



Year of the Bridges

Although not an official designation on the Chinese calendar, 2014 will henceforth be known at Steep Rock as the Year of the Bridges. Recognizing that the Hauser Bridge and the access ramp to the Reich Bridge could no longer withstand the forces of nature, Steep Rock embarked on a capital improvement campaign to restore and/or replace these iconic structures. At the same time, plans were well underway to kick-off construction of the new Thoreau Bridge at Hidden Valley Preserve.

HAUSER BRIDGE

The 23-year old Hauser Bridge in Steep Rock Preserve was given an extensive facelift. This included replacing the crossbeam of both tower structures, repairs to the tower uprights, replacing portions of the undercarriage and sections of the walkway, constructing new handrails and stairs, and refurbishing the suspension anchors, clamps and connectors. Suspending the bridge to replace the tower structures was the most daunting aspect of the project. This required an innovative approach and adapting creative solutions to problems encountered along the way. By late fall, the bridge was restored and reopened for public use.

REICH BRIDGE

Immediately following the restoration of the Hauser Bridge, the contractors remobilized to Hidden Valley Preserve to address the access ramp to the Reich Bridge, which was on the verge of sliding into the Shepaug River. What originally appeared to be a "simple fix" quickly became a time-consuming and challenging project. Based on soil studies and consultation with engineers and soil scientists, it was determined that the thin, erodible soils and lack of underlying bedrock on the riverside slope could not support, on a long-term basis, another access ramp. Instead, a three-level stairway was proposed on the more-stable slope at the end of the bridge. Fighting the elements of sub-freezing temperatures and snow, the contractors quickly began construction in early December. However, the icy trails and winter's wrath became too intense in mid-January, for work to continue. The new stairway, just a few days from completion, will be finished and open to the public as soon as weather permits.

We wish to thank our Steep Rock friends that generously supported the Bridges Restoration Campaign. To date, we have raised 84% of our \$100,000 goal and continue to seek additional contributions to fully fund these bridge projects. Your support will be greatly appreciated. If paying by check, please include "Bridges Restoration Campaign" on the footnote. To donate online, please visit www.steeprockassoc.org.

THOREAU BRIDGE

Construction of the newest addition to the Steep Rock family of bridges, funded by the Gould Family Foundation and named in honor of Henry David Thoreau, began in December at Hidden Valley Preserve. The bridge alignment was cleared of necessary trees and casings for the footings and anchors were installed prior to the ground freezing. This project has been suspended until spring when work will commence again. We anticipate the bridge construction will be completed this summer. Periodic updates will be provided on the Steep Rock website. Steep Rock wishes to thank the Gould Family Foundation for generously underwriting this project.



Tower structure repair/replacement at the Hauser Bridge



New stairway to replace access ramp at the Reich Bridge



Schematic rendering of the Thoreau Bridge at Hidden Valley Preserve.

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From the Executive Director *By Steve Law*

“Return on Your Steep Rock Investment”

Thanks to your generous support, we met last year’s annual budget and reached 84% of our funding goal for the much needed repairs to the iconic bridges at Steep Rock and Hidden Valley Preserves. Fiscal year 2014 was an exceptional year for capital projects. In addition to the aforementioned restoration of the Hauser Bridge and construction of a new stairway at the Reich Bridge, Steep Rock constructed a small trailhead parking lot on June Road to facilitate access to Macricostas Preserve, built a new boardwalk meandering through the Macricostas meadow, began construction of a new boardwalk at the Bronson Fields section of Hidden Valley Preserve, and completed a major trail remediation effort throughout the nature preserve system. We also completed a three-year inventory of critical habitats which will guide future land management decisions and initiatives. That is quite a return on your Steep Rock investment!

As we near the midpoint of our fiscal year 2015, we are again seeking your support to help us reach our new fundraising goals. In addition to funding our \$450,000 annual operating budget, our capital needs include a replacement vehicle and surfacing/drainage improvements to the parking lots at Steep Rock and Hidden Valley Preserves. And, as follow-up to the critical habitats inventory completed last year, we will initiate a rare plant survey to identify and provide management recommendations for the plant species of greatest conservation need in our most significant habitats.

