

Sheepscot Wellspring Land Alliance

Practicing Land Stewardship since 1990

February 2008

PO Box 155, Freedom, ME 04941

Issue No 17



Check Us Out Online!

You can now visit SWLA on the internet at www.swlamaine.org. We are excited to be taking this big step and are confident that this move will help the organization continue to mature and attract new and increased support for conservation in our region. You can also email us at info@swlamaine.org.

We owe a great thanks to SWLA member Will Sugg who volunteered many hours to create the site. The website is hosted by Planet Maine, a website design and hosting company that Sugg founded. Sugg, who lives in Palermo, has designed sites for other businesses and nonprofits including the Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association.

Technology has evolved dramatically in recent years, making it possible for smaller organizations to afford good websites. The site can be managed by SWLA and easily edited and updated with new material. We may be looking for assistance with keeping the site up-to-date, so please contact us if you're interested in helping. If you have outdoor or wildlife photos taken in the region that you'd like to share please send them along to be considered for use on the website.



From the Executive Director

Buck O'Herin

Welcome to SWLA's first winter newsletter! Because there is so much momentum and exciting activity with SWLA lately, we decided it was important to put out two newsletters a year to keep members informed and up-to-date. Another way to stay connected is to **visit us online at our new website, swlamaine.org** (see "Check Us Out Online!"). By the way—SWLA's new phone number is 589-3230. Call us and let us know how we are doing!

I want to remind you that until **April 1st**, Energyworks of Liberty, Maine will match each dollar of new member donations up to \$1,000. So, please tell your friends and neighbors about SWLA and this opportunity. This match includes the purchase of gift memberships. Individual memberships are \$20 and a family is \$35.

Recently SWLA membership topped 125 individuals and households. In 2002 it was around 40 and as recently as 2006 it was at 75. Some of this unprecedented growth is undoubtedly due to the increased outreach and publicity of the past few years and the increas-

ing visibility of the SWLA-Georges River Land Trust 22-mile trail network. However, I believe there is greater interest in local conservation due to the growing awareness and concern over environmental issues locally and globally. A broad and active membership is essential to SWLA's ability to make a difference and to sustain this effort over time.

Support for SWLA's work continues to grow. My position as SWLA's first executive director has been funded since last June by a generous grant from Newman's Own Foundation. This past fall we received a **\$25,000 grant** from the Falcon Charitable Foundation to use for a land purchase project in the watershed that appears close to bearing fruit and recently we received a generous **pledge of**

\$100,000 from a member that will go a long way toward helping us achieve organizational sustainability. We received half of the gift in February and the other half is bequeathed in the donor's will. This gift comes at a pivotal time as we work to professionalize the organization and prepare to do significant landowner outreach as the conservation plan for the Sheepscot watershed reaches completion this spring.

We are immensely grateful for all of this support. However, it is the individual support from all of you as members and volunteers from the surrounding communities that will largely shape the conservation path and outcome in this region.

I hope you can make some of the exciting SWLA events planned for the year.

Thanks to our Volunteers

Tom Boothby, Heidi Brugger, Brendan Curran, Kirstin Edelglass, Kai George, Mac George, Missy Hatch, Jay Legore, Moe Martin, Ed Merry, Bill Pickford, Jay Seyfried, Mike Shannon, Clover Street IV, Susan Wolford; Connie Bellet, Phil Whitehawk, and the Palermo Community Center; Common Ground Fair volunteers Jackie Ascrizzi, Connie Comfort, Betsy Duncombe, Rhoda Waller, and Gabe Willow; Unity College teachers Amy Arnett, Shawn Biello, Chris Marshall, Tom Mullin, and their numerous students who worked on projects on SWLA properties last fall.

Thanks to Unity College President Mitch Thomashow for his inspiring talk at our annual meeting in August. A special thanks to Bill Behrens and Pat Coon of Energyworks for their generous help with our annual appeal. We also would like to give a special thanks to Will Sugg who gave so much consulting and design time in creating the new SWLA website.

Newsletter Credits

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Walker School 5th Graders Explore

Kai George

On an October morning, Walker School's fifth grade class explored a SWLA forest and wetland area of the upper Sheepscot River under the guidance of SWLA volunteers Kirstin Edelglass, Buck O'Herin, and Kai George, and Unity College student Clover Street IV. As we hiked the Bog Brook Trail, we observed animal and plant habitats, gaining an appreciation of a local watershed and the importance of protecting it for all life forms living there. In an activity illustrating the ecological concept of interdependence, each student imagined he or she was a plant or animal and thought about what was needed to survive. ("I'm a fungus. I'm linked to Jack the Oak because when he is injured in a storm, I move in to the wound site and grow.") Getting down on our bellies, we pretended to be ant-sized creatures crawling around through the leaf litter, imagining what it would be like to be a small insect. We talked about a world without insects and fungus and came to realize how fortunate the world is to have such "decomposers."

