



ROYAL RIVER
CONSERVATION TRUST

Currents

Conserving land for people, wildlife, clean water, and the future

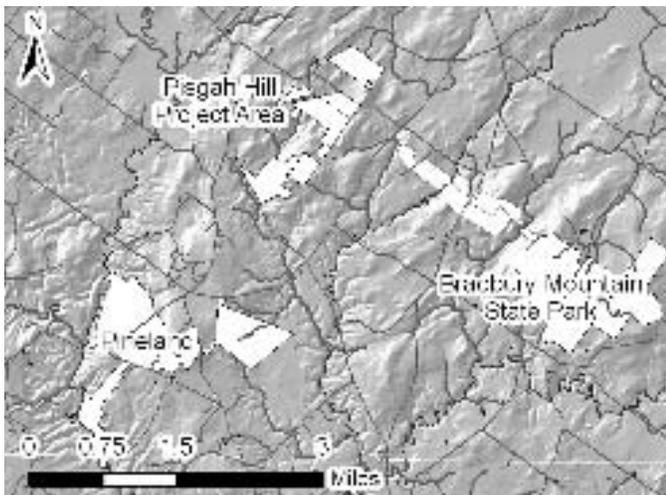
Land For Maine's Future Backs Two RRCT Initiatives

Pisgah Hill Project to Protect Trail and Wildlife Corridor

Trail visionaries, land conservationists, and wildlife in the Royal River watershed got an important boost in July when the Land for Maine's Future fund awarded a \$260,000 challenge grant to RRCT to pursue its Pisgah Hill Project. The project encompasses nearly 300 acres of undeveloped forestland between Bradbury Mountain State Park in Pownal and Pineland Farms in New Gloucester. If protected, this parcel will bridge the gap between the two preserves, providing an outstanding corridor for both recreation trails and wildlife movement.

"This unique project helps implement RRCT's vision for the region by establishing a conservation preserve with connections to other conserved lands and future greenways," said Gro Flatebo, RRCT Board president.

Centered between Portland, Lewiston-Auburn, and Brunswick - and an easy drive from each - the Pisgah Hill area retains a sense of the wilder *Pisgah Hill continued on Page 2*



Davis Farm Project to Protect Land for Agriculture



Photo by Duncan Chesley

Many people in Maine remember when locally grown food was the rule, not the exception. But for the past generation or two the reverse has been the norm, and much of Maine's former farmland has reverted to forest as a result. Fortunately, new interest in local agriculture is growing as people become more aware of the unsustainable practices, high transportation costs, and detrimental health effects associated with today's food production.

Enter the Davis Farm Project, a partnership between the Maine Department of Agriculture, a local landowner, the Land for Maine's Future program, an aspiring Durham farm family, and the Royal River Conservation Trust. Davis Farm in Durham is a 70-acre property that has been fallow for over 20 years. Located near Runaround Pond, a major headwater of the Royal River, Davis Farm is one of several former farms in the area on the threshold of transitioning to suburban, residential uses. That is, unless RRCT can conserve and permanently protect this outstanding property for agricultural uses.

In July, RRCT won a \$156,000 challenge grant from the Land for Maine's Future toward the purchase of an agricultural/conservation easement on the property. The land will be *Davis Farm continued on Page 3*

Letter from the President: A decade of momentum

In August, when Tom Armstrong handed over the reins of RRCT board president to me, I couldn't help but marvel how the organization has grown and developed over the course of this decade. In 2002 we reconstituted the Friends of the Royal River as a regional land trust to reflect the growing interest in protecting not just the river, but the landscapes and natural values of its entire watershed. Recognizing that staff support would be essential to accomplish what we needed to do in this fast-growing part of the state, we took a major step and hired Henry Nichols full-time as executive director.

Under Henry's leadership, Friends of the Royal River became a fully functioning land trust serving all the communities in the Royal River watershed. Endorsement for this came when independent land trusts in Yarmouth, North Yarmouth and New Gloucester voted to merge with us. To better reflect our constituency and mission we changed our name to the Royal River Conservation Trust in 2005. Merger conversations now underway with the



Pownal Land Trust may soon allow all the core communities in the watershed to work as a whole for land conservation.