Your support has always been and continues to be the cornerstone of our success. We believe that all Washingtonians and other local residents benefit from the permanent protection of our community’s spectacular natural resources and particularly benefit from the scenery and diverse recreational experiences available throughout the Steep Rock nature preserve system. Whether you are a frequent visitor to the nature preserves or simply take comfort in knowing these natural areas will remain unblemished for generations to come, we hope you will recognize and acknowledge the significant role Steep Rock Association has played, and continues to play, in preserving our quality of life. We hope you will include Steep Rock in your charitable giving by contributing as generously as possible. Every donation received, regardless of size, helps support our land conservation, stewardship, and environmental education initiatives.



New boardwalk meandering through the meadow at Macricostas Preserve



New trailhead parking lot on June Road

New Board Leadership

After six years of service to Steep Rock Association (SRA), Ed White and John Herrmann stepped down in June as President and Chairman of the Board, respectively, leaving behind a legacy of unprecedented advancement. During their tenure, Steep Rock enhanced organizational professionalism through staff recruitment, embarked on a biodiversity-based approach to land management, completed an inventory of critical habitats which will guide future land management decisions, protected an additional 457 acres, launched an environmental education programming initiative, and expanded membership by 27%. Thank you Ed and John! The Board, staff and community now look to Gene Pinover and Kirsten Feldman to guide Steep Rock into a new era of achievements. Please meet our new leaders.



Gene Pinover, President

Gene has resided in Washington for 16 years. Elected to the Board of Trustees in 2008, Gene served as Chair of the SRA Preservation Committee for four years. Gene

believes that Steep Rock is an extraordinary resource for the Town of Washington and the surrounding areas with unsurpassed opportunities for hiking, relaxing, swimming, canoeing, education, picnicking and just having fun. He is particularly passionate about making Steep Rock a good and cooperative citizen that enriches Washington and protects the biodiversity of the preserves. Gene is co-head of the Real Estate Department at the New York law firm Willkie Farr & Gallagher, LLP. He has been the President of other not-for-profit Boards including Disability Rights Advocates, Trinity School in Manhattan, and is currently active on the Board of The Gunnerly.



Kirsten Feldman, Chairman of the Board

Kirsten has lived in Washington for over 25 years. Elected to the Board of Trustees in 2007, she served as Chair of the SRA Development Committee for five years and was a leader in Steep

Rock's purchase of the 68.9-acre Bronson Fields property at Hidden Valley Preserve. She is an avid hiker and horseback rider, and sculls on Lake Waramaug. Kirsten believes that Steep Rock provides a way for members of our community to engage in conservation and habitat protection at the local level. She is passionate about increasing outdoor recreational opportunities for people of all ages and using the preserves to enhance environmental awareness and education. Kirsten is a retired Managing Director at Morgan Stanley and is a long-time Trustee of the Environmental Defense Fund.

Judea Garden – Growing Goodness *By Denise Arturi*

We are pleased to announce that effective last October 1st, Steep Rock Association became the official sponsor of Judea Garden. As such, the garden is now fully integrated into Steep Rock's operations, community outreach, and land stewardship initiatives. Denise Arturi will continue as the Master Gardener. Steep Rock is very appreciative of St. John's Church for its previous sponsorship of this vital community service.

The beautiful vegetable garden sited in a field at Macricostas Preserve is more than just a pretty face; it's a life saver for many local residents. Volunteer-based, Judea Garden has grown, harvested and distributed 25,000 pounds of fresh produce to neighbors in need in the Washington/New Milford area since its inception in 2009. Contrary to local assumption, there is definitely a need for this community service. Just ask our recipients:

"My deepest gratitude for all you do."

"Your vegetables got me through the winter."

"Thank you...especially for the flowers that have for me brightened my weeks of being ill this year."

"Thank you...It made all the difference."

Judea Garden has helped galvanize the greater Washington community as individuals and volunteers from churches and civic groups have come together to work the soil, harvest the crops and deliver the food. Gardening experience is not necessary and is only one of the ways to help. Delivering food, setting up or cleaning up food distribution sites, organizing tools, and grant writing are all ways to make a difference. If you like to garden, think about adopting a crop or setting up a regular work day.

