



# Little Compton Landscapes

Newsletter of The Sakonnet Preservation Association

Summer 2002

## Letter from the President

### LOOKING TO THE FUTURE: THE WORK OF CONSERVATION

Heather Steers

President, Sakonnet Preservation Association

After many months of volunteer work, consolidating and filing SPA records that had been stored in board members' homes, the Sakonnet Preservation Association's office at 7 South of Commons Road is now fully operational. Since October, the office has been the site of many board and committee meetings, professional development workshops, client meetings, closings and a Christmas party. Having all of SPA's operational needs in a centralized location has enabled the board to function more efficiently and effectively. In July, the office will be staffed and open to the public on Fridays, from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Please stop by.

The SPA has been focusing on how open space helps protect groundwater. A recent report prepared by the Rhode Island Field Office of The Nature Conservancy, *A Conservation Plan for Wetlands and Associated Natural Resources in Little Compton and Tiverton, Rhode Island*, addresses some of these concerns. Since every home in Little Compton has a well, the report observes, "protecting groundwater is of critical importance." The report identifies failed individual sewage disposal systems (ISDS), leaking underground storage tanks, and pesticides and fertilizers as the primary causes of groundwater contamination in Little Compton. "Increasing residential development leads to a growing consumption of water for drinking, household use and landscaping. Some forms of agriculture and golf courses are heavy users of groundwater." The TNC report concludes, "water withdrawal from the aquifer may negatively impact not only the town's human residents, but also the biodiversity of wetland communities."

At the SPA Annual Meeting on July 18<sup>th</sup>, James Campbell of the U.S. Geological Survey will speak about Little Compton's groundwater and the importance of its protection. The community is invited to attend. Hope you can join us.

Please join us for the

## ANNUAL MEETING

6:00 pm  
Thursday  
July 18th

at the  
stone  
house  
club

guest speaker:  
**James Campbell**  
U. S. Geological Survey

### "Water Resources of the Sakonnet River Watershed"

What We Know  
What We Don't Know

Hors d'oeuvres  
Cash bar  
All are welcome





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Preservation Association**

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**SPA**

P. O. Box 945  
Little Compton, RI 02837

Phone/Fax: 401. 635. 8800

Office: 7 South of Commons

## THE CHALLENGE OF STEWARDSHIP: *Monitoring SPA Conservation Easements*

BY PHOEBE COOK

The Sakonnet Preservation Association is rapidly increasing its land protection program through the use of conservation easements. "From its inception only a few decades ago, the conservation easement has become a tremendously popular tool enabling the permanent protection of conservation land and historic property across the nation," writes Brenda Lind in her book, *The Conservation Stewardship Guide*.

*"Conservation easements protect more than five million acres nationwide. But as conservation easement acreage increases, so does the easement holders' responsibility to make sure that these easements last over time."*

The SPA currently owns 196 acres and also has an additional 90 acres under conservation easement. We recognize that easements require significant ongoing legal and programmatic obligations. Last fall, the SPA applied for and was awarded a grant for \$1,800 from the Land Trust Alliance's New England Land Trust Matching Program. The grant is being used to improve our Conservation Easement program.

We were very fortunate to be able to engage Brenda Lind to work with our board of directors. Ms. Lind met with the SPA's land preservation, stewardship, and planning committees, and presented her completed report to the full board at our April meeting. Ms. Lind commended the board on the "terrific foundation" that we have and she gave recommendations for improvements. Based on her report, the SPA board has reviewed our criteria and procedures for the use of easements in conservation projects, updated SPA baseline documentation procedures, and created an SPA Easement Monitoring format.

We are currently considering Ms. Lind's recommendations for preparing a "model" easement for landowners interested in educating themselves about what an easement document actually is, and creating and funding a dedicated stewardship fund to help ensure that monitoring and enforcement responsibilities will always be met.



THE MATERIAL BELOW IS REPRINTED BY PERMISSION OF THE LAND TRUST ALLIANCE FROM A BROCHURE TITLED  
**Protecting Your Land with a Conservation Easement**

HOW DOES A  
CONSERVATION EASEMENT WORK?

A conservation easement is a legal agreement between a landowner and a land trust (a private, nonprofit conservation organization) or government agency that permanently limits a property's uses in order to protect its conservation values.

When you own land, you also "own" many rights associated with it. When you donate or sell a conservation easement to a land trust, you permanently give up some of those rights. For example, you might give up the right to build additional residences, while retaining the right to grow crops. Future owners also will be bound by the easement's terms.