The leaders were impressed by the children's enthusiasm and observation skills. The children were excited to spot moose tracks, hoping to see the critter munching on water lilies in the bog. Spending a whole minute in silence enabled us to hear signs of life often missed in the din of normal human activity.

Exclamations such as, "This must be a white pine because it has five



Lindsay and friend. Photo: Cindy Scappaticci

needles just like its name has five letters" and "I found a red maple leaf with saw-toothed edges" came forth as children learned tree identification.

One student suggested that the class return to the Bog to experience it in different seasons. Several students said they wanted to bring their families to hike on Bog Brook Trail. And back in the

classroom, a committee began writing and illustrating a brochure to share with other schools and classes, showing what they had observed in the forest and bog encouraging others to hike SWLA's trails. Reflecting on her morning experience in the watershed, a student wrote, "It's a wonderful place...it's peaceful, it has nature, it has beauty."

Unity College Classes Utilize SWLA Lands



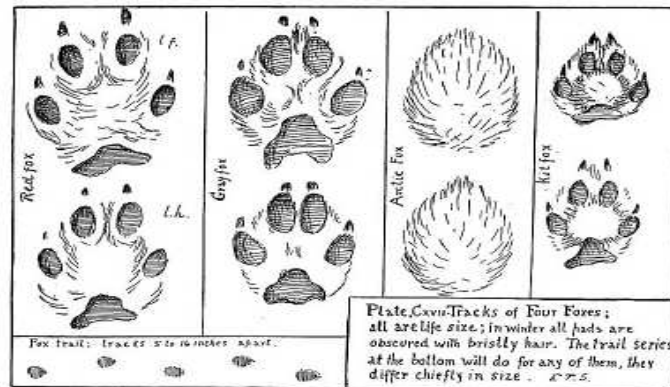
This past fall four classes from Unity College used SWLA lands for purposes ranging from studying limnology (the division of hydrology that studies inland waters) and archeology to developing management plans for the properties that included sending surveys to property abutters asking what activities they would like to see on these conserved lands. The students learned that the majority of people prefer low-impact activities like hiking, snowshoeing, and picnicking.

Maine Landowner Liability Law Benefits Land Trusts

More than half of SWLA's 12 miles of recreational trails cross 17 privately owned properties. This is an anomaly compared to the rest of the country where most recreational trails open to the public are located on public lands. What accounts for this difference is Maine's landowner liability law, one of the strongest in the U.S. Of course, these trails could not be built and used without the generosity of the numerous landowners involved.

- Ø If someone uses your land or passes through your land for outdoor recreation or harvesting, you assume no responsibility and incur no liability.
- Ø If you allow volunteers to maintain or improve your land for recreation or harvesting, you are also protected from liability.
- Ø Legal protection is the same whether you post your land "no trespassing" or not.

SWLA's trail arrangement with landowners is done with a handshake to keep things as simple as possible. If a landowner changes his or her mind all they need to do is make a phone call to end it. To date, no one has withdrawn permission. The trails are a wonderful community asset.



SWLA Lands “Forever Wild” by Read Brugger

This past April the SWLA Board adopted Declarations of Trust (DOTs) for all the parcels of land SWLA owns. Motivated by the desire to permanently protect SWLA's land as well as the need to update our Open Space tax status with the town of Montville, we set to work.

DOTs are attached to deeds at the Registry of Deeds and filed with the Attorney General. This creates an oversight mechanism whereby any citizen becomes a monitor of our lands. If SWLA fails to abide by the conditions of the DOT anyone can contact the Attorney

General and seek remedy.

After much board discussion to clarify our management intentions, the board voted to designate all but one of SWLA's parcels as “forever wild.” (The donor of that parcel had requested that we allow the possibility of future forestry practices on the land.) Part of what informed our decision is the research done by the Maine Forest Biodiversity Project, in which scientists concluded that perhaps the most disturbing threat to biodiversity in Maine is the decrease in mature forests.

An ad hoc committee composed of board members Bob Brooks, Susie O'Keeffe, and Read Brugger worked hard to craft a definition of “forever wild” that reflects SWLA's mission statement, stressing protection, and restoration of the upper Sheepscot watershed.

