



Little Compton Landscapes

Newsletter of The Sakonnet Preservation Association

June 2006

Annual Meeting is for the Birds!

The Sakonnet Preservation Association's Annual Meeting will be Thursday, July 6, 2006 at the Stone House Club, 122 Sakonnet Point Road, from 6:00-8:30 p.m. The evening will include a reception with hors d'oeuvres, sandwiches and cash bar that begins at 6:00 p.m. The annual meeting describing the year's activities and electing new SPA officers and directors is at 6:45 p.m. At 7:15 p.m., Geoff Dennis, Little Compton's own skilled birder and accomplished avian photographer, will offer a slide show of many of the 160 bird species he has photographed over the years to document sightings in his Little Compton yard.

Since 1995, what began as a backyard hobby has developed into an accomplished avocation. Commercial enterprises such as Droll Yankee and Aspects feature Geoff's photographs for both product and cover artwork. His images have been used by such organizations as The Nature Conservancy of Rhode Island, The Audubon Society of Rhode Island and US Fish & Wildlife Service.

Geoff was the first to document a New England sighting of a Virginia's Warbler, on Monhegan Island, Maine in the spring of 1998, and he caught Rhode Island's first Rufous Hummingbird on film in his Little Compton yard in the fall 1995. Geoff has given lectures and slide presentations throughout New England and is recognized as a generous and respectful birder who willingly shares his knowledge and techniques with interested novices. When he's not photographing birds, Geoff works as a commercial fisherman and enjoys life in Little Compton with his wife, Emily Wales.

All SPA members, as well as the entire community, are welcome to attend. Please consider bringing a friend or neighbor. There is no charge for the event, but donations will be welcome at the door. Call 635-8800 for additional information.

Piper Hawes

The Sakonnet
Preservation
Association

presents

**Geoff
Dennis**

THURSDAY

JULY

6 at 6 pm

Join the SPA for
complimentary
hors d'oeuvres and
sandwiches
at the
Stone House Club
Sakonnet Point Rd.

Public welcome.

ANNUAL MEETING



Sakonnet Preservation Association

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Terence Tierney, *Vice President*
Sheila Mackintosh, *Secretary*
Chris Burns, *Treasurer*

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Roger Greene
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Newsletter Editor

Jana Porter

Design

Karen Richmond

SPA

P. O. Box 945
Little Compton, RI 02837
Phone/Fax: 401. 635. 8800
Office: 7 South of Commons

Why Wetlands?

Members of the Sakonnet Preservation Association Board of Directors are becoming increasingly active in trying to protect Little Compton's freshwater wetlands. These areas are not just home to ecosystems that can't thrive without them; they are also a critical source of fresh, clear water for the wells on which we all depend.

Wetlands are areas of land where there is some sort of water source and where water-loving plants live in wet soils. Often they adjoin open water, and they may include zones of marsh, shrub swamp, or wooded swamp depending on the water table. In Rhode Island, deciduous forested wetlands (wooded swamps) comprise over 50% of our wetlands.

Sometimes what is defined as wetland can appear dry to an observer, depending on the season, but wetlands aren't always easy to identify. Most wetlands are either covered or saturated by water for at least several weeks during the year, although some never have surface water. If you take a walk in Wilbour Woods after a heavy rain, you may notice an accumulation of water in certain areas; these are probably wetlands.

Wetlands store water, absorbing it and then gradually releasing it so a large downpour doesn't run off, which could lead to waste of water, flooding or erosion. This gradual release helps to recharge the groundwater on which our wells depend. Wetlands don't just store water – they also filter it. Their plants catch many pollutants, such as sediment from fertilizer or leaking septic systems, as water flows through them.

As developable land becomes scarcer in the town, more and more people who want to build homes here are seeking building permit variances that will allow them to build within the 100-foot required wetland buffer.

SPA Board members are actively working in a variety of ways to protect Little Compton's wetlands. Some have attended hearings for wetlands variance requests. Others have communicated with town building officials about the importance of wetlands for Little Compton residents, and they have requested a broader system of notifying residents when variances are up for approval.

In Little Compton, the land that people purchase for building often includes a variety of topography, and often a site for a house exists outside of a wetland buffer. In advocating for the protection of wetlands, SPA's goal is to find a win-win situation that allows a future homeowner to build on his or her land in a way that minimizes the impact on existing wetlands.

Jana Porter



Leaving Only Her Footprints

Sidney Tynan donates an easement on 2.07 acres on Tompkins Lane



Walking Sidney Tynan's four acres with her and her golden retriever, Zoe, is a magical experience. The land itself is a Little Compton sampler. A small pond and stream, wetland buffers, fields, wooded areas, wildlife habitat and even a restored sluiceway that once connected a cranberry bog to its water source, are home to Sidney's personal touches; among them are birdhouses of every height and description, a greenhouse, and a bridge blending so naturally into the landscape it is a work of art.

