

VISTA

**HARVEST TO
HOME AT
JUDEA
GARDEN** p.4

**PINNACLE
CLIFFS EXPANDS
MACRICOSTAS
PRESERVE**

30 acres of vital habitat
protected. p. 8

**NEW TRAILS AT
HIDDEN VALLEY**

A strategic link to future
regional trail systems.
Help us "Open The
Loop." p. 3

SPOTLIGHT

SRA Trustee & Secretary
Peary Stafford, Naturalist,
Photographer and
Philanthropist. p. 5



Shepaug River at Hidden Valley Preserve, by Ron Crowcroft

TRUSTEES

Thomas Rickart

President

Marie Schwartz

Treasurer

Peary Stafford

Secretary

Howard Barnet

Robby Barnett

Andria Budd

Sara Carter

Sally Cornell

Kirsten Feldman

Kathy Guttman

Joe Hanggi

Ellen Hanson

John Herrmann

Rachel Jacobellis

Eliot Johnson

Chris Koppel

Roxanne Kraft

Michael Lloyd

Carol Maxwell

Robert Micheletto

Ray Reich

Richard Rosen

Jodi Schwartz

Joanna Seitz

Kasia Smith

Steve Solley

Shannon Waldron

Leslie Warner

Lynn Werner

TRUSTEES EMERITI

Bill Bardel

Natalie Dyer

Joe Gitterman

Edwin Matthews

STAFF

Brian Hagenbuch, Ph.D.

Executive Director

Monica Roberto

Development Director

Rory Larson

Director of Conservation

Merlin Ennis

Trails & Preserves Manager

Johanna Maches

Office Manager

Denise Arturi

Judea Garden Manager &
Head Gardener & Volunteer
Coordinator

Dan Sherman

Land Steward

Christine Adams

Development Coordinator

IN THIS ISSUE



Backlit leaves on the Shepaug River by Ron Crowcroft

As autumn unfolds, the fields and forests across Steep Rock's preserves are bursting with vibrant colors, a stunning reminder of nature's beauty. While many species are winding down for the season, our team is reflecting on a productive summer and gearing up for a busy fall, with exciting plans for 2025.

In this edition of VISTA, we're

thrilled to share news about a significant land acquisition for the Macricostas Preserve Expansion Plan, updates on our new trail system in Hidden Valley Preserve, and enhancements at Johnson Farm. We also highlight the passion and dedication of trustees, donors, and volunteers, whose contributions to our mission are immeasurable.

And get ready! In 2025, Steep Rock Association will celebrate 100 years of protecting what you love. Our Centennial Committee is hard at work planning a year of activities that will engage and inspire our community as we honor a century of conservation. Stay tuned for more updates as we prepare to celebrate this incredible milestone together!

DESTINATIONS

Steep Rock (2 Tunnel Rd., Washington Depot). Explore over 1,000 acres of wilderness, marvel at old growth forest from the Summit, and uncover history along the railroad bed and amidst the Holiday House ruins.

Macricostas (124 Christian St., New Preston). This 500-acre preserve boasts a diverse landscape, rare birds, and vibrant wildflowers. Opt for a leisurely hike around the hayfield or a challenging trek to Waramaug's Rock for stunning views. This preserve is also home to Judea Garden.

Hidden Valley (198 Bee Brook Rd., Washington Depot). Explore 900 acres of forest and meadows along the scenic Shepaug River. Highlights include the Thoreau Bridge, Quartz Mine, Bronson Fields Pollinator Meadow, and the Pinnacle.

West Mountain In southeast Washington, Johnson Farm (37 West Mountain Rd.) and Hillside Farm (397 Nettleton Hollow Rd.) highlight the area's agricultural legacy with trails skirting productive farmland and open meadows.



Steep Rock Preserve by Ron Crowcroft

NEW TRAILS AT HIDDEN VALLEY

In May 2023, Steep Rock added four properties—Cook, Mt. Tom, Bantam, and Asrar—to totaling 206 acres to our Hidden Valley Preserve. These acquisitions, known as the Hidden Valley Expansion Project, were identified as high conservation priorities by SRA's Board more than 17 years ago. As a result of an extraordinary community effort, which included financial support from State and Federal grants, private foundations, and over 120 donors, we were able to successfully protect these parcels and are now working to make them available for recreational trail use.

Given the proximity to Hidden Valley Preserve, Mt. Tom State Park, Shepaug and Litchfield Greenways, and the Mattatuck Trail, these properties serve as a strategic link to a future regional trail system. Such long distance, publicly accessible trails provide spectacular opportunities for outdoor adventurers

to travel off-road between locations and are proven economic assets to many small towns.