In a truly collaborative manner the committee drafted a unique definition of forever wild that reflects our ideals and fits with the specifics of the land we are protecting. The following is a section of the DOT that was written for the Northern Headwaters Preserve:

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The Northern Headwaters Preserve shall be maintained as forever wild.

Forever wild is a designation for land protected in its natural condition whereby the ecological integrity and wild character of the land are preserved and protected in perpetuity. The Northern Headwaters Preserve shall remain forever wild and primarily free from human manipulation and disturbance with minimal management activity allowed, which is limited to protecting and restoring natural communities and rare species and ensuring low-impact recreation. Minimal tree removal and pruning are permitted for the following reasons: building and maintaining foot trails, enhancing scenic views, constructing small viewing platforms and/or blinds for wildlife observation, and constructing lean-tos. Maintenance of existing fields is permitted. Neither commercial timber harvesting, land development, nor any other major alterations are allowed.

Land managed as forever wild benefits the natural communities thereon as well as humans who may enjoy the scenic beauty and other wilderness values through minimal impact, non-mechanized nature recreation such as wildlife observation, hiking, and cross country skiing, for example. SWLA believes that, in general, natural occurrences should govern the land but have made the above exceptions so that humans can more easily benefit from and enjoy the natural world. SWLA reserves the right to establish rules and regulations for permitted uses on the Northern Headwaters Preserve, to temporarily close all or part of the same, and to prohibit, by posting or otherwise, uses it deems inconsistent with or adverse to its intended uses.

The Northern Headwaters Preserve shall not be transferred except subject to the perpetual restrictions and requirements stated in this trust deed.



The board recognizes that each parcel has unique characteristics and the restrictions and protections we want to maintain in perpetuity must reflect that. The forever wild protections we affirmed on our existing parcels may not be appropriate for all the land we hope to protect.



*Inquisitive woods visitors enjoy a walk led by longtime SWLA member Moe Martin.
Photos: Read Brugger*

LOST and FOUND

Reviews of Two Books

by Charles Fletcher

Over the last two decades, the number of birds migrating across the Gulf of Mexico has fallen by half. The main reason for this is habitat loss. Mike Tidwell's book *Bayou Farewell* explains why Cajun country, "the sole of the boot" of Louisiana, where these birds first make landfall on their northward journey from South and Central America, is the "fastest disappearing landmass on earth." Louisiana

loses 35 square miles of land in an average year. That's an area about the size of a typical New England town, replaced with water, year after year.

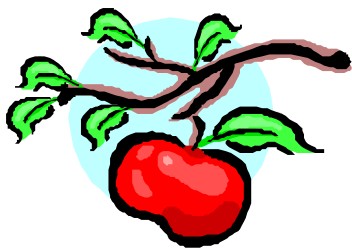
Rising sea levels are not the main culprit here, though that will certainly take more of a toll in the future, along with increasing storm intensity. Instead, the land is sinking, the unforeseen consequence of building levees and digging oil company canals.

Louisiana is built of seven millennia of deposited sediment carried by the Mississippi River from a large part of the North American continent. In the not too distant past, as the river spread out and slowed down near the Gulf, sand, silt, and clay from a large part of North America would settle out, forming land soon colonized by plant and animal life. That sediment is still settling, subsiding, but now without the spring floods which



well as the fertilizer and manure responsible for the Gulf's dead zone, over the edge of the continental shelf.

As with so many environmental issues, the solution is simple and terrifying, and the political will may never be forthcoming. Several projects have been built to show how easily the subsidence can be reversed, but a really big project is needed just to keep abreast of the rate of subsidence. Plans have been drawn up to construct an artificial river north of New Orleans to divert some of the river's burden into the bayous, but given the reputation for corruption in Louisiana, and cynical comparisons to Iraq and Boston's Big Dig, and given the oil industry's need for ease of navigation in deep channels, the chances of anything getting done anytime soon seem remote.



These may be excellent times for misanthropes, but John Bunker's wonderful book reminds us that talking to neighbors and planting trees can help hold back the tide of

negativity to be seen encroaching everywhere. *Not Far from the Tree* recounts the history of Palermo from the vantage point of its orchards. Clearly, from his lovingly drawn illustrations and pages of maps, he regards these trees as old friends. He seems to know every old tree in town, if not by name, at least by taste, not to mention where all the cider mills and dance halls were and whose uncle ran them. For more than thirty years

he has been learning about his town from his neighbors and the trees they tended and loved. In this book, he shares some of those old stories, and encourages us to continue our own researches into our own chosen places.

