



# The Steep Rock VISTA Spring 2009

## How Do We Use Your 36er Dollars?

*by Natalie Dyer*

The \$36 you contribute to us to take the 36er Challenge benefits you and Steep Rock. Hiking the trails offers great exercise in a spectacular setting and it gives us funds to use for trail maintenance.

Keeping more than 36 miles of trails in the three preserves in good condition is a challenge in itself. Steep Rock's trail system consists of old town roads, the railroad bed, logging roads and carriage paths. There are old hiking, horseback riding and bicycle trails built before Steep Rock was begun in 1925. Most of the trails are on steep slopes and are very susceptible to erosion. The trails committee oversees 25 trail monitors who keep us informed of problems on their assigned trails. We keep a list of the trails that need attention and decide which ones are suitable volunteer projects and which ones Clark Gifford our Land Manager should tackle. A few years ago Steep Rock bought a tractor a backhoe and other tools. Now we can accomplish most of our trail maintenance with our own staff and equipment.

In 2008 we used the 36er funds in several areas in Hidden Valley and Steep Rock. In Hidden Valley we installed culverts to redirect water, placed gravel in washed out areas and repaired the canoe launch in the main parking area just south of the Shepaug. This short section of the trail is heavily used, not just as a launch for canoeists but also by other visitors to Hidden Valley. It's a lovely spot to get close to (sometimes in!) the river before or after a hike. Log steps were installed in the eroded trail, then filled with gravel. There's no longer any danger of tripping over or damaging exposed roots when walking down to the river. See the photo on page 2.

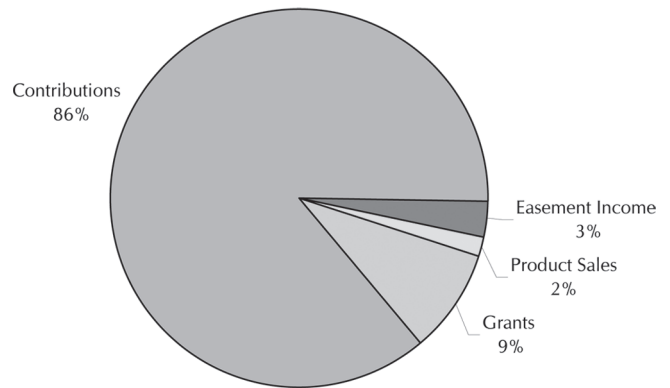
In Steep Rock we repaired trails near the Holiday House by filling in ruts and washouts.

We're delighted to see so many people using the trails in the preserves. Let's hope they sign up for the Steep Rock challenge to keep themselves and the trails in good condition.

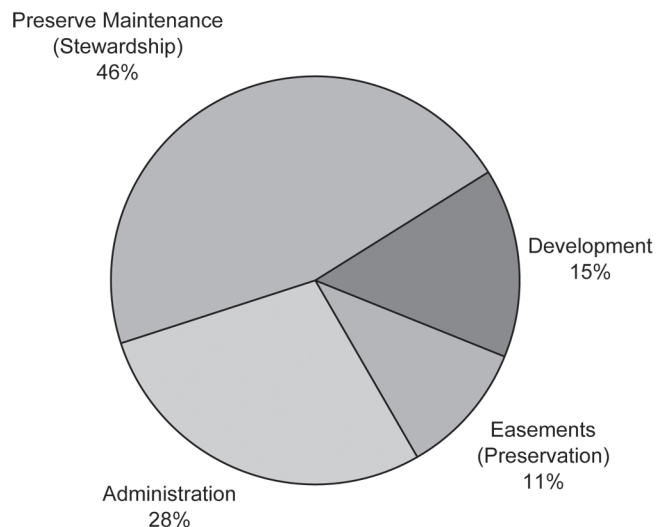
## Please Become a Member of Steep Rock!

We're halfway through our Annual Membership Drive and we need your support! Did you know that we receive no funding from the town or the state? 86% of our operating budget depends on your financial support. We need your help now. Mail your contribution to Steep Rock Association, PO Box 279, Washington Depot, CT 06794.

### Source of Funds



### Use of Funds



## Spring Equals Goshawks Here We Go Again!

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The Goshawks (*Accipiter gentilis*) that live in Hidden Valley and Steep Rock are year round residents, but don't become aggressive until spring.

These extraordinary birds deserve protection and our respect. We're fortunate that our preserves provide the habitat that is suited to their needs.

The birds begin their courtship and nestbuilding in early April, earlier if the winter has been mild. The Hidden Valley Goshawks have nested in the same general area, on the top of the ridgeline along the west side of the river, often called the Bee Brook area, for many years.

For the last two years another pair has been nesting in Steep Rock, along the upper portion of the yellow trail.