Over the past year, we have been planning, designing, and initiating trail construction to make these stunning natural landscapes available to hikers while ensuring that we avoid impacts to sensitive ecological areas. When completed, visitors will be able to immerse themselves in 150 acres of core forest, nearly a mile along the Shepaug and Bantam Rivers, 0.25 miles of cold tributary streams, acres of rich swamp, and impressive rocky outcrops.

The new River and Rail Trail along the historic railroad bed at the northern end of Hidden Valley Preserve is now open. The trail has been cleared with improved drainage and can accommodate hikers, cyclists, and equestrians. Visitors can take a relaxed walk along the Shepaug River or explore the trails lined with hemlocks and maples. In-



Stewardship staff preparing site for new Hidden Valley Expansion kiosk

stallation of a connector trail to the Bronson Field Pollinator Meadow is planned for the future.

The Knollside Trail and Stone Loop Trail will form a 2.4-mile double-loop that connects the Mt Tom and Bantam parcels and traverses striking geological formations and rare ecological communities. Construction commenced this summer and we anticipate opening the trails Spring 2025. Future plans may

include connecting these trails to those in Mt. Tom State Park and the Mattatuck Trail system.

Steep Rock is excited to share the natural beauty of these new acquisitions with you. Our budget for the project is \$95,000 and we've currently raised about 34% of what we need to complete and open these trails. Together we can make it happen. Help us "open the loop" by visiting <https://steeprockassoc.org/hidden-valley-upgrades/>

BILL COLEMAN MEMORIAL FUND ESTABLISHED

Steep Rock has established the Bill Coleman Memorial Fund in honor of the Fund's namesake. Bill, who passed away in 2022, was a long-time member of the Steep Rock Board and incredibly generous with his time, wisdom, and philanthropy. His contributions were many, including planting the historic roses on the stone walls around the Isaac Camp House at Macri-costas Preserve, funding cleanup of an illegal dump, advocacy for technology upgrades, and meticulous research and title work into every individual property that Steep Rock owned. Trustee Kirsten Feldman stat-

ed, "He loved the early history of Steep Rock and in particular the connections between our founders and where he lived in Brooklyn. He was a true role model as a Trustee." Michael Lloyd, Trustee and Development Chair, added, "Bill had a clear vision, far-sightedness, devoted amazing amounts of his free time, and recognized the responsibilities on our shoulders to live up to the legacy left to us by our eminent forebears. I am sure Rossiter and Van Sinderen would have been as impressed as we all were with his attention to detail, remarkable work ethic, wisdom, and pragmatism."

SRA Executive Director Brian Hagenbuch reflected, "I am filled with gratitude not just for the generosity of this gift but for the mentorship that Bill provided me when I first started at Steep Rock as we confronted Covid-19. I am a better ED because of him."

The Fund was established with a \$250,000 gift from his family through the Alvin and Fanny B. Thalheimer Foundation and will support stewardship of Steep Rock's trails and preserves. Steep Rock is incredibly grateful for the generosity of the Coleman family to keep Bill's legacy alive through our work.



Bill Coleman (left) with Intern Emma Okell in 2017

LOCALLY SOURCED, COMMUNITY SERVED

We recently had the pleasure of speaking with Kate Karet, a member of Steep Rock's Community Engagement Committee, to delve into an innovative initiative blossoming at Judea Garden — **Harvest to Home**

This program marries the bounty of Judea Garden with the culinary expertise of local chefs to craft nutritious, simple-to-prepare recipes aimed at combating food insecurity in the Litchfield Hills and making fresh and sometimes new vegetables more accessible and appealing to our recipients.

Kate's idea to bring prepared food to the pantries intrigued Steep Rock Trustee, Kasia Smith and Judea Garden Manager and Head Gardener, Denise Arturi. Together they developed the pilot program working with local chefs and food pantry managers. Distributing the samples directly to the clients in the food pantries, allowed them to get immediate feedback to improve the program such as translating the recipes to Spanish.

Harvest to Home is a community-driven endeavor. With the dedication of volunteers, we provide partnering food pantries not only with these recipes but also with the fresh ingredients and pantry staples required to recreate them.

This program inspires us all to embrace locally sourced foods, guided by the creativity of chefs who demonstrate how simple and nutritious eating locally can be.

To discover more about **Harvest to Home**, we talked to Kate Karet.

What is Judea Garden's Harvest to Home? Harvest to Home is a new program within Judea Garden. We team up with

chefs in the community and they develop recipes using fruits and vegetables from the garden. We then provide samples of the recipes at Food Banks so people can try them. The produce and the other pantry items needed are available for anyone who wishes to make the recipe at home.

