



*Winter at
Macricostas*

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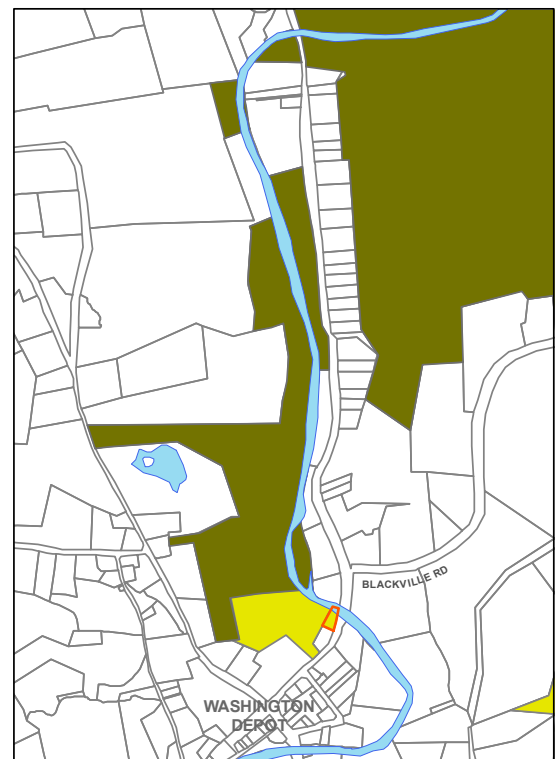
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Unique Partnership Yields Land Preservation

What do affordable housing and land preservation in the Town of Washington have in common? On the surface, nothing. But that all changed this past November. Working in partnership with the Washington Community Housing Trust, with additional support and cooperation from Washington Supply Company, Steep Rock Association assisted the Housing Trust with its purchase of the Welles Estate property located on Bee Brook Road across from the GW Tavern. This unique partnership enabled the Housing Trust to purchase the 1.2-acre property, renovate the existing residence and prepare it for re-sale as an affordable housing unit. In the process, Steep Rock acquired from the Housing Trust a 0.59-acre conservation easement to preserve the steep, rocky slope above the Shepaug River. Funding for the purchase of this easement was made possible through the generosity of Steep Rock Trustees Kirsten Peckerman and Steve Solley. In spite of its size, this easement is highly significant as it further protects the river corridor and will serve as a public access for a future hiking trail along the west bank of the river between Washington Depot and Hidden Valley Preserve.

This was a win-win-win situation for Steep Rock, the Housing Trust and the Town of Washington. In addition to the obvious benefits of preserving critical habitat along the Shepaug River and accommodating public access to an expanded trail network, this project will increase the inventory of affordable housing units, thus helping to keep young families living in town.

Steep Rock is pleased to have been a catalyst in this community enhancement initiative. This model of collaboration may serve as a blueprint for future opportunities in Washington or for similar projects in our neighboring towns.



-  Land Protected in 2013
-  Steep Rock Association Preserves
-  Conservation Easements



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From the Executive Director...

"Keeping You Informed"

2014 is shaping up to be a banner year for Steep Rock in many respects. Never before have we undertaken so many diverse initiatives and capital improvement projects simultaneously. Several of these high-profile projects, each likely to be of special interest to you, are described on the following pages. And, as you will see on the following pages, we have assembled a spectacular series of environmental programs to educate and entertain you throughout the spring and early summer. It's an exciting time at Steep Rock!

As the Association continues to evolve and diversify, so too will the VISTA newsletter. We are taking the first steps with this edition. Future issues will be filled with updates on land preservation initiatives, habitat management practices and capital projects; special announcements; a schedule of our seasonal programs, educational lectures and training workshops; and much more. Our goal is to keep you better informed about Steep Rock happenings and how we're effectively using your generous contributions to further our land conservation and environmental education mission. So please, let us know how we're doing. — Steve

New Faces at Steep Rock

Late last fall, we were pleased to welcome two new part-time employees to the Steep Rock staff.

