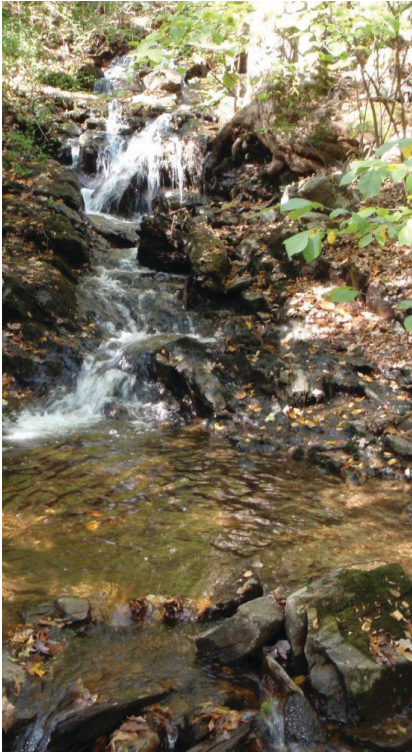




# The Steep Rock VISTA

Winter 2012



*Tributary to Shepaug River.*

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## Land Preservation Accomplishments

For the Steep Rock Association, 2011 was another successful year of land preservation. In addition to acquiring the 68.9-acre "Bronson Fields," as reported in the summer issue of VISTA, Steep Rock accepted land donations from Rumsey Hall School (1.1 acres) and Tillie Laird (1.0 acre), as well as conservation easements from Patte Doran (53.7 acres) and Dale Geurts (10.8 acres).

The land donations from Rumsey Hall School and Tillie Laird provide Steep Rock with contiguous land ownership from Sabbaday Lane to "Bronson Fields," which is now incorporated into the Hidden Valley Preserve. These critical properties will enable Steep Rock, in the near future, to create a small satellite parking area off Sabbaday Lane, providing hikers with easier access to the Baldwin Knoll section of Hidden Valley.

The conservation easement donated by Patte Doran, located off River Road, is strategically situated adjacent to other preserved properties, thereby creating a conservation area in excess of 215 contiguous acres. This mature hardwood forest provides an undisturbed forested buffer along two unnamed perennial tributaries to the Shepaug River, plus critical habitat for a diversity of interior forest bird species.

The conservation easement donated by Dale Geurts, located off June Road, adjoins Macricostas Preserve and other conserved properties, including an easement donated by Dale last year, thereby creating a conservation area in excess of 538 contiguous acres. This mature hemlock/hardwood forest is situated on a steep slope overlooking Lake Waramaug. Extensive bedrock outcrops provide excellent habitat and den sites for a variety of small mammals, reptiles, and amphibians. An abundance of large snags provides suitable habitat for a variety of cavity-nesting bird species, and a series of small pocket wetlands and vernal pools provide critical habitat for a diversity of amphibians and invertebrates.

Thanks to the generosity of our many conservation partners over the years, Steep Rock Association now protects 5,168 acres, including 2,523 acres owned in fee and an additional 2,645 acres held in conservation easements on private property.

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Fax: 860.868.5034  
www.steeprockassoc.org

## From the Executive Director...“Taken for Granted”

The “Blizzard of October” (a.k.a. “Winter Storm Alfred”) was a harsh reminder of just how much we tend to take for granted. If you’re like me, you don’t often think about our daily conveniences (like heat, running water, flush toilets, and refrigeration), until you are inconvenienced by their absence. As our society and lifestyles have become more sophisticated, we have become pampered and depend on an uninterrupted flow of such basic necessities. It generally takes a climatic occurrence to snap us back to reality and remind us just how vulnerable we truly are to external forces.

We tend to think the same way about open space and natural areas. Too often we assume that the farm at the corner or the upland forest on the ridge will always be there — preserving our scenic vistas, harboring a diversity of wildlife, and protecting our cultural and natural heritage. But, obviously, this is a myth. We must work to protect the things we value. For the past eighty-six years, Steep Rock Association has been working in partnership with the residents of Washington and surrounding communities to protect the lands we treasure most. Let’s never take this work for granted. Let’s never assume that our work is done. Together we have embarked on a long journey. We have pledged to preserve these precious gifts of land in perpetuity. With your continued financial support and volunteer service, Steep Rock will be better positioned to ensure that our open space never becomes a convenience that we take for granted. — *Steve*

## Steep Rock and Kirsten Peckerman Honored



The November 19th annual holiday reception hosted by The Gunnery was an evening of celebration and recognition. Highlights included honoring Steep Rock Association for its historic relationship with The Gunnery and recognition of Kirsten Peckerman as the recipient of the 2011 Friend of The Green Award.