The conservation easement (called a "conservation restriction" in some states) is written up in a legal agreement that is tailored to protect the land's conservation values and meet the financial and personal needs of the landowner. An easement designed to protect rare wildlife habitat might prohibit development of any kind, for example, while one on a farm might allow continued farming and the building of additional agricultural structures, but prohibit subdivision.

In some cases, a conservation easement may apply to just a portion of the property, leaving the option of development open for the remaining part. It may allow limited building within the area under easement.

The land trust takes on the responsibility and legal right to enforce the easement. If a future owner or someone else violated the easement—perhaps by erecting a building the easement doesn't allow—the land trust will work to have the violation corrected. (The land trust usually asks for a donation from the easement donor to help offset the cost of future stewardship expenses.)

A CONSERVATION EASEMENT CAN  
SIGNIFICANTLY REDUCE ESTATE TAXES

If you own land with substantial value, you may not be able to pass it on intact to your heirs. When you die, your children may find that the federal estate tax—which is based on the value of land at its most lucrative potential use and is levied at rates as high as 55 percent—is in the hundreds of thousands or millions of dollars. Selling all or part of the land for development may be the only way to pay the estate tax.

But if you place an easement on the land restricting future development, its fair market value will, in most cases, be reduced. When you die, this reduced value will result in lower estate taxes.

An easement's effect on estate taxes is usually more important to landowners with sizeable estates and substantial real estate holdings, since, depending on the year of death, the first \$625,000 to \$1 million worth of assets is exempt from estate taxes. However, today's real estate market can easily push a property's value well above that without the landowner realizing it.

A 1997 tax law put in place an added incentive for easement donations in certain areas, such as those affected by urban sprawl or those surrounding national parks. See your tax advisor to find out whether an easement on your land would qualify for this additional estate tax benefit.

*For more information write:*

*Land Trust Alliance*

*1319 F Street NW, Suite 501*

*Washington, DC 20004-1106*

*phone: 202. 638. 4725*

*email: [www.lta.org](http://www.lta.org)*



## RECENT CONSERVATION EASEMENT DONATIONS PROTECT 50 ACRES OF LITTLE COMPTON OPEN SPACE

Donations of separate conservation easements by Little Compton property owners Carolyn Haffenreffer, John Cooper-Mullen, and Thomas Drew in December, 2001 resulted in the permanent protection of 49.94 acres of open space in different parts of town.

Mrs. Haffenreffer donated to the SPA a conservation easement on two lots that are part of Seaconnet Point Farm on Washington Road. One lot of 3.74 acres abuts Round Pond and is adjacent to other property which she and her late husband, Carl, had previously protected by easements donated to the State of Rhode Island. The other protected lot of 3.72 acres is a sloping pasture fronting the ocean. The donation of the conservation easement ensures that the wildlife habitat and scenic character provided by these properties will be permanently preserved for the enjoyment of the community.

Across town, John Cooper-Mullin and Thomas Drew donated a conservation easement of 42.48 acres, encompassing an entire lot that stretches between John Dyer Road and Old Harbor Road. The protected property includes a mixed hardwood forest,

wetlands, stone walls, and cart paths. Cooper-Mullin and Drew have made the donation as part of their thoughtful plan for the development of the 94-acre property. The plan creates only four residential lots on the entire 94-acre parcel, almost half of which will be protected by the conservation easement donated to the SPA.

By placing conservation easements on their properties, Mrs. Haffenreffer, Mr. Cooper-Mullin, and Dr. Drew have ensured that the properties will not be subject to further residential development. At the same time, the owners have reserved rights for certain agricultural uses on the properties. The conservation easements do not permit public access to the properties.

As a result of these recent donations, the Sakonnet Preservation Association has protected approximately 286 acres throughout the community, either by outright ownership or through the acquisition of conservation easements and development rights. Founded thirty years ago, the Sakonnet Preservation Association is the oldest land trust in the state.

### A ~ R ~ T S ~ H ~ O ~ W

The Sakonnet Artist's Co-op is having a members' show to benefit the Sakonnet Preservation Association. Each of the Co-op's nine members will be donating a piece of artwork to be auctioned off in a silent auction. The proceeds from those pieces will go to the SPA.

Artist's include: Josie Richmond Arkins, Jim Bush, Judy Hambleton, Joan McKenzie, Dora Millikin, Lanny Parker, Terry Shapiro, Galen Snow, and Felicia Touhey.

The show will run from August 8th-25th with an opening on Friday, August 9th From 5-7.



