



THE MEADOW VIEW

The Great Meadows Conservation Trust, Inc. in Glastonbury, Rocky Hill and Wethersfield, Connecticut

Vol. II No. 3

October 1990

ROCKY HILL QUARRY WALK

1 P.M. SUNDAY, OCTOBER 14, 1990

A Great Meadows Conservation Trust Event

Come with camera and binoculars and join fellow Trust members and friends for a walking tour of the Rocky Hill Quarry. Enjoy views of Glastonbury Hills, Rocky Hill Meadows and Hartford skyline from the top of THE "Rockie Hill". Explore old quarry ruins and surrounding woodland that are part of the new park!

Don Watson, Bill Robbins and Dave Cooke - who know the area intimately - will lead the tour starting from Matteson Avenue. Trust members, being a hardy breed, traditionally enjoy the challenges of nature, consequently

the tour will be held rain or shine.

Refreshments will be served, rain or shine!

Matteson Avenue runs east from Old Main Street, and is close to the Marshall Road stop sign, about half a mile south of the RR tracks at the Wethersfield line.

Parking is available on Matteson Avenue and Old Main Street.

NOTE - The river cruise on the Lady Fenwick mentioned at the annual meeting for October has been postponed to another year.

ANNUAL MEETING WELL ATTENDED

The 23rd Annual Meeting of the Trust was held May 31st 1990 at the Cora J. Belden Library. In addition to routine reports, John Lepper and Peter Stern discussed the proposed boat launch and floating dock at the west end of the Putnam Bridge. Members then elected the following to serve as Directors until 1993: Clyde Brooks of Glastonbury, Christine Sprague of Rocky Hill and Ingrid Boelhouwer of Wethersfield. The business meeting was followed by Archaeologist David Cooke's talk on the Native American sites in Glastonbury and Wethersfield. He illustrated his talk with slides and artifacts discovered in the course of his excavations.

The Board of Directors convened the same evening and chose the following officers to serve for the year 1990-1991: Clyde Brooks, President; John Lepper, Vice-president; Eleanor Revill, Secretary; Judith Parker, Treasurer.

BERNADETTE HOLDEN'S BEQUEST TO THE TRUST

The Great Meadows Conservation Trust is pleased to report that it has recently received an unrestricted bequest of several thousand dollars from the estate of Bernadette Holden (Mrs. Robert Holden) of Rocky Hill. The money will enhance the Trust's ability to buy land in the Great Meadows.

ROCKY HILL QUARRY ACQUIRED BY STATE

The future of the Rocky Hill Quarry site as an open space and natural area in perpetuity is now assured. On September 3rd the State of Connecticut became the owner of the 84 acre site adjacent to and overlooking the Rocky Hill Meadows. The purchase was made under the State Recreation and Natural Heritage Trust Program of the Department of Environmental Protection, the state and the town of Rocky Hill sharing the \$1,325,000 cost. This is the culmination of more than ten years of effort on the part of the Rocky Hill Neighborhood Association and its friends (including GMCT) to

prevent development on the acreage and to find a way to preserve its natural beauty. Over the years the Trust has testified on behalf of preservation of the quarry before town commissions on 3 different developments. All were defeated. GMCT became a cooperator in the purchase. John Lepper, GMCT vice president, and Don Watson, a director, were present at the closing. Management of the park will be by the Town using DEP guidelines.

PUTNAM BRIDGE BOAT LAUNCH RAMP NEWS

The Great Meadows Conservation Trust is not alone in calling for a Connecticut Environmental Policy Act (CEPA) review and public hearings about the proposed state boat launch ramp at the Putnam Bridge and the private dock at Putnam Park. The Trust owns a 1.9 acre parcel of riverside land adjacent to and downstream of the proposed boat launching site. The Trust is not only concerned with its own land, but with the effect on all the Meadows.

The Connecticut Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ), the Connecticut River Watershed Council and the Connecticut River Assembly have all contacted the Department of Transportation (DOT) and Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) on the issues. So far, both departments have balked at holding public hearings. It should be noted that DOT intends to build the boat launch for DEP with the new Route 3/1-91 interchange.

