



# THE MEADOW VIEW

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

VOL. IV NO. 1

FEBRUARY 1992

## Great Meadows Conservation Trust Winter Meeting

Thursday, March 5, 1992 at 7.30 P.M. in the Naubuc School Cafetorium, Griswold Street, Glastonbury

### GREENWAYS - FROM CONCEPT TO REALIZATION

#### PRESENTING THE CONCEPT

\*Karl Wagener, Executive Director, State Council on Environmental Quality

#### PRESENTING THE REALIZATION

\*Nancy Bostwick, Executive Director Farmington to Trails Association

\*Ann Letendre and Douglas H. Smith, Co-Chairs, Manchester Section, Four Town Hockanum River Linear Park Committee

\*Ellen Miller-Wolfe, Planning & Development Administrator, Riverfront Recapture & Co-chair, Blackledge River Watershed Committee

**MODERATOR:** Peter Stern, Chair, Glastonbury Conservation Commission

The public is invited to attend

Refreshments will be served

Directions: From I-91 take Rt. 3 exit (25), cross Putnam Bridge to Glastonbury, take Main St. exit. Turn left at end of ramp. At next traffic light cross Main St. directly to Griswold St. School is a short distance on right. From South on Rt. 2 take Wethersfield Exit (5D), then exit to Main St. Right on Main, at next light turn left on to Griswold St. From North on Rt. 2 take Griswold St. Exit. At end of ramp turn right on Griswold, continue to school on left. Ample parking either side of school.

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**THIS IS THE TIME TO RENEW YOUR MEMBERSHIP AND SUPPORT OF THE GREAT MEADOWS CONSERVATION TRUST. DUES AND CONTRIBUTIONS ARE TAX DEDUCTIBLE. AN ENVELOPE IS ENCLOSED FOR YOUR CONVENIENCE.**

The Great Meadows Conservation Trust, Inc., P.O.Box 171, Glastonbury, CT 06033

## REPORT FOR THE YEAR 1991

During 1991, the Trust actively continued its commitment to the preservation of the Great Meadows in the towns of Glastonbury, Rocky Hill and Wethersfield. Through its Board of Directors and committees, the Trust worked to limit structural encroachments into the flood plain of the Connecticut River, and to deter misuse of the land.

At the annual meeting the by-laws were revised to increase the allowable number of directors from nine to twelve which will permit more flexibility in the selection of officers. John Lepper of Wethersfield, Peter Stern of Glastonbury and Donald Watson of Rocky Hill were reelected as directors. Peter Revill of Rocky Hill was elected a new director. At their next meeting the directors elected the following officers: John Lepper as president, Peter Revill as vice president, Eleanor Revill as secretary of the Trust and Ingrid Boelhouwer as treasurer. The program for the evening was highlighted by a potluck supper and an illustrated talk by James MacBroom, Professional Engineer, on the Connecticut River and its floodplain, followed by a lively question and answer session. A second membership meeting, a visit to Earle Park in Glastonbury on November 9th, featured the pond created to compensate for wetlands lost at Red Hill.

Three Trust membership walks were sponsored by the Land Management Committee in February, two were held and one washed out by high water.

The Operations Committee, which conducts the day-to-day affairs of the Trust, met nine times in 1991 to discuss committee activities and the actions of people and agencies that might threaten the integrity and health of the Great Meadows. Dominant were the proposed private boat dock at Putnam Park and the state Boat Launch at Putnam Bridge, adjacent to Trust land. The dock apparently will not be built, but the Boat Launch continues to be a major threat as reported elsewhere in this newsletter. Other items of concern included proposals for housing east of Middletown Avenue in Wethersfield, the Welles Street Housing in Glastonbury, a shopping mall on streams feeding the meadows in Rocky Hill, and a variety of lesser but important matters, such as illegal filling and excavating in the Meadows, rubbish dumping, etc. In many situations, directors and members of the Operations Committee attended public and agency meetings and testified, sometimes as representatives of the Trust, and sometimes as private citizens. Several members of the Operations Committee

attended ecological meetings such as the convocation "A Vision of Your Town's Future" organized by several groups including The Nature Conservancy.

