

# American Chestnut Land Trust, Inc.

Post Office Box 204  
Port Republic, MD 20676



## NEWSLETTER

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Volume 2 - Number 2

April 1, 1988

Editors: Ellen and David Farr, 4512 Tonquil Place, Beltsville, MD 20705 (301-937-8160)

### Board of Directors

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### Message from the President

Spring has arrived and the ACLT woodlands will soon give evidence of this fact. We hope that all ACLT members will take advantage of the schedule of activities presented in this newsletter to enjoy nature's rebirth and help with "spring cleaning." Thanks to Joe Steller we are able to enclose the first edition of a trail map.

The Board realizes that the most important item on its agenda is the retirement of the mortgage (\$300,000). The market for development rights is soft due to the county's effort to limit growth to conform with available public facilities. We applaud that effort, although it has had a negative impact on our plans. During the next two months we will be completing an application to the State's land preservation program for the 103+ acres east of Scientists Cliffs Road ("South Parcel"). If our application is accepted and the price is reasonable, we will have another option towards retiring this debt.

I am pleased to report that Elaine Cochran has agreed to serve as chairperson of the Membership Committee. She will be contacting regular members to renew their memberships in several support categories. Our strength is our membership, so we hope that you will "re-enlist" and encourage your friends and neighbors to join the Land Trust. She also will be recruiting new members and challenging the Board to provide recreational and educational activities.

### Board Notes

The next ACLT Board of Directors meeting will be Saturday April 30 at 10:00 a.m. at Chestnut Cabin in Scientists Cliffs (enter at Gate B off of Scientists Cliffs Road). Members are welcome to attend.

Elaine Cochran will be assisted on the membership committee by Ed Hacskaylo, Bob Ulanowicz, Aileen Hughes, Gary Loew and Ralph Dwan. The committee will focus on membership renewal and recruitment of new members. New categories of membership have been adopted. They are: Regular/Family Membership \$25, Sponsor \$50, Patron \$100, Partner \$500, Benefactor \$1000 and Sustaining Life Member \$2500.

McCrone Inc. has finished the official survey of the ACLT property. Completion of this survey allows us to proceed with our application to the state's program which purchases agricultural easements.

At the March 23 Board meeting Ralph Dwan announced that ACLT had received a \$10,000 grant to cover our surveying costs from a charitable trust administered by the First Trust Co., of St. Paul, Minnesota. Treasurer Gary Loew reported that as of March 25 funds on deposit in ACLT accounts totaled \$55,076.53.

ACLT has purchased a general liability insurance policy through the Land Trust Exchange. This will include coverage of volunteers working on the property and damage to vehicles on the property.

—The Editors

### Bird Watching Activities

A "bluebird trail" is planned in the open field area opposite Gate A on Scientists Cliffs Road. We will start with five boxes posted about 100 yards apart. Boxes will go up Easter Weekend. A volunteer is needed to help check the boxes at weekly intervals. Please contact Sue Hamilton if you are interested (586-1494).

The Wildlife Preservation subcommittee of the Land Use Committee hopes to begin a breeding bird census in June. However, we are anxious to start an informal survey of the migratory songbirds which begin to pass

through the area in April. In conjunction with the state-wide bird census on Saturday, May 14th, there will be an *early* morning hike through the ACLT trails on that morning. We will count the numbers of each species seen, so we will need volunteers to count and tally the results on paper. All helpers will be welcome—you don't need to be an expert. Call Sue Hamilton for details.

A "beginner's" bird walk will be scheduled Saturday May 7th at 6:45 a.m. We will meet by the Scientists Cliffs' Office (Gate A). Try to bring a pair of binoculars.

—Sue Hamilton

### Forester's Good News Outweighs the Bad

We recently received the bad news that Project Forester Dave Chessler would no longer be serving as developer and overseer of the ACLT long range forestry management program for Calvert County and the Maryland Department of Natural Resources. Dave has worked closely with us for more than a year. Most assuredly, his strong support of our endeavor combined with the favorable soils analyses and timber evaluations of our woodlands facilitated the prompt acceptance of the ACLT tracts into both the County and State Agricultural Preservation District programs. The good news is that Dave's job change is an opportunity for career advancement. He will continue to live in the county and has indicated his willingness to continue to work with us as a volunteer member of the Land Trust. Volunteerism seems to come naturally to Dave. Knowing the importance of meeting prescribed deadlines during the petitioning process, Dave devoted many of his own hours after work, "cruising" the land (to use his own term), collecting the necessary data and keeping us on schedule. On weekends he has been available to meet with the Board, the Land Use Committee and sub-committees and, most recently, has kept in close touch with our surveying crew in the field. One of his last official acts will be the completion of the Land Management Program proposal for the 103+-acre South Parcel which must accompany our application for settlement of a development rights easement with the State which is due in June. We are deeply indebted to Dave and look forward to our continuing relationship.

—Aileen Hughes

### Aerial Photos Trace the Last Half Century's Land Use on the Chestnut Trust

Aerial photographs provide a fascinating record of changing land use and vegetation cover—pity that airplanes and cameras weren't invented centuries ago! I superposed ACLT boundaries on the earlier aerial photo (1938) and on 1980's images. To get some simple statistics I divided the land into pine forest (dark), cleared land (light), and hardwood forest (intermediate). The pine forest—Virginia pine (*Pinus virginiana*) with some loblolly (*Pinus taeda*)—shows up as patches with sharp, sometimes linear edges. These patches reveal the location of past fields, abandoned from a few to as many as 50–75 years before the photograph was taken. Separate statistics were computed for the 103+-acre South Parcel and the 330-acre North Parcel.

