Canton. One individual described his first moose sighting as "two people carrying a large brown couch across the road." Then, he saw the antlers! The problem with moose is that they are as large as a horse and unfazed by automobiles. Collisions between cars and moose are not a pretty sight and can result in serious injury or worse to the occupants of the vehicle. It is for this reason that conservation officers will attempt to remove moose that venture too near heavily traveled roadways. Here in Canton, it is more likely that the state will leave moose on our country roads alone, hopeful that they will wander back north to Massachusetts from where they likely came.

According to the Department of Environmental Protection's Wildlife Division, there were 23 moose sightings in Connecticut towns in 1998. Like bears, the Massachusetts moose population is growing and it is likely that wandering moose in the Farmington Valley area will become an annual event.

Will you see a moose or a bear in Canton this year? Although the odds are against it, one never knows where or when the next sighting will take place, but it could be in your backyard! Keep a camera nearby because you never know when you might have the opportunity to take the "picture of a life time."

Memorial Donations

Many people made donations to the Canton Land Conservation Trust this year in memory of two residents who recently passed away, Mark Goedecke and Larry Plona. Donations came from local residents as well as friends and family from around the state and the country. The Land Trust appreciates these donations greatly, and joins in remembering Mark and Larry.

The Ray Smith Trail

The Ray Smith trail at the Mary Conklin Preserve is now complete! The trail is 1.75 miles long, and represents the culmination of hundreds of hours of volunteer labor. The final phase was the completion of a footbridge across a small stream. The bridge was designed by Ted Cowles, who drew on his experience constructing trails for the Appalachian Trail. Among other helpers we appreciate the enthusiastic help of a youth group from the Canton Center Congregational Church, led by Doreen and Pat Grace. There were many trail volunteers, and the following list may omit some: Ted Cowles, Ted Kolzak, Art Sweeton, Charlie, Rhonda and Zack DeWeese, Betty and Frank Stanley, Fred Feibel, Steve Mitchell, Niels van Gemeren, Joel Staub, George and Nancy Groft, Katherine Pearson, John and Karl Pech, Peter Lamb, Art Mauger, Shirley Sutton, Emily Doubleday, Scott and Kelly McAlindin, Drew and Jamie Stone, Suzi Smith, Elenor Smith, Kevin Carpenter.

The trail traverses fields and forest, offering opportunities for birding and other wildlife study, and passing stone walls and other reminders of its farming history. The Land Trust was awarded a grant of \$900 for building the trail by the Stewardship Incentive Program, which paid for the assistance of a forester in designing the trail.

Along the trail a memorial bench has been placed engraved with Ray Smith's name. Ray was much loved by all his friends in Canton, and he was the former president of the Land Trust. The Ray Smith Memorial Fund is sponsoring a booklet about the trail, which will include the history of the Preserve, a beautiful topographic map showing the trail and other features, and a record of wildlife that calls Mary Conklin's home.

Land Trust Note Cards

We are most appreciative to Kay Hunt, a nuclear technician at St. Francis Hospital who lives in Avon, who has designed the Land Trust's new series of note cards. There are four different designs, each with a line drawing of a different bird, reflecting Kay's love of nature and ornithology. The cards are available in packages of eight for \$5 by calling Betty Stanley at 693-2074 or Elenor Smith at 693-8967. There are still a few t-shirts (\$10 Adults, \$9 Kids) and sweatshirts (\$20 Adults, \$19 Kids) left, but lots of Land Trust hats at \$12.50. They are also available from Betty Stanley.

PHOTO CONTEST WINNERS

Canton photographers entered 40 specimens of their art work in the Land Trust photo contest this year. The quality of entries was very high. We are hoping to hold the contest again next year, with even more entries, particularly from the youth of Canton.

The contest offered several themes: Land Trust properties, Canton places, Canton people, and the artist's view of nature. Photographs entered in the contest were displayed at the Land Trust's Sam Collins Day booth

The grand prize winner was Chris Williams for her photograph of trees in the forest. Other winners included high school student Kate Fitzgerald, with three prize-winning photos, Betsey Van Gemeren with five prize-winning photos, Leslie Nylin, David Nylin, Betty Stanley and Charlie DeWeese. The youngest entrant was 2nd grader Zack DeWeese, who had two prize-winners. Honorable mention was awarded to Carol Squiers, Brad Welton, Phyllis Mancini, Elaine Morisano and Donna Finn.

Judging a contest like this is a difficult job, but our judges, David Girardin and Marcia Reid Marsted, did a splendid job. David Girardin had also led the Land Trust's very successful photography workshop earlier this year.