Our paid summer internship program enters its fifth season with two positions available for high school (minimum age 16) or college students. Working 20 hours a week, interns learn about sustainable agriculture and current food issues while growing vegetables for local food banks. An application and more information are available at our website www.steeprockassoc.org. This program is made possible in part by a grant from the Connecticut Community Foundation.

Please join us and make a difference in your life as well as the life of others by volunteering at Judea Garden this season. It's so easy and so rewarding, just contact us for information at our web-

site or email Denise Arturi at denise.arturi@steeprockassoc.org. We also hope to see you at our season opening presentation by Chef Eddy from Winvian (see program listings for details).

WORK DAYS IN THE GARDEN

Volunteers are needed to help with the following projects. If interested in helping, show up at the garden on the specified date and time.

SPRING CLEANUP:

Sat., April 18, 9:00 am – 1 pm;

Sun., April 19, 1:00 – 4:00 pm

EARLY PLANTING DAY:

Sun., April 26, 1:00 – 4:00 pm

PLANTING DAYS:

Sat., May 16, 9:00 am – 1:00 pm;

Sat., May 30, 9:00 am – 1:00 pm;

Sun., May 31, 1:00 – 4:00 pm

FALL CLEANUP:

Sat., Oct. 24, 9:00 am – 1:00 pm;

Sun., Oct. 25, 1:00 – 4:00 pm

All dates are weather dependent so check the website for any changes.

Explorations in Nature



Join us as we explore various facets of nature through a fascinating array of guided hikes and educational programs. All programs are free; however, **pre-registration is required**. Enrollment is limited and registration is on a first come — first serve basis. To register for a program, please complete and return the enclosed registration form or complete and submit the registration form on our website (www.steeprockassoc.org). Your registration will be confirmed by email. If a program is canceled, registered participants will be notified.



WHAT'S UP WITH THE NIGHT SKY?

Thursday, March 19 • 6:30-8:00 pm

LOCATION: Wykeham Room at
The Gunn Memorial Library
(5 Wykeham Rd, Washington)

AUDIENCE: Ages 12 and older; all children
must be accompanied by an adult

Do you ever look up at the night sky and marvel at the beauty of the stars while pondering the celestial wanderings of the planets? Do you ever wonder why our seasons vary in length — believe it or not winter is allowed the fewest days! Are you perplexed as to why, when the Earth is closest to the warm sun, we are actually experiencing winter? Join retired Gunnery astronomy teacher Ray Reich as he takes us on an informative and fun journey exploring the mysteries and mechanics of our solar system.

PROGRAM LEADER: *Ray Reich* moved to Washington with his wife Sue and three children in 1980, to further his career as a physics and astronomy teacher at The Gunnery School. He retired nine years ago after 45 years of teaching. Active in several town committees, he currently serves as a Steep Rock Trustee.



RIVERSIDE REPTILES

Saturday, March 28 • 1:00-2:00 pm

LOCATION: Max Theatre at Rumsey Hall
School (201 Romford Rd, Washington Depot)

AUDIENCE: All ages; all children must
be accompanied by an adult

Back by popular demand, naturalist Brian Kleinman returns with his impressive collection of reptiles and amphibians. This interactive, "hands on" learning experience will introduce us to numerous examples of these two similar yet different groups of animals, and explain why the populations of many reptile and amphibian species are declining world-wide. Well-known for his engaging rapport with children, Kleinman allows his audience to get up close and personal with the wonderful world of lizards, toads, snakes and turtles. New to his collection of fascinating creatures is a baby alligator!

PROGRAM LEADER: *Brian Kleinman*, inspired by his years of work at the Roaring Brook Nature Center and his animal curator position at the Children's Museum of West Hartford, decided to create Riverside Reptiles, his own live animal education program. Brian has been educating and entertaining audiences of all ages for over 11 years.



THE SHEPAUG RIVER NOW AND THEN

Thursday, April 2 • 6:30-8:00 pm

LOCATION: Wykeham Room at
The Gunn Memorial Library
(5 Wykeham Rd, Washington)

AUDIENCE: Ages 12 and older; all children
must be accompanied by an adult

The history of the town of Washington is centered along the Shepaug River. Meaning "Rocky River" in the Algonquin language, the Shepaug has provided the vital waters needed to sustain the town's earliest farms and mill industries and has continually given nourishment to the varied wildlife that lives near or in its waters. Today, the Shepaug River provides Washingtonians with numerous recreational possibilities and is at the core of Steep Rock Association's efforts to preserve critical habitat. Calling rivers "good allegories for the passage of time", Curtis Read reprises and updates his "Shepaug Now and Then" presentation, originally given in 1998 to kick-off the "Celebration of the Shepaug" exhibition.