What are the goals of Harvest to Home? Harvest to Home was ultimately developed to help feed food-insecure people and families in the Litchfield Hills. It also helps all of us connect to locally sourced foods. The program's educational component, geared for people who access their food through the food pantry, is one step towards this goal. In the end, it's really about introducing people to new and different fresh produce in an exciting way.

Who is involved? Chef Maggie Colangelo from The Po helped us in July, Chef John Favreau from Warren General Store helped us in August and Manager Jo-Ann Makovitzky and Chef Bolivar Hilario of Community Table developed the recipes for September. Each of these chefs came up with 1 to 2 recipes for our samples.

What's the program's impact? In our pilot project in July, Maggie from the Po, who was our first chef, developed a recipe using zucchini in chocolate cake. It was really geared to families with young children to get them to try vegetables through the chocolate cake. There was one parent who came through with her daughter and they were very excited to try the sample and take it home with them. In all, everyone who came was so excited to chat with us, they took all of the ingredients, they took the recipes, and they



Photos: Top, Kate Karet, Harvest To Home volunteer. Bottom: Denise Arturi & volunteer Dave Hoffman packing up the harvest for distribution

took multiple samples which spoke to their excitement.

How can I get involved?

There are multiple opportunities to help and get involved with Harvest to Home, and they don't require that you be a gardener. You can connect with Denise Arturi, Volunteer Coordinator & Judea Garden Manager (denise.arturi@steeprocksassoc.org). We will print out the schedule for when we are going to the vari-

ous food pantries, and on those days, we could use help driving the food, picking it up from the chefs who are preparing it, and volunteering at the pantry to help hand out the samples. We have an abundance of ways to get involved if you are interested in helping us.

To participate and help reduce food insecurity in the Litchfield Hills, contact Denise Arturi at (860) 868-9131 x103.

PEARY STAFFORD

NATURALIST, PHOTOGRAPHER, PHILANTHROPIST

We recently had the pleasure of speaking with Peary Stafford, Board Trustee and Legacy Society member, who has made Steep Rock part of his family's estate plans. First appointed to the Board in 2006, Peary has spent almost two decades studying biodiversity, an interest that has been life-long for him as an avid observer of nature and amateur photographer. Peary currently serves as co-chair of our Stewardship Committee and Board Secretary, and even acted as interim Executive Director from 2015-2016.

What's your Steep Rock origin story? My wife, BK, and I were regulars at a restaurant in New Preston, Oliva, where former Executive Director Susan Branson's daughter was often our waitress. When she cottoned on to the fact that we were bird and butterfly watchers, she introduced us to her mother who was dining at a neighboring table. It all came together at Oliva!

Describe your best experiences at Steep Rock. There

is a joy that you get by going out and exploring and being in nature, finding or hearing a new species of bird or butterfly or insect, or seeing a bobcat or a coyote. These little bursts of adrenaline settle in your mind and become wonderful memories and underscore the fact that throughout the world we need to do everything we can to protect it.

Several years ago, I worked with Clark Gifford (former land manager) on a viewing platform over the beaver pond in the Macricostas Preserve. As we were drilling with a gas-powered auger to install the support posts, we hit a bed of bricks from the old brick works that had once been there. Well, the auger caught in the bricks and the two of us spun around like tops! It was great fun, bookended by the natural beauty that surrounded us -- beavers slapping their tails in warning on the pond, red tail hawks swooping above our heads -- and the slapstick history lesson as well.

How have your experiences driven your stew-



Peary Stafford by BK Stafford

ardship? The guiding principle of my work – promoting an integrated biodiversity plan throughout our preserves on the Stewardship Committee - evolved from an early strategic plan. What started as a think tank with Kirsten Feldman and Natalie Dyer, turned into a manifesto which was met with welcome ears by our Board colleagues.

With the help of botanist Bill Moorehead and herpetologist Dennis Quinn, we've been able to really push these efforts forward. We've taken an inventory of critical habitats and other areas of greatest conservation needs and created standards for their management. For example, a few years ago we identified Lesser Celandine in a stream in the Steep Rock Preserve - a seemingly harmless, beautiful yellow lily that is quite dangerous for our ecosystem. Left unchecked it will blanket the streams and riverbanks, seriously endangering other aquatic life and native plants. We're keeping it in check.

