



# Little Compton Landscapes

Newsletter of The Sakonnet Preservation Association

Winter 2003

## SURVEY SHOWS CONTINUING TOWN SUPPORT FOR LAND CONSERVATION

*Heather Steers, President, Sakonnet Preservation Association*

A recent professional telephone survey conducted in Little Compton indicates that a large majority of respondents strongly support the protection of open space and farmland in Little Compton. The very positive results of the entire survey come at a time when development pressures are greater than ever and the need to safeguard Little Compton's drinking water is a serious concern.

The survey was initiated by the Sakonnet Preservation Association (SPA), the Little Compton Agricultural Conservancy Trust, and the Nature Conservancy, all organizations that preserve open space in Little Compton. The groups hoped to learn how Little Compton residents felt about land protection efforts in town. 76% of respondents said they strongly favor protecting more open space in Little Compton, and an additional 17% said they somewhat favor such efforts. The total of 93% favoring open space protection validates the groups' land conservation efforts.

A section of the survey asked respondents to rate the important reasons for preserving open space in Little Compton. A resounding 83% said that protecting the quality and supply of drinking water is very important, and 9% said it was somewhat important. Other conservation purposes were rated "important," as follows: 93% to protect wetlands and salt ponds; 92% to protect and preserve active working farms; 92% to preserve the rural character of Little Compton; 87% to protect the town's scenic views and landscapes; 90% to provide a safe habitat for many types of birds; and 83% to provide land that can be used for recreational purposes.

When asked which of the previous reasons to preserve open land they thought "most important," 42% of respondents answered to ensure safe drinking water, 25% to protect Little Compton's rural character, 15% to preserve active working farms, 6% to provide public shoreline access, 3% to provide recreational fields, and 2% to preserve scenic views.

A resounding 93% said they thought unplanned growth, uncontrolled development, and overcrowding can and will hurt the quality of life in Little Compton; that family farms, landscapes, and scenic views are part of our heritage; and that we owe to future generations our efforts to protect these areas.

Residents were also asked whether they would support or oppose a modest real estate tax increase or a rise in the present property transfer tax from 2% to 4% as a means of increasing funds for the purchase of open space by the Little Compton Agricultural Conservancy Trust. A majority of 56% indicated that they would support a modest real estate tax increase; 57% said they would support an increase in the property transfer tax.

The survey was conducted under the direction of the Kitchens Group, a public opinion research firm that has conducted surveys and focus groups in 44 different states. Three hundred residents were interviewed in a random sample taken December 13-16, 2002. The sample was balanced according to known demographic factors so as to obtain a reliable cross-section of the town. *continued on page 3*

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**&**

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## *Eddy Conservation Donation Expands Open Space Network*

A donation of land to the Sakonnet Preservation Association (SPA) in December 2002 has added to a growing network of open space, farmland, and forest at the headwaters of Dunderly Brook in the center of town.

Little Compton resident and long-time SPA board member Stetson W. Eddy donated the two-acre parcel of forest land, which is linked to an 11-acre lot he donated to the SPA in 1985 and to 169 acres of Bumble Bee Farm protected recently by the Nature Conservancy and the Little Compton Agricultural Conservancy Trust. Mr. Eddy's "wood lot," as he has called it, serves as excellent habitat for wildlife such as woodcock and deer. Vegetation on the property consists of maple and holly trees, as well as other native plants. Along with other nearby SPA-owned parcels, including the Duffield property and the Ponderosa, more than 220 contiguous acres have been preserved in the vicinity of Mr. Eddy's recent donation.

Mr. Eddy, an attorney and outdoorsman, has been an active supporter of land conservation in Little Compton and the surrounding region for many years. In addition to his gifts of land to the SPA, he has previously donated to the Agricultural Conservancy Trust a 54-acre parcel at the north end of Long Highway. Besides serving on the board of the SPA, Mr. Eddy served as a member and secretary of the Agricultural Conservancy Trust for more than ten years and is now serving on the advisory committee of the Tiverton Land Trust.

***If you are interested in making a donation of land or conservation easements please contact the Sakonnet Preservation Association.***



## SAKONNET ARTISTS RAISE OVER \$5,000 FOR THE SPA

Last August, the Sakonnet Artists Cooperative Gallery, located at Tiverton Four Corners, held a Silent Auction Benefit Show for the Sakonnet Preservation Association. The show raised over \$5,000 from the sale of artwork donated by 21 members and artists and from the donation of 20 percent of all other gallery sales during the show.

