



# Friends of the Oswegatchie Hills Nature Preserve

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## Newsletter—Spring 2012

### A Message From the President

I always know when spring has arrived in the Hills – even if the calendar says it is not yet official. On March 10, the wood frogs began their annual mating ritual in the vernal pools. Besides the pools in the Preserve, I am lucky enough to have one at the end of our driveway, so all day long and especially at night the sound of these small but very loud creatures fills the air. This annual event, for me, is something magical, almost mystical. And I am reminded of just how lucky we are to have the Preserve, where we can watch the changes that each season brings.

#### Irene Leaves Her Mark

This past fall brought some changes to the Hills. When Tropical Storm Irene blew through, she left dozens of downed trees in her wake. The Stewardship Committee, which oversees the Preserve's maintenance, reported 34 downed trees blocking trails. With help from community volunteers, the Committee spent most of the fall making the trails passable, leaving larger trees where they fall, in accordance with Board policy.

#### Ecological Survey Completed

Thanks to board member Rich Gallagher, another big (and I do mean BIG) project was completed this year: the publication of *Oswegatchie Hills Nature Preserve Terrestrial Ecology Survey*. It provides significant insight into the Hills' flora and fauna and is a valuable source of information. I cannot thank Rich enough for all his time and hard work. I urge you to check out the report at [www.oswhills.org](http://www.oswhills.org). (Another accomplishment this year was the update and revision of the FOHNP website. If you haven't visited the site recently, check it out.)

#### Riparian Buffer Project

The Stewardship Committee is undertaking a Riparian Buffer Project with pro bono assistance from Drew Kenny, a landscape architect. Its purpose is to restore and enhance the west bank of Clark Pond, so bank erosion can be stopped and the potential for flood damage reduced. Read more about this exciting project on Page 3.

#### Annual Meeting on May 5

Please join us on Saturday, May 5 for the Annual Meeting of the Friends of the Oswegatchie Hills Nature Preserve. We gather at 10:00 a.m. in the Olive Tubbs Chendali Room at the Park and Rec Office. Come and hear in person all that is happening in the Hills!

I want to thank the entire Board of Directors of the FOHNP for their untiring efforts on behalf of the Preserve. These committed volunteers work hard to keep the Hills the beautiful place we all love. Without their time and talent, the Hills would surely be, in the words of Robert Frost, "a diminished thing."

President

FOHNP thanks Dominion for printing this newsletter

## FOHNP Board Member Honored for Public Service



*Esther Williams presents Marvin Schutt with Paul Harris Award*

Marvin Schutt was honored by the Niantic Rotary at its annual Gala in February when it presented him the Paul Harris Award in recognition of his many years of exceptional service to the community. Most of us know Marvin as the founding force and first president of the Friends of the Oswegatchie Hills Nature Preserve. Marvin still serves as a director on the FONHP Board, but in addition he is a member of the East Lyme Conservation Commission and the vice chairman of the Niantic River Watershed Committee.

Over the years he has served as member and leader of countless other town boards and commissions, including the Board of Selectmen, East Lyme Development Commission, Design Committee of the Niantic Bay Overlook Project, and the East Lyme Waterfront Development subcommittee. He is also past president of the East Lyme Arts Council and the East Lyme Historical Society. In a recent letter to the *The Day*, Christopher Barrett wrote “[Marvin] has made Oswegatchie Hills a part of [his] legacy, helping to keep the Niantic River from further decline, while working to preserve so much of our past.” True words! Congratulations, Marvin.

## Beaver Deceiver on Clark Pond Dam

Anyone visiting the preserve has probably noticed the work of the beavers and the pipes that traverse the earthen and concrete dam at the southern end of Clark Pond. The pipes are part of a system called a “Beaver Deceiver” which helps maintain the intended level of the pond by draining off the excess water held back by the beaver’s handy work of sticks and mud. If left unmanaged, the water that overflows the dam would not follow the intended water route over the dam, and would undermine the dam.

The pipe ends in the pond are suspended underwater in a wire cage so the beaver cannot get to them and plug them. Beavers can sense flowing water and will make every attempt to stop it. The pipes are capped at these ends and have a wide slot cut in the bottom of the pipes in the cage. The beavers have trouble sensing water flowing into the pipes in this manner and will not attempt to dam up the cage; hence, a beaver deceiver.