The Land Management Committee inspected nine Trust properties and arranged for the continued leasing of seven of our parcels to farmers.

The Land Acquisition Committee continued to investigate the possibility of acquiring several properties in the meadows.

The Riverwatch program, designed to enable the public to draw the attention of authorities to harmful activities in the meadows, was maintained most of the year. Unfortunately the reorganization of the cooperating Connecticut River Watershed Association has put the program out of commission.

We were pleased to honor Eleanor Wolf, a founder of the Trust and a very active member, by presenting her with the Great Meadows Conservation Trust Volunteer of the Year Award at the annual meeting.

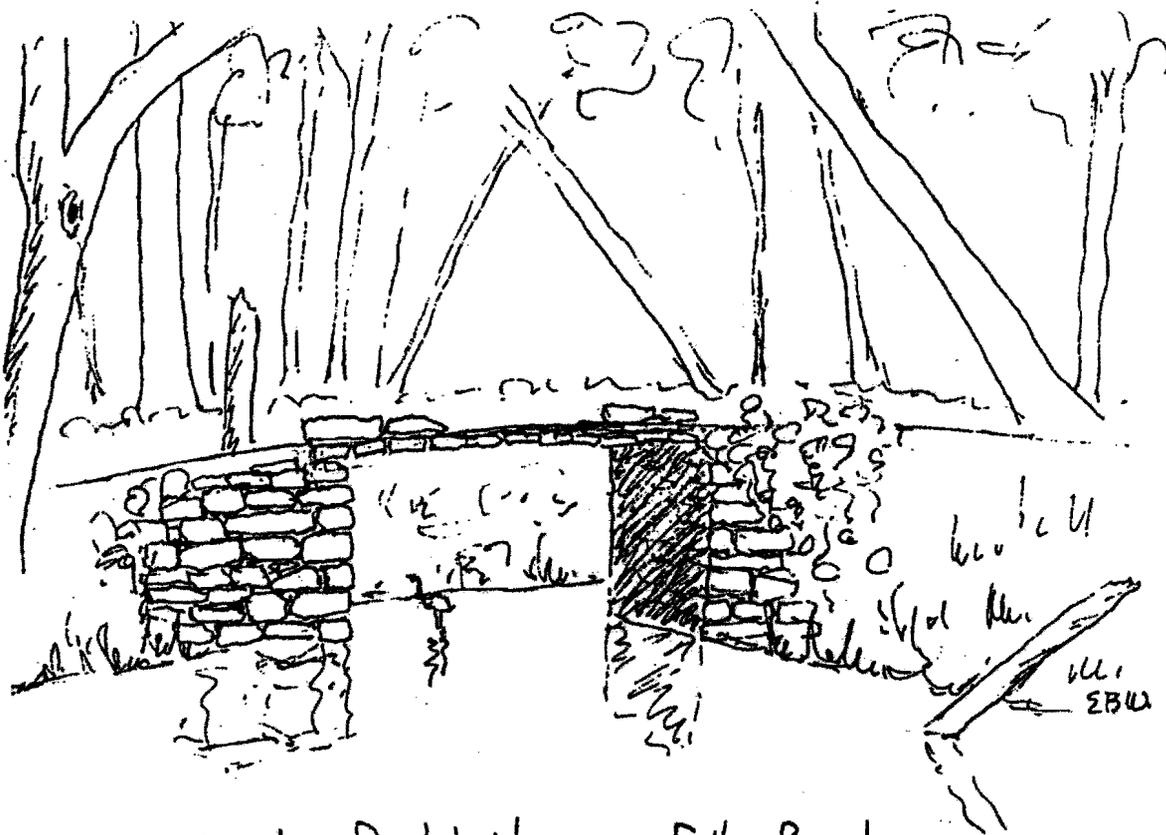
The Trust now has a handsome new membership recruitment brochure, details elsewhere in this newsletter. Three issues of the newsletter, The Meadow View, went out to members and public officials during the year.