Sidney has donated a conservation easement on 2.07 acres of her property to the Sakonnet Preservation Association, land that lies in close proximity to other natural, scenic and agricultural properties protected by the Little Compton Agricultural Conservancy Trust. "People go right ahead and do what they want to do to land, whether it's according to the laws or not," said Sidney, who will be 85 in June. "This way I can make sure this land stays as beautiful as it is today." She chose SPA to hold the easement on her land because she knew the association would monitor it carefully.

According to an SPA biologist, the property, which is within the Watson Reservoir watershed, includes wildlife habitat important to migratory birds, the type of habitat that is rapidly being lost in Rhode Island. Although the stone walls are exposed along the edge of Sidney's field, she has left "a tangle" of wild shrubbery every few feet so the birds she loves will have a safe stop-over spot on their way north.

Plant, insect and animal species are diverse and include green darners, downy woodpeckers, woodchucks and bullfrogs, goldenrod, and swamp magnolia. If one plant isn't flourishing, Sidney moves it to a more suitable spot on the property. A URI Master Gardener, Sidney doesn't miss a cinnamon fern or a green darter; she knows her property like the back of her hand.

Loving land and the creatures that inhabit it is a family tradition for Sidney. Her childhood pets included a squirrel, an otter, a raccoon that lived in the house, and two skunks. She grew up on over 300 acres in Boxford, Massachusetts with parents who were both naturalists. Her father protected the majority of the land with a conservation easement, selling 100 acres to the town for passive recreation.

Almost every morning, Sidney finds a squirrel in her trap and takes it up to Simmons Mill to turn it loose. Almost every evening, she and Zoe walk the entire length of her property. These are among the moments when she notes the most minute changes and details of her land, observations that celebrate Little Compton's seasons in letters she writes to the Sakonnet Times. Thanks to her generosity and thoughtfulness, her land is now protected for future generations to cherish.

Jana Porter

PRESIDENT'S LETTER

Heather Steers, President, SPA

There is no more spectacular time in Little Compton than in spring. Marsh marigolds and skunk cabbage emerge from the recharged, overflowing wetlands. Shadblow trees spread a soft white hue over the woodland edges, migrating songbirds delight us with their vibrant breeding plumage and lilting songs, and the dull winter landscape gives way to a pallet of every shade of green. It is protected woodlands, open fields, wetlands, and scenic vistas that help to provide these natural wonders that make Little Compton such a special place.

On April 6, 2006, Sidney Tynan donated to the Sakonnet Preservation Association a conservation easement on 2.04 acres of her property. There is an exceptional mix of plants and wildlife on Sidney's land and even an historical sluiceway that once regulated water to a cranberry bog. Sidney is the Association's newest land conservation "hero" for preserving a lot that will remain undeveloped forever, providing an important habitat for the plants, birds and insects Sidney loves. (See next page)

Because the cost of land has skyrocketed in recent years, especially in the northeast, land trusts have found it difficult, if not impossible, to purchase conservation land and have turned increasingly towards acquiring open space through conservation easements. Just what is a conservation easement? The Land Trust Alliance, in its "Conservation Options" pamphlet, states that:

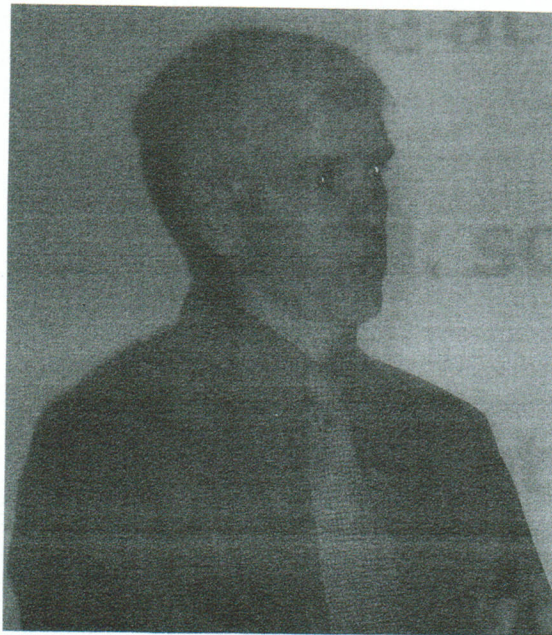
"A conservation easement (or 'conservation restriction') is a legal agreement between a landowner and a land trust that permanently limits uses of the land in order to protect its conservation values. It allows you to continue to own and use your land and to sell it or pass it on to heirs. When you donate a conservation easement to a land trust, you permanently give up some of the rights associated with the land. 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, and the land trust is responsible for making sure the easement's terms are followed."

