

# LANDMARK

The newsletter of the Northern Connecticut Land Trust



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## Loosestrife Project Into Effective Phase – by Jerry Stage

The Trust's Land Stewardship Committee has undertaken a biological control project this year whose goal is to control the large and spreading population of purple loosestrife (*Lythrum salicaria*) that infests much of the wettest part of the Scantic Riparian Area (SRA) in Somers. Though a beautiful flower, it is an invasive species introduced from Central Asia that invades wetlands throughout the Northeast where it crowds out native species, thereby reducing biodiversity and the wildlife value of the land.

The philosophy of the biological control method is to bring a non-native pest species under control by introducing some of the parasites, predators or diseases that keep it under control in its native land. Ideally, once this is accomplished the pest species is no longer a pest because it now exists in sufficiently low numbers to more or less enhance the local biodiversity rather than destroy it. Natural control agents are only released after exhaustive studies have been done to ensure that they themselves will not also become pests. The great advantage of this approach is that once successfully completed the pest species ceases being a problem because it is in balance with the local ecosystem. Pesticide based approaches unfortunately must be repeated year after year and often incur unacceptable economic and environmental costs.

The USDA has completed initial studies on the safety of several biological agents (all beetles or weevils) to control purple loosestrife and has begun careful releases in numerous places in cooperation with various state organizations. In Connecticut the work is being promoted and coordinated by Donna Ellis, Extension Educator and Co-Chair, Connecticut Invasive Plant Working Group (CIPWG) in the Department of Plant Science at the University of Connecticut, Storrs, CT. The actual work is done by volunteers such as the great folks on our Volunteer List.

For our project in the SRA we are using two species of small, nondescript leaf beetles in the genus *Galerucella*. But before releasing any we had to grow a sufficiently large number to make the release effective. The "farming" process started with transplanting muddy root balls from a half dozen dormant loosestrife plants from the flooded SRA into 3 gallon pots. This was done on April 17 during one of the regular work parties. The pots were then placed in water filled trays at George and Leslie Grant's beetle farm where it was hoped they would flourish. And flourish they did!



**DIRECTOR ED DRESNER AND PROJECT COORDINATOR JERRY STAGE INSPECT THE BEETLE-GROWING CAGES AT THE GRANT PROPERTY.**

By early May the lush greenery was 1 to 2 feet tall and ready to be enclosed in cages of fine nylon netting, provided by Donna Ellis. By May 27<sup>th</sup> the plants were pushing at the tops of the 3 foot tall cages and 10 to 15 adult beetles were introduced into each. These beetles were collected from a site on the UConn campus in Storrs. They all died rather soon thereafter, but not before mating and laying a bumper crop of eggs. The resulting hungry beetle grubs then proceeded to all but destroy the plants while completing their life cycle. This was not too surprising since each cage now held somewhere between 1,000 and 1,500 new adults giving us between 6,000 and 9,000 of the little critters to turn loose in the SRA!

The big event, the release, took place late in the day on July 6<sup>th</sup>. Donna Ellis was there with a student from the UConn's Department of Natural Resources. Peter Marteka and a photographer were there from the Hartford Courant. And of course a number of our volunteers (Ed Dresner, Kirsten Martin, Judy Snyder, John Sheirer and Dave Sutherland) were there with me. (cont.)



Dave Sutherland looks on as Donna Ellis uncovers the beetles, while Jerry Stage finds the target plant in the background.

The release was made by leaving a beetle infested potted plant (minus its nylon cage) against each of 6 previously selected target loosestrife plants scattered along a quarter mile of the lower part of the service road. If all goes as hoped these adults will feed for a week or so and then seek shelter and wait to repeat the process without cages in the SRA next year. If 60 to 90 beetles turned into 6,000 to 9,000 in our cages this year, can you imagine what the loosestrife plants have to face next year? Stay tuned.

**CHECK OUT THE NEW FORMAT AND  
CONTENT AT OUR WEBSITE.**

### **Ellington Hilltop Added to Trust Holdings**

In May this year, the Trust closed on a 14 acre hilltop ridgeline property on Sunset Hill in Ellington, acquiring it from the Ellington Congregational Church. The purchase was made possible by a generous gift from the Vranos Family Foundation and Mike Vranos, former Ellington resident.

The property, with a beautiful view of the Connecticut Valley, will be open to the public for hiking and picnics in the near future. A spokesman for the Trust said "Preserving open space in Ellington is a high priority issue with the Land Trust, and we are indebted to the Ellington Congregational Church for its foresight and cooperation."

### **NCLT Supports the American Chestnut Foundation**

The American Chestnut Foundation (TACF) is a non-profit organization dedicated to restoring the American Chestnut trees into eastern forests. In the early 1900's, a blight introduced on some ornamental chestnut trees imported from the Far East decimated the native chestnut trees in our forests. Until that time, chestnuts were the predominant tree in many areas east of the Mississippi. American Chestnuts are beautiful, tall, fast growing trees, valued for their wood and their nuts. Before the 1930's when the blight killed adult trees, they were an important source of food for people, deer, turkeys, and other forest animals. Several articles found in the TACF Journal, Spring 2005, comment on the practice of people in the Appalachians collecting the nuts to be sold or for their own use.