## FOLLY BROOK UPDATE

The Great Meadows Conservation Trust owns 13 acres of the Folly Brook Natural Area in Wethersfield. This land was acquired from The Nature Conservancy in 1982. It lies behind the houses along the north end of Hartford Avenue and is bounded by Wethersfield Cove and Folly Brook. Eleanor Wolf reports on a sunny winter's day visit to this fine wooded wetland.

Wethersfield's Town Naturalist Rick Duffy, Peter Revill and I walked the Trust owned section of the Natural Area on December 11, 1991. The southern end was under 5 or 6 feet of water from the Cove. Silver maples, white ash, slippery elm and black willows are growing vigorously throughout this flood plain, even though it is almost completely inundated when the Connecticut River is above the 10-foot stage.

The Trust's property is bisected by a line of large trees dividing Hale's Pond from the slightly higher land to the south which used to be mown once a year for rowen (second growth) hay for bedding down the farm animals. Mowing stopped when tractors replaced horse-drawn mowers and could no longer negotiate the swampy land. Edward Buck, the former owner, used to keep a large board attached to the most westerly



Meadow Road bridge over Folly Brook

of the line of trees. Marked off in elevations, like a thermometer, it kept us informed on the river heights during floods, and could be read even as far away as Hartford Avenue.

Before the days of indoor rinks, and until the Cove froze thick enough to make skating safe, Hale's Pond, only a few feet deep, provided an early place for this popular sport. Surrounded by woods which protected us from the sharp north winds and large enough for Snap-the-Whip or informal hockey, it provided many hours of fun. With plenty of dead branches collected from the nearby woods, bonfires helped to keep us warm. Today, scrub and swamp grasses are beginning to fill in Hale's Pond, and muskrats build their houses there.

In the north end of the tract the old meadow road giving access to Hartford's South Meadows, before the dike was built, is still visible between the giant maples. However, the little wooden bridge which crossed Folly Brook is long gone, though a few of the fieldstones which once supported it still cling to the banks.

In the late 1800's, farm owners rechannelled Folly Brook from its old course to the east, to run in a straight line south to the Cove. Over the years, the brook has worn itself into a series of curves, undermining trees on its bank. - trees which fall across the brook, impeding access to boats, but allowing mallards, mergansers and occasional black and wood ducks to raise their

families in an unpeopled environment. On this morning, a great blue heron flew up ahead of us. We looked for barn owls which have been here and find plenty of nesting holes in the ancient trees. Squirrels, woodchucks, muskrats, grey foxes, deer and coyotes, as well as many small animals, use this habitat, undeterred by the virulent ground cover of poison ivy.

"Our walk reinforced our conviction that, except for scientific studies such as are now being conducted by The Nature Conservancy, the entire 70-acre Folly Brook Natural Area should be reserved for its native inhabitants."

## TREES

(With apologies to Joyce Kilmer)

I think that I shall never see  
 A poem as lovely as a tree,  
 But not a tree whose spreading branches  
 Do interfere with Man's advances.  
 Nor yet the tree cut to a stump  
 When wind-blown fruit gives cars a thump!  
 Pity the trees besides small streams  
 Who interrupt bridge-builders dreams!  
 Woe to the trees who dare to wear  
 Not nests - but utility wires in their hair.  
 Lost are the trees whose height encroaches  
 On airspace of airport approaches!  
 But there is hope. More fools like me  
 Are crying out, "God save the tree!"

E.B. Wolf

## BIRDS

Christine Sprague has given us the following report on the recent survey of birds in our area.