Rory Larson, our new Land Steward, was raised in Roxbury and is intimately familiar with the nature preserve properties. He is a graduate of the University of Maine with a degree in Wildlife Ecology. Rory brings extensive knowledge of wildlife conservation and habitat management to our staff team, as well as skills and experience in trail maintenance. You're likely to see Rory busily working on our trails and elsewhere in the preserves.

Louise van Tartwijk, our new Outreach Coordinator, moved to Washington in 2010 with her husband and four daughters after living for 24 years in The Netherlands. She is a graduate of the University of Pennsylvania with a degree in English and History. Louise is a history buff and author of two books about the European Union. She is very active in our community with the Gunn Museum, as a Board member of the Washington Art Association and The Institute for American Indian Studies, and as a member of the Washington Historical Commission. Louise is coordinating our educational programs and other community outreach initiatives.

Welcome Rory and Louise!



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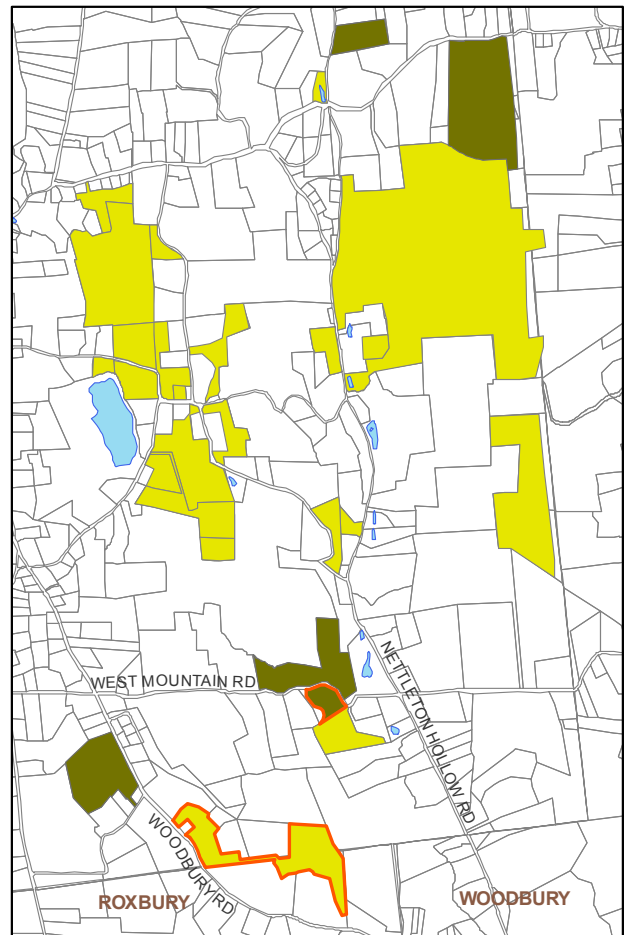
More Land Protected in Nettleton Hollow Area

Calendar year 2013 ended with a flurry of activity as Steep Rock Association partnered with local residents to preserve more of Washington's picturesque countryside. In addition to acquiring the 0.59-acre conservation easement along the Shepaug River from the Washington Community Housing Trust (see cover story), Steep Rock was the beneficiary of two very generous conservation donations in the southeast corner of Washington.

In December, Mark and Glynnis Snow donated approximately 6.8 acres of land on West Mountain Road. This forested property is strategically situated between, and adjacent to, 30.5 acres of Steep Rock-owned land to the north and a 14.5-acre Steep Rock conservation easement to the south; thereby creating a conservation area in excess of 50 contiguous acres.

Also in December, Alan Mnuchin donated a 41.5-acre conservation easement at the Washington/Roxbury town line off Woodbury Road (Rte. 47). This property, designated by the Litchfield Hills Greenprint as being part of a "Large Forest Habitat", was identified as a conservation priority in Steep Rock's new Strategic Land Conservation Plan.

With these two donations, Steep Rock has now partnered with area residents to preserve approximately 824 acres in the southeast corner/Nettleton Hollow region of Washington. We are grateful to these newest donors and all of our previous conservation partners for helping to protect and preserve our rural character. If you are considering a gift of land to Steep Rock and would like more information, please call us at (860) 868-9131.



