

RATTLESNAKE GUTTER TRUST NEWSLETTER

FRIENDS OF RATTLESNAKE GUTTER TRUST
SIXTH ANNUAL MEETING
WEDNESDAY, MAY 19, 1993

6 PM Hike and Picnic Supper
LONG HILL NATURAL AREA

If you have not yet hiked the half-mile climb to the top of the hill, we invite you to pack your picnic supper and join us before the annual meeting. On a clear day you can see five towns and two states! We'll meet at the Town Hall and carpool to Long Hill.

8 PM TOWN HALL
Election of Trustees
Dessert & Social Hour

PEREGRINATIONS

Once when I was poking around a used bookstore in Northampton, I found a fieldbook of natural history, published in 1949. I use it more than any of my other fieldbooks, because it gives a description of the plants and animals I live with in Leverett.

In addition to giving the natural history, each entry comments on the "value" of the organism to man. Spruce grouse is "of some economic importance as a destroyer of insects, flesh unpalatable in winter." The Hessian fly does "millions of dollars of damage to wheat each year", black flies are to be "controlled by spraying with DDT." Red oak is "good for heavy construction..." and live oak is a "valuable tree for shipbuilding." White birch is of much economic importance for dowels and spools, but yellow birch is not recommended for encouragement. Lesser duckweed is useful for wildlife management, wild calla and rockweed are of little or no economic importance, while vine kelp is harvested commercially.

With these entries, the book presents nature not only as something that biologists know about but also as a resource to be exploited by human beings, a resource that is a component of the human economic system, to be turned into products or property, to be employed or devalued according to its commercial potential.

My old book is a great help to me in identifying the birds, animals, and plants that live with me in North Leverett. But it isn't much help in developing a land ethic for the 1990's. One of its weaknesses lies in its economic approach. As Aldo Leopold wrote (around the time my fieldbook was published), "nature" can't be treated like a commercial resource or a piece of property, with whatever isn't profitable sprayed to death or turned into a parking lot.

To understand nature, we need a newer biology, a very different sort of integration, and a more inclusive set of ethics than those represented by my old fieldbook.

The new biology says that we can't separate an organism from its environment. There is no environment without an organism and no organism without an environment. Organisms create environments, and they cannot live without constantly changing those environments. Plants send down roots that break up and aerate the soil, changing the soil's chemical nature, changing the height of the water table, altering the humidity; while moles and earthworms burrow, the complex life of humus goes on, the succession of plants in the forest waxes and wanes. Like all living organisms, we human beings create and change the environment. And the environment changes us.

The new ethics have to bow to the new biology. Ethics can't simply be restricted to relations between human beings or to declarations of human rights to life, liberty, and property. If the ethics of relations between people can't be separated from our relationship with our environment, i.e., with nature, then nature has to be included in the ethics. This can't be done in cost-benefit terms (white birch is valuable, pesticides are harmful to man, rockweed has no commercial value, swamps must be filled in to build new housing, etc.) Ethics have to include us and our environment together. We cannot be considered apart, separate, from the environment. Nor can the environment be considered separate from us. These ethics have to include our social, economic, and political relations with each other, just as the old ethics did, but we have to understand these as integral parts of our environment.

At the other extreme, accepting the new biology and the new ethics means it makes no sense to "preserve" nature in some unchanged, "natural" state. Nature always changes. Nature is an essential part of human economy, just as human beings are a part of nature's economy. Nature's economy does not function on a premise of profit or loss. Yellow birch, wild calla, rockweed, even pesky (to us) black flies have a valuable place in the ecosystem, and that value is being understood and examined afresh with the new biology and the new ethics we are developing. Like other organisms, we must live off nature (so to speak) by changing our environment. A land ethic has to offer a guide to integrating human needs with the needs of our environment.

The Trustees of RGT have been working on developing a land ethic not only from a global standpoint, but also from the standpoint of a land trust located in a small, rural town like Leverett. In Leverett, the economics and the biology and the

ethics often come down to practical questions about the dump or about what land might best be left open, what might be best developed for housing or left to other commercial use.

There are various strategies for dealing with such questions. One of the strategies is to rely on zoning and other such regulations to determine land use. This is essential framework for a land ethic, and it is the tool used by the town through the Planning Board and the Conservation Commission. Given that framework, the main strategy that the Trust follows is to work directly with landowners in a partnership, negotiating various guidelines for land use based on a mutual love of the land in Leverett. This is a strategy Aldo Leopold recommended over forty years ago: government and business working together to make a healthy environment for all living things. The Clinton administration appears to be developing this strategy on a national scale, measuring conservation, preservation, and economic needs together, working toward solutions by uniting these interests and finding common ground.

Working with landowners means respecting their rights to whatever degree is possible within the land ethic. In Leverett, some landowners have donated conservation restrictions to the Trust. For example, through the efforts of Sid Poritz, homeowners on Laurel Hill are donating conservation restrictions on land along North Leverett Road. The Trust has helped raise money to buy land to be owned by the town, such as the 40 acre tract at the Gutter's heart. The Trust has accepted ownership and management responsibility of land on Long Hill, the acquisition of which we will celebrate at our annual meeting. In an ongoing effort, the Trust continues to meet with landowners to work for the long-term good of both people and land. Trustees are currently engaged in fruitful discussion with Paul Jones. All of these efforts are guided by what we refer to as a land ethic.

The deepest source of a land ethic in Leverett is our own love of the land, a love that inspires each of us to care for our own space.

In an earlier newsletter, we invited readers to send us their thoughts on a land ethic for Leverett. We welcome your comments, and we invite you to join in the discussion at our annual meeting.—K.A.

References: Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac* (1949); R.C. Lewontin, *Biology as Ideology* (1992); E. Laurence Palmer, *Fieldbook of Natural History* (1949).