PROGRAM LEADER: *Curtis Read* has a BA from Hamilton College and a MA in Agriculture from West Virginia University. He is a founding partner of Hydro Technologies Inc. and currently the manager of Lablite LLC, which develops software to manage laboratories. Curtis is also the First Selectman of Bridgewater and a photographer/filmmaker of sorts.



ORGANIC GARDENING WITH WINVIAN'S CHEF EDDY

Sunday, April 12 • 12:00-1:30 pm

LOCATION: Washington Montessori
School (240 Litchfield Turnpike [Rte. 202],
New Preston)

AUDIENCE: Ages 12 and older; all children
must be accompanied by an adult

Judea Garden is proud to open its 2015 growing season with this rare opportunity to hear Winvian's award winning executive chef Chris Eddy, "a crusader for adventurous cuisine", talk about Winvian's commitment to growing its own ingredients for the table. Chef Eddy is a well-known advocate of sustainable non-gmo (genetically modified organism) gardening practices that he applies to Winvian's three-quarter acre garden, planted with the herbs and vegetables used in his restaurant dishes.

PROGRAM LEADER: *Executive Chef Chris Eddy* has long been an acknowledged master of haute cuisine and trained under Daniel Boulud and Alain Ducasse. What makes him a revolutionary is his insistence on using only the freshest seasonal ingredients, most from Winvian's organic gardens... ingredients Eddy and his talented staff have planted, picked, prepared and plated themselves. He is the passionate founder of Winvian's pure food philosophy and prides himself on being a culinary craftsman, creating spontaneous farm-to-table menus using simple, crisp and fresh foods accented with unusual and foraged findings. The results are extraordinary and have garnered rave reviews from revered food critics and guests alike, including Connecticut Magazine's Top Five Best Restaurants. Savoring Chris Eddy's inspired and ever-changing daily menus has become a highlight of the guest experience.



AN EVENING WOODCOCK WALK

Saturday, April 18 • 7:00- 8:30 pm

LOCATION: Macricostas Preserve
(Christian Street)

AUDIENCE: Ages 12 and older;
all children must be accompanied
by an adult

The American woodcock, also known as the "timber doodle," is a shy and elusive bird that spends most of its time hidden from view. In the early spring, however, the male woodcock leaves the safety of protective ground cover at dusk to perform a unique mating ritual that combines a distinct call and an aerial display that has been called, "one of the magical natural sights of springtime in the east." The program will include a brief introductory overview of the life of the American woodcock, followed by a 1-1 1/2 mile hike along the fields of Macricostas Preserve. Participants should wear weather-appropriate clothing, walking shoes and bring a flashlight.

PROGRAM LEADER: *Fran Zygmunt*, an avid birder, is a longtime member and past President of Litchfield Hills Audubon Society and a past President of the Audubon Council of Connecticut. He is also a longtime member of the Connecticut Ornithological Association.



THE NATURAL HISTORY OF SPRING WILDFLOWERS – LECTURE

Sunday, May 3 • 1:00-2:30 pm

LOCATION: Washington Montessori School (240 Litchfield Turnpike [Rte. 202], New Preston)

AUDIENCE: Ages 12 and older; all children must be accompanied by an adult

Steep Rock Association and the Washington Garden Club are pleased to welcome well-known wildflower author Carol Gracie to talk about the native wildflowers that brighten our woodlands in spring. More than just a delight for the eye and a lift for the winter-weary spirit, each wildflower plays an important role in nature by providing food for

pollinators, which in turn help disperse the flower's seeds. Join us as we learn about the fascinating life histories of some favorite spring wildflowers.

THE NATURAL HISTORY OF SPRING

WILDFLOWERS – HIKE

Sunday, May 3 • 3:00-4:00 pm

LOCATION: Hidden Valley Preserve (Bee Brook Rd./Hwy. 47)

AUDIENCE: Ages 12 and older; all children must be accompanied by an adult

As an accompaniment to her lecture, wildflower expert Carol Gracie will lead a wildflower identification hike at Macricostas Preserve. Space is limited.

