



# The Steep Rock *VISTA* Spring 2006

## 2005 an Outstanding Year for Preservation

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The Steep Rock Association, Washington's Land Trust, preserved more than 400 acres of land in 2005. Eighty one acres of land were given to us in fee, and 363 acres in conservation easements. We are deeply grateful to the landowners who have protected their land in this way.

In the Nettleton Hollow area, Steven Mnuchin, gave Steep Rock 73 acres of land. The land, which was recently threatened with development, is forested. It contains mature mixed hardwoods and is near the headwaters of Nell's Brook which feeds Sprain Brook.

Michael and Ann Loeb of Bethlehem granted Steep Rock a 67 acre conservation easement on the Washington side of the Carmel Hill ridgeline. The land is approximately one quarter open fields and three quarters forested land.

Lawrence and Susan Kessler's 12 acre conservation easement is directly across West Mountain Road from Steep Rock's West Mountain Preserve.

An anonymous gift of 8 acres near Lake Waramaug is near the historic trail to Waramaug's Rock (also known as the Pinnacle).

A conservation easement from an anonymous donor protects some 150 acres of land in New Preston.

Melvyn and Janet Lewinter eased 29.4 acres of their land on the Roxbury Road (Rt. 199). This easement is contiguous to land owned by Steep Rock and further protects Kirby Brook and the wooded hillside visible from the road.

Preservation efforts continue in the Shearer Road area, with Robert and Angie Brown granting a 23 acre easement.

Also on Shearer Road, Peter Canoni and Donald Brigham eased 9.4 acres of land, preserving and protecting land near the road itself.

Minna Hebert's 55 acre conservation easement on land above and behind her home on River Road protects a critical hillside from development.

Wendy and Bill Luers have protected a beautiful open area on Upper Church Hill Road with a 12 acre conservation easement. The Luers hope their easement will inspire others to protect land in this important part of town.

Jennifer and Neil Mitchell's 6 acre easement on a beautiful open field is next to land they eased in 2000, and further protects a lovely view along Fenn Hill Road.

If you are interested in finding out more about how to preserve your land, please call the Steep Rock office (868-9131).

## FAQ (Frequently Asked Question): What is a Conservation Easement?

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A conservation easement (or conservation restriction) is a legal agreement between a landowner and a land trust (like the Steep Rock Association) or government agency that permanently limits uses of the land in order to protect its conservation values. It allows you to continue to own and use your land, and to sell it or pass it on to heirs.

When you donate a conservation easement to a land trust, you give up some of the rights associated with the land. For example, you might give up the right to build additional structures, while retaining the right to grow crops. Future owners also will be bound by the easement's terms. The land trust is responsible for making sure the easement's terms are followed. Conservation easements offer great flexibility. An easement on property containing rare wildlife habitat might prohibit any development, for example, while one on a farm might allow continued farming and the building of additional agricultural structures. An easement may apply to just a portion of the property, and need not require public access.

A landowner sometimes sells a conservation easement, but usually easements are donated. If the donation benefits the public by permanently protecting important conservation resources and meets other federal tax code requirements it can qualify as a tax-deductible charitable donation. The amount of the donation is the difference between the land's value with the easement and its value without the easement. Placing an easement on your property may or may not result in property tax savings.

Perhaps most important, a conservation easement can be essential for passing land on to the next generation. By removing the land's development potential, the easement lowers its market value, which in turn lowers estate tax. Whether the easement is donated during life or by will, it can make a critical difference in the heirs' ability to keep the land intact.

## Steep Rock's Web Site [www.steeprockassoc.org](http://www.steeprockassoc.org)

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Visit our web site to find lots of useful information. There are plenty of pictures, including several of Steep Rock Forester Vinnie Forese, who recently retired, and also the Shepaug River after the heavy rains in the fall.

You'll also find interesting links to other environmental web sites and a timeline of Steep Rock's history.

# Our Yearly Goshawk Reminder: They Will Attack

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

## Please Become a Member of Steep Rock. We Need Your Support!

A contribution of any size entitles you to membership for one year, and helps us to maintain the reservations. Please use this form to send in your donation.

Send Maps

Stephen Reich Memorial Fund

Name \_\_\_\_\_

PO Box/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

www.steeprockassoc.org

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Clark P. Gifford, *Land Manager*

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From left, Trustees Jane Conn, Chick Treadway, Natalie Dyer and Kirsten Peckerman and volunteers Cynthia Carter and Steve Paggioli building and installing a waterbar. This fall workday in Hidden Valley focused on directing water flow from the hillside off the trail.

# Washington Garden Club Plans Educational Trail at Macricostas Preserve

By Prudence Montrezza,  
Washington Garden Club Conservation Committee

The Conservation Committee of the Washington Garden Club is busy planning an interpretive trail on the Macricostas Preserve. Enthusiastic members are working with chairman Debbie Swigart and Natalie Dyer who heads the project. The purposes of the trail are twofold: recreation and conservation education. School groups will be encouraged to make use of the trail to learn the importance of wildlife habitats and ecosystems.