ANNUAL REPORT TO MEMBERS

LAND PRESERVATION ACTIVITIES

LONG HILL NATURAL AREA: Trustees this year voted to accept the deed to the parcel of land purchased by Long View Alliance and neighbors through the Valley Land Fund. This decision represents a real commitment for the Trust, both financially and in terms of land management responsibility. Many meetings were spent working out the various considerations of land ownership. One plus is that it provides a link to our goal of a pond walkway.

POND WALKWAY: Another step in establishing a walkway around Leverett Pond was taken with the gift from Mary and David Field of land between Depot Road and the pond, accepted for the town by the Conservation Commission. We are also currently assisting a landowner desiring to make a partial donation of an easement that would add to this goal.

RATTLESNAKE GUTTER PROTECTION: We continue to explore the question of assuring the preservation of Rattlesnake Gutter. It is our goal to implement preservation of this area in its natural state with as little invasion as possible, consistent with its current use. It is the policy of the Rattlesnake Gutter Trust to work with all landowners in developing a preservation plan. To this end, we are working with W.D. Cowles on a possible purchase of either land or development rights along the Gutter road through a combination of grants and fund-raising.

EDUCATION

NEWSLETTER: We introduced our Rattlesnake Gutter Newsletter last April as a way of keeping our Friends informed of various activities and concerns of the Trust. Newsletters are sent to every member of Friends of Rattlesnake Gutter. We welcome contributions, suggestions and letters to the Editor, which should be sent to RGT, P.O. Box 195, Leverett, MA 01054.

LAND ETHIC: During several meetings, we explored our own thoughts and individual feelings about land, the concept of ownership, the changing use of land, the need for preservation and the kind of preservation that is appropriate. This exploration is ongoing.

WAYS AND MEANS

MEMBERSHIPS provide us with both funds and support. Our fall membership drive letter, sent to all townspeople, brought in 43 new members. Our financial focus in the coming year is to help retire the remainder of the Long Hill Natural Area purchase price.

Memberships this year included special designations in memory of: Margaret Barry, Wehle, Earle C. Vance, Verdi Watson Brett, Ethel Woodward, Floyd W. Hammond, Andrew S. Kahn, Katrina, Frederick T. Bashour, F. Donald Ashley, Donald Sturtevant, Zarka Smith.

REFUNDABLE CAN/BOTTLE BOOTH: Still our best moneymaker, thanks to Gordon King and Dave Field. They can always use help, if you have an extra few minutes when you bring your cans to the landfill.

LEVERETT CALENDARS: The third Leverett Calendar was on sale at the Harvest Festival this year. If you like this timing, help us by getting photo entries to us by the end of July.

T-SHIRTS: Our Gutter Snake has taken a different twist, in a new design by Cynthia Thomas Kimmel. The new shirts went like hotcakes at Town Meeting. They will be available at the Annual Meeting and, of course, in stock at the Village Co-op. A bargain at only \$10.00.

PATRON DONATIONS: All Laurel Hill home sales include a \$500 donation to the Trust, thanks to the commitment of Sidney Poritz. We welcome to Leverett donors Hanlyn Davies, Charles and Donna Holmes.

TRUSTEES OF THE RATTLESNAKE GUTTER TRUST

The Board of Trustees (no less than five nor more than fifteen members), is elected at the annual meeting from the membership to serve a term of three years. A slate of candidates is presented by the nominating committee and other nominations may be made from the floor.

This year we have also added two high school age associate trustees for one year terms. We have enjoyed adding their thoughts and perspectives to our discussions.

Current Trustees and their terms:

Priscilla Greeley	1993
Matthew Kelty	1993
Gordon King	1993
Annette Gibavic	1993
Kathy Addelson	1993
Albert Shane	1993
David Palmer	1994
David Field	1994
Stephen Weiss	1994
Jean Bergstrom	1994
Roberta Bannister	1995
Evelyn Schuyler	1995
Brooke Thomas	1995
Steven Schmidt	1995

Associate Trustees:

Matthew Godsey	1993
Evan Perkins	1993

RECOGNITION OF CONSULTANTS: In addition to the work of the Trustees, we are fortunate to have been assisted again this year by the following:

Richard Howland, Legal Advisor
Julie Shively, Treasurer
Gail Alt, Oxbow Press

HONORARY MEMBERS

Roberta Bannister
Mary Catherine Phinney
Betsy Douglas

Respectfully submitted,
Annette N. Gibavic, Secretary

Friends of Rattlesnake Gutter
P.O. Box 195
Leverett, MA 01054

TREASURER'S REPORT

January 1, 1992 to December 31, 1992

Balance January 1, 1992 \$8,115.87

INCOME

Life Memberships	\$300.00
Membership	407.00
Contributions	670.00
Follies	891.90
Donations, Laurel Hill	1,000.00
Donations, Long Hill	100.00
T-shirt sales	179.00
Can Recycling	1,915.15
Canvas bag sales	75.00
Leverett Calendar sales	1,399.75
Interest	301.01
TOTAL INCOME	\$7,238.81

EXPENSES

Leverett Calendar	\$757.20
Newsletter	\$1.60
P.O. Box Rent	7.25
Postage	159.86
Printing	175.57
Mailing	39.60
Safe Deposit	20.00
Supplies	38.00
TOTAL EXPENSES	\$1,249.08

Balance December 31, 1992 \$14,105.60

NET PROFITS TO DATE

Recycle	\$8,790.31
T-Shirts	2,269.30
Canvas Bags	232.00
Leverett Calendars	4,242.30
Follies '92	891.90

Respectfully submitted,
Julie Shively, Treasurer

Bulk Rate
U.S. Postage
PAID
Leverett, MA 01054
Permit No. 2