"The highlights of the Hartford Audubon Society's Christmas bird count done on December 28, 1991 were the sighting of an American woodcock in Wethersfield and an eastern phoebe in Rocky Hill.

"The American woodcock has never before been spotted during the Christmas count, and an eastern phoebe was last seen in the 1984 Christmas count.

"Altogether 58 species were observed in the count area which included the Wethersfield and Rocky Hill meadows, the Rocky Hill quarry and residential and open areas of both towns.

"Early in the morning thousands of common grackles were seen rising up along the river; red-tailed hawks were numerous and several great horned owls were seen; as were belted kingfishers. But the one I enjoyed the most was an close look at a brown creeper, a small camouflaged tree climber who ascends a tree spirally from the base.

"How fortunate we are to have the meadows and Quarry Park to enjoy - I'm sure the birds and wildlife feel the same."

## A NICE HIKE

On Saturday, January 11, a group of eight members from the Land Management Committee, led by Peter Revill, hiked into the Rocky Hill Meadows for an inspection of the Brooks and Ryan Parcels. In addition to Peter, the group included John Lepper, Ingrid Boelhouwer, Bill Robbins, Thayer Chase, June Cox and Frank and Julie Child. The day was cold, freezing, but brightly sunny with a light breeze from the north. It turned out to be a good condition for hiking: the ground was not so frozen that we couldn't get traction, and not so wet that we had to walk through water and mud.

Shortly after 1.30 P.M. we left the road by the Sewage Plant and hiked south along Goff Brook Road to the first bridge across Goff Brook. Crossing the brook, we continued more or less easterly, eventually traversing the length of the Brooks Parcel. The major disturbances were large numbers of vehicle tracks, left at an earlier date when the ground was soft, by some four-wheel-drive vehicles having fun. The brook along the northern boundary was mostly frozen but not thick enough for skating. The matted grasses showed that fall flooding had taken place. In one swale, the receding waters had left dozens of hickory nuts which had, no doubt, floated from upstream.

In order to reach the Ryan Parcel we had to either wade across a deep and swiftly flowing branch of Goff Brook, or use an alternate route — a fallen tree bridge and a subsequent shallow ford of firm gravel. The tree proved we all had a pretty good sense of balance, aided by a "handrail" consisting of a long branch waveringly held by those yet to cross. No one fell in. The ford proved that at least one of us lacked waterproof boots. Bill Robbins generously remedied that defect by carrying June Cox on his back — a scene right out of "Robin Hood".

In general, the two parcels showed little change since earlier visits. However, boundary markers, placed four years ago, are becoming increasingly difficult to locate, many seem to be missing. Much of these two parcels is old cottonwood forest. In winter the sights and the scenery are starkly beautiful. In summer, the undergrowth, richly laced with poison ivy, would likely convince most people not to visit.

Julie and Frank Child

## WETHERSFIELD BOAT LAUNCH AND INTERCHANGE

The planned improvements to the I 91/Rte. 3 Interchange and the proposed boat launch at the west end of Putnam Bridge are intertwined insofar as the layout of one affects the details of the other. Local concern is that the lowering of the river bank for the boat launch would tend to channel eroding flood water into the frail meadow farmland south of the Putnam Bridge. The Great Meadows Conservation Trust (Trust), which owns adjoining property, has long been pressing for public hearings on the two projects: one has been held on the Interchange, but it appears that the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) plans to go ahead with the launch without any public input or review.

### The I 91/Rte 3 Interchange

A hearing on the interchange was finally held on November 7, 1991 by DEP. Since the Connecticut Department of Transportation (ConnDot) had removed the boat launch from their Inland Wetlands Permit Application, (earlier it had been planned for ConnDot to build the boat launch with the interchange), the hearing focussed on the balance of cuts and fills in the flood plain and preserving the integrity of the river bank.