PROGRAM LEADER: *Carol Gracie* is retired from The New York Botanical Garden, where she headed the Children's Education Program and the Foreign Tour Program. Carol has made dozens of trips to South and Central America, both as a tour leader and for botanical collecting expeditions, resulting in five newly discovered tropical plant species named for her. Princeton University Press published her latest book, *Spring Wildflowers of the Northeast: A Natural History*, in 2012. Carol is currently writing a book on the natural history of summer wildflowers.



THINGS THAT FLY

Saturday, May 30 • 8:30- 10:00 am

LOCATION: Macricostas Preserve
(Christian Street)

AUDIENCE: Ages 12 and older; all children must be accompanied by an adult

Have you ever identified an Indigo Bunting, an Orchard Oriole, a Pearl Crescent, and a Bronze Copper? Join naturalists Peary and BK Stafford on an informative walk to discover more about the "things that fly" around us on a spring day. Learn about the birds, butterflies and dragonflies that call the fields at Macricostas Preserve their home. In addition to learning to recognize these flying species, this program will offer a closer look at Steep Rock's conservation efforts to manage its critical habitats where many of these birds, butterflies and dragonflies flourish. Participants should wear weather-appropriate clothing, hiking shoes and bring binoculars.

PROGRAM LEADER: Both bird and butterfly enthusiasts, husband and wife team *Peary and BK Stafford* have traveled the world in search of birds and butterflies. But the preserves of Steep Rock are where they have identified more than 170 species of birds and 80 species of butterflies. Peary has been a Steep Rock Trustee for nearly 10 years.



Managing for Biodiversity *By Peary Stafford*

We all have different ways that we take pleasure in the preserves of Steep Rock. Whether it's riding horses, walking dogs, meeting friends or simply enjoying the solitude, all of these motivations have a critical element common to them; the natural beauty, varied landscapes and diversity of life that exists on our lands. Without these, there's no attraction, no allure; and as stewards of the land it's our duty to conserve and protect our flora and fauna by encouraging natural habitat and preventing invasive species from taking over. The maintenance of our preserves, trails and infrastructure will always be paramount in our efforts, but we need to go beyond preserving the status quo. The question is, how do we do so?

To help guide us in our efforts to protect and promote the biodiversity in our preserves we recently conducted a multi-year Inventory of Critical Habitat on the land we own outright. As defined by the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP), Critical Habitats are those areas that harbor or have the potential to harbor the most species of Greatest Conservation

Need (GCN); that is to say, those species at highest risk in Connecticut, New England or beyond.

Identifying these habitats allows us to focus our conservation management and research on those parcels of our land that are most "special" from the point of view of biodiversity, where there is the most potential for improvement in quality of the habitat, and where we can impact the most important species. It also helps us when we apply for grants from the government and other conservation organizations, because being able to say that we are improving or expanding critical habitat carries a great deal of weight in improving our chances of raising money from these sources.

Our recent inventory turned up some remarkable results. Of the roughly 2500 acres owned by Steep Rock Association, approximately 500 acres can definitely be designated as Critical Habitat, and based upon future surveys, it's quite possible that another 460 acres may qualify, in all a total that would constitute about 38% of our holdings. Is that a lot? The DEEP seems to think so;

Confirmed plus Potential Critical Habitat



Hidden Valley

- Approximately 960 acres
- About 38% of total holdings

■ Confirmed Critical Habitat
■ Potential Critical Habitat



Macricostas



Steep Rock

when asked they said that only about 1% of the permanently protected land in Connecticut is currently designated this way. While this comparison may contain some inaccuracies and counting differences, even the most conservative guess would say that we have about 10 times more critical habitat than other protected land in the state. Clearly, our preserves are pretty special. But we all already knew that!

It should come as no surprise that the type of Critical Habitat of which we have the most (about 150 acres) is called Old Growth Forest. This land generally is characterized by trees older than 200 years and is found largely on the steeper slopes of the Shepaug River where the topography has limited lumbering and clearing over the years. Some of the ravines and slopes in this habitat hold plants and birds at the southernmost limit of their range, making them unusual, or even rare in Connecticut.