As RRCT continued to add valuable easements and properties to our portfolio of holdings (now numbering 28 easements and six preserves) the need for more on-the-ground support grew as well. Last fall we hired Amanda Devine as our part-time stewardship coordinator. Amanda never sits still; she is constantly out and about, monitoring easements, mapping properties, evaluating potential projects, attacking invasive

species, rallying volunteers, and generally doing what needs to be done. When executive director Henry Nichols faced a major family crisis this past year, Amanda and several board members stepped up to fill his role, a testament to RRCT's capacity. Thankfully, continuing improvements on his home front have allowed Henry to return to work.

There certainly is no shortage of things to work on at RRCT. This issue of Currents highlights some of our recent activities, accomplishments, and challenges. I think you'll agree that RRCT has built an enormous amount of momentum over the past decade. We couldn't have done what we've done without your support and we can't keep doing it without your continued membership and annual fund contributions. As we brace for turbulent economic times, please remember that RRCT is a vital investment in our communities for the decades to come.

– *Gro Flatebo*

Pisgah Hill continued from page 1

and less developed parts of Maine. "I've explored this area extensively and think its rolling terrain, small brooks, and mature woods are some of the most beautiful around," remarked Mark Powers, a cooperating landowner in the project. "I discover something new each time I walk this land."

Eight landowners have so far agreed to work with RRCT to sell or donate their land or a conservation easement on their land. Another 100-acre parcel located in the heart of the project area is currently for sale.

RRCT recognizes that if this particular property were to be developed, it would forever compromise the value of the area as unfragmented wildlife habitat and inhibit the efforts to develop a broad trail system linking existing and future conservation corridors.

A committed group of volunteers has been working to put this project together over the past year and were instrumental in RRCT's successful application to the Land for Maine's Future fund. The challenge now is to raise the additional funds to complete the project. A Pisgah Hill cam-

paign committee is enlisting others to help spread the word about this exciting opportunity. People interested in helping or learning more should contact Henry Nichols, RRCT's executive director.

As part of its campaign, RRCT will be leading hikes to the Pisgah Hill project area over the next several months so that people can become better acquainted with this wonderful area. If you are interested, please make sure we have your e-mail address—it's our most efficient way of letting people know of our walk schedule.

Joining Hands to Broaden Shoulders

RRCT and Pownal Land Trust in Merger Discussions

“Mergers and acquisitions” are terms that might conjure images of giant corporate deals fashioned around enormous, polished wooden conference tables littered with paper and Perrier bottles. So the words seem a bit out of place when applied to the Royal River Conservation Trust's evolution over the past several years. Nevertheless, the consolidation of local land trusts in Yarmouth, North Yarmouth, and New Gloucester with RRCT two years ago was a merger - albeit of the kitchen table variety - of committed people from several communities who shared a vision for a land conservation organization that will serve our region. Since that merger and the resulting acquisition of more than 20 conservation easements and properties, RRCT has devoted significant time and resources to bolster its land stewardship efforts.

The benefits of consolidating stewardship and conservation efforts in the watershed are much of what lies behind recent merger discussions



Members of the Pownal Land Trust work to clear the Tryon field, a landmark section of the Bradbury-Pineland Corridor Protection project. Photo by Chris Ayres

between RRCT and the Pownal Land Trust. As appropriate when considering combining operations, resources, and assets, each organization wants to ensure that such a merger will help to increase the pace and oversight of conservation activities, both in Pownal and throughout the region. Over the past few years RRCT and PLT have partnered on several successful projects.

“We are excited about the possibility of taking our relationship to the next level,” remarked Alix Hopkins, past PLT president and author of *Groundswell: Stories of Saving*

Places, Finding Community.

“Combining the talent and resources of each organization - one with a regional focus, the other with deep local ties - makes a lot of sense.”

“The Pownal Land Trust is a strong organization supported by a committed group of volunteers. Adding their collective experience and local wisdom to RRCT is a significant step toward sustaining conservation in the region and in our core communities,” observed Gro Flatebo, RRCT president.

While discussions are preliminary, both organizations remain optimistic that they can come to an agreement that satisfies the continuing need for an active local team in Pownal, and for a stronger RRCT capable of building and caring for an infrastructure of connected greenways throughout the region. Both RRCT and PLT will keep their members and communities posted on our progress toward this exciting opportunity.