The SPA is grateful to the gallery members who organized the show and to the following artists who donated their work: Josie Arkins, Tuck Buffum, Jim Bush, Jane Cissel, Pat Compton, Meredith Cornell, Susie Emery, Susie Field, Judy Hambleton, Joan



*Artists Dora Milikin and Joan McKenzie at the gallery.*

McKenzie, William Middendorf, Dora Millikin, Lanny Parker, Bob Schofield, Miriam Scott, Terry Shapiro, Ian Silvia, Galen Snow, Sarah Tappan, Felicia Touhey, and Brooks Wall. We would also like to thank the many Little Compton area residents who supported the show and purchased artwork.

The generosity represented by the Sakonnet Artists Cooperative Gallery's benefit show directly helps SPA protect land, thereby ensuring that Little Compton will have scenic landscapes and vistas forever to inspire future artists. Thanks again, everyone!

### PRESIDENT'S LETTER *continued from page one*

Because groundwater protection has been a continuous focus of SPA activities, Mr. James Campbell of the United States Geological Survey was invited to speak at the SPA's annual meeting last July. He explained that Little Compton has no large aquifers or underground rivers that bring water from elsewhere. Our only source of water, he explained, is what falls from the sky. Unpaved land, open space, and forests serve as filters as the surface water moves through the soil and becomes groundwater. Open space is critical for ensuring that Little Compton has clean drinking water.

Mr. Campbell described how the USGS is currently studying water use and availability in the East Bay to establish the actual quantity of water that exists in the area. Until the USGS has completed the inventory, the exact amount of available groundwater in Little Compton will remain unknown.

That development pressures are greater than ever was reinforced by a December 22, 2002 article in the *Wall Street Journal* titled "A Year to Be Choosy." It included a list of "Ins and Outs of 2003" and described "What else is

hot for 2003." Fifth on the list was "In: Little Compton, Rhode Island," "Out: the Hamptons, Long Island." Will Little Compton be under siege?

A brochure distributed townwide by the Agricultural Conservancy Trust in October, titled "The LCACT Renews its Wake Up Call," cited a variety of new pressures for increased residential development in Little Compton. These included the Tiverton Industrial Park, a planned commuter rail linking Boston and Fall River that is expected to be in operation in 2007, and the South Coast Partnership that is seeking to attract business and industry to southeastern Massachusetts.

Land protection costs money. SPA is very grateful to those who generously supported our recent annual appeal. This year's goal of \$20,000 was surpassed by \$4,000. These funds help with legal and professional expenses when property is donated and support stewardship on all SPA lands.

Armed with the positive results of the December survey and the strong support of its membership, SPA will continue working to fulfill its mission.



## ***SPA Expands Property Documentation and Stewardship Program***

*by Karen Richmond, Chair, SPA Stewardship Committee*

**I**ncreasing the amount of conserved land in a community also increases the amount of work and expense for a local land trust such as the Sakonnet Preservation Association (SPA). There are two ways a land trust can preserve land: by purchasing and owning property outright; or by securing a conservation easement on property whose ownership remains with the landowner. It is extremely important to ensure that a conservation easement is carefully documented so that when property ownership changes hands there is a complete record of the property's history. This documentation is generally called baseline documentation, and it represents an important legal and land management tool, both for the land trust and the landowner.

Last winter, with the support of a grant from the Land Trust Alliance, SPA board members completed several workshops on easement documentation and stewardship. The workshops were led by Brenda Lind, a nationally recognized authority on conservation stewardship. The SPA then hired Sarah Storer, an experienced land manager from the Dartmouth Natural Resources Trust

and creator of the Naushon Environmental Program, to aid the SPA in completing its baseline documentation on the SPA's easement properties.

