



The Steep Rock *VISTA* Spring 2005

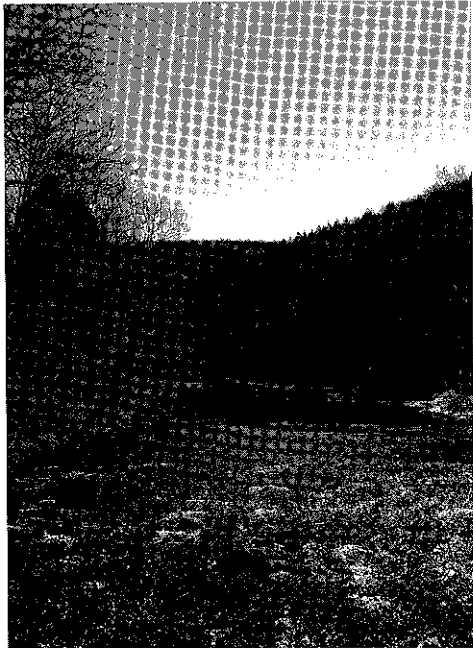
Settlement in Shepaug River Litigation! The River Wins

After more than ten years of struggle, frustration, and seemingly endless meetings, a settlement agreement has been reached between the city of Waterbury and the town of Washington.

The Shepaug River is the winner this time. Waterbury has agreed to release significantly more water to the river, up to 12 million gallons per day during certain times of the year, and Waterbury will still be able to meet the needs of its customers. We have always maintained that there is enough water for us all!

At its regular meeting on April 2, 2005 the Trustees of Steep Rock voted unanimously to "authorize its President (Michael C. Jackson) to execute the agreement with the city of Waterbury."

On April 12, 2005, the Town of Washington held a special town meeting at which Edwin Matthews, President of the Shepaug River Association and Attorney Bill Bright explained the terms of the settlement agreement. Town of Washington then voted unanimously to authorize First Selectman Dick Sears to sign the agreement.



February 2005
The Shepaug River

Steep Rock Association: Washington's Land Trust

Many people don't realize that Steep Rock is a land trust. In fact, we are one of the oldest land trusts in Connecticut. Ehrick Rossiter founded the Steep Rock Association in 1925, and Steep Rock was officially incorporated as a land trust in 1963.

The Certificate of Incorporation states our mission, in part, as follows:

"To accept, receive, acquire, hold, manage, maintain, preserve and improve land and real property, including conservation easements and other easements and interests in land and real property, in the Town of Washington and towns adjacent thereto for the use and enjoyment thereof by the citizens and residents of the Town of Washington, Litchfield County, and by the general public for conservation and recreational purposes."

Steep Rock's Land Preservation Committee's priorities include acquiring gifts and easements:

1. on land that is currently farmed or suitable for farming in an effort to preserve farming and farmlands in Washington
2. on properties contiguous to existing Steep Rock properties (such as the Steep Rock and Hidden Valley Reservations, the Macricostas Preserve, and Waramaug's Rock)
3. that protect Washington's water resources: its major rivers (Shepaug, Bantam and Aspetuck), major streams (Bee Brook, Kirby, Mallory, Sprain, and Walker Brooks) and the Lake Waramaug Watershed.
4. that protect scenic views and historic sites and districts
5. for greenways and preservation corridors for public enjoyment where compatible with wildlife and natural resource conservation.

If you're interested in finding out more about Steep Rock's mission to preserve land, feel free to call the office (860-868-9131) or Susan Payne, Chair of the Preservation Committee (860-868-9348).

www.steeprocksassoc.org

Visit us there. There are photos, information about Steep Rock, and links to other interesting environmental organizations.

Outlook Hopeful for Hemlock Recovery

Background: The hemlock woolly adelgid, a serious pest of eastern hemlocks, was accidentally introduced in the eastern US in the early 1950's. The adelgid is now estimated to infest half the range of the eastern hemlock from Maine to Georgia. Adelgid was discovered in Connecticut in 1985 and by the mid to late 1990's had spread to all six counties in the state. The adelgid was identified in Steep Rock in 1998.

For many years Dr. Mark McClure at the CT Agricultural Experiment Station in Windsor advised us on how to cope with the adelgid problem. Steep Rock helped fund Dr. McClure's trip to Japan in 1999 where he discovered and returned with a tiny predatory ladybeetle (*Sasajicymnus tsugae*).

Since Dr. McClure's retirement, Dr. Carole Cheah has continued the studies he began. The information for this article was gathered primarily from Dr. Cheah's most recent report to the Steep Rock Trustees.

Biological Control Experiment: In 1998, as part of an experiment to investigate the potential for dispersal and biological control of the Hemlock woolly adelgid, 10,000 adult ladybeetles were released on a single adelgid infested mature hemlock at the Steep Rock summit. Since the release, annual assessments of hemlock health, winter mortality of the adelgid and sampling for the dispersal of the ladybeetle have been conducted.

In the first two years following the release, adult ladybeetles and larvae were recovered from the release area during a period of some of the warmest winters on record (1998 & 1999) when adelgid populations flourished. Adult ladybeetles were also recovered from the footbridge area by the Shepaug River, indicating a dispersal distance of more than 1/2 mile.

Weather Effects: Both extended severe winter temperatures (below 0 degrees Fahrenheit) and wildly fluctuating winter temperatures like those in 2000 have inflicted high winter mortality rates on the adelgid populations, especially on exposed sites. In 2000, adelgid mortality was 100% at the Steep Rock summit and 53% by the Shepaug River. In 2003 winter mortality was 98% and resulted in very low levels of adelgid in the spring of 2004.