DOT Commissioner Burns has refused to consider a CEPA review for the boat launch, claiming that this was done when the Route 3/1-91 interchange application was made. At that time the boat launch was not included. The Trust has written to CEQ asking for a copy of the CEPA approval said to have been issued by the Office of Policy and Management (OPM) in June 1982. In response to an inquiry from CEQ, OPM has rendered an opinion that DEP is the sponsoring agency for the boat launch, and that compliance with CEPA is required under DEP's Environmental Classification Document.

In its letter to CEQ, the Trust has questioned the decisions regarding the location, size and design of the proposed boat launch made in the absence of any environmental assessment. CEQ's attention was drawn to the apparent lack of public participation in the formulation and

approval of the project. The Trust has also asked who determined that the Wethersfield site would be a suitable mitigation for disruption of a site 40 miles downstream in Old Saybrook.

The Great Meadows Conservation Trust is not opposed to the orderly planning of recreational access to the Connecticut River. However, it does question the process by which the Putnam Bridge project is being advanced through state bureaucracy, and objects to the lack of formal opportunities to study the project's impact, examine alternatives, or review plans for its operation by DEP.

The Wethersfield Inland Wetlands and Water Courses Commission has examined the project plans, and in letters to DOT and DEP pointed out the existing and increasing erosion problem in the meadows. It noted that during moderate flood stage a strong current crosses the bend of Great Meadow Road, and that the current is from water flowing from the river into the drainage ditch lying east of the road (and adjoining Trust land): "It appears that the regrading of the existing Great Meadows Road embankment for the boat launch may significantly increase the southerly flow and the erosion in this area".

The Commission further requested that DOT and DEP undertake engineering studies to determine whether the grading will aggravate the existing erosion problem, and to recommend remedial measures. Since the project is located on state land, the Commission has no administrative control but can submit comments.

Concerned over possible damage to the Meadows, the Wethersfield Game Club has voted to support the efforts of the Trust. It has also voted to oppose the boat launch and the Putnam Park dock. Several farmers have expressed their concern over the future of the Meadows if the facilities are built.

On June 15th. the Hartford Courant ran an editorial concerning the lack of planning along the river and cited the two proposals for Wethersfield as an example. In part it said "It's time for uniform rules of development on the Connecticut and other major rivers of the state. As a first step, the two Wethersfield proposals should be reviewed together". We might add "with full public knowledge and participation".

John Lepper has given us this report of the adventures of the boating plans at or near the Putnam Bridge. The subject is covered at length because it illustrates the importance of close public attention to the activities of the bureaucracy and the need for public participation

in projects that involve large expenditures, serious disruptions of the landscape and the social and environmental consequences involved. - Editor

ANOTHER LOOK AT THE GREAT MEADOWS

The following article, by Doug Hoskins, is based on a longer paper he wrote on the GMCT for a graduate course at Antioch/ New England, Keene, NH. Here he concentrates on the nature of the Great Meadows.

Since 1968, The Great Meadows Conservation Trust has existed in a state in which such organizations proliferate. Connecticut is home to 111 different land trusts that own or have easements on a total of 25,000 acres, nearly one percent of the state's total land area. The Great Meadows Conservation Trust (GMCT) controls less than half the average acreage of a typical Connecticut land trust (228 Acres). It makes up for this shortfall by selectively playing the role of a land steward for all the Meadow's 4000 acres.

The "Great Meadows" referred to here are comprised of floodplain land, mostly lying below the 20 foot contour line, abutting the Connecticut River in the towns of Glastonbury, Rocky Hill and Wethersfield, Connecticut. A dynamic area, the meadows and river should be considered as one natural system, each owing its existence to the other. This area has played host to a number of different cultures and still, today, offers the three towns a chance to round out their New England characters with undeveloped vistas, peaceful riverbank sojourns, rolling farms and a natural playground for walking, boating, hunting, birding or fishing.

The first thing one notices, when looking at this area on a map, is the severe bending of the river's course. Currently appearing as a double oxbow, the river has taken many shapes throughout time as is evidenced both by historical accounts and by studying the positions of the relic riverbanks thousands of feet distant from where the river currently flows. Like a slow side-winding snake, taking thousands of years to make its way across a sand dune, the Connecticut River snakes its way south using the entire reach of its floodplain to do it. Thus, the current shape and symmetry of land and river in the Meadows is fixed only in our limited span of observation. At the slower pace of geomorphic change, it is

constantly in flux.