Members of the land trust's stewardship committee and volunteers monitor easement properties regularly, and the landowner is notified by the land trust if any violations are observed.

A conservation easement donation that meets federal tax code requirements - in essence, that provides public benefit by permanently protecting important conservation resources - may qualify as a tax-deductible charitable donation. Perhaps most important, a conservation easement may be essential for passing land on to the next generation. By removing the land's development potential, the easement lowers its market value, which in turn may lower estate tax. Whether the easement is donated during life or by will, it may make a critical difference in the heirs' ability to keep the land intact.

Please call the SPA office at 401-635-8800 if you would like more information about conservation easements or would like to become a stewardship volunteer.

After months of research, the SPA Board of Directors voted to hire its first part-time Executive Director. Land trusts' responsibilities have become increasingly more complex and critical as the Congressional Joint Committee on Taxation keeps an increasingly watchful eye over the management of land conservation organizations. With that in mind, the Board recognized the importance of developing the necessary policies and procedures to make the Association a first-rate land trust. Having a professional to guide SPA in that process will help to assure we meet that goal. Sanne Kure-Jensen, who has served on the board of the Aquidneck Land Trust and who is currently president of the Blithewold Board of Directors, began her employment on April 4th. We all welcome Sanne to the SPA and to Little Compton. (See page 7)



Scott Millar

Rhode Island Department of
Environmental Management
Chief of Sustainable Watersheds Office

The Opportunities of Flexible Zoning

SPA Sponsors Community Education Event

On Tuesday, May 16, over 50 town residents, including members of the town zoning board and planning board, attended a public education event on "The Opportunities of Flexible Zoning" sponsored by the Sakonnet Preservation Association. Scott Millar, chief of the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management's Sustainable Watersheds Office, and head of the Planning Board in Exeter, Rhode Island, was the presenter. He discussed the concept and practice of conservation development and the experiences of the Rhode Island towns that have implemented it.

Mr. Millar linked the idea of creative land use directly to the Little Compton Comprehensive Community Plan, maintaining that current zoning laws may make it more difficult than necessary for the town to accomplish its stated goals. By creating zoning options that take into account land characteristics and the preservation of open space, towns can continue to develop in ways that protect their rural landscape.

The goal of conservation development is to protect at least fifty percent of a land parcel scheduled for subdivision, placing houses in areas where the land is most buildable and maintaining shared, jointly owned open space, woodlands, views and wetland buffers. By linking protected land on adjoining parcels, towns can develop continuous corridors of open space.

"Development is not the problem," emphasized Mr. Millar. "It's the way development typically happens, with grid zoning and build-out of road frontage, that takes a community's character away."

Jana Porter

News for Novice Naturalists

Because Little Compton's children represent the future of land conservation in our town, the Sakonnet Preservation Association is exploring educational opportunities for them.

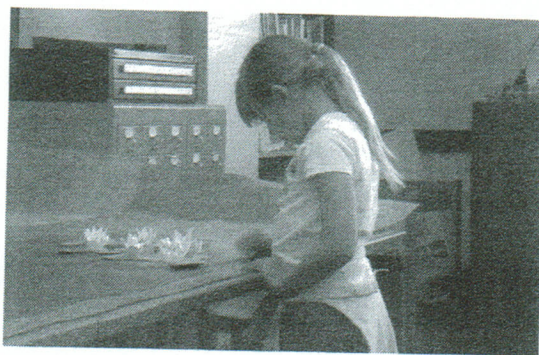
As part of the effort, SPA has researched and purchased well-respected nature books for the Wilbur & McMahon School. Each SPA Newsletter highlights one of these books so that interested parents, grandparents and friends can borrow or buy copies for their novice naturalists. The book featured here is available at Partners' Bookstore in Westport.

Book Review

The Shape of Betts Meadow: A Wetlands Story
Meghan Sayres/Millbrook Press, 2002

So many books for children emphasize the problem of habitat destruction, but this picture book for younger children is positive, empowering them to make a difference in their own communities. The simple text recounts the true story of a doctor in the state of Washington who purchased a dry pasture and restored it to its original state as a wetland. He mapped the meadow to discover where streams had flowed, dug ponds, planted trees and wildflowers, restocked fish and then witnessed the transformation. His proactive approach shows children that habitats can be restored and inspires them to be proactive. Brief introductions to wetland plants and animals in Betts Meadow, as well as the addresses of several conservation organizations, are also included.

Piper Hawes



Earth Day participant; Adriana Cafarella

Earth Day Celebration at the Wilbur McMahon School

The Sakonnet Preservation Association joined with the two local garden clubs to help celebrate the 3rd Annual Earth Day Celebration at the Wilbur and McMahon School.

