**The story of www.rattlesnakeguttertrust.org**

**How does it work? (And why?)**

Note: This document describes the present website. As RGT moves forward, the goals - and everything else about the website - needs to be reconsidered. This is simply a snapshot of the website in the winter on 2015. Please keep this document updated as you make changes!

1. Goals: why bother?

Goal 1: Provide information to the community

(Community = RGT members, Leverett residents, others interested in our activities of conservation issues, wandering folk)

a. The format tells the story:

appearance (layout, font) is consistent, calm, easy to use

text is accurate, grammatical, timely

maps are easy to understand and download

photos appropriate, with credit to the photographers, and timely

b. Pages load quickly (use pdf documents, low resolution photos, if set of photos for an event uses "click to see next photo" never a slide show) This will not be as much of an issue when we are all using warp-speed fiber optic cable, but there are other, non-Leverett folk who do check in, so will want to keep loading simple. Also WordPress (the software used for this website) has memory-size limits for each file.

Goal 2: Provide information for the Board (Board-only section)

a. All Board members have access to information on all owned properties and all CRs (baselines, monitoring reports, any else unique to that property. This information is also in the Green Field Notebook held by the property chair and the Blue Archive Notebook kept in the RGT Archives on the second floor of Old Library/Museum.

b. Board has access to forms needed for monitoring and stewardship reports

c. Board has easy access to timely information: meeting dates, documents to review

 d. Board also easy access to background documents: By-laws, Fact Sheet

e. Each property committee is encouraged to have non-Board members. At the Board's discretion, those volunteers are also given access to the "Board-only area" (given the password). This gives them access to all the above information.

Goal 3: Anticipate hacking/data loss

a. Nothing is put on password protected area that is sensitive information (personal information, financial records) in case the website is hacked.

b. Duplicate copy of most documents (pdf files) are put on google docs with access by all executive board members. (The Board needs to evaluate the effectiveness of this approach. As of the end of June 2015, there are dropbox and google doc files, but how to share them is not solved.)

c. Webmanager uses password to enter WordPress software (and WordPress has a good security history - although the new version keeps the password for a password protected area open for 10 days which is ridiculous.)

d. Webhost, Hatfield Printing, does weekly website backup. Webmaster does weekly backups (theoretically)

e. We learned in the spring of 2015 that the site had been hacked some time earlier - years earlier - so that someone searching for "land trust is Leverett" would go to the wrong site. The repair will be completed by mid-June and some possible entry points closed.

f. We also learned that WordPress, in its wisdom as it was updating its software, decided that once you have put your password in, you don't have to re-enter it for 10 days. This is absurd. It means that, should you be using a library, or someone else's, computer, anyone else using that computer can enter the password protected section of the website for the next 10 days. Clearly this is a bad programming decision and there is lots of complaining you can read about if you google your way to that conversation. One can hope that WordPress will change their policy and go back to letting the webmaster select the length of time the password should be viable - my choice would be 5 minutes.

Goal 4: Easy to manage and update

a. The RGT website is hosted by Christopher Smith, Hatfield Printing. He is an invaluable resources and does regular backups of the website (see Goal 3).

b. At present there is only one RGT web manager and Chris. He is an invaluable resource - especially to this webmaster who is marginally skilled in web work. While it may be better to have more folks writing/updating webpages, there is a huge danger of getting in trouble and spoiling pages - sharing only works if the webmaster is a real Word Press expert (can get folks out of trouble - which I cannot.) Hence the need for an expert manager.

c. The website creator, Bob Dolan, has continued to be very helpful in solving problems and creating ways to make life easier.

d. During the early years of the website, WordPress was not able to show what would be seen (the famous lovely-sounding acronym WYSIWYG i.e. what you see is what you get). In January 2015, Bob Dolan figured out that the problem was the 2-column format - which looked great on a computer and less good on a smart phone, but which WordPress just couldn't deal with. The two column (actually 2-page) format was removed. And all is well in the world of WYSIWYG.

e. It is possible to delete an entire webpage - in fact is shockingly easy to do. There is a dropbox file with a copy of each webpage. (Not kept entirely updated, but the format is there which would allow for easy reconstruction.) It will be passed on to the next web manager.

f. Note the "domain names" rattlesnakeguttertrust.org and rgtrust.org are registered with DreamHost (they also used to host the website). They automatically renew the domain names each year - sending the webmanager announcements and automatically using her charge card. We have chosen to keep both domain names even though we have not used the second. (Anyone typing in that name would be redirected to the one we use.) At some point, these charges need to be transferred to RGT.