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owned and farmed by Steve Sinisi and Robin Hetzler, who currently work at their extended family's organic New Leaf Farm located a short distance away. They intend to raise organic livestock and plan to eventually develop a small farm store on the edge of the property to sell locally grown foods. The easement will allow structures, such as storage barns, windmills, and manure containment facilities that support agricultural enterprises only. This means that the property's highest and best use will be for farming in perpetuity. The easement will also allow RRCT to develop a public access trail to connect with an eventual trail network at Runaround Pond.

“We are thrilled that Robin and Steve have this wonderful opportunity to set down their own farming roots right here in the neighborhood,” said Dave Colson, New Leaf Farm's owner. “Hopefully, this area will return as a hub of local farming activity.” Eventually, both farms will be able to share resources, such as labor, materials, and equipment helping each operation's efficiencies.

Another \$44,000 remains to be raised for this project. As part of this campaign, RRCT is hosting an Oktoberfest harvest dinner featuring local foods on Saturday, October 25 (see box on page 6). All proceeds will benefit the conservation and protection of this local farm.

Editor's Note: The Foray

When I first heard Amanda shout, I thought she had been stung by another hornet. On our first walk to monitor the Shaker Village easement, she had been stung, and the unexpected allergic reaction that followed necessitated a cell phone call and speedy compass-course exit to the nearest road, where we were met by a neighbor with Benadryl. (A lesson there.) Such is the life of RRCT's stewardship coordinator - never a dull moment. This time, on our return walk her shout was one of excitement.

"Chanterelles!" she exclaimed with completely undisguised relish. Stretching down the forested slope below her were large patches of the delectable mushrooms, bright orange in the brown leaf duff. I could see that already she was anticipating dropping handfuls into a hot skillet with garlic. In no time her pack was off her back and she was stuffing the chanterelles into the top.

It was a scene that the late Sam Ristich would surely have appreciated. Sam was a North Yarmouth resident for many of his 92 years, who knew perhaps better than anyone how incredibly biologically diverse our region is. A highly accomplished botanist and entomologist, Sam had

an encyclopedic knowledge of nature - but what he really offered to all that knew him was a deep and irrepressible passion and sense of wonder about the natural world that he had to share. And he shared it with thousands of people, many who made the pilgrimage to Sam's Sligo Road home for his regular forays through the surrounding fields and woods.

Sam was particularly passionate about mushrooms. To many naturalists in Maine, he was *the* mushroom "guru." He taught courses on mycology, led countless forays to teach people how to find and identify fungi, provided expertise to poison control centers, and even discovered a new mushroom species that was named for him. "He can turn a casual interest in mushrooms into a lifelong experience of discovery," wrote the National Mycological Association in naming their annual foray for him.

Sam would have loved this summer. The persistent rain brought about an extraordinary bloom of mushrooms. The chanterelles were just the beginning. As Amanda and I



Chanterelles

continued our walk along the Shaker property boundaries, I found myself becoming more and more distracted by the sheer number and variety of mushrooms that were growing everywhere throughout the forest. Of multiple shapes, sizes, and colors, they begged examination and identification-if for no other reason than to hear the wonderful names given to mushrooms: names like

Salmon-Urn, Entoloma, Luminescent Panellus, Destroying Angel, Yellow Patches, Tawny Grissette, The Blusher, King Bolete, Velvet-footed Pax, Many-headed Slime, Chocolate Milkies - as though taken from a fantasy novel.

Fortunately, this remarkable diversity of life is for real - and it is still all around us to be discovered, learned from, and in the spirit of Sam, to be marveled upon. It is one of the reasons why RRCT's mission is so important. Working together we can protect this region's landscapes and the diversity they harbor. It's a legacy we inherited and one we should leave.

-Bill Hancock

Bittersweet and Bates Students Face Off in Battle on Littlejohn

When eight Bates College students and one professor emerged from their van September 18 to stand blinking in the late summer sunshine at RRCT's Littlejohn Island Preserve they could be forgiven for feeling overwhelmed. They had come in search of Asiatic bittersweet (*Celastrus orbiculatus*), and within a few yards of the

trailhead they found more than what they were looking for: festooning the canopy was a seemingly impenetrable mat of bittersweet, a pernicious invasive vine that spreads rapidly, smothering and displacing native vegetation.

