



# The Friends of Valley Falls, Inc. NEWSLETTER

Volume VIII Number 1

SPRING

April 2009

## VALLEY FALLS FARM

**W**ith the farm under a blanket of snow for much of the winter, many hours of our time have been spent indoors refurbishing the vacant front apartment in the farmhouse. This is the original 1850 section of the house which still has the wide floorboards and plaster walls. With very timely help from community service workers, we patched, repaired and painted five rooms. New flooring was installed in the kitchen. The basement was cleaned and debris removed, and railings were constructed on the stairwell. Thanks to **Paul Gingras** for coordinating these efforts. Five new windows were also installed in the rear apartment. We are now receiving applications for a potential tenant for the front apartment and expect to make a selection shortly... And outdoors, honey is in our future! Local beekeeper **Dermot Jones** will provide and manage a beehive behind the stable. He will give us some of the honey – so we will soon have our own locally produced Valley Falls honey! Also outdoors, we took down a large maple and two oaks that were dying. The oaks will be taken for lumber by a restoration carpenter.



*Community service volunteer installing new kitchen floor in the farm house*



*Vernon Greenway Volunteers taking a break after a morning of hard work*

## VALLEY FALLS PARK

### Braille Trail

Refurbishment of the Braille trail will take place in April and May. Funded by a DEP Recreational Trails grant to the Friends, new metal braille signs will be installed, and a concrete surface will be constructed on the steep section of the Trail. A grant from Pratt & Whitney to the Vernon Greenway Volunteers provided funds for plantings, new posts and roping. Many thanks to **Don Bellingham** and the **Vernon Greenway Volunteers** who put in a yeoman effort of over 50 hours of tough labor installing 45 new posts on the trail.

## NEW BOARD MEMBER ★

The Friends welcomes **Sally Sullivan** to the Board of Directors. Sally and her husband are avid hikers and canoists, and have enjoyed Valley Falls Park for 37 years ago. A retired realtor, Sally volunteers for several organizations, including the Federated Garden Club of Vernon, and the Appalachian Mountain Club.

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**NEWSLETTER**

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# LAND STEWARDSHIP AT THE

*by Jane Seymour, Wildlife Technician*

*Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection*

## **American Chestnut Restoration**

The Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) in partnership with the Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station will introduce blight-resistant American chestnut trees to the Belding Wildlife Management Area (WMA) in Vernon. The American chestnut was once a dominant tree of the eastern forests. It was an extremely valuable source of lumber and its wood was highly resistant to rot. In addition, it produced edible nuts that were an important food source for wildlife. However, an imported fungus discovered in New York City in 1904 spread quickly and decimated American chestnuts throughout their entire range. The blight cannot exist in the soil, so while it killed the trees, it did not kill the roots. Many of these persisting roots continue to grow new sprouts, but the sprouts become infected by the blight and die before reaching maturity.

Dr. Sandy Anagnostakis of the Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station has been breeding blight-resistant American chestnuts as part of an effort to save this tree from extinction. The DEP will plant 200 of these seedlings on a 2.5-acre site within Belding WMA where native chestnut sprouts are abundant. The abundance of native chestnut sprouts on the site is a critical factor in the re-establishment of this valuable species as a key component of Connecticut's forested landscape. The native sprouts will be inoculated against the blight until they reach maturity and can cross-pollinate with the blight-resistant seedlings. The offspring of these crosses will

result in trees that are genetically similar to the trees that were native to the site, but will also carry the genes that resist the blight.

Because American chestnut seedlings require full sunlight, the overstory trees on the restoration site will be cleared by a forestry contractor. As the planted chestnut trees grow, the oaks, maples and birch will grow up with them, resulting in a more diverse forest.

The 282-acre Belding property was donated to the State of Connecticut by Maxwell Belding in 1981. In 2002 the Belding Charitable Support Trust was established by Mr. Belding to provide resources to the DEP for the professional management, enhancement and long-term maintenance of the Belding WMA and its natural resources.

## **Pitch Pine Restoration**

In 2008, the DEP initiated a project at the Belding Wildlife Management Area to restore native pitch pines. Pitch pine woodland, a globally rare forest type, is found only in the northeastern United States. Pitch pines depend on fire to expose the soil and release the seeds. Due to fire suppression, pitch pine communities have become increasingly rare.

The Belding WMA contains mature pitch pines, but young pitch pines have not been able to grow here for more than 50 years. A 3-acre site where mature pitch pines are growing has been chosen for this regeneration project. In order to restore this unique habitat, common tree species that were competing with the pitch pines have been removed. The soil will be exposed to allow the pitch pine seeds to germinate.

As the seedlings become established, the young stand of pitch pine will provide important cover for species that depend on this type of early successional habitat. Wildlife species associated with this type of disturbance-

# BELDING WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREA

dependent habitat include whip-poor-will, prairie warbler and brown thrasher, a species of special concern in Connecticut.