2. Rationale/goals for each section

 Home Page

A Home Page has two purposes. First to give some background about the organization - this is done visually and in text. The other purpose is to help folks get to the most timely information. I have never been pleased with the format of the links section at the top. The page also needs some links at the bottom to take the reader to the history, whatever.

About Us

When we started the website, having the old newsletters and annual reports included seemed appropriate. They are still good reading. Note that the Annual Report is dated as if for the previous year - which the budget is, but narrative reads from June to June. The budget is NOT posted.

I think the history and list of trustees is useful. (Especially when I update the list correctly!). It is also on this section that Board members can get to the Board-only section.

News

This section was added before the links at the top of the Home page were put in. In theory it can now be removed. However, when I check which pages are visited (using the free software "Going Up!") folks do go to it, so I am reluctant to remove it. It also provides a nice place for updated photos.

This heading space might be converted to a section like the properties section for the CRs we hold on town-owned land. (Should not put up the CRs we hold on private land.) Logically, it would be moved to the right so that owned properties comes first.

Properties

Note that we put up public information about each owned property but do not describe our Conservation Restrictions (they are owned by others). While these pages are easy to maintain, the underlying map of all Leverett Protected Properties (the one with the circle showing the property location) has to be changed whenever there is another conservation-protected property in town. There is probably no way around this, but it is time-consuming. (I usually update every year after town meeting - or if there is some major event such as the Brushy Mt. CR). In the process of checking every page when the re-formatting was being done, I found some very outdated information. Perhaps the property committee could be asked to review the webpage for their property every year. All properties need to have photos in the photo gallery updated regularly. (photo gallery = click here to see....)

Land Protection

While this could always be improved, it is an expected part of all land trust websites and basically just sits there.

Events

This is a really important part of the website. (And one of the most visited.) It is nice to keep photos from previous events. (I rarely get comments about this gallery - I do hear from trails workday folks about the galleries on the LTC-events page - they check out the most recent trails workday photos because they like to see themselves covered in mud.)

Helping Us

The information on this page is important. We have put PayPal on the page, but don't know if it works.

Trails

This page area gets high traffic - especially the trail maps page. It seems important to me to keep events sponsored by RGT and those sponsored by LTC (which is co-sponsored by RGT and the Leverett ConCom) separate. How to do that is not always obvious - i.e. the balancing of proper referencing and being able to find stuff. My solution is that the full description is on the proper page and a title/link is on the other page. In theory, the trails maps will go on the town website and we will only have a link, but the town website is limited and no one seems to be able to improve it, so the trail maps are with us for until the town website improves.

The link to the KMZ and KML files (in a google doc) is necessary because WordPress does not allow that kind of file on its site.

Links

This is an important section politically (link to those linking to us and/or helping us) and is probably actually useful. All links should be checked at least twice a year to make sure they still work (or the group still exists, or that they are still appropriate.)

3. Understanding the hierarchy (warning, if you are not interested in the internal workings of a webpage, you may die of boredom if you don't skip to #4)

This issue of hierarchy - knowing where every page belongs and why - is the basis of web management (and design). As listed here, it looks like an old fashion outline with indents - which it is. When working in Word Press, the hierarchy uses the term "parent" - an image that works for me some days and some days all I see is little critters clustered under a big critter clustered under an even bigger critter. . . .

There is a problem caused by Word Press:

On every page, the pull down menu appears in the top heading. Think of these are the parents - the pull downs as children.

This is NO problem under the parent "About" where there is history, newsletters and annual reports, list of trustees - or in "Properties" where it goes alphabetically through the properties.

Nor is it a problem for "Home" or "News" where there are no children

The problem is in "Events" where the children are the photo galleries of past events and those look stupid as pull-downs. Solution (thanks to Bob Dolan) was to hide them under About/History where they are effectively "grandchildren" and don't show up on any pull-down menu.

I also used this approach to the Cave Hill pages. In the long run, these pages can go under the new category "town-owned CRs" (see above about News and Properties). Or perhaps they can be dumped - although that seems a shame.

Here is the hierachy:

Home

About

History

*the "Events" gallery pages are put here because of the limitations of Word Press. See explanation above*

Trustees

Newsletters and Annual Reports

Contact Us (and become a member)

*This page was also used as a place to park the Cave Hill Conservation Area pages (These pages are accessed through the Home Page. As stated earlier, might end up in a new section on town-owned trails.)*

Board Area PASSWORD PROTECTED

*(note this is the most complex section of the website. It is also password protected). Opening page has dates of Board meetings*

Documents

Monitoring forms

Background on each property owned and CR

And then other general categories: policy, forms, history, and a series of How-to sections

News - has both RGT and LTC each with a photo and text

Properties (Note: RGT-owned, not CRs)

*The opening page (which is usually not opened by the viewer) has the town Leverett Protected Properties map with labels.*

(SAMPLE) Donald H. Bates Sanctuary (includes the map with the circle) and link to trail map (on Trail Maps page)

Details (more information, often second photo)

Maps (contour, topo, orthophoto each can be enlarged)

Photos (gallery - the "click here section)

If the property has a trail, a link to the Trail Maps section is included

and so on through each property - all have the same pages/format.