Planning for the Future

Throughout its nearly 90-year history, Steep Rock Association has been fortunate to partner with many of our members and local residents on a variety of land preservation initiatives. Each of these projects has strengthened our organization and enriched our community. Thanks to your foresight, land ethic and generosity, we have amassed a nature preserve system encompassing more than 2,500 acres and have helped protect nearly 2,700 acres of your private land with conservation easements. Steep Rock now protects 20% of the land in the Town of Washington. But our job is not finished. As we look to the future, we will embark on a more strategic approach to land conservation. Although we will continue to accept and appreciate unsolicited gifts of land that meet our land acquisition criteria, our priority will be to permanently protect properties of the highest conservation importance.

During 2013, Steep Rock's Preservation Committee worked diligently to identify unprotected properties of high conservation value. This first phase of our Strategic Land Conservation Plan will guide our land preservation initiatives for the foreseeable future. With a focus on

riparian (river and stream) corridors, agricultural lands and critical habitats, we hope to further protect our water resources and working farms, and fill important gaps to create contiguous conservation corridors for wildlife. But we can't do this without you!

As we begin 2014, the Preservation Committee is moving into the second phase of the plan – communicating with owners of these conservation priority properties. Choosing to permanently protect your land is a noble gesture, and an action that should be based on an informed decision. Today, there are numerous land conservation options available, and it is important for you to choose the tool(s) that best suits your goals – now and into the future. We don't expect our friends and neighbors to navigate these options alone; we're here to educate, inform and help simplify the decision-making process.

As we begin this journey in search of new conservation partners, we are hopeful that this effort will further enrich our community through the preservation of our rural landscape.

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.



RIVERSIDE REPTILES

Saturday, March 29 • 2:00-3:00 pm

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

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

Get up close and personal as we explore the wonderful world of amphibians and native reptiles. Pet a lizard! Stare into the eyes of a huge toad! Touch a giant Python! Naturalist Brian Kleinman will give a “hands on” interactive learning experience using various examples of these two similar and yet different groups of animals, while explaining their natural history and the importance of their conservation.

PROGRAM LEADER: *Brian Kleinman* — Inspired by his years of work at the Roaring Brook Nature Center and his animal curator position at the Science Center of Connecticut, Brian decided to create his own live animal education program — Riverside Reptiles. Brian has been educating and entertaining audiences of all ages for over 10 years.



COYOTES AND WOLVES

Saturday, April 12 • 2:00-3:00 pm

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

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

Coyotes now call the Steep Rock Preserves home. Many of us listen to them howling at night and wonder: Were there always coyotes in Connecticut? How many coyotes are there in the preserves? How do they live and hunt? What impact do they have on other wildlife species? Maggie Howell, of the Wolf Conservation Center, will answer these and other questions while helping us to understand the amazing world of coyotes and wolves, their relationship to their environment and the important role we must play in protecting their future. She will also introduce us to Atka, an Arctic grey wolf, the Wolf Conservation Center’s wolf ambassador.

PROGRAM LEADER: *Maggie Howell* is Executive Director of the Wolf Conservation Center in South Salem, NY. She was a founding board member of the Nation Wolfwatcher Coalition and is currently their Director of

Wildlife Science. Maggie is a committed educator and advocate for wolves and coyotes.



SKYHUNTERS IN FLIGHT

Saturday, April 26 • 2:00-3:00 pm

LOCATION: Steep Rock Preserve (Riding Ring)

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

Master falconer Brian Bradley gives a peek into the fascinating world of raptors through live birds of prey, including owls, falcons, hawks and eagles. He will introduce us to the ancient sport of falconry, let us witness the silent flight of an owl and leave us gasping at the aerial maneuvers of a trained hawk and falcon as they perform a hunting demonstration overhead. See these beautiful birds up close and learn about their vital role in the environment.