A Stipulation of Fact Agreement, signed by representatives of ConnDot, DEP, The Town of Wethersfield and the Trust prior to the hearing, provided for maintaining the river bank at the 16

foot elevation under the Putnam Bridge. Remaining to be decided was the location of an access road for bridge maintenance, and a dike across the man-made ravine between ConnDOT and Trust properties.

The access road location, south of the bridge as proposed by the Town of Wethersfield, would act as a levee offering some flood protection to the meadows. A portion of the abandoned Great Meadow Road could be used for this purpose. At the same time it could meet the balance of cuts and fills required by DEP. ConnDOT, however, had proposed building a new road to the north side of their project.

The proposed dike, designed by the Town of Wethersfield and constructed by ConnDOT, would limit the erosion that takes place during floods and reduce the possibility of the river channeling into a former riverbed and permanently flooding farmland.

As of this writing, the Hearing Officer has not issued a decision on the access road location.

The Trust has submitted to ConnDOT, as required by the stipulation agreement, written justification for the dike and an environmental assessment of the area involved. The Town of Wethersfield is to follow up with the engineering data and design for the dike.

### **The Boat Launch**

On January 9, 1992, Wethersfield town officials were notified by DEP that they wanted a meeting the following day to discuss the boat launch. At the meeting, seven representatives from DEP, including a Deputy Commissioner, an Assistant Commissioner and several Bureau Chiefs, informed Wethersfield officials (with apparent disregard for due process) that they planned to go ahead with the proposed boat launch, regardless of the 191/Rte.3 Hearing Officer's decision.

On February 3, in response to the DEP action, the Wethersfield Town Council affirmed its opposition to the boat launch and unanimously approved a resolution introduced by Councilman Lawrence Ebner. This resolution requests the DEP to respond and show cause for its action as it appears to be contrary to the Stipulation of Fact Agreement mentioned above. The resolution also asks DEP to show cause why the Town of Wethersfield should not revoke its approval for the relocation of Great Meadow Road, without which the boat launch project cannot go forward.

## **MORE PROTECTION FOR INLAND WETLANDS**

Peter Stern has sent us a discussion of a recent Connecticut Superior Court decision (*Schultz v. Inland Wetlands-Environment Commission*) which gives local agencies greater scope to protect inland wetlands. The Court found that:

\* A local wetlands commission has the authority to adopt regulations which provide for a conservation buffer, *even if the regulations exceed statutory mandates.*

\* In order to prove that such regulations constitute a taking of property, an owner must show that he or she is denied all reasonable use of the land.

Mr. Stern notes that East Hartford's new regulations were alleged to expand the Inland Wetlands Commission's jurisdiction, i.e. by including a conservation buffer as part of the regulated area.

A landowner must now secure a permit to conduct a regulated activity not only in a wetland or watercourse, but also in the area within 100 feet from the wetland or 200 feet from the watercourse. The Court, in rejecting Schultz's appeal, noted that the buffer areas in question are "all equal to or upgradient from the wetlands or watercourses and thus seemingly within the the same watershed and hydrologically connected." The Court also referred to the Connecticut Supreme Court's 1981 decision in the *Aaron v. Conservation Commission* (Town of Redding) case which had found that, in some instances, an activity outside the physical limits of a wetland or watercourse could have an impact on the wetland or watercourse.

Regarding the issue of a taking of the plaintiff's property as a result of regulation, the Superior Court found that "a property may be subject to reasonable restraints without resulting in a taking," and that "the owner must show the requisite finality that no reasonable use will be allowed," to constitute a taking.

The decision is of potential benefit to the Great Meadows in that an Inland Wetlands Commission could restrain a development above a wetland if it finds that such activity might contribute to the pollution of the wetland proper.