Land Protection

Protecting and Conserving Land

More about Protecting and Conserving Land (with links)

Events

*In theory, this would be where the past events gallery would be listed. It is not (see explanation at the beginning of this section). The present byzantine approach works fine.*

Helping Us (has PayPal button)

Trails

Leverett Trails Committee Calendar of Events

gallery of past events

Leverett Trails Committee Reports and Resources (with links)

list of archived Reports

Trails Maps and Stewardship Information (also link to updated KMZ/KML files)

Links

4. Some thoughts on Word Press

Note: this is NOT a tutorial - those exist and are useful.

How the heirarchy of pages works in Word Press

Getting to a page. You cannot sign into our webpage on Word Press without a password - need to get that from Christopher Smith at Hatfield Printing (our webhost). You will find a "pages" section on the left-hand side. Click on that and you will be on the first of the 6 lists of pages we have on this website. At last count, we had 110 pages (one is an archived '2-column page" so 109 active pages)

Parents. This listing is really because there is a system for assigning a "parent" i.e. if I am going to create a new the page that goes under Ellamoose Repose, I select "Ellamoose" as the parent. The pages under each parent are assigned a number, which is the order it appears in when you look at the list. When I am selecting a number for the new page, I check the page before and the one afterward and pick a number in between. (Note, these pages may also have subpages i.e. be parents themselves.)

Just an added word of caution, if you only use the linking code to connect a page to its parent, it will work for the viewer, BUT you will never be able to find it again - think a computer desktop with everything you have ever written just randomly scattered on the screen. Assign a parent and number to each new page just as you would put documents in an appropriate folder.

 Basic stuff - looking at any page

Open any page that interests you - using Edit. There are two ways to look at the page as an editor: VISUAL and TEXT

VISUAL: This is definitely the way to use WordPress and now our website design (without the 2-column format) allows us to do that. I have used Text for so long, I can't give you any insight into its use.

TEXT. This shows you the words that will be seen on the screen surrounded by their html coding. It also shows you the coding used to bring in a photo or to make a link to another page. (I once knew what html stood for - and a few of the alternative acronyms that frustrated folk have created over the years.) I use the TEXT screen to create and edit everything because VISUAL did not work for me until January 2015. I am putting in some background in case it is useful - skip if you don't care.

PREVIEW works for some people - you have to be able to remember to close the right tab to get back to your work. I don't do it well and therefore don't use it. If you do it wrong, you loose your work. With the VISUAL working well, it is not that important.

HTML coding

This is a VERY brief introduction to the grammar rules (there are good books/websites just on this topic)

Opening and closing. Each item on a website appears there because there is a line of HTML code written on the coded version of webpage i.e. the instructions for the page, not the page the casual user sees - or even the way you see it in VISUAL. Each set of instructions begins with a tag (or code) which is surrounded by greater/lesser than arrows (<...>) and it ends with the SAME CODE but this time there is a “/” which means “end” </> Everything that is opened (for example <li>) must be closed ( </li> ). Trust me, this is really important – otherwise the next line will be added to the previous line and that gets really messy. Not only must every opening <...> be closed </....> BUT if the line of instruction begins with 2 codes <li><h2> then is must be closed in the reverse/balanced order: </h2></li> (li’s on outside, h2’s on inside.)

GoingUp! All the public pages and the major board pages have some weird script/html stuff at the bottom on the page that makes no sense. This is the way the free software "GoingUp!" is able to count how often each page is used. Ignore it. (but don't mess with it)

Format. In the new "single column" format, the photos on opening pages are all left-justified. (the gallery photos i.e. "click to see next photo" are center justified) The left-justified could be changed to center-justified, but, turns out, it is really important to be consistent so do them all.

Figuring Stuff Out. You can usually figure out how stuff works by checking the html on a page you like and then looking at it as a finished product. (Re-read the note about the lines at the end above so it doesn't confuse you.) When you get into serious trouble: html (TEXT) has much better information than the VISUAL alternative. Check every code because you got one of them wrong. Or you inserted a photo that is too large and it is destroying everything else. You can also return to a previous automatically saved versions (scroll down the page) so that the website looks OK while you: go for a walk/have a cup of tea/scream before starting again.