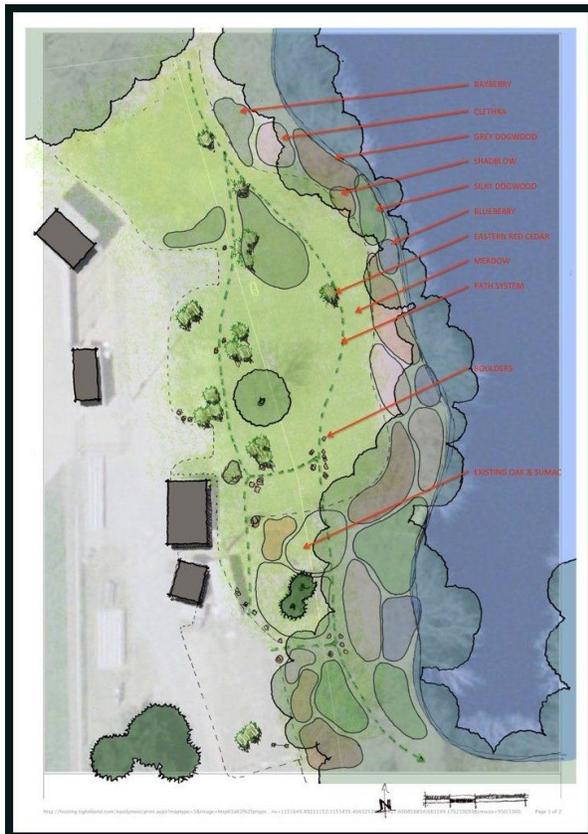
*Skip Hilliker, who constructed and installed the deceiver.*

With beavers making a strong comeback in CT, conflicts often arise between landowners and the industrious animals because of the flooding issues they cause. The beavers are often trapped and killed, as it is illegal in Connecticut to relocate them. Employing beaver deceivers is a conservation-minded method of allowing the beavers to thrive, and is in line with the OHNP management philosophy of protecting the native flora and fauna which exists in the preserve.

## Landscape and Riparian Buffer Project

The Nature Preserve's Management Council is partnering with the Eastern CT Conservation District to improve the vegetative area on the southwest shore of Clark Pond. This sloping area from the pond up to the ball fields is termed a "riparian buffer zone". Buffers are the first line of defense against the impact of land usage associated with residential, agricultural and industrial areas.

This buffer zone is displaying increasing amounts of erosion with soils washing into the pond. The native vegetation along the pond's edge is also being replaced by non-native invasive plant species. The goal of the project is to enhance and restore the buffer zone and eradicate the invasive plants. It will improve the local habitat for terrestrial and aquatic flora and fauna and enhance the aesthetics of the waterside area.



*The landscape plan above was designed by professional landscape architect Drew Kenny*

Invasive species contemplated for removal include Japanese Knotweed, Asiatic Bittersweet, Multiflora Rose and Japanese Barberry. Upon approval, these invasives will be replaced with native plantings comprised of bayberry, sweet pepperbush, grey dogwood, shadblow, silky dogwood, highbush blueberry and Eastern red cedar. A portion of the grassy slope will become a meadow walk, with a mix of grasses, legumes and wildflowers which will help control erosion and add beauty. Visitors will be able to walk through the meadow via multiple paths, shown on the landscape plan to the left.

### Many Volunteer Contributors

Several conservation-minded individuals have stepped forward to make this project happen.

**Judy Rondeau**, Natural Resource Specialist and Niantic River Watershed Coordinator for the Eastern Connecticut Conservation District, is providing oversight and guidance on the project, ensuring the proper techniques and conservation methods are employed.

**Gary Goeschel**, the East Lyme Director of Planning and Inland Wetlands Agent, secured the proper permit from the EL Inland Wetlands Agency (IWA) and is overseeing the project on their behalf.

**Dave Putnam**, East Lyme's Parks and Rec. Director is providing insight, labor and vehicles for brush removal.

**Greg Decker**, FOHNP Vice President, FOHNP Stewardship Committee Chair and a CT-DEEP Master Wildlife Conservationist, is coordinating the many facets of the project.

**Dominion Nuclear Connecticut** donated \$2,500 to the project and the staff of the **Millstone Environmental Lab** will be donating a day's labor as a local stewardship project helping with the landscaping and plantings.

The Friends of Oswegatchie Hills Nature Preserve also obtained a \$1,000 grant from the **New England Grassroots Environmental Fund**.

Many thanks are due to one individual who donated a generous amount of time and valuable insight and knowledge to the project. **Drew Kenny**, a professional landscape architect, developed the overall landscaping plan. Drew was instrumental in providing the professionally drafted plan and supplemental documents needed for the IWA permit application. Drew, an East Lyme resident, is passionate about conservation and offered his services free of charge.

As the project nears implementation, other interested conservation minded individuals and groups are welcome and encouraged to participate, making it a community effort. The project is large and will have to be carried out in steps so there will be multiple opportunities for you to get involved. If you or your group would like to help and do some true conservation work, please contact the Friends of Oswegatchie Hills Nature Preserve through its web site (<http://www.oswhills.org/>) or contact Greg Decker at 860-739-9177.

### Seen Around the Preserve



*One of three bluebirds seen recently on the Blue Trail, scouting out the two nesting boxes installed last year. Bluebirds nest and breed in the early spring, and will have as many as four broods per year.*

**Dog Lovers: Please remember to keep your dog on leash while walking him or her in the Preserve. Thanks.**



*East Lyme brothers, Christopher and Christian George, were seen recently walking Christian's pet pig, Jack, along the Blue Trail. All three love walking in the Preserve, and when they leave, Jack cries "WEE WEE WE LOVE THE HILLS" all the way home.*



*The result of a festive-minded hiker*