Head of School, Susan Graham remarked “I have been impressed throughout my twenty-one years here in Washington by the Steep Rock Board’s dedication to and preservation of this

precious land in its nearly natural state. And I remain ever grateful that Gunnery faculty and students have always been welcomed.”

Kirsten Peckerman, a Trustee of both Steep Rock and The Gunnery, was acknowledged for her philanthropy and community service. Mrs. Graham described Kirsten as “a dear friend, a trusted colleague and a kindred spirit.” In her remarks to the audience, Kirsten said “I was absolutely surprised. The Gunnery and Steep Rock are very important to the lifeblood of the Town of Washington. The Gunnery has been in existence since 1850 and has left a mark on the Town. Steep Rock has kept the character of Washington what it was so many years ago.” Congratulations, Kirsten!

*Pictured above, left to right: Ed White, Kirsten Peckerman and Susan Graham*

## Donor Dollars – Conservation at Work

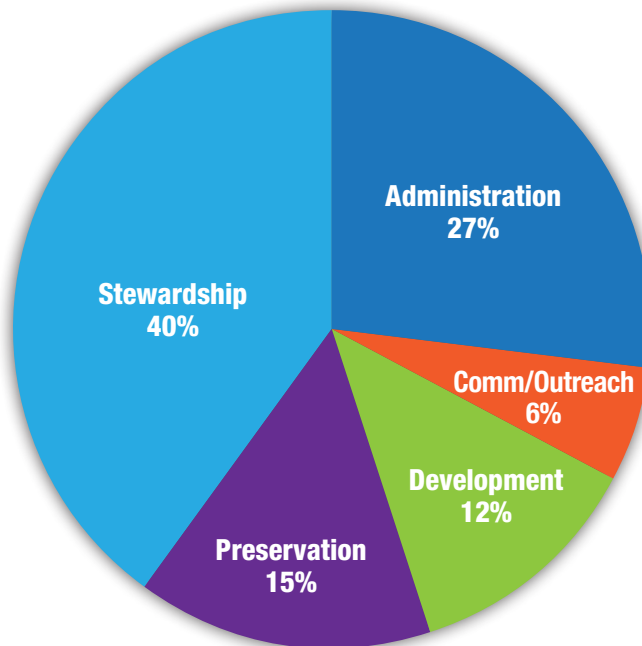
Thanks to the generous support of more than 500 contributors, Steep Rock Association enjoyed a successful Fiscal Year 2011 (which ended September 30th). Success can be measured in a number of ways, but from a budgetary perspective, we successfully met our targets, while expanding and diversifying our membership base. Donations from individuals like you are the lifeblood for all nonprofit organizations, and Steep Rock's Board of Trustees and Staff are most appreciative of your generosity. Ninety percent (90%) of our income was generated by private donors. Thank you!

In this era of financial instability and diminishing accountability, we want you to know how your FY 2011 contribution supported our conservation mission. We are pleased to report that fifty-five percent (55%) of our \$300,000 budget was directed to the management and maintenance of our nature preserves and the protection of private lands through conservation easements. This included (i) maintaining 45 miles of nature preserve trails and four campsites for public use; (ii) enhancing wildlife habitat and species diversity through the implementation of natural resource management practices; (iii) removing invasive, exotic plant species which threaten the viability of our ecosystems; (iv) restoring native flora; (v) negotiating two new conservation easements encompassing 64.5 acres on private properties; and (vi) acquiring an additional 71 acres that contribute to Washington's open space. These stewardship and land-preservation expenditures reflect Steep Rock's core responsibilities and conservation mission.