Setting up a new page (not using HTML)

Format. I always select a similar page, copy text (which will include the html code), import it and then change appropriately. Save lots of time. NOTE: the script at the bottom of the page is so that "GoingUp!" the software that counts page use. Just leave it there - and don't mess with it.

Title. When naming the page, be kind to yourself and give it a name that will tell you what it is and make it short (it has to be used in links)

Removing Comment Option. Once you have set up the name and maybe put something in the text, and identified the "parent," do a "save as draft" and close the page. It will appear on right page of "All Pages" but only if you have refreshed that list - i.e. gone to another page first. You **MUST** now open it in "Quick Edit" - go to the bottom of the page and "de-click" the Allow Comments. You (or more accurately "I") really don't want this on the website - Comments are used if you are a blogger, but we are not and taking the time to deal with comments is a horrifying thought. If you forget to do this, when you are seeing how your page looks there will be this huge white box. Go to "Quick Edit" to get rid of it by de-clicking Comments.

Previewing your work. As long as you are working in a draft, you can just hit preview and then return using edit or the back arrow. BUT if you are working on a published page, you can preview but MUST return by hitting the close button (red arrow on mac). Any other approach and you will lose your work. (In theory you can close the right tab at the top - I can't.) This is less of a problem now that VISUAL really works.

Etiquette. Final thought on linking. Every page should have a way to get back to its parent. That link can be in the title or at the end. It is a kindness to the viewer. In fact, since every public page shows the pull down menu at the top, this is somewhat less of a problem, but it should still be on the page. You have to build the link into any new board-only page.

Getting photos ready for the web

I am sure I have spent more (frustrating) time dealing with photos than any other part of the website updating

Memory size: cameras and smartphones that take good picture use lots of memory. You have to reduce the size to the "small websize" (448x336 approximately, memory usually about 100KB ) before putting them on the website. (Word Press won't even take really large files, but even if they did, the webpage would load too slowly.

shape: With the "one-column" format, this is not the problem it used to be. Cameras produce different proportioned photos and folks take both horizontal and vertical pictures. Just focus on the overall size and the rest will take care of itself.

Jpeg vs PDF. If you want a photo (or map) to show on the screen, you need to use some variation on jpeg/png. If you want a document (photo or map) to be available to download, use pdf. In either case, focus on low memory/minimal quality when you are working on the document to load onto the web.

Putting those photos on the web

(Putting a new photo on a page is relatively easy - assuming it is the right memory and size before you begin - see previous section.)

Placing the photo. Get yourself to the right page and the right place on the page. If there is a previous picture, either delete or better yet copy it into a new Word doc just in case you need to put it back.

Go through the Add Media 3-click process, wait for it to load and then click Insert.

Go to the VISUAL page, click on the photo and then the little edit box top left-hand corner. You can change the size (can only guess until you see it on the web) - I often go to 80%. Chose which side of the screen it should be one (left unless you make a design decision to change all the photos). Close and save (2-step process).

You now need to UPDATE the page and view the page as a webpage - DO NOT go to view (or preview) before update, you will lose your work (trust me).

If it worked, great. If the photo is too small, it is easy to click on edit page, then click on photo and change the size. If you are looking at a true mess, try reducing the size of the photo first to see if that makes a difference (go to edit, then edit photo). You can always put back the old one (from that copy you put in the word document). You can also scroll down to the list of previously (automatically) saved copies of the page and restore one of them.

Galleries. Make sure your photos meet the low-memory test before you begin. The Galleries are sets of photos used in the properties section and on the Events page and the Trails/LTC Events page. (The "click to see another" pages.) The gallery system really works. You create a gallery (be sure to write down its number), load in photos (not too many at a time or it will not work), "manage" them making sure there are no duplicates and changing the sequence (be sure to save). Note, each webpage with a gallery (click to view) is its own webpage, so once you have done the gallery you have to create a webpage - this is where copying from another one is incredibly useful. Besides changing the title, be sure to change the gallery number.

It is wonderfully easy to add additional photos. Again, make sure they meet the low-memory test. Find the right gallery, add, sort if necessary, SAVE and check to see if the new ones are included when you click the photos.

**That's it**

It doesn't cover all the tricks - some of them are so ingrained in my system I have forgotten to include them - others I don't even know about and so can't pass along.

To repeat the introduction: this document is designed to be a snapshot of how the website works in the winter of 2015. It is completely appropriate to re-think the goals, to change the software or the design, to branch out to other social media.

The only unacceptable choice is to let the electronic voice (in whatever format) of RGT languish - to not keep it updated, accurate, easy to use, and relevant.

Mary Alice, June 2015