PROGRAM LEADER: *Brian Bradley* is a licensed master falconer and has been training birds of prey for over twenty-five years. His childhood interest in raptors turned into a lifelong passion of educating others about these magnificent creatures.



PAINTING THE STEEP ROCK LANDSCAPE

Saturday, May 10 • 10:00 am-12:00 noon

LOCATION: Steep Rock Preserve (Riding Ring)

AUDIENCE: Ages 15 and older

Let nature be your muse and awaken your intuitive artistic spirit. Turn the colors and shapes of the ever-changing Steep Rock landscape into a personal artistic expression. The emphasis of this outdoor art class will be on creativity training using watercolor and nature as vehicles. This workshop is open to all levels of art experience. All materials will be provided; participants will only need to bring a camping chair or ground mat, and their creativity.

PROGRAM LEADER: *Fran Patnaude* is Head of the Art Department at Rumsey Hall School in Washington, CT. He also teaches color and design at Western Connecticut State University and develops training methodologies and workshops in diverse areas of creativity.



NAVIGATING THE FOREST WITH A MAP AND COMPASS

Saturday, May 17 • 9:00-11:00 am

LOCATION: Steep Rock Preserve (Riding Ring)

AUDIENCE: All ages; children under age 13 must be accompanied by an adult

Join us for an invigorating and exciting morning in Steep Rock Preserve learning the sport of orienteering. Originating as a Swedish military training exercise in land navigation, orienteering is a race against the clock maneuvering from checkpoint to checkpoint through the woods using a special map and a compass. Orienteering is an individual sport for young and old that offers a great way to exercise both the mind and the body in nature.

PROGRAM LEADER: *Nick DePreter* is a teacher at the Horace Mann School's Dorr Nature Laboratory in Washington, CT. He has taught outdoor skills and environmental science for over ten years in the US and abroad.



BUTTERFLIES, CATERpillARS AND THE PLANTS THAT FEED THEM

Saturday, May 31 • 10:00-11:30 am

LOCATION: Macricostas Preserve (Christian Street)

AUDIENCE: Adults

Too many landscapes today consist mainly of green lawn and offer very few trees and shrubs to support wildlife. Andy Brand will show us how we can increase biodiversity in our yards by concentrating on the importance of native plants. Learn how to identify Connecticut's native butterflies, while discovering which local plants offer food for caterpillars and nectar for butterflies. Attract these beautiful visitors to your yard with plants that are truly butterfly magnets. A wildflower walk will follow the presentation.

PROGRAM LEADER: Avid naturalist *Andy Brand* is the Manager of the famed Broken Arrow Nursery in Hamden, Connecticut. He is a past president of the Connecticut Butterfly Association as well as a past president of the Connecticut Nursery and Landscape Association.



A ROSE BY ANY NAME

Saturday, June 28 • 11:00 am-1:00 pm

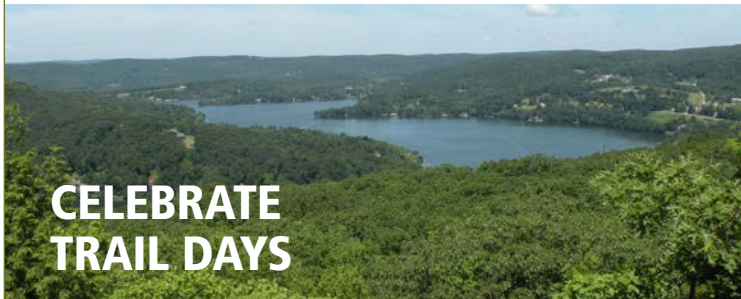
LOCATION: Macricostas Preserve (Christian Street)

AUDIENCE: Adults

Come hear Stephen Scanniello lead a lively and fascinating outdoor program at the Macricostas Preserve rose garden – the site of three historical roses. Even if you're not a rose enthusiast, this presentation is for you. Stephen digs into history, origin of rose names, science, botany, and tells some hilarious personal stories of his early beginnings as a rose horticulturist.

