



The Steep Rock *VISTA*

The Newsletter of the Steep Rock Association

Fall 2002

New Trustees Elected to Steep Rock Board

R. William Fairbairn Bill is returning to the Board of Trustees. He served two three year terms,* 1995-1997 and 1998-2000 and was a Council Member for one year. We found we couldn't do without him! He is a member of Steep Rock's Preservation, Nominating and Picnic Committees. Bill is a partner in the law firm of Cramer and Anderson. He's practiced law for more than twenty five years. Bill and his wife Martha and their two children live on Green Hill Road in Washington.

Elaine C. Luckey Washington's First Selectman, Elaine was a Trustee for two three year terms,* 1993-1995 and 1996-1998, and we're happy to have her back. She has an environmental background, having studied environmental law at Vermont Law School and she's the former Chair of the Washington Inland Wetlands Commission. Elaine hikes often in Steep Rock and serves as one of our trail monitors.

Henry R. Martin Hank has been a member of the Town of Washington's Zoning Commission since 1995 and has served as its Chairman since 1999. He was a member of Washington's Open Space Steering Committee from 1999-2000. Hank has also been a member of the Steep Rock Trails Committee and he volunteers as a trail monitor.

Chapin Miller Chip grew up in Washington, and graduated from Shepaug High School. He knows the Reservations well from years of hiking and camping in both Steep Rock and Hidden Valley. Chip teaches at the Gunnery School and heads up Gunnery's Outdoor Club. Under Chip's leadership, the students have put in many volunteer hours working on the trails in Steep Rock and Hidden Valley.

A Wonderful Gift Steep Rock Has Been Given a House!

The donor is a long-time resident of Washington and a long-time friend of Steep Rock. The charming house rests on land that abuts the Steep Rock Reservation. The donor is retaining lifetime use of the house and property. After the donor's death Steep Rock will have the right to use or sell the property. Certain building restrictions have been placed on the house, which are intended to maintain its present scale, so appropriate in its rustic woodland setting.

The donor had several reasons for making this generous gift:

- ◆ There are no relatives likely to want to live in the house
- ◆ Steep Rock will preserve the property in a fashion consistent with its surroundings
- ◆ The gift to Steep Rock reduces future estate taxes
- ◆ Making the gift now gives an income tax deduction during the donor's lifetime, of approximately 45% of the appraised value of the property.

From Steep Rock's point of view the gift offers the opportunity on the donor's death to use the house, perhaps for staff housing, or to sell it and increase our modest endowment.

We are most grateful for this very significant gift. We hope the donor will enjoy this house for many years to come, secure in the knowledge that its beloved appearance and scale—so in tune with its arboreal setting—will continue to be preserved for the enjoyment of the residents of Washington.

*Steep Rock's By-Laws allow for election for two consecutive three year terms. Trustees, unless they are Officers, must then step down from the Board for at least one year before they can be renominated and reelected.

This Issue's FAQ (Frequently Asked Question): What's All This About Invasives?

The notion of ridding the land of invasive plants may seem daunting-- if not ridiculous-- and rightly so. In some areas, our landscape is so densely covered by these plants that any eradication other than in one's own garden or a small backyard may seem fruitless, not to mention an utter waste of time. However, a well thought out and implemented plan combined with a lot of persistence can have positive results even on the larger landscape scale.

Towards this end, the Steep Rock Trails Committee and the Flora and Fauna sub-committee of Washington's Conservation Commission are working together to address the Reservations' invasive plant issues.

The group will work on a variety of projects including the documentation of non-native invasive plant species present in Steep Rock and Hidden Valley with emphasis on newly introduced species; assessing the extent of the infestations and prioritizing areas for eventual control and/or eradication.

Initially, small plots such as the Baldwin Knoll #3 and Quartz Mine #2 in Hidden Valley, will be studied to determine the feasibility of manual control in similar habitat types (forest). Yale School of Forestry's Caroline Norden and Brenda Lind created these study plots in 1985 as part of their Management Plan for Steep Rock. On the education front, plans are in the works to conduct public information sessions including invasive plant identification workshops; demonstration areas at study plots and control/eradication sites will be made available for public viewing.

The most important step, however, will be to inform residents about the invasive plants problem. So, to start things off, here is a brief overview of what invasive plants are, the threats they pose to our landscape and reasons why we should all be concerned; these points will be further emphasized over the course of our projects.

What are invasive plants?

When botanists talk about invasive plants, they are referring to non-native plants introduced either intentionally or unintentionally to geographic areas outside of their normal range and having the capability of becoming over-abundant at the expense of native species. While some native plants such as Poison Ivy can also become over-abundant in the landscape, technically speaking, they are not "invasive" but *dominant* and, as such, they are eventually replaced by other native species. In other words, they succumb to natural succession. (For example, Washingtonians cannot "invade" Washington - they may be the dominant species, but in this context they are not "invasive".)

There are five characteristics common to non-native invasive plants:

1. the ability of individual plants to produce large quantities of seed or fruit
2. the ability to effectively disperse over considerable distances in the landscape
3. easy establishment
4. rapid growth
5. the ability to out-compete native species

Why should we care?