Because of the wide lateral movement of the river and its regular tendency to flood the entire area, the Great Meadows covers a thick alluvial soil of up to 25 feet in depth. The soil consists of gray, very fine sands and silts that are deposited by the river as the sediment laden, fast moving water periodically escapes its banks, considerably reducing its velocity. This loss of energy enables the swollen river to drop its sediment load on its flood plain, building it up over time. This action of dispersing the flood waters over a wide, unpopulated area is a primary reason to protect this area from urban or suburban development.

In addition, the make-up of the Meadow's soil essentially limits what activities have and should be conducted throughout this area. The U.S. Soil Conservation Service has confirmed this by classifying this soil as not suitable for urban development or sand and gravel extraction but quite well suited for agricultural use. Unfortunately these warnings have not kept development activities out of the area.

In 1968, the Great Meadows Committee (forerunner of the GMCT) sponsored a detailed natural and cultural inventory of the Meadows which was conducted by the Department of Landscape Architecture at the University of Massachusetts. The report, "The Great Meadows of the Connecticut River" (1969) included a land use analysis of the area. While now out of date, it is safe to say that the apportioned usages have not changed dramatically (Thanks in part to the GMCT!). Perhaps the one that has changed the most is the "Parks and Natural Areas" category, since the GMCT has been active preserving land since the time of the study.

OPEN SPACE	87%
EXTRACTIVE AREAS	5%
HIGHWAYS	4
WASTE DISPOSAL	2
RESIDENTIAL	1
INDUSTRIAL	1

Open Space percentages-

Tilled fields	40%
(Turf, hay, vegetables, nursery stock, tobacco)	
Water	25
Forest cover	17
Open wetlands	14
Abandoned fields	4
Parks and	
Natural Areas*	3

* (Land included in other categories)

As one might expect, the Great Meadows are home to a wide variety of flora and fauna. This large and unpopulated area gives the wildlife to a chance to make use of and move unrestricted through a variety of habitats, including marshlands, wooded swamps, river, open water, tilled fields, second-growth and forest.

The presence of humans in this area has been documented back to prehistoric times with the discovery of two separate Native American burial sites. The desire to settle in such an accommodating land carried through to the Dutch and English in the early 1600's when this same area became the first to be settled in the New England interior. It didn't take more than a few decades to drive the Native Americans out of the valley. Then agriculture flourished in the fertile soil of the Meadows.

As seen from the percentages above, farming is still a dominant activity in the region. Currently, this usage coexists with those of hunting and passive recreation. But since the mid 1930's, the Meadows have been constantly affected by urbanizing pressures. Large tracts of land here were stripped and the sediment used to build a dike to protect the city of Hartford from flooding. Interstate 91, traversing the Meadows, was built before the age of environmental review and was consequently built at great expense to this fragile area.

It is the beauty of the Great Meadows that drives the GMCT to do what it is doing. It has been proven how ecologically, agriculturally and recreationally important this land is. Yet it is a vulnerable land, being located within a major metropolitan area.

The GMCT, while not able to conserve as much land as it would like to, has integrated itself into the area's political network well enough to make a difference in helping to control incompatible land development schemes. It has also been effective in conveying the idea to the public that the Great Meadows are not dumping grounds, gravel mines, or worthless swamps and fields that could be better used by being more profitably developed.

The Trust has stuck in there for the long haul, throughout the "ecological age" of the 70's and 80's. Largely because of the Great Meadows Conservation Trust, people can count on a future of continued enjoyment and protection of a profitably undeveloped land.

NIGHT VISITORS

Furious barking!

And at four o'clock in the morning!

The moon had set. The pre-dawn darkness revealed nothing in our side yard where we had set the Hav-a-Heart trap.

What to do? The whole neighborhood would be awakened if this yapping kept up.

Grabbing a robe and flashlight, I left the house by the front door and made a cautious wide-circle approach toward the noise.

The trap was not where we'd left it. The barking continued. An animal fight? -creature in the trap? -a pack of mad dogs?