Administratively, FY 2011 was a year of change, one focused on enhancing our organizational stability and strength. This was a critical stage in the evolution of Steep Rock as a land trust, and it has left us better positioned to address conservation challenges in the future. During the year we completed a staff transition which has yielded a strong, cohesive team to lead Steep Rock forward. New committees were created to enhance our governance and improve our community outreach initiatives. New and stronger conservation policies and procedures were implemented. And we began positioning Steep Rock to pursue

accreditation from the Land Trust Alliance — the industry seal of approval that assures our members and conservation partners that Steep Rock is using best management practices and is operating at the highest ethical standards.

### FY 2011 Budget Expenditures



### Fiscal Year 2012 Goals and Challenges:

Fiscal Year 2012 is presenting Steep Rock with many new challenges and exciting opportunities. Several of our initiatives will include: (i) implementing the Biodiversity Management Plan to enhance wildlife habitat; (ii) completing a Strategic Land Conservation Plan, which will allow us to be more proactive in preserving lands critical to the protection of our rivers, ridgelines, forests, farms and wildlife; (iii) implementing a technologically advanced program to improve our effectiveness and efficiency in monitoring our 100-plus conservation easements; (iv) engaging more effectively with our members and the general public through educational programs, special events, and other outreach initiatives; and (v) pursuing national accreditation through the Land Trust Alliance. Once again we have set the bar high and hope that you will continue to partner with Steep Rock in support of conservation by giving as generously as possible.



## Fiscal Year 2011 Donors – Thank You for Supporting Steep Rock

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## New Volunteer Coordinator

After many years of coordinating Steep Rock's volunteer initiatives, Natalie Dyer has decided to take a well-deserved rest. During her tenure, Natalie did an outstanding job of coordinating the efforts of trail monitors, implementing trail workdays, and scheduling school groups to assist with trail maintenance projects and the removal of invasive species. Thank you, Natalie for your dedication and perseverance!

We are pleased that Whitney Raith has agreed to step into this important role as Steep Rock's point person for all volunteer projects. As a trail monitor, volunteer, and long-time supporter of Steep Rock, Whitney has been very involved over the years in numerous volunteer projects. In addition to Whitney stepping into the coordinator role, the entire volunteer program is being reorganized and expanded in an effort to engage our members and the Washington community more fully in Steep Rock endeavors. For additional information about volunteer opportunities, please visit the Steep Rock website at: [www.steeprockassoc.org](http://www.steeprockassoc.org). If you would like to become a volunteer, please contact Whitney Raith at [steeprock.whitney@gmail.com](mailto:steeprock.whitney@gmail.com).



## EARLY SNOW WREAKS HAVOC

The heavy wet snow deposited by Winter Storm Alfred on October 29th turned nature preserve trails into obstacle courses. The ground, still saturated from the rains of Hurricane Irene, could not support the pressure from suddenly snow-laden tree trunks and leafed-out branches. Uprooted trees toppled and limbs snapped, cascading debris through the canopy to the forest floor below. Most of Steep Rock's 45 miles of trails were severely impacted and became impassable. However, through the daily efforts of Steep Rock's land manager, Clark Gifford, with assistance from Trustees and volunteers, most of our trails have been cleared and reopened for public access. Thanks to all who rallied to our plea for help!

## Conservation Easement Monitoring Enhancements

Steep Rock is embarking on a new project that will provide GPS mapping of all easement boundaries. When completed, this mapping will make our conservation easement monitoring more efficient and accurate, as well as make it conform better to the Land Trust Alliance's *Land Trust Standards and Practices*. With the assistance of a \$2,000 grant from the Connecticut Land Trust Challenge Fund, administered by the Connecticut Land Conservation Council in partnership with the Land Trust Alliance, we have hired a private consultant to begin this multi-year project. Steep Rock currently holds

conservation easements on 2,645 acres, and has GPS mapping data on 651 easement acres (25%). The first phase of this project, to be completed by mid-summer, will map an additional 660 acres of easement boundaries, raising our total GPS mapping to 1,311 acres (50%). Pending additional funding, we anticipate completing the mapping of the remaining backlog of easements within two years. Henceforth, the boundaries of all newly acquired easements will be GPS mapped as part of the baseline documentation process.



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