Prizes were generously donated by the following local merchants and by the Land Trust:

Worley Ace Hardware	Maria's Restaurant	Benidorm Bikes and Snowboards
LaTrattoria Restaurant	Bagels Plus	Framemakers of Avon
Farmington River Tubing	MAI Karate	Collinsville Framing
Collinsville Canoe and Kayak	The Baja Café	Barbourtown Sugar Farm
Hinman's Riverside Nursery	Country Sports	Saybrook Fish House
North American Canoe Tours, Inc.	Hinman's	Quiet Sports
Farmington Valley Office Equipment		

EARTH DAY

Last Earth Day was celebrated by bringing all Cherry Brook Primary School students to Land Trust and other properties in town for programs on forestry and nature study. Students toured the Smith Tree Farm, where they learned about planting Christmas trees and saw the recent forestry operation, and the Mary Conklin Preserve where they studied pond life and hiked the new Ray Smith trail. Some of the students also toured Sam Humphrey's Christmas tree farm and Charlie and Rhonda DeWeese's property where they saw a red fox, a beaver pond, and recent forestry work. The tours were guided by Land Trust directors and local foresters and wildlife experts.

16th Annual Convocation of Land Trusts

Land Trust Directors Ted Cowles and Bob Porter attended the convocation of Land Trusts earlier this year. They attended workshops on trends in land trust conservation, using volunteers for boundary posting and other activities, public relations and fund raising. We will be using the knowledge they gained to implement future programs.

NEW LAND TRUST DIRECTORS

The Canton Land Conservation Trust elected three new directors at the annual meeting at Roaring Brook Nature Center in June. The new directors, Dave Cover, Tim Lord and Dick Swibold, bring a wealth of ideas, experience and energy, and are welcomed enthusiastically. In addition, we welcome Peter Lamb, who has rejoined the board after a leave of a few years.

The Land Trust also expresses its appreciation for the service of retiring directors Skip Alford and Laurie Oleasz.

Dave Cover lives with his wife Janet and young daughters Haley and Hannah on Andrew Drive in North Canton. Dave is a computer professional working in the insurance industry. Dave and his family enjoy hiking, camping, skiing and other outdoor activities.

Tim Lord lives with his wife JoAnn and three children Katy, 11, Avery, 9 and Timmy, 7 in Canton Center. Tim's home on West Street was the boyhood home of Land Trust Director Arthur Sweeton. Tim is a graduate of Vermont Academy and Boston University, and has a PhD from Iowa State University. He is employed by CIGNA Investment Management Company, and is a member of the Canton Center Congregational Church and the Canton Historical Society, and a Trustee of the Massachusetts Eye and Ear Infirmary. Tim enjoys hunting, fishing, camping, hiking and skiing, and is interested in forestry, beekeeping and farming. Tim is off to a good start with the Land Trust, having used his fine tractor to mow the fields at the Mary Conklin Preserve and the Knode property.

Dick Swibold is a long time Canton resident, and lives with his wife Gretchen on Cherry Brook Road in North Canton.

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Sun Wind and Woodland Preserve

The Land Trust has been working diligently to complete the acquisition of this beautiful 145 acre property off Breezy Hill Road, and hopes to complete the purchase by the end of the year. It will be funded by the generous contributions of our members to the Land Trust Acquisition Fund, and by a state grant of \$67,500 that was awarded to the Land Trust for this purpose in a competitive bidding. A hiking tour of Ratlum Mountain is planned for October 23, and will have taken place by the time you get this newsletter. It will traverse this property among other Land Trust preserves. The property includes the top of Breezy Hill, a pond with cranberries and poison sumac, evidences of prior use and settlement, and numerous large stone piles, a relic from clearing fields long ago. The property is now mostly forested and was last cleared 80 to 90 years ago. It contains at least one red oak tree that is almost 17 feet in circumference. A hiking trail will be built here as one of the Land Trust's next big projects. If there is enough interest, the hiking tour of Ratlum Mountain will be repeated in the spring.

Forestry at Smith Tree Farm

The Land Trust's Smith Tree Farm on Doyle Road was the site of forestry operations this spring. This work included a selective hardwood harvest and the clearing of a stand of pine that had suffered storm damage. Our forester Jim Gillespie of Forestland Associates marked the sale, and the logging was done by Keith Larson of Granville, MA in April of this year. In connection with this work, two vistas were cleared, one along the Ted Wright trail and one at the top of the Charlotte Craig trail. The forestry operation resulted in cleaning up the woods, opening the canopy so the remaining trees will grow better, and creating an opening for a new forest to grow. Under the Connecticut Forest Stewardship Incentive Program, the Land Trust was awarded a grant to defray the cost of cutting the vistas. Income from the sale has been transferred to the Land Acquisition Fund.

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* Benefactor and Life members contributing in 1999

List includes Land Acquisition Fund donors.

FOR YOUR CALENDAR

Annual Christmas Tree Sale
Smith Tree Farm, Doyle Road
Saturday, December 11, 9:00 AM to 2:00 PM
Rain Date Sunday, December 12
All Trees \$25 Cocoa, cookies and
conversation in the farmhouse



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Please renew your membership or join the Canton Land Conservation Trust.
We are a public, town-wide organization and we need your help!