The students from the Bates Biology Department's Invasive Plant Ecology course are spending their

fall semester studying invasive plants, the threats they pose, and their control methods. Their professor, plant ecologist Dr. Sharon Kinsman, is guiding them through the complicated processes of understanding the interface between plant biology, human land use, and land management,

Bittersweet continued on Page 5

Youth Conservation Corps Wraps Up Another Great Season

Among the 75 high school-aged students that crowded into the Rowe School Auditorium in Yarmouth on August 8 to celebrate a summer's worth of hard work with the regional Youth Conservation Corps were five that worked for RRCT's Royal River Youth Conservation Corps on water quality improvement projects in the Royal River watershed. (See photo) Funded by local municipalities and grants from public and private organizations, the crew dug infiltration trenches, mulched trails, installed rip-rap and infiltration steps, and planted nearly 1000 native plants.

RRCT members and staff served on the Youth Conservation Corps steering committee that helped enable the crew's successes this summer. Partnering with RRCT in this effort were the Cumberland County Soil and Water Conservation District and the Department of Environmental Protection. Funding support was provided by the towns of Yarmouth, North Yarmouth, Pownal, Cumberland, and New Gloucester; the New England Grassroots Environmental Fund; the Casco Bay Estuary Partnership; DeLorme; Shawnee Peak; and local water districts and lake associations. To all involved we extend a well deserved thank you.



Back row: Will Woodworth, Frank Rollins (happy homeowner), Aaron Ricardi
Middle row: Crew Leaders David Miklovich & Becca Gerber
Front: Hannah Martin, Hannah Blatchford

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Bates student, Holly Ladd frees apine tree at the Littlejohn Preserve

and they have chosen the Littlejohn Island Preserve as their classroom. With roughly six acres covered in bittersweet, the preserve presents the perfect opportunity to study management options in what at first glance looks like an already lost battle. The noxious vine forms a monoculture in several areas, and is slowly strangling canopy pines.

For their final assignment, the students will draft a management plan that takes into account manual, mechanical, and chemical control options; the preserve's location in the shoreland overlay zoning district (in which vegetation removal necessitates a permit and replanting plan); the likelihood for reinvasion; and the tremendous expenditure of time and energy it will take to reduce - much less eradicate - bittersweet cover on the preserve. Following

the students' submission of their plans for how to address this problem, RRCT will seek appropriate permits from the Maine DEP to begin a removal program. This effort is being funded by a generous grant from Bank of America.

During a second visit to the preserve in October, the students were heartened by a round of weed-whacking in the preserve's interior. While acknowledging the years of hard work it will take to return the preserve to a natural state, there was no question in anyone's mind that this gem on Littlejohn is well worth the effort. Future cohorts of Invasive Plant Ecology students will analyze the successes and failures of different forms of management and continue to develop recommendations for RRCT staff and volunteers.



Great Food and Fun for a Great Cause

There's no excuse for staying home Saturday evening **October 25** - not when you can enjoy great food in great company and for a great cause. The event is RRCT's Octoberfest harvest dinner, and it promises some wonderful local food from **New Leaf Farm** in Durham prepared by chefs from some of the area's best restaurants, including Portland's **Fore Street**, Brunswick's **Henry and Marty's**, and Freeport's **Harraseeket Inn**. The cause is RRCT's Davis Farm project, an easement that will protect agricultural land near the headwaters of the Royal River (see page 1).

The **harvest dinner** will take place from **6:00 to 8:30 p.m.** at Merriconeag Waldorf School's Community Hall, located at 57 Desert Road in Freeport. Dinner will be followed by a short lively auction in which we will auction off some delectable food items, including dinner for six at Sea Grass Bistro in Yarmouth and provisions for your Thanksgiving meal. Tickets are \$40 per person and \$75 for a couple. You may purchase your tickets at Royal River Natural Foods on Rt. 1 in Freeport, or at the RRCT office on Main Street in Yarmouth. Call 846-4458 for more information.

Membership Card

Thank you for sustaining the Royal River Conservation Trust with a membership gift. Our success is directly attributable to membership support from people living, working and playing in the Royal River region. Please make a gift of \$35, 50, 100, 250, 300 or more today.

Name(s) _____ I wish to make my tax-deductible membership gift of \$ _____ by check credit card

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I'd also like to help by volunteering. _____

Please contact me. _____

Expiration date _____

THANK YOU!!!!

RRCT will not share your information with anyone. Member benefits include our biannual newsletter and invitations to special events.