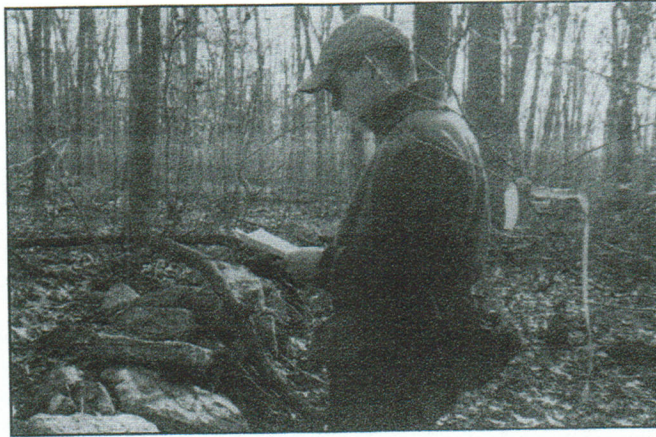
The baseline documentation work includes locating boundaries; photographing the boundaries and property, and keying them to the property map; conducting deed research; preparing a species inventory; assessing management issues; and ensuring all documents relative to the site

are available. Such documents usually include soil maps, topographical maps, aerial photos, surveys, and a summary of the terms and restrictions included in the

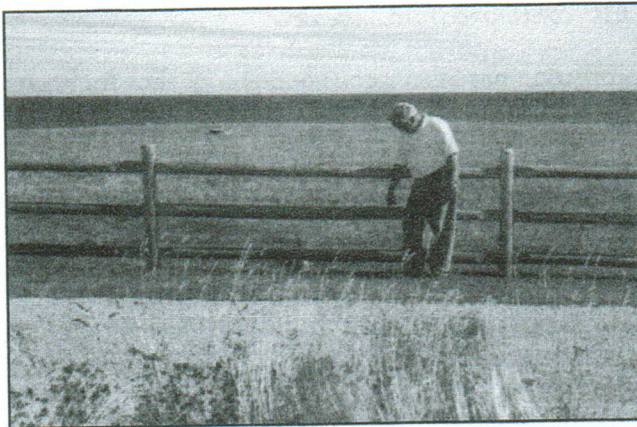
conservation easement. After many hours of work by Ms. Storer and volunteers, the baseline documentation reports for the SPA's eight easement properties were

completed this fall and are currently on file in the SPA office. The reports will be reviewed with the respective landowners of the easement properties.

Another management issue confronting land



*Larry Anderson reviews a boundary on the Cooper- Mullin Drew easement.*



*Mike Steers checks bound on the Haffenreffer easement.*





*Sara Storer, an experienced land manager and wildlife biologist from the Dartmouth Natural Resources Trust, has been working for the SPA since July completing baseline documentations for easement properties. She is also currently serving as the project manager for the SPA's Watson Reservoir Study.*

trusts is stewardship. This past spring the SPA launched its volunteer monitoring program, which encompasses all our properties, both easement and outright ownership. The properties were divided among board members and volunteers who are assuming responsibility for inspecting these properties. The monitors are asked to inspect their assigned parcel and complete a property report annually. The next step will be the creation of a permanent stewardship fund to cover such costs as mowing, trail development, and general maintenance. The SPA welcomes volunteers for any of these activities.

## SPA Receives Grant for Watson Reservoir Study

A \$10,000 grant awarded by the Prince Charitable Trusts will enable the Sakonnet Preservation Association (SPA) to develop a protection plan for land and natural resources within the watershed of the Watson Reservoir in Little Compton.

The 645-acre reservoir area, also known as Patchet Brook Reservoir, was created by the City of Newport to provide drinking water for its residents. It is currently used as a support reservoir. Little Compton reserves the right to purchase water from the city if necessary. In addition to serving as a water resource, the protected reservoir and its surrounding preserved land help to protect the groundwater in Little Compton. This area also provides good habitat and open space for wildlife.

Working closely with the City of Newport and other local agencies and organizations, SPA will assess the existing land use patterns surrounding the reservoir and identify threats to the watershed. Using existing data bases and information compiled by town, state and federal agencies, SPA will develop a report documenting the project's findings and will also hold a public workshop in the spring of 2003 to share those findings with the community.

The Watson Reservoir Watershed Project is being overseen by a committee chaired by SPA vice-president, Terry Tierney and including SPA board members Heather Steers, Karen Richmond, Sheila Mackintosh, Larry Anderson, and Roger Greene. Sarah Storer, who has recently completed baseline documentation reports for the SPA's conservation easements (see previous article), has been retained to serve as project manager.

The Prince Charitable Trusts, located in Chicago, Illinois, support grants directed toward that city as well as Washington, D.C. and the state of Rhode Island, focused primarily on Aquidneck Island.