Site Conditions: The Steep Rock summit is a marginal site for hemlocks. Approximately 50% of the surface is bedrock and very prone to drought conditions. Hemlock have very shallow root systems and are very drought sensitive.

Other Hemlock Pests: Steep Rock's hemlocks are also infested with the elongate hemlock scale (*Fiorinia externa*) insect, which is a needle feeder. And in the early 1990's the hemlock looper, an insect much like the gypsy moth passed through the area, inflicting heavy damage on already weakened trees.

Results: It is now recognized that a combination of Circumstances: site conditions, weather phenomena and other hemlock pests combine to affect hemlock health.

However, in 2000, 2003 and 2004, above normal precipitation and cool growing season temperatures aided the recovery of the hemlocks. Hemlocks at the Steep Rock summit have shown great improvement and new growth was abundant in 2004.

The survey conducted by Dr. Cheah in 2004 showed that in the Clam Shell area and by the Shepaug River, adelgid levels remained low (0-10% of the crown), and the trees were generally healthy with abundant new shoot production.

Dr. Cheah believes that the outlook is optimistic for the continued recovery of our hemlocks.

Steep Rock and Hidden Valley Rules & Regulations

- Motorized vehicles are prohibited.
- No hunting.
- No alcoholic beverages.
- No loud noise or music.
- Dogs must be leashed at all times.
- Horseback riding is permitted except where posted otherwise.
- Tent camping is by permit only, in designated sites.
- Fires are permitted only in the provided grills. Ground/camp fires are prohibited.
- There are no waste barrels. Please do not litter; carry out what you carry in.
- There are no sanitary facilities in the Reservations.

Mountain Bike Rules

- Do not speed! Speed limit is 15 mph.
- Dismount when approaching horses.
- Always yield to people on foot.
- No more than four riders in a group.

Steep Rock: No bikes allowed on the west side of the river. Bikes are only allowed on Tunnel Road and the railroad bed.

Hidden Valley: No bikes allowed on the west side of the river. Bike trail follows yellow blazed trail to the railroad bed, then stays on railroad bed to the property line boundary.

Resident Goshawks Aggressive in Spring and Early Summer

The Goshawks (*Accipiter gentilis*) that live in Hidden Valley become active in early spring. Our intrepid regular hikers in Hidden Valley are watching and listening for signs of increasing activity, that is, aggressive behavior.

The birds begin their courtship and nestbuilding in early April, earlier if the winter has been mild. The pair of Goshawks we're familiar with 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. They are year round residents, but don't become aggressive until early spring.

They Will Attack!

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.

We post the main entries with warning notices as soon as we get the first reports of Goshawk activity. If we can find the exact location of the nest, we will close that particular trail. Nevertheless, your best protection from attack is to stay away from the whole area once you see we've posted the entries.

Other Goshawk Facts

Habitat: Goshawks in Connecticut reside in mixed forest types—hemlock and northern hardwood forests. They like to have a corridor such as a river or a trail along which to hunt. The male does most of the hunting.

Diet: Goshawks eat chipmunks, squirrels, rabbits and other mammals. They eat birds, too, such as blue jays and crows. They are fierce predators and agile fliers, and can catch birds in mid-air.

Nest: The nest is large, 3-4 feet in diameter, and usually found high in a tree, balanced against the trunk or a main branch.

Nesting Activities: Two or three eggs are laid in April or early May. The eggs incubate for 36-41 days. The young birds can fly about 45 days after hatching and they are independent 70 days after hatching. The female builds the nest, incubates the eggs, does most of the brooding and almost all of the defense of the nest.



Hidden Valley's Goshawk with fledglings in the nest. This photograph was taken in the mid 1980's by Washington resident Paul Staib.

Become a Member of Steep Rock We Need Your Support!

We're more than halfway through this year's Annual Membership drive. We began in October 2004. A contribution of any size entitles you to membership for one year.

This year's Appeal has the added incentive of a Challenge Grant to help us raise funds for trail maintenance. Several Trustees have agreed to match contributions as follows:

- All new members' donations will be matched.
- Last year's members who increase their donations will have the increased amount matched.

All funds raised help us fulfill our stewardship obligation to maintain Steep Rock, Hidden Valley and the Macricostas Preserve for the public's safety and enjoyment.

Please use this form to send in your donation.

Name _____

POBox/Street _____

Town _____

State, Zip _____

Send To:
Steep Rock Association
PO Box 279, Washington Depot, CT 06794

Steep Rock Association

Telephone 860-868-9131 FAX 860-868-5034

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Trails are Fragile, Especially in Spring

Conditions this spring have been such that we haven't felt the need to close the reservations, but trails are still especially fragile this time of year, when nighttime temperatures still fall well below freezing and daytime temperatures are much higher. This year we've seen fluctuations from 30 degrees to 60 degrees in one 24 hour period.

In addition, the hilly terrain in both Hidden Valley and Steep Rock makes trails susceptible to water runoff. When hikers, mountain bikers, and horseback riders leave deep imprints in muddy trails, erosion of the trails soon follows.



Workday, November 6, 2004

Dan Sherr, Trustee Polly Roberts and Addie Roberts work on constructing log steps that will help restore a trail leading to the Hidden Valley Pinnacle.



Steep Rock Association
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