## Membership News

### *SPA Sponsors Geographic Information Systems Public Information Meeting*

The Sakonnet Preservation Association, on March 13<sup>th</sup>, hosted a well-attended public information session about Geographic Information Systems (GIS) at the Little Compton Community Center. Carol Baker, the speaker, explained what GIS is and how it is used by other Rhode Island municipalities. Ms. Baker is the GIS administrator for the towns of South Kingstown and New Shoreham (Block Island). She also serves on the board of the Hopkinton Land Trust. Landscape paintings and drawings of Little Compton were also on display at the March 13<sup>th</sup> meeting to emphasize the town's natural beauty and the importance of its preservation.

The GIS program was made possible by a grant from the Rhode Island Committee for the Humanities (RICH), as part of its statewide initiative, *Rhode Island Dialogues*. Drake Patten, Executive Director of RICH, met with several Little Compton residents last fall to identify important issues facing the community. Ms. Patten asked participants what they thought was special about Little Compton and how they would define their "sense of place." Those present agreed that they most valued Little Compton's beauty and rural character and were concerned about encroaching development. The participants at last fall's meeting with Ms. Patten proposed that SPA apply for a RICH grant for a project to raise public awareness about the benefits of land preservation. Because GIS is currently revolutionizing land-protection planning throughout the country, a program was developed by SPA members and RICH staff to educate Little Compton citizens about the GIS technology, including some of the pros and cons of adopting a municipal GIS program.

Carol Baker, in her illustrated March 13<sup>th</sup> presentation, explained that GIS is an

*continued on back page*

### **SPA Takes Steps to Maintain Ponderosa for Skating**

The board of directors of the SPA voted in April to retain the firm of Aquatic Control Technology, Inc. to undertake a program for controlling invasive vegetation at The Ponderosa, on Meetinghouse Lane. In recent years, the shallow, manmade pond at the SPA-owned property has become increasingly overgrown with *Phragmites* and other invasive vegetation, hindering the pond's usefulness as a site for public ice skating.

After a long, thorough investigation of vegetation control alternatives, the SPA board decided to pursue a program that calls for the limited application of herbicides approved for such use by the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management (DEM). Aquatic Control Technology, a DEM-approved contractor, has filed an application with DEM for a "Permit to Control Aquatic Vegetation." If the permit is approved, the company will apply the herbicide Rodeo in July and August. A committee, headed by board member Stetson W. Eddy, will begin to raise funds to defray some of the cost of the treatment.

In addition, through the generosity of local residents, the SPA recently installed a new light to illuminate the Ponderosa for night-time ice skating. Two anonymous donors contributed funds for the purchase of a new light. Electrical contractor Paul Golembeske installed the light without charge. During the winter skating season, a key will be available at the Police Department that will enable skaters to turn the lights on and off.

Hope for good ice next winter!



## *A Fragment of the Wild on West Main Road*

*By Stetson W. Eddy*

**I** would like to tell you a little about the Duffield/Yeatman property owned by the Sakonnet Preservation Association (SPA). It is situated on the east side of West Main Road just north of The Country Stand. It contains approximately 25 acres.

When the Little Compton Proprietors met in Duxbury, Massachusetts on April 10, 1674 to set off the land along West Main Road, the lots included acreage on both sides of the road. Edward D. and Barbara F. Duffield purchased one of the original tracts from Samuel B. Gray, son of Amasa Gray, on August 19, 1919. Their grandson, Edward D. Duffield II, still owns and farms some of the land along Blockhouse Lane.

Elizabeth Duffield Yeatman and her sister-in-law, Alice Louse Duffield (widow of Dickinson C. Duffield), decided to effect a bargain sale of the parcel on the east side of the road to the SPA. The conveyance was completed on August 23, 1985. It was the twelfth acquisition by the SPA.

Aside from providing a large stretch of unspoiled road frontage, the parcel has a number of interesting features. The tract is largely covered by scrub and woodlands. There is a lot of shad bush, tupelos, swamp maples and holly. There is even one large elm remaining adjacent to the northwest corner. As a child I remember

the huge elms along the road near the Blockhouse. There is also a large area of wild blueberry bushes at the north central portion of the property. My family used to go berrying there. Because the parcel evolved from pasture to scrub and woodland long ago, there is little evidence, except near the road, of wild roses, bamboo, bittersweet and other invasive species.