# PONDEROSA DAYS

Ellie Hough (right) sets up the refreshments for the all volunteer crew.

Thanks for the food donations by the Eddys, the Houghs, the Sargents, the Sissons and the Stearnses.



Mark Bellows (right) of Aquatic Control Technologies was hired by the SPA to spray the *Phragmites australis*, a dense monoculture that has displaced more diverse marsh vegetation and the wildlife it supports. After receiving the necessary permits, spraying took place in September. The non native invasive phragmites was allowed four weeks of dieback after which an all volunteer crew was organized to cut back and remove the dead stalks.



Volunteers Tom Grimes and Bill Richmond slog through the muck to enlarge the open water for wildlife habitat and ice skating.



Tom Arkins swings into action.

The SPA thanks Tom and Josie Arkins, Chris and Jeff Brady, Fred Bridge, Tack Eddy, Jim and Rob Gallagher, Tom Grimes, Adolf Haffenreffer, Bill and Sheila Mackintosh, Steve Madden, Sean Martin, Chris Oliveira, Steve Reuter, Bill and Karen Richmond, Joe Rocha, Doug Stearns, Mike and Heather Steers, Bill Theriault, and Terry Tierney.

*The open water created by this project should make way for rushes, native grasses, smart weed and cattails. This mosaic of plants will attract wildlife including muskrats and their predators, mink; frogs and tadpoles will attract their predators, racoons and blue heron. Mallards that feed on smart grass will make the pond their home.*

# COLD NIGHTS





## Land Trust Alliance Conference Offers Training and Inspiration

by Sheila Mackintosh, Secretary, SPA

In late October, SPA President Heather Steers and I attended the Land Trust Alliance's Rally in Austin, Texas. The Land Trust Alliance (LTA) is a twenty-year-old organization dedicated to promoting land conservation while providing resources and training to volunteer organizations around the world. There were 1,800 attendees from 40 states, the District of Columbia, and 10 foreign countries at the four-day event. Rally consists of pre-conference seminars, workshops, speakers, exhibits, and field trips.

Heather and I both chose to attend the all-day seminar entitled "Planning and Managing Conservation Easements—The Legal Perspective," led by Karin Marchetti Ponte, a Maine attorney specializing in conservation law. Ms. Ponte discussed a wide range of issues outlined in a 150-page workbook. Topics included easement drafting, stewardship endowment, the importance of ownership relations, second generation ownership, and resolving easement violations. From the case studies to the sample documents, this was a seminar worth attending.

It took some time to chose from the 67 different workshops held on Monday. My first workshop was on title investigation. The second workshop was about IRS tax code easement requirements, estate planning rules, and family limited partnerships. Stephen H. Small, a tax attorney from Boston and author of a series of books entitled *Preserving Family Lands*,\* led the workshop. Mr. Small is also the author of the federal tax code regulations on conservation easements. By the end of the day, my head was spinning.

*continued on back page*



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### *Land Trust Alliance Rally* from page 7

On Tuesday I had 61 workshops to select from, and I selected one on polling, one on conservation easement defense, and lastly a workshop on strategic planning for small volunteer land trusts.

Each day included speeches by politicians, conservation award winners, and authors. Other speakers included LTA President Rand Wentworth; Ray Dubois, deputy undersecretary, U.S. Department of Defense; and Roger Kennedy, former Director of the National Park Service. The American Land Conservation Award was given to native Rhode Islander Ron Strickland who conceived of the 1,200-mile-long Pacific Northwest Trail. All of the speakers told their stories with eloquence, passion, and inspiration, urging us to continue with the task of land conservation and water protection.

Our only field trip while at Rally was to the Congress Avenue Bridge which crosses the Colorado River. Heather and I walked out on the bridge, along with a hundred other visitors, to watch the largest urban bat population in North America depart for their evening meal. A million and a half Mexican Free-tailed bats consume 10 to 15 tons of insects a night!

It's very exciting that Providence has been chosen for the site of the Land Trust Alliance Rally in 2004. I hope than many more people who are concerned about land preservation in our area will be able to attend. There is a lot of work to be done in a short period of time to protect our rural character and visual landscapes, watersheds, farms, and open space.

\*\*\*

\*The book *Preserving Family Lands: Book III* is available by request from the SPA. Call 635-8800.

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The Sakonnet  
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