Together, both non-native plants and animals impact economies and threaten the sustainability of agricultural production world-wide. In the United States alone, crop losses and environmental damage due to invasive species are estimated to be \$138 billion^{1,*} annually, the costs of which are paid by the consumer through tax dollars, increased food costs and reduced quality of agricultural products. Invasive species are also the second major threat to biodiversity, next to habitat degradation and loss. While non-native plants are only a part of this "big picture",

Continued inside back cover

Members of the Steep Rock Association For the Fiscal Year 2001-2002

Some of you may not know that the Steep Rock Association is a land trust. Ehrick Rossiter founded the organization in 1925, when he purchased the 100 acres of land that included Steep Rock itself. Steep Rock was incorporated as a land trust in 1961 and became a membership organization in 1994

Steep Rock has always relied on contributions from friends to help defray the costs of maintaining the land we own. This financial support is crucial to our operating budget, which in the coming year is projected to be close to \$200,000.

Our fiscal year ran from September 1- August 31. This year it has been adjusted to October 1-September 30. Our annual membership campaign for 2002-2003 will begin in late October.

We are grateful to our members for the fiscal year 2001-2002.

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*More Picnic:
 Alison Picton, Trustee,
 with Dana Gibson*

FAQ—Invasives, continued

they are a major contributor to the invasives problem outside of agricultural landscapes. For example, they can alter the physical features of habitats such as soil characteristics and hydrology. That's bad news not only for endangered species, many of which have specific habitat requirements, but also for other species such as migrating birds. If native plants at regular "re-fueling" stop-overs are replaced with non-native invasives with little or no food value, birds may be unable to replenish spent energy reserves and will perish during their long journey. Invasive plants are also homogenizing our landscape. One of the special features of New England is its varied landscape and resulting habitat types composed of diverse plant and animal communities. If invasive plants are not held in check, our natural areas will eventually not only all look alike but can become "biological deserts" as most invasive plants cannot sustain diverse native animal populations due to their negligible food value. This leads us to consider serious quality of life issues. A spring without bird song might be difficult to imagine yet it can become a reality in many areas if we don't tackle the invasives problem.

No new invasions!

To fully come to grips with the invasive plants problem, particularly in the broader landscape context as with a land trust, one must first realize that we will never *entirely* rid the landscape of invasives. Once this is understood, the solutions are easier to consider and the problem is less overwhelming. The best approach is to set up an early detection network in which volunteers are trained to identify invasives and to remove them *before* they become established, especially in pristine habitat areas. The second approach is to manage large, existing incursions, and keep them at bay so that they don't increase in size and spread into new areas. The complete removal of small infestations makes the most sense in preventing further expansion but with huge infestations this is not always feasible. Because funding and volunteer time for control efforts is limited, staving off incursions into new territory and preventing the establishment of new invasive plant arrivals is the most prudent, and least frustrating, route to take.

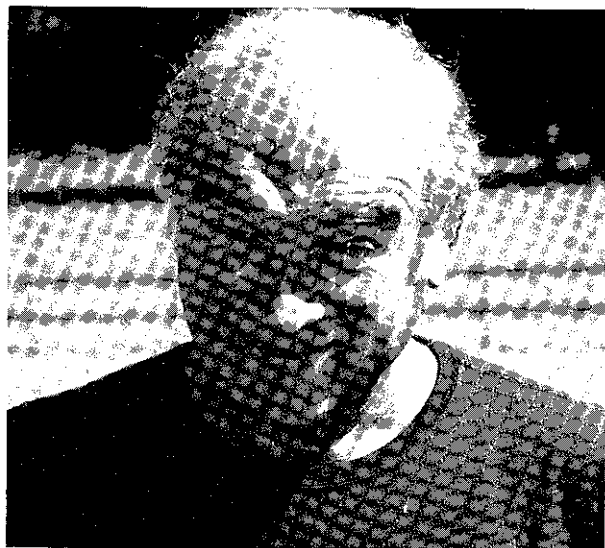
Betsy Corrigan

Co-chair, Connecticut Invasive Plant Working Group

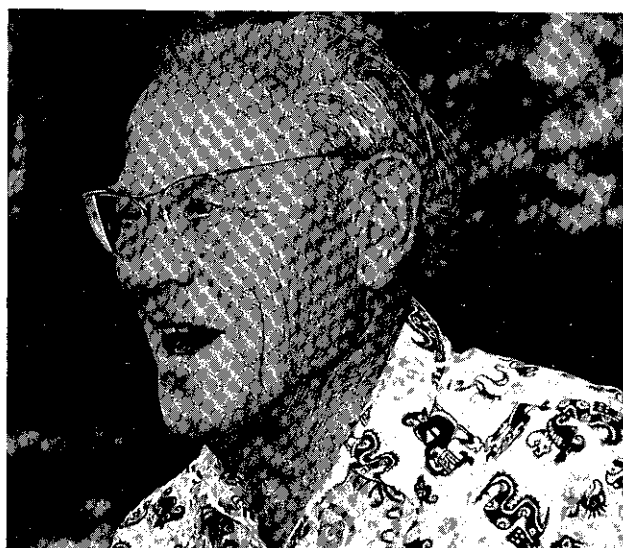
*Botanist and GIS Specialist, The Litchfield County Conservation District
Chair, Flora sub-committee, Washington Conservation Commission*

¹ Pimentel, Cornell University, 1997

* Compare to the United States wheat crop, a \$12 billion/yr industry !!



At the Picnic: Vinnie Forese, Steep Rock's Forester



Bob deCourcy, Steep Rock Honorary Trustee and Past President

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What A Picnic!



More than 450 people came this year and we were delighted! The Annual Picnic is Steep Rock's way of saying thank you to our supporting members and to all the residents of the town Washington.

The weather was perfect: sunny, warm, but not really hot.

Trustees had to scramble to keep the food lines moving. We ran out of tomatoes, salads, lemonade, even paper plates! Everyone did get something to eat, though. There were plenty of hamburgers, cheeseburgers, and hot dogs.



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