TACF is conducting a selective breeding program that is developing blight resistant trees that will eventually be reintroduced into our forests. The program has reached the stage where pollen from trees with blight resistance is being used to fertilize a few American Chestnut trees that have survived to flowering size to produce chestnuts that are adapted to our area and carry resistance to the blight. The Northern Ct. Land Trust is supporting these efforts by volunteering to assist with the fertilizing process and hopes in the future to use some of our protected open space to grow the blight resistant trees in support of the reforestation project. Volunteers were present when a local tree in Enfield was pollinated in early July, with the plan then to harvest the nuts and develop the resistant trees for our area. For more information on TACF or to join the organization, visit their Website at [www.acf.org](http://www.acf.org).

### **Governor Rell Signs Open Space Bill**

On July 11, Governor M. Jodi Rell signed Senate Bill 410 saying "This is one of the most worthy and visionary pieces of legislation approved this year." The bill provides \$6.5 million each for farmland preservation, open space acquisition, historic site preservation, and affordable housing. The bill had passed the Senate unanimously and by a 109-39 vote in the House of Representatives. Funding will help continue to make matching grants available to such organizations as the Trust, providing dollars which have been extremely important to our recent successes in acquiring land for preservation.

### **Scantic River Watershed Volunteers Complete River Survey**

On August 16<sup>th</sup> the SRWA held a wrap-up picnic at the Powder Mill Barn in Hazardville to celebrate the completion of the survey of the Scantic River. Over 30 volunteers participated in the project. The river has its headwaters at Culver Pond in Stafford and wends its way through Hampden to Somers, Enfield, East Windsor and exits into the Connecticut River in South Windsor. As the “crow flies” the river is 17 miles; however, with its many twists and turns the actual length is 32 miles.

Following a 3 hour training session provided by the CT Natural Resources Conservation Service, the river was divided into 16 sections with teams of 2,3 or 4 people taking a section and filling out a survey sheet with a variety of criteria. The surveyors either walked, floated in tubes, kayaked or canoed to navigate the river. The depth of the river goes from 0.5 ft. to over 15 ft. while the width is from 2 ft. to over 50ft. Most of the river is clear; however, several discharge pipes sited at various locations. There are numerous fallen trees throughout the course of the river making navigation difficult in many areas. Some of the comments were: “It was our version of survivor with a little Huckleberry Finn thrown in”, “I stopped counting after I crawled over the 15<sup>th</sup> tree”, “I had a blast!” All in all the surveyors seemed to have a good time and enjoyed the challenge. The Association is planning on using the information for use in their upcoming river guide as well as for continuing to monitor the river. They are also planning on getting the information on their website in the future.

The Association’s annual meeting will be held on Sunday, October 16<sup>th</sup> at 6 PM at the Somers Senior Center on Battle Street. Steve Gebhard will be speaking on the return of the shad and salmon to the Scantic and the possibility of removing the Springborn Dam in Enfield.

Anyone interested in further information about the SRWA please contact Mike Dynia @ 745-9986 or [mdynia@yahoo.com](mailto:mdynia@yahoo.com) or Judith Snyder @ 749-5411 or [nctia@yahoo.com](mailto:nctia@yahoo.com).

### **2005 Land Trust Annual Meeting Saturday, September 17**

Be sure to mark your calendar for Saturday, September 17, 2005 for the Potluck and Annual Meeting of the Northern Connecticut Land Trust. A slide presentation entitled, “*Gifts of the Ice Age: Vernal Pools, Bogs and Swamps*” will show why these features are so interesting and valuable as we learn about the unique communities of plants and animals found in each! This highly entertaining program will be presented by Walt Landgraf, Naturalist at the Stone Museum, People’s State Forest, Pleasant Valley, CT.

This year the meeting will be in East Windsor at the First Congregational Church (124 Scantic Road, i.e., Rte. 191). The evening begins with a social at 5:30 PM followed by dinner at 6:00. The featured speaker is right after a brief business meeting at 7:00. Bring a dish to share, and your own plate and utensils. Beverages will be supplied unless you wish to bring your own.

Walt Landgraf is planning to visit our Wapping Bog property and perhaps the Scantic Riparian Area earlier in the afternoon. Anyone wishing to join him should contact Jerry Stage for details (860 870-4255 or [JerryStage@aol.com](mailto:JerryStage@aol.com)).

The slate of Officers and Directors nominated for 2005-2006 are as follows:

President – Culver Modisette  
1<sup>st</sup> V. President – Jerry Stage  
2<sup>nd</sup> V. President – Karl Hasel  
Treasurer – Jim Gage  
Recording Secretary – Michelle Hayward  
Corresponding Secretary – Judy Snyder

Directors:  
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Jerry Stage  
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If you have a friend interested in joining the Trust and supporting the work of protecting our natural resources, please pass this newsletter on to them. Contributions are tax deductible.

**MEMBERSHIPS:**

Student - \$2.00      Individual - \$20.00      Family - \$30.00  
Business - \$100.00      Life - \$250.00      Patron - \$500.00  
Benefactor - \$1000.00

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If you would like to volunteer to work projects such as fund-raising, trail maintenance, newsletter, or others, please check **YES** \_\_\_ **NO** \_\_\_