Using a trick learned from a Florida Everglades Park naturalist for spotting alligators at night, I sighted along the beam of my flashlight. Staring out of the darkness were two pairs of gleaming eyes, sparkling like stars.

No small animal, these!

"Go home!" I shouted in my most guttural voice.

The stars blinked out. Silence returned.

But where was the trap?

The small bank beside our house we kept as a haven for wild things, cutting it only once a year to discourage the growth of trees. Into this tangle the trap had been pushed- hauled- dragged.

What was in it? -

Not a skunk. None could mistake their pungent signature.

An opossum? They never learned that a Hav-a-Heart wasn't a neat, safe home just for them.

A woodchuck? We transplanted these animals because of their sophisticated taste for vegetables in preference to wild plants.

There in the flashlight's beam stared two beady black eyes from the masked face of a racoon.

But wait! Not one, but two half-grown youngsters!

We knew that some midnight visitor had been stealing our apple bait, but how did two get caught before the trap was tripped?

Freed from their overnight prison, the racoons disappeared into the undergrowth, well able to outwit their most skilful pursuers.

And what of their aggressors? All the neighborhood dogs were inside at that time in the morning. Nor were we aware of roaming packs of dogs in recent months. Could the "dogs" we heard have been some of our newest and most secretive immigrants to Connecticut - coyotes?

Eleanor B. Wolf

DUMPERS BEWARE!

Early in the summer while driving his tractor through the meadows, a Wethersfield farmer was hailed by a man with a truck stuck in the mud. He requested a tow from the farmer. Noting that the man had just dumped a load of trash, the farmer told him that he would pull the truck out after the man reloaded the trash into the truck. The man objected, but the farmer told him that if the truck was not reloaded when he came back, he would not only not tow the truck but would report the incident to the police. In this case the man would be arrested for illegal dumping and have to pay a towing service to pull his truck out. The farmer left, and the man decided that he had better reload his truck and wait for the farmer to come back!

For those of us fed up with dumping in the meadows the story would have been more satisfying if the farmer had not returned! In any case we wonder if the man has visited the meadows again.

POLICE ACTIVE IN MEADOWS

Fresh produce can be expensive as four New Britain men found out. They were charged August 8 with sixth degree larceny and trespassing after they were caught taking crops from a field in the Wethersfield Meadows.

Don't drive into the meadows at night! On July 6 at 11:40 P.M. a Wethersfield teenager drove his dirt-bike into the Elm Street meadows gate. After his release from Hartford Hospital, the Wethersfield Police issued him a summons for driving an unregistered motor vehicle, driving without a motorcycle license, driving without motorcycle insurance, and driving without a headlight.

Gates to the meadows are secured every night at dusk making the meadows off limits to all but authorized property owners with keys.

WE'RE HUNTING -

- For any GMCT material that our members might have that they no longer want. If you have any maps, copies of the 1969 "The Great Meadows of the Connecticut River" by the University of Massachusetts, or other papers that are in your unwanted pile, please let us know. Call any of the officers to arrange a pickup.

LAND TRUST CONVOCAATION IN NOVEMBER

The Connecticut Land Trust Service Bureau will hold its Eighth Annual Convocation of Land Trusts at the University of Hartford on November 3, 1990. The meeting, attended by members of many Connecticut and out of state organizations, includes talks on legal matters, land management and numerous other areas of interest to land trusts. This year, GMCT members Jim Coe and Bob Farrell will be on a panel on the Recreational and Natural Heritage Trust Program.

The meeting lasts all day and lunch is included, all for a modest fee. For information, contact The Nature Conservancy, Middletown, telephone 344-9867 or 344-0716.

DEP'S "RIVERS"

The Department of Environmental Protection's River Management Program now publishes a newsletter "Rivers". Articles include The Farmington River- Wild and Scenic Study Update, June is Rivers Month, Mystic River Greenway Plan and other river items. A map of Connecticut's Outstanding Rivers in the January 1990 issue shows thirty notable river segments, one of which is the Great Meadows reach. The data is from American Rivers, Inc.- the nation's principal river-saving organization.

For information about the River Management Program and its newsletter, contact DEP Natural Resources Center, 165 Capitol Avenue, Room 119, Hartford, CT 06106, telephone 566-3540.



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