Another type of critical habitat of which we have significant acreage is floodplain forest; about 70 acres combined in Steep Rock and Hidden Valley Preserves, found largely on the interior of the meanders in the Shepaug River. This habitat is characterized by sandy soil and relatively young vegetation; unfortunately it is also some of the most susceptible to invasive plants and there are plenty!

Our part of the Shepaug River — the jewel of our preserves — is one of the longest free-flowing stretches of river of this type in the state. We border about 7 ¼ miles — 4 ½ miles on both sides — and it actually constitutes about 70 acres of our area. The river and its tributaries are about as critical as it gets and are deeply connected to just about every other type of important habitat.

In addition to delineating the important areas, our report came with a long list of management recommendations, some of which we've already started to implement, some of which we'll get to in later years. Some of the efforts currently underway include a government grant-funded project in the tracts to the north and east of the agricultural field at Macricostas Preserve (including the swampy area north of the bridge) where we've begun a multi-year effort to remove invasive species that should significantly improve the important bird, butterfly and reptile habitat. In a similar effort you'll also notice areas in the boardwalk meadow this spring that have been sprayed with herbicide to control the invasive Reed Canary Grass. We'll also be surveying the Hemlocks in Steep Rock Preserve for the insect pests Woolly Adelgid and Hemlock Scale and, depending upon the results, take action to combat them in the hopes of conserving our magnificent trees — one of the finest stands of Hemlock in the state. Our river subcommittee has numerous projects underway to protect the banks of the waterways and control erosion in the Shepaug River watershed.

These are just a very few examples of the kinds of projects we are hoping to undertake over the next few years to ensure that our plants and animals continue to thrive.

So, while we remain firmly committed to maintaining our preserves in a fashion that promotes the safe and passive recreation that we all enjoy so much, we equally appreciate our duty to promote and protect the native flora and fauna and we will continue in our efforts to assure that our preserves will remain the wonderful natural sanctuaries that they are. ■



How Sweet It Is *By Kirsten Feldman*

Steep Rock Honey is a new project created by a group of Trustees and friends of Steep Rock who love bees and care about our land trust. Beehives are currently maintained at various private properties in the Town of Washington as well as at Macricostas Preserve. Honey collected from each hive is hand spun and bottled by volunteers and marketed by the location of the hive so you can enjoy and compare the unique flavor of each site. The limited edition, pure, distinctive honey from these hives will be harvested once per year, uniquely packaged and sold at exclusive locations in Washington for seasonal holiday gifts. Our local retail partners (J. Seitz, Nine Main, The Hickory Stick Bookshop, and the Community Table Restaurant) have generously agreed to sell Steep Rock Honey without a profit so that 100% of the proceeds can go to the Association to help support trail maintenance. From hive to table, it's a true local gift.



This past inaugural season was a wonderful success. Our initial small supply sold out in two weekends and raised \$3,000 for Steep Rock. Many local businesses graciously supported the project by purchasing Steep Rock Honey as corporate holiday gifts. We anticipate that our supply of honey will increase this coming year as the hives become more established. To facilitate sales, we plan to accept preorders for this year's holiday season. Find out more at www.steeprockhoney.org.



A Conservation Legacy

How do you want to be remembered? Will it be as a champion of the environment?



A conservation gift to Steep Rock, whether financial or the gift of land, is one that will help ensure the protected open space we cherish today will be enjoyed for generations to come. Please join your friends and neighbors by including Steep Rock Association in your estate plans and becoming a Charter Member of the Steep Rock Legacy Society. Steep Rock is deeply indebted to our current Legacy Society members: (*deceased)

- Josephine Dobkins
- Natalie Dyer
- Kirsten Feldman & Hugh Frater
- Joan Friedland*
- Valerie Friedman
- Joe Gitterman

- Zachary Goodyear*
- Suzanne Kelly Kurz
- Ted Kurz
- Kirsten Peckerman
- Priscilla Porter*
- Frederick Roberts*

- Peary & BK Stafford
- Charles Treadway
- Margaret T.M. Jones*
- Dan Whalen

If you have already designated Steep Rock Association as a beneficiary in your will, please let us know so you can be properly recognized. To obtain a copy of our legacy brochure, please call the Steep Rock office or visit www.steeprockassoc.org.

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