The book is available from Fedco, or from the author: John Bunker, 167 Turner's Mill Pond Road, Palermo, Maine 04354.

Why Does the Turtle Cross the Road?

Buck O'Herin

Each year around the solstice in June turtles can be seen crossing roads in Maine; these are mostly female turtles in search of good egg-laying ground. Road shoulders are a favored choice because of the sand and fine gravel. Unfortunately this places them at great risk and many are killed by cars because their Triassic software is not designed to deal with Holocene (our era) hardware. At this time of year we also may see people stop and do their best to get turtles out of the road so they won't get hit. This maneuver can sometimes be very risky. A painted turtle can be easily picked up and moved but trying to move a large snapping turtle with sharp jaws that is likely feeling threatened, all the while keeping your eye on the traffic, tends to be a delicate and demanding task.

In first aid, the first thing they teach is not to create more victims. This adage applies here as well. Keep yourself safe by being sure the help you give can be done safely. Sometimes trying to shoo a snapping turtle along only makes it turn and face you—the perceived threat. With practice, picking up

and moving a snapper can be done quickly and safely.

The trick is to get behind the turtle (this may take a little maneuvering) and grab the tail close to the shell but do not yet lift it off the ground (you can hurt a snapper holding it by the tail). A snapper cannot reach around and bite you as long as you are firmly holding onto the tail. A turtle may snap wildly into the air but it also wants to pull into its shell for protection, so its strikes are not well aimed. Tip up the back end a little so you can slide your other hand under the shell, then with your palm and fingers spread out against the bottom of the shell, you can safely lift her up with the weight supported by your hand under the turtle. This must be done while keeping the head pointed away from you with a good grip on the tail. The turtle will snap into the air but cannot reach your hands. To release the turtle, set it down and do everything in reverse order. Try this at home before you try it on the roads. Good luck!

If you are in our area of Maine and find an injured turtle you can take it to Avian Haven in Freedom

(they care for all sorts of wild animals) or call them and they'll send a volunteer to retrieve the animal. Avian Haven's phone number is 382-6761. You can check out their web site at avianhaven.org.

Board Happenings

In August we said goodbye to Board members **Vernon LeCount** and **George Maendel** and welcomed two new board members, **Deb Harbaugh** and **Cindy Thomashow**. George and Vernon both joined the board in 2001 and contributed a great deal of time and energy despite having busy lives. George served as board president for four years and Vernon served as secretary for two years. Both of them brought a great deal of expertise, enthusiasm, and humor to our circle. We owe them many thanks.

Deb and Cindy joined the SWLA Board during the fall. Deb was born and raised in Freedom, left for ten years, and now lives there with her husband Jared. Deb has hiked the Appalachian Trail from Georgia to Maine and the John Muir Trail in California. She works as an occupational therapist in Rockland. She brings many skills to the SWLA board including a great love for the outdoors.

Cindy moved to Waldo County last summer with her husband Mitch. She had been teaching in the Environmental Studies Department at Antioch University in New England and directing the Center for Environmental Educa

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In the accompanying photo, SWLA member Sanna McKim's father, Clint McKim, can be seen trying the old west method of removing a snapper from a road.

tion Online. The center is a free online resource for environmental educators and schoolteachers. She will continue to direct the program through Unity College. Cindy discovered SWLA's trails shortly after moving here and when asked if she was interested in joining the Board, immediately answered yes. "I already had a heart connection to the lands SWLA protects."

Congratulations to Board member **Glen Widmer** and his wife Kim on the arrival of their second son Ruben, born January 10. Glen, a full-time teacher at Troy Howard Middle School in Belfast, will understandably be taking a leave-of-absence from the SWLA Board.



The Sheepscot

*I come
to sit
here,
by you.
To know your moist language,
your fluid wisdom.*

*My wanting so impatient
it becomes the young boy who,
once having tasted the terrible agony
of desire's tender tongue,
loses himself to the ceaseless churning
of his unquenchable thirsts.*

*Emboldened by the fecundity of your own fullness,
you go about your flowing.
Undulating over and beneath and around
moss covered Zen Masters.*

*Sun shimmers himself gently through you,
Freckling your laughter with his light.*

*Cloud, always jealous,
always longing to pour into you,
asks for a dance.*

*You settle quietly under his dark gaze,
the silent melody of politeness moves you now
as you wait for the light of your true love to return.*

Susie O'Keeffe

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