I've loved being able to develop

our focus on nature, above all else. We've created an integrated natural resources management plan for all the preserves and included that crucial element in all of our work. It's been a thrill to put SRA on the ecological map; it's been a rewarding experience to do what I love while creating a place where people can go to immerse themselves in nature.

What inspired you to leave a legacy gift to Steep Rock?

Simply, it's the easiest way to really make a difference, when you no longer need that principal to generate income, but can allocate those funds towards a large charitable gift. It's a more impactful way to further our interests in preserving nature. We have travelled all over the world looking at birds and enjoying nature and it's important that it be preserved, because without it, it would be a pretty bleak world. Staying the course in the future by stewarding our preserves with an eye on biodiversity will be the key to our success. It's an ongoing, perpetual responsibility and I'm happy to help keep the engine running.



Peary celebrates SRA's first LTA Accreditation application completion

FALL AT JOHNSON FARM



Photo of Johnson Farm by Michael Hosmer

Have you been to Johnson Farm lately? Thanks to a directed gift from Alan and Alessandra Mnuchin, we've continued to make exciting upgrades, including removal of invasive plants, hazardous trees around the trail perimeter, and poison ivy along stone walls, as well as installing stone pavers across wet areas to improve both drainage and the hiker experience. In addition, we've added nest boxes for kestrels and bluebirds to promote biodiversity. The preserve is stunning in the fall, with vibrant foliage and ridgetop vistas of the surrounding landscape. If you haven't visited recently, now is the perfect time to explore its beauty. To learn more about directed gifts, contact Monica Roberto at (860) 868-9131.

EVENTS

NOVEMBER

NATURE PRESERVE MONITORING BLITZ

Sat., Nov. 2 and Sun., Nov. 3, 9:00AM-12:00PM
Steep Rock House, 116 Christian St, New Preston
Each fall, SRA seeks volunteers to monitor ecosystem health and wildlife across nearly 30 preserves. Join us for refreshments and training using your smartphone as GPS. Afterward, you'll be paired up and sent to your assigned preserve. Join for one or both days, with routes available for all skill levels.

SENIORS IN STEEP ROCK – STEEPED IN STEEP ROCK COFFEE HOUR

Fri., Nov. 15, 11:00AM-1:00PM
Steep Rock House, 116 Christian St, New Preston
Join us for refreshments and

conversation at this event, a collaboration with the Washington Senior Center, generously supported by a grant from the Connecticut Community Foundation's "Pathways for Older Adults" program.

MONTHLY TRAIL WORK PARTY

Sat., Nov. 16, 10:00AM – 12:30PM. No experience needed. Ages 16+.

DECEMBER

HOLIDAY IN THE DEPOT

Friday, Dec. 13th, 6:00PM – 8:30PM. Bryan Memorial Town Hall. The evening will begin with the lighting of our tree followed by Santa arriving by horse and wagon. Christmas carols will be performed on the steps of the Bryan Memorial Town Hall by our local school

choirs. Visit the shops in the Depot for holiday shopping and enjoy a glass of cider and holiday treats. SRA will offer free bird seed craft kits!

CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

Sunday, Dec. 15 from 10:00AM – 12:00PM. Macricostas Preserve, 124 Christian St., New Preston. Join SRA for a 1½-mile winter birding excursion at Macricostas Preserve. Help gather data for Audubon's 125th Christmas Bird Count, the nation's longest-running community science bird project. All are welcome, from seasoned ornithologists to first-time birders, and families.

SOLSTICE CELEBRATION

Thurs., Dec. 19, 5:00PM-7:00PM. Steep Rock House, 116 Christian St, New Preston. Join us by the firepit as we welcome the winter season with refreshments and good times!

MIDWINTER EAGLE SURVEY

Virtual Training: Thursday, Jan. 2, 2025 from 5:00PM – 6:00PM
Survey: Saturday, Jan. 4, 2025 from 7:00AM – 11:00AM
Bundle up and become a community scientist by scanning sections of the Shepaug River for bald eagles. The data collected will be reported to the CT DEEP as our contribution to the nationwide survey whose goal is to document trends in eagle populations over time.

Thanks to our donors and Conservation Education Sponsor National Iron Bank, we're able to offer all of these events at no cost. To register: steeprockassoc.org/events-programs

WELCOME NEW TRUSTEES

At the June meeting of the Steep Rock Board, Trustees celebrated the incredibly noteworthy accomplishments of three trustees who had reached their term limits on the Board—Alan Mnuchin, Reese Owens, and John Santoleri. In addition, the Board welcomed four new inspiring trustees and look forward to their contributions to our mission.

Ellen Hanson: Ellen and her husband Richard Perlman settled in Washington in 2020 enticed by the natural beauty of the hills and the caring and engaged community.