### **CREDITS**

Material for this issue has been provided by Frank and Julie Child, John Lepper, Eleanor Revill, Christine Sprague, Julianne Steffens, Peter Stern, Eleanor Wolf and Editor Peter Revill

## CHALLENGE GRANT FOR GLASTONBURY'S GREAT POND PRESERVE

A ceremony at the Glastonbury Town Hall on December 10, 1991 observed the signing of an agreement between the Town and The Nature Conservancy to manage the Great Pond Preserve. This 75-acre conservation area in southwestern Glastonbury is being established on land donated to the Town by the Balf Company of Newington. In attendance were members of the Town Council, other town officials, and representatives of Balf, The Nature Conservancy, and Friends of Great Pond, a local volunteer group which played a key role in bringing the parties together.

To assure the area's protection, the Balf Company presented The Nature Conservancy with a check for \$25,000 and promised to match other contributions up to an additional \$25,000. The Conservancy intends to raise the matching sum to create a permanent \$75,000 Great Pond Preserve Endowment Fund for study and management of the area.

The agreement establishes a Preserve Stewardship Committee to manage the Preserve, and will consist of town officials and representatives of the Conservancy and Friends of Great Pond. Glastonbury's sub-chapter of The Nature Conservancy will help to monitor the area.

Great Pond, the focus of the new preserve, is a five acre glacial pond which supports an unusual community of plants, amphibians and crustaceans, and is bordered by the largest red cedar tree in the eastern United States. It is one of Connecticut's two "drawdown ponds", experiencing great fluctuations in water level at different times of the year, and from year to year. These changes require shoreline vegetation able to withstand conditions varying from submergence to drought.

The Preserve will be accessible to the public for hiking, cross-country skiing and nature observation. Those wishing to help match Balf's challenge grant should contact Tom McGuigan, Director of Development, The Nature Conservancy, 55 High Street, Middletown, CT 06457, phone 344-0716.

### NEEDED - A TRANSIT

The Land Management Committee is planning to survey the Trust's parcels to check boundaries. For this work a transit (theodolite) is needed - so, if you have one to give or lend to the Trust, please let Peter Revill know. Telephone 529-9254.

## GOVERNOR ASKED TO FUND HERITAGE PROGRAM

Great Meadows Conservation Trust President John C. Lepper recently wrote to Governor Lowell P. Weicker requesting him to include a new bond authorization of five million dollars for the Recreational and Natural Heritage Trust Program in his current budget proposal.

He reminded the Governor of his commitment to children and wrote, "We owe it to them to preserve Connecticut's natural heritage and provide them with recreational opportunities. Keeping the Recreation and Natural Heritage Program funded and operating will help achieve that objective."

### NEW TRUST BROCHURE

A new Great Meadows Conservation Trust membership recruitment brochure is now available. It is the production of a number of Trust members. Duffy Schade of Glastonbury, professional photographer, contributed photos of the meadows. Eleanor Wolf, Wethersfield artist, sketched a map of the flood plain. Credit for its design goes to the brochure committee of Ellie Revill, Rocky Hill, Betsy Katz and Jolly Steffens both of Glastonbury, with President John Lepper, very much a part. Mary Goodwin of Glastonbury, a former newspaper reporter, helped edit the text which Jolly Steffens typed on her computer and Frank Child of Wethersfield printed by laser. Love Printing in Glastonbury offered helpful suggestions with final layout of the brochure which they reproduced on recycled paper. Copies will be available at the March 5 meeting.

### ON SACRED LAND

"The President in Washington sends word that he wishes to buy our land...if we sell you our land, you must remember that it is sacred.

"...teach your children what we have taught our children. That the earth is our mother. What befalls the earth befalls all the sons of the earth.

"...the earth does not belong to man, man belongs to the earth. All things are connected like the blood that unites us all. Man did not weave the web of life, he is merely a strand in it. Whatever he does to the web, he does to himself.

"We love this earth as a newborn loves its mother's heartbeat. So, if we sell you our land, love it as we have loved it. Care for it as we have cared for it. Hold in your mind the memory of the land as it is when you receive it. Preserve the land for all children who love it..."

-Chief Seattle (Chief of Dwamish tribe of the Pacific Northwest), 1852