PROGRAM LEADER: *Stephen Scanniello*, president of the Heritage Rose Foundation, is the author of many books on roses. The 2009 book, *A Rose By Any Name*, was the inspiration for the creation of the Heritage Rose District in New York City and this sister project in Macricostas Preserve.

Looking for another Holiday House Hike?
Check our summer-fall program schedule in a few months.



CELEBRATE TRAIL DAYS

Celebrate Connecticut Trails Day on June 7th and 8th by enjoying a self-directed hike along any of the 40 miles of beautiful trails throughout Steep Rock, Hidden Valley and Macricostas Preserves. Whether you choose to explore by yourself or in the company of family or friends, we hope you will spend this weekend outside re-connecting with nature. Trail maps for each of the preserves are available for purchase at the Steep Rock Association office (Monday – Friday) and at The Hickory Stick Bookshop or the Gunn Memorial Library. Since this is a self-directed hike, there is no need to register. Have Fun!

HIKER'S CHALLENGE

Walk Off Those Winter Blues



Cabin fever got you down? It's time to get active again with the onset of spring! Take the Hiker's Challenge and explore all 40 miles of nature preserve trails at Steep Rock, Hidden Valley and Macricostas. This is a self-directed hiking activity that's fun for the whole family. Hike at your own pace, there's no time limit. When you register (cost is \$40 per adult; \$20 per child), you will receive all three preserve maps and an official Steep Rock Association hat. Upon completion, you will be rewarded with a certificate and a lapel pin to proudly display your accomplishment and we will also add your name to the Hiker's Challenge Club listed on our website. For more information, please visit www.steeprockassoc.org/whats-happening.

Shepaug River Hiking Routes Interrupted

Hauser Bridge –
Deterioration of
wooden tower
crossbeam



Two of the most iconic structures in the nature preserves...the Hauser Bridge at Steep Rock Preserve and the Reich Bridge at Hidden Valley Preserve...enable hikers to traverse a loop trail along the river's edge. These loop routes are now in jeopardy and will be interrupted for an unknown amount of time this spring and/or summer as needed repairs are implemented.

Now 23 years old, the Hauser Bridge has aged well, but several critical structural components are beginning to fail and must be replaced. This was confirmed during an inspection in January by the engineer who designed the bridge in 1991. Although a final analysis and repair plan is still in the works, we have been advised that, at the very least, the wooden towers supporting the suspension bridge, sections of the under-carriage, and parts of the walking surface and handrails will need to be replaced. Informational signage will be posted at the preserve when a project timeline has been approved. Please visit our website for more information and timely updates.

Although the Reich Bridge itself is in excellent condition, the wooden ramp providing access to and from the trails on the west side of the river has been closed for your safety. The entire hillside on which the ramp sits is gradually sliding downhill, taking shrubs, trees and the ramp with it. Soil movement on steep slopes is a natural, on-going process and this hillside will continue to creep downward over time. Therefore, a "quick-fix" of the existing ramp is not a viable option. Instead, we are seeking a creative, long-term solution that will not leave a new structure (ramp or stairs) subject to the same fate. An engineer is currently assessing this situation and will provide

Steep Rock with guidance on how to proceed. Additional information will be posted at the preserve and on our website as soon as it becomes available.

As you can well imagine, these costly repairs are well beyond the scope of Steep Rock's modest annual operating budget. Preliminary estimates place these repairs in excess of \$100,000. Therefore, we need your help! Public safety within the preserves is our primary concern, and without adequate funding to make the repairs, we will be forced to close both bridges indefinitely. What does this mean to you? It means you will no longer be able to enjoy riverside loop hikes. It means you will no longer be able to cross the river without first retracing your steps back to the parking lot from which your journey originated. It means your hikes will be less diverse and more repetitive.

Please help us avoid an extended closure of our bridges by helping us fund these necessary repairs. Each year, we use your generous annual fund contribution as effectively as possible to be wise stewards of our lands and conservation easements, maintain safe trails, and offer public environmental education programs. Your continued support of our annual fund is critical as it enables us to fulfill our land conservation mission. But, those dollars simply will not stretch far enough to encompass these major capital expenditures we now face. So we are asking you and all others who enjoy the beauty of our preserves to give a little extra in this special time of need. Thanks to the generosity of Gus and Rita Hauser, our fundraising initiative has received a substantial jump-start. Can we count on you too? Please help us now by sending an additional tax-deductible donation specifically earmarked for our bridge projects.