During their mating and subsequent nestbuilding, the hawks may only circle high above your head. When there are eggs in the nest they not only circle but call out warnings. When the eggs have hatched and there are fledglings in the nest, the birds, usually the female, will swoop down on unsuspecting intruders (hikers!) with every intention of attack, emitting a piercing call the whole time. The birds will swoop repeatedly, back and forth along the trail, until the intruder is driven away from the area. We've dubbed this activity "dive bombing", and it's a frightening experience.

Some say the birds will attack the highest part of the intruder. i.e. your head. If you carry a stick raised above your head, perhaps even put your hat on the stick, you may have some added protection. Your best protection from attack is to stay away from the posted area once you see we've posted the entries.

## Shepaug River Update Project on Schedule

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*by Randy Bernard*

Don Carver of the Waterbury Bureau of Water has kindly provided the following update.

**Shepaug Reservoir:** The new gate valves have been installed in the gate chamber and the programming for them is under way. The stainless steel weir has been installed at "Peter's Dam". Final grouting of Peter's Dam will take place this spring and USGS will be calibrating the gauging station soon. The SCADA system screens have been installed in the Water Treatment Plant.

**Wigwam Reservoir:** The new pipeline has been completely installed from the new pump station to the Treatment Plant. All of the taps at the Treatment Plant have been completed. Work on the new pump station has continued throughout the winter with the large diameter piping located inside the station completed. Work on the concrete structure is currently under way.

The project is on schedule and hopefully the weather will cooperate and it will be finished ahead of schedule.

We'll be celebrating the completion of the work and water releases at this year's Steep Rock Picnic. The date is September 12, noon until 2 pm. Mark your calendars and join us that day for good food and good fun.



*36er Dollars at work. Canoe launch trail restoration. Land Manager Clark Gifford and Waddy Davidson prepare the ground before placing logs in position.*

## Announcing Member Hikes Starting May 2

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We are pleased to announce the start of Member Hikes. On the first Saturday of each month, beginning Saturday, May 2, join Steep Rock's Land Manager Clark Gifford for a hike in one of the three preserves. It is a good chance to get outdoors and hike trails you may not have been on before. If you are a member of Steep Rock and are interested in taking part, send an email to Clark at [srlandmanager@gmail.com](mailto:srlandmanager@gmail.com) with "Member Hikes" in the subject line and your name in the body of the email. In the week prior to the hikes, Clark will contact you with the meeting location and a description of the hike.

## Taft Community Service Day

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Last fall, on October 20, five students and their instructor helped us cut back the growth at the top of the pinnacle in Hidden Valley. The students' work was a continuance of the project we began in 2004 when we opened up the view to the south.

At that time we removed many small scrub oaks that had grown up over the years. We also cut back some invasive plants, mostly barberry, that were beginning to take hold. Our objective is to create a more permanent opening and to encourage expansion of the existing patches of mountain laurel.



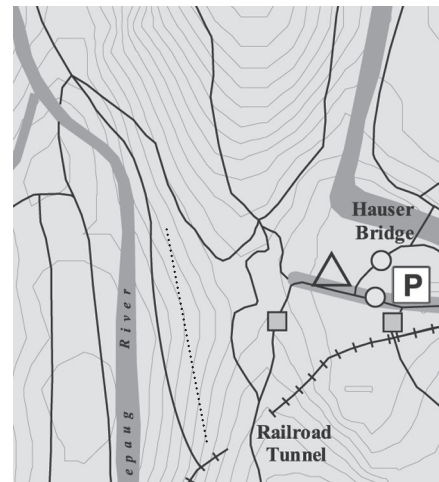
*Steve Palmer, instructor, Sarah Perda, Ebony Easley, Jack Dowling, Hi Joe Kim and Max Kachur rest on the highest point of the Hidden Valley Pinnacle after 5 long hours of work.*

## Two New Connector Trails in Steep Rock

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Take the trail that heads north from the main Steep Rock parking lot at the riding ring. It follows the river upstream and it used to dead end at its northern most point. The new section loops back higher on the ridge, heading south, and joins the trail that leads back to the parking area. It is shown here next to the dashed line.



The new trail goes from the railroad bed, south of the tunnel, downhill to the river. It connects to the trail along the river in the Clam Shell area. The trail is shown on the Steep Rock map and is flagged on the ground. Construction is underway and we hope to complete the work by the time warm weather is here for good. It is shown here next to the dashed line.

## Mark Your Calendars!

### Picnic Saturday, September 12

We're having our picnic and celebrating our river!

Look for your invitation in August.

### Washington Horse Show September 19 and 20

Two days this year.



*Hooded Merganser at Macricostas Preserve.  
Photograph by Peary Stafford n March.  
He saw four pair that day.*

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[www.steeprocksassoc.org](http://www.steeprocksassoc.org)

Our website has been updated with many more photographs, articles, links to other environmental organizations and much more. You can find the trail maps there, too and past editions of newsletters.



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