Coordinated by B.J. Whitehouse, the school's music teacher, the morning celebration included age-appropriate assemblies by the Rhode Island Resource Recovery Council in which each student received a bag of recycled materials. The assemblies were highlighted by a drawing for students to "win" a field trip with Mr. Whitehouse to visit the Recycle Center in Johnson, Rhode Island.

After lunch, multi-aged groups of children attended a variety of indoor and outdoor educational workshops, with each child attending three different activities. Board member Piper Hawes joined school librarian Sarah Jansen to introduce students to the importance of SPA's Ponderosa Pond habitat for various animal and plant species. Children made models and drawings of animals and plants that thrive there, including dragonflies, butterflies, frogs, turtles, herons and Canada geese. The invasive phragmites were also discussed, as was SPA's role in keeping the pond clear enough for ice skating and for native plants and wildlife. Craft activities came from one of the books SPA purchased for the school library in the fall and culminated in a huge cut-and-paste mural of the Ponderosa, its plant life and its inhabitants.



Letter from the Executive Director

Visit Ponderosa Pond on a spring day and you might see dozens of chattering children studying tadpoles, watching water striders and skipping stones. On another day, you could see a Canada goose with her gaggle of fuzzy goslings tagging along. When the weather cools, you may hear skates scouring the ice in a high-speed hockey game. These are just a few of the many activities that take place on the Sakonnet Preservation Association's most visible, preserved property. Most of SPA's preserved properties are unmarked, so you may not notice those large (and small) stretches of Little Compton that will, through SPA's work, forever remain undeveloped. Some protected parcels are wooded and wild. Still others look like swamps with low development risk. Each site has its own unique habitat and conservation value.

The work SPA does to protect land in Little Compton is critical. Open space significantly benefits our earth. Wetland and forest plants provide a buffer against global warming by storing carbon instead of releasing it into the atmosphere as carbon dioxide. The protection of wetlands, once considered useless land, is part of SPA's work. Today, scientists recognize that wetlands provide critical habitat for plant and animal life as well as essential storm water management, filtering and storage. Recent improvements in technology have led to septic system designs that allow construction on wet sites that never could have been built upon 25 years ago. Last summer's devastating hurricane floods showed us what could happen with overdeveloped wetlands. Protecting wetlands will continue to be one of SPA's priorities.

Thank you to everyone who supports SPA's conservation mission through donations, memberships and grants. Thank you to all who donated land or easements, preserving forever their pieces of open space in Little Compton. Their generous legacy benefits not only their children and yours, but the whole Little Compton community.

Thanks to everyone who has made me feel so welcome in my new position. I look forward to helping preserve many more magical meadows, wondrous wetlands and fabulous forests in Little Compton.

Sanne Kure-Jensen, SPA Executive Director

Don't throw away that envelope !
Join the Sakonnet Preservation Association or Renew your membership for another year!

Dear Current and Future SPA Members,

Thanks to the generous support of its members, the Sakonnet Preservation Association, Rhode Island's oldest land trust, has protected more than 330 acres of our magnificent Little Compton landscape during its thirty-four-year history. Many of SPA's members also volunteer by helping to clean up Ponderosa Pond, "stewarding" properties to make sure easement requirements are being followed, or contributing professional expertise when it's needed. You, SPA's constituents, are the lifeblood of the organization, and our land protection and stewardship efforts depend on your support.

There has never been a more important time to be a member of SPA. As the rest of the world "discovers" the jewel that is Little Compton, development pressures increase. As regulations for land protection become more complex, the leadership of an executive director becomes more imperative. SPA is currently laying the groundwork to become accredited by the national Land Trust Alliance, which will help the association maintain its high standards and the trust of Little Compton landowners.

In an effort to make renewed or first-time SPA membership as easy as possible for you, we have enclosed an envelope in this newsletter. As you will see, membership in SPA is available at a variety of levels in an effort to make participation possible for all town residents.

We also invite you to let us know if you'd like to volunteer to help us conserve and steward land in Little Compton. Would you enjoy getting out to walk the land, helping us to protect its conservation value? Can you help us write a grant application? Do you have office skills you could contribute? If so, please let us know in the return envelope, and we will be in touch.

Please join us in protecting the rural character and resources of the town we all love so much. We can't do it without you!

Sincerely,
Heather Steers, President, SPA

ANNUAL MEETING July 6 at 6

Postal Customer

Our Mission
The Sakonnet
Preservation
Association,
a non-profit
land trust,
is dedicated to
preserving the
rural character
and natural
resources of
Little Compton
for the lasting ben-
efit of the
community.
For information:
401. 635. 8800

Sakonnet Preservation Association
P.O. Box 945
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