Founded in 1991 Ellen's eponymous interiors firm aims to create "Interior design that is luxurious, sustainable, local, essential, and durable." Her projects embrace their environment, use virgin resources sparingly and responsibly while also creating lasting value and enhancing the lives of the people inhabiting them.

With a BFA from Cornell in

Art History, Ellen's course work also included organic gardening and biology reflecting a wide yet connected well of resources that have informed her career and life pursuits. When not collaborating with her design team or practicing Iyengar Yoga, Ellen is an avid hiker, cross-country skier and lifelong learner.

Ellen serves as a trustee on the Board of the Foundation for National Public Radio and lives part time in Boca Grande FL.

Christopher Koppel: Chris, a Connecticut native, brings a deep passion and extensive knowledge of plants to the Steep Rock Association Board. Growing up amidst the marshes and beaches of Connecticut, Chris developed a lifelong appreciation for the natural world.

Currently an estate manager in Washington, he focuses on agriculture while maintaining native ecologies in woodland and grassland buffers. Chris's past roles include managing the woodlands of the Sky-

lands and Iroki estates. He also serves on the Inland Wetlands Commission, demonstrating his commitment to environmental conservation. Chris and his partner, Julie, have been active members of the Washington community for over six years.



Roxanne Kraft: Roxanne resides in Washington CT, with her husband Greg and their two very active

Weimaraners, Otto and Fritz. Roxanne has had a lifelong love for the outdoors. She is an avid hiker, gardener, and kayaker. Roxanne has dedicated her professional life to education. As a 37-year veteran special education teacher, she currently works at the Litchfield Hills Transition Center (LHTC) in New Milford. At LHTC she collaborates her love for the outdoors and education to teach young adults how to develop healthy living skills, job skills, and social skills.

Roxanne also has extensive training in Mindfulness, completing the Mindful Schools

Teacher Certification Program. She uses her training in this field to embed Mindfulness in her lessons at LHTC and guided hikes promoted by the Steep Rock Association.

Shannon Waldron: Shannon started walking Steep Rock's trails upon moving to Washington in 2015, becoming a Trail Monitor soon thereafter.

For the past twenty years she's practiced as a land use attorney with a firm in Annapolis, Maryland (starting the remote work journey in 2013, before Covid made it cool).

Shannon lives on The Frederick Gunn School campus with her spouse, Brian Konik, and her four kids, who all attend Shepaug Valley School.



HOLIDAY GIFTS

A brand new range of merchandise to celebrate 100 years of protecting the land we all love.

In 2025, Steep Rock Association celebrates its 100th anniversary. To mark this momentous occasion, we are launching a new range of hoodies, t-shirts, hats, and accessories in our brand-new merch store.

As we head towards the holidays, check our Instagram to see limited edition drops for events like Three Peaks in Three Weeks, a new Centennial collection, new seasonal designs, and regular updates. **You can also find the store online at: steeprockassoc-shop.fourthwall.com**





PO Box 279
Washington Depot, CT 06794

PINNACLE CLIFFS

30 ACRES OF VITAL HABITAT NOW PROTECTED

In August, Steep Rock secured a 30.46-acre expanse known as Pinnacle Cliffs, a striking addition to our Macricostas Expansion Project. Nestled between Macricostas Preserve and the Town of Warren, this land bears witness to nature’s resilience and beauty—a place where core forests, water resources, and rare habitats converge in an intricate balance.

Pinnacle Cliffs stands as part of a 1,056-acre core forest block, now more than half protected. Its mature forest and dense mountain laurel absorb carbon, fortify the land against intensifying storms, and safeguard streams that feed both Lake Waramaug and Meeker Swamp.

In preserving Pinnacle Cliffs,

we protect more than just land; we safeguard a vibrant mosaic of life. Within this modest landscape, wildlife corridors connect the region’s core forests. SRA surveys reveal an abundance of vulnerable species—including more than 25 birds, four bats, salamanders, turtles, wood frogs, butterflies, and rare plants.

For explorers, Pinnacle Cliffs offers both natural beauty and a glimpse into the Earth’s ancient past: glacial erratics, a towering 65-foot cliff crowned with pine, and wetlands as pristine as they are rare in northwest Connecticut. A new trail into this stunning landscape is planned.

This acquisition was made possible through the generosity of



Glacial erratics in Pinnacle Cliffs parcel

grants from the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, John T. and Jane A. Wiederhold Foun-

dation, Connecticut Land Conservation Council, and private donors who share our vision of preservation in the Litchfield Hills.