In the northeast corner, the parcel is traversed by Dunderly Brook. It is fairly marshy at that point but soon turns to a defined stream just south of a large stone bridge on Bumble Bee Farm. That portion of the farm was recently conveyed to The Nature Conservancy.

I have seen plenty of deer sign on the parcel, as well as the tracks of many other woodland creatures in the snow. It is one of the few places in town supporting a number of ruffed grouse. It is also a good layover spot for woodcock when they are passing through.

If you would like to see the parcel yourself, there is a trail, maintained by the late Blanche Frenning and, in recent years, her family, running easterly from about opposite the Blockhouse driveway. This trail connects with trails on the aforementioned Nature Conservancy property. Wear waterproof footwear and, if you are so inclined, bring your clippers to help keep the trail pruned.





The cleared Shaw property on Sakonnet Pt. Rd.

### Volunteers Honored for Stewardship Work

The Sakonnet Preservation Association honored Fred Bridge on April 25 at the Little Compton Community Center's 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Volunteer Recognition Night for his work on the SPA Stewardship Committee.

Fred has worked closely throughout the year with Karen Richmond, SPA board member and Stewardship Committee chair, maintaining SPA properties. All SPA properties are monitored annually and documentation is recorded for each visit.

Fred has spent many hours cutting brush and vines to expose the stone wall and pond at the Shaw property on Sakonnet Point Road. He has cleared brush at the Meehan Triangle on West Main Road and helped Karen remove debris on two large parcels in Adamsville. Fred has also participated in the SPA's recent stewardship workshop, helped other board members in preparing mailings, and will continue to be a volunteer property monitor this year.

Another SPA volunteer deserving recognition is Chuck Makepeace, who prepared many monitoring and photo reports on SPA properties this past year. Thank you!

The SPA would also like to recognize Susan Hooker, who worked on the Rhode Island Committee for the Humanities grant application for the GIS program. SPA welcomes volunteers and is grateful to those who have helped the organization in the past.



## Sakonnet Preservation Association

YES, I WOULD LIKE TO BECOME  
A NEW MEMBER.

*Enclosed is my tax deductible  
membership contribution.*

<input type="checkbox"/> Individual Member	\$20
<input type="checkbox"/> Family Member	\$25
<input type="checkbox"/> Sustaining Member	\$35
<input type="checkbox"/> Special Gift	\$_____

YES, I WOULD LIKE TO SUPPORT THE  
ANNUAL GIVING CAMPAIGN

☐ Annual Gift (Tax Deductible) \$\_\_\_\_\_

☐ My company will match my gift.

I am already a current member. \_\_\_\_\_

I would like to be a new member. \_\_\_\_\_

*Please make checks payable to:*

**Sakonnet Preservation Association**

P. O. Box 945, Little Compton, RI 02837

Phone/Fax: 401. 635. 8800

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Permanent Address \_\_\_\_\_

Town \_\_\_\_\_

State \_\_\_\_\_

Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Summer phone \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

Summer Address \_\_\_\_\_



### GIS Article continued from page 5

organized collection of computer hardware, software, geographic data, and personnel designed to efficiently capture, store, update, manipulate, analyze, and display many sorts of information. Geographic data such as zoning and parcel boundaries, roads, wetlands, historic sites, water and sewer lines, wells, and septic systems can be entered in a computer data base, and then edited, analyzed, and plotted to create maps at any scale.

Ms. Baker described some of the ways municipal officials, such as building inspectors and assessors, use GIS data and maps. She also explained that land trusts use GIS to educate the public about land conservation, research the conservation value of new land-protection opportunities, refine criteria for judging potential protection areas, maintain information about site visits, and fulfill the long-term stewardship obligations of land and conservation easement ownership.

Ms. Baker also addressed the costs of establishing a municipal GIS system. Digital conversion of tax maps and computer hardware/software costs may range from \$28,000 to \$33,000, she estimated. The ongoing personnel expense of maintaining GIS costs New Shoreham \$30,000 annually for one full-time GIS specialist and South Kingstown \$100,000 for two specialists.

Little Compton residents and town officials attending the March 13<sup>th</sup> meeting discussed some of the benefits of GIS as a tool for town boards and officials as well as for private organizations, such as the Historical Society and SPA. In sponsoring the GIS public-information session, SPA hopes to generate discussion about a cost-effective plan for the implementation of a GIS program for Little Compton.

Postal Customer

Save  
the date!  
ANNUAL  
MEETING  
Thursday  
July 18<sup>th</sup>  
6 pm  
"Water  
Resources  
of the  
Sakonnet River  
Watershed"



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