The entrance to the Preserve is at 124 Christian Street off Route 202 behind the old red farmhouse. The information board will have a box for a self-guiding brochure that will show and explain stops keyed to numbered posts. This area was chosen for an interpretive trail because it is a large calcareous wetland capable of supporting unusual species of plants and animals.

The Interpretive Trail will begin before "Adams Bridge" over Bee Brook and move through agricultural fields in different stages of succession. It will follow the farm road to the rich habitat of Meeker Swamp, cross Bee Brook again, at its headwaters, and end where the boardwalk stops, in the drier part of the shrub swamp.

In planning the stops, the Garden Club members organized several site visits and gained an appreciation of the beauty and ecological significance of the preserve. Some of the interesting points that will be included are the great variety of wildlife habitats and the flora and fauna inhabiting them, the problems associated with non-native invasive species and of course, the wetlands. The trail is less than a mile long on a relatively flat surface and will have about 20 stops. The opening is slated for June 3, 2006 to coincide with Connecticut Trails Day. The Washington Garden Club wishes to acknowledge the naturalists who are helping with the content of the guide, the Steep Rock Association staff and the informative Yale Management Plan.



Along the railroad bed in Steep Rock



In the fall, Steep Rock purchased a used truck big enough to do the many jobs required to maintain our properties. Here, truck and plow are being put to the test clearing the parking area near the Hidden Valley Bee Brook entrance.

## Signs: Are They Necessary?

Managing a multi-use trail system often means posting signs. Steep Rock believes that too many signs in our reservations diminish the experience of what they are: nature preserves. We try to follow the "less is more" philosophy.

Some signs are important; oftentimes our postings offend those who believe no rules or notices should be posted anywhere in the Reservations.

We regularly find that our signs get ripped, removed and destroyed, and occasionally offensive remarks are scrawled over the sign's message. The one below, though, was just too creative and funny not to share with you!

### Attention:

#### RULES FOR WINTER TRAIL USE:

- DEER - STAY OFF TRAILS !!**
1. **X Country Skiers:**  
Please set your tracks on one side of trail only.  
**SQUIRRELS - TREE TO TREE OVERHEAD ONLY**
  2. **Hikers, Snowshoers and your Dogs:**  
Please respect x-country tracks by keeping to the other side of the trail. **THERE ARE HIDDEN MONITORS IN THE HEMLOCKS**  
Steep Rock Association, Inc., 860-868-9131  
**FOXES AND RABBITS - NO WANDERING ACROSS TRAILS INDISCRIMINATELY**

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

## Stewardship Report

In April 2005 the Board of Trustees adopted an Invasive Management Plan written by Josh Ellsworth of Ellsworth Management, LLC. In addition, Steep Rock was approved for a Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) grant. With the Invasive Management Plan as a guide and the partial funding the WHIP program provides, we are pursuing ways to manage and eradicate invasive plants.

Clark Gifford, Land Manager, Susan Branson, Executive Director, and, until his retirement, Vinnie Forese, Forester, began to work on the recommendations of the Invasive Plan by cutting back the Nye fields, near the Sabbaday Lane entrance to Hidden Valley. They cleared around the edge of the field back to the surrounding stonewall and made several brush piles with all the material they cut. Clark put the new tractor to good use consolidating and burning those piles (see photo, right). As part of the WHIP program fields will now be mowed every other year to encourage bird and butterfly habitat. Steep Rock will mow around the edge of the fields to keep invasives out and the field open, but the next scheduled mow of all the fields in Hidden Valley is not until 2007.

Steep Rock hired Lewis Tree Service, a company that specializes in invasive eradication and was recommended by Josh Ellsworth, to help in a few of the larger areas. They came out in February to one of Steep Rock's fields on Sabbaday Lane and two other areas, and began "Phase 1" of the project to cut all the bittersweet, barberry, euonymus, and honeysuckle.

## Maps for Sale

There are now accurate, informative trail maps of all three of Steep Rock's Reservations - Steep Rock, Hidden Valley, and the Macricostas Preserve. Packages containing all three are for sale at the Hickory Stick bookstore and the Gunn Memorial Library at a cost of \$8.00. We have them for sale at the office, too. We're on the second floor of the old firehouse building in the Depot.

## Trails are Fragile, Especially in Spring

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 Hidden Valley, Steep Rock, and the Macricostas Preserve make trails susceptible to water runoff. When hikers, mountain bikers, and horseback riders leave deep imprints in muddy trails, erosion of the trails soon follows. Please be careful and tread lightly.



*In the fields near the Sabbaday Lane entrance to Hidden Valley, Clark Gifford, Steep Rock's Land Manager, uses the new Steep Rock tractor with its grapple to move brush onto a burn pile.*

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



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