## Grassland Restoration

In 2008, the DEP initiated a project at the Belding Wildlife Management Area (WMA) to remove invasive shrubs and increase grassland habitat in the fields along Valley Falls Road. Two hedgerows of trees and invasive shrubs that had grown up between the fields were removed to create one larger field. Larger grasslands attract a wider diversity of wildlife.



*Fields at Belding Wildlife Management Area*

Early successional habitats – grasslands, shrublands and young forest – have become rare due to the elimination of disturbances such as fire and beaver flooding that historically created or maintained these types of habitats. Livestock grazing is another type of disturbance that maintains grassland habitat, but pastures have been disappearing from the Connecticut landscape. As these habitats disappear, so do the species that depend on them.

Grasslands are home to a variety of native wildlife. Birds such as bobolink, eastern meadowlark, red-winged blackbird and field sparrow nest on the ground in grasslands. Twelve species of grassland-dependent birds are on Connecticut's list of endangered, threatened and special concern species. The most endangered of these species are those that require large areas. The state-endangered grasshopper sparrow prefers sites of at least 100 acres. Upland sandpipers require grasslands of 150 acres or more.

Hayfields attract grassland ground nesters, but early mowing destroys the nests before the chicks fledged. Lawns, which are mowed regularly throughout the season, are not considered grasslands and provide very little wildlife value. To maintain grassland habitat, the DEP mows grassland areas after the nesting season. Without mowing or other type of disturbance, these fields would eventually revert to forest.

Species that inhabit the fields and field edges at the Belding WMA include eastern bluebirds, tree swallows, red-winged blackbirds, indigo buntings, eastern kingbirds, song sparrows, red-tailed hawks, blue-winged warblers and yellow warblers. Small mammals such as meadow voles and meadow jumping mice are also found in these fields as well as a variety of butterflies, moths, dragonflies, damselflies and other insects.

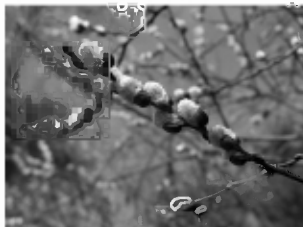
***Editor's Note:** Open space lands must be managed and cared for, just as we care for our own properties. Responsible stewardship of open space lands involves an assessment of the resources on those lands, and planning for how best to nurture and sustain them into the future.*

*To learn more about land management techniques, including habitat restoration, forest management, and invasive plant removal, the local agencies below are a good resource. Also, check out the article in the New York Times Magazine (4-19-09), "The Working Forest", p. 50.*

- UConn's Center for Land Use Education and Research (CLEAR) (<http://clear.uconn.edu/tools/habitats/part6.htm?panel=1>);
- Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), located in Tolland. <http://www.ct.nrcs.usda.gov/>; and
- North Central Conservation District (NCCD), and UConn Extension Service, second floor, TAC Building on Route 30 in Vernon.

*The Friends support and laud the land management work at the Belding Wildlife Management Area. We are very fortunate to have this 282-acre preserve in our community – as a natural area for the public to enjoy, and as an environmental education resource for our school children. Nurturing the Belding is the right thing to do - for us today, and for our children tomorrow.*

# Nature Notes



**PUSSY WILLOW (*Salix discolor*).** One of the earliest signs of Spring, this shrub or small tree has been disappearing from the landscape. The flowers appear in early March or earlier on twigs of previous

season's growth before the leaves appear. Most commonly found at edges of marshlands, along streams and sometimes on moist hillsides. They can be easily rooted in water and transplanted in suitable ground. (We are rooting some twigs and will place them in the swale at Valley Falls Farm).

## ARTISTS' DAY AT THE FARM

The 2nd Annual Artists' Day at Valley Falls Farm will be held **Sunday, August 23rd**. Artists will be invited to paint during the day (8 a.m.-2 p.m.) and the paintings will be displayed and auctioned during a reception to be held between 3-5 p.m. The day will feature music, display of art work (by artists who have done previous work).

*Would you like to help the Friends planning the event?*  
Call Sally Sullivan (871-1473) or Ginny Gingras (875-9865).

# ★ Calendar ★

**Join us for Spring nature walks:**

**Wildflower Walk - led by Ginny Gingras**  
**1:00 p.m. | Saturday, May 9, 2009**

**Bird Walk - led by Denise Anamani**  
**7:30 a.m. | Saturday, May 23, 2009**

(Rain Date: Sunday, May 24, 2009). Wear appropriate clothing. Spotting scopes and binoculars will be available for your use.

For both walks meet in the Valley Falls Park parking lot.

### *Would You Like to Join the Friends?*

- Dues Are:
- INDIVIDUAL - \$10
  - FAMILY - \$25
  - CONTRIBUTING - \$35
  - BENEFACTOR - \$100

Please send check to PO Box 2008,  
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