Reich Bridge
Access Ramp
– ramp sliding
away from
hillside



Railroad Tunnel Gets A Facelift

The 235-foot curved pathway carved through Steep Rock Ridge is a reminder of days gone by when trains of the Shepaug Valley Railroad frequented Washington Depot. Today, this tunnel is a landmark destination for visitors to Steep Rock Preserve; where hikers enjoy the cool damp air within the darkness of its chiseled bedrock walls.

Abandoned since 1948, this 142 year old structure is gradually showing signs of aging. Tree roots, year-round moisture, and decades of freeze-thaw action have created fractures in the bedrock; occasionally dislodging and dropping small to medium-size chunks of the heavy rock to the trail surface.

In an effort to improve visitor safety, Steep Rock commissioned an engineering study to evaluate tunnel conditions and to determine a course of action for managing its natural aging process. The resulting report led us to cut numerous trees from the exterior walls and to remove potentially dangerous sections of fractured bedrock at both entrances. In addition, a more pronounced drainage trench was cut along the trail inside the tunnel to hasten the removal of surface water. This project, completed in December, is part of Steep Rock's new structural inspection program designed to keep our preserves and visitors safe.



Sprucing-Up Our Trails

Downed trees and falling debris...trail maintenance... more downed trees and falling debris...more trail maintenance! It has been an endless cycle over the past several years cleaning up after some of this region's most severe storms. From Winter Storm Alfred to Hurricane Sandy to Hurricane Irene, heavy snows, driving rains and high winds have wreaked havoc on our nature preserve trails. Just keeping up with this deluge of damage, even months after a storm event, has been challenging. As a result, our attention has been focused on simply keeping our trails open and in a safe, passable condition for your enjoyment.

But all that changed this past fall when Steep Rock doubled its trail maintenance staff and boosted efforts to make our most heavily-used trails more aesthetically appealing. Through the tireless efforts of our land managers and a hard-working Trustee, bulky tree debris was pushed back from the trail edges and dangerous "hangers" or "widow-makers" were safely pulled to the ground. Trail maintenance; be it routine or storm-related, remains a high priority. We hope you will enjoy these trail improvements on your next hike and that you will continue to be our eyes on the trails by informing us of downed trees and other maintenance issues via the trail conditions reporting form on our website.

More Bang for Your Buck

How can you stretch your contribution into more dollars for Steep Rock Association? By donating online between 12:00 noon on May 6th and 12:00 noon on May 7th during the *Give Local Greater Waterbury & Litchfield Hills* campaign. During this 24-hour period, every dollar raised for Steep Rock will be amplified with additional funds secured by the Connecticut Community Foundation. To support Steep Rock during this campaign, please visit www.GiveLocalCCF.org and give as generously as possible.



A Lasting Gift



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

A conservation gift, whether financial or the gift of land or an easement, is one that lasts in perpetuity and ensures that the protected open space we cherish today will be enjoyed for generations to come. Ehrick Rossiter, the founder of Steep Rock Association, demonstrated how important and

influential a conservation gift can be with his purchase and eventual donation of the Steep Rock Summit. Decades before the land preservation movement was even recognized, he understood the importance of those one hundred acres to the environment, to the Town of Washington and to our rural heritage. That one generous act initiated a chain reaction by like-minded friends of nature who have since partnered with Steep Rock Association to permanently protect more than 5,200 acres.

If you are not able to donate a conservation gift now, please consider including Steep Rock Association in your estate plans and becoming a Charter Member of The Steep Rock Legacy Society. If you have already designated Steep Rock as a beneficiary in your will, please let us know so you can be properly recognized. To request a copy of our new legacy brochure, please visit www.steeprockassoc.org/giving-opportunities.

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