A half century ago the South Parcel was 81% hardwood and 19% pine. (I'm giving my results to the nearest acre but wouldn't claim to be more accurate than plus or minus five.) There was no cleared land, even in 1938, although pine patches clearly indicate previous fields. The largest of these fields (ca. 10 acres) was centered behind the sand pit, on the high ground between the Boesz and G. Switzer houses. In 1938 Scientists Cliffs Road bisected another nearby area of pines where the Matteson, Escowitz, Pfeiffer, and Boesz houses stand today; some of these pines survive as yard ornamentals.

Today the South Parcel is still 17% pine, not much less than in 1938. This is misleading, because most of the 1938 pine patches were young, appearing dense, homogeneous, and dark in the aerial photo. The pine woods surviving today are old—by the short-lived standards of Virginia pine—and past their prime. Redheart has weakened their trunks, and many have been blown down in recent years. Oak, beech, and other hardwoods are replacing the pine in an age-old natural succession. The pine forest on the Chestnut Land Trust is a forest in transition!

The story of the larger (330 acre) North Parcel is more complex. In 1938 there were 62 acres (19%) in cleared fields and 35 acres (11%) in pines. The fields, mostly small and irregular, were loosely clustered around the four dwelling sites and near Parkers Creek Road. By the 1980's, only the 10-acre tobacco field across from Gate A of Scientists Cliffs remained as cleared farmland—less than 3% of the Land Trust property. (However, the ACLT land use plan will ensure that this remaining cleared area will remain as a living part of our agricultural heritage.) Pine forest still covers 35 acres (11%) of the North Parcel, but most of it too is being replaced by hardwood. It is only a coincidence that the pine acreage today is the same as it was in 1938. Of the farmland abandoned after 1938, 8 acres are now in pines, and, by chance, a similar area of pines has reverted to hardwood. Since pines outcompete hardwoods mainly on poor, sandy, acid soils, the fact

that only 8 of the 52 acres of farmland abandoned after 1938 has been claimed by pines is a tribute to the good Land Trust soils. We must also conclude that pine patches on aerial photos only reveal some abandoned fields!

To sum up—during the half-century long Gravatt era, the Land Trust property changed from 73% hardwood, 13% softwood, and 14% cleared land to 86% hardwood, 12% softwood, and 3% cleared land. In 1938 there were four occupied dwellings plus assorted outbuildings, farm animals, and pets on the property. Aside from one working barn and the tobacco field, the ACLT land has reverted from agriculture back toward nature—continuing a trend that began in Southern Maryland already in the later 19th century. In some ways the Land Trust property today is more like it was before the arrival of English settlers than at any time since the early 1700's. This in spite of the fact that Calvert County's population has exploded from 10,000 to 46,000 since 1938, with over 25,000 acres converted to residential subdivisions! Of course, until the Land Trust came along, the Gravatt-Miles tract was also destined for suburban development.

—Peter Vogt

### Spring Weekends at the ACLT

Now that spring is breaking out, it is time to turn our thoughts to the outdoors and the ACLT. The flowers and birds are at their best during May. To fully enjoy them, we need to clean up the trails and roads. Therefore Saturday April 16 (raindate April 17) has been scheduled as a work day on the trails. We will meet at the main entrance to the property opposite Gate A of Scientists Cliffs at 10:00 a.m. on April 16. We will then break up into groups to walk and clear the trails, at the same time learning the basics of trail maintenance. Bring your favorite pruning shears or lopping shears, and a lunch and drink. At the end of the work day we'll all return to our starting point for drinks, snacks and conviviality.

Starting on April 23 and extending through May we will enjoy the fruits of our labors. Every Saturday during this period (Sunday in case of rain), someone will be at the main entrance at 10:00 a.m. to meet those interested in a nature walk. (Contacts: Oliver Flint 586-0146 or (703)370-9522 and Peter Vogt 586-0067.) The exact route will depend on the interests of the participants. We plan to keep the walks informal, vary the routes, and see whatever is attractive on a given weekend. Here is your chance to see the property, learn the paths and enjoy the beauties of the land. [Editor's Note: These walks are in addition to the bird walks described above.]

We are fortunate that there is already a network of old roads and trails on our land. Most of these roads gave owners access to their farms, woodlands, and possibly the wharf for exporting their tobacco. Now these roads are rarely used by vehicles and have reverted to grass and shrubs. They provide an ideal system for walkers to see the property, as well as access for emergency vehicles in the case of fire. However, to keep these roads open the annual growth of plants must be cut and fallen trees and limbs must be removed. We do have access to a tractor and cutter that will remove most of the plant growth every year, but volunteers are needed to walk the roads several times a year to clear fallen limbs, trim back overhanging bushes and report major tree falls or other problems. If we had 10-15 volunteers, each would need to have responsibility for less than half a mile of trail and our system would remain in tip-top shape with little effort on any one person's part. If you can help, please return the coupon below.

—Oliver Flint

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*Tear off and return this portion to:*

American Chestnut Land Trust, Inc., P.O. Box 204, Port Republic, MD 20676

I (will) (will not) be there on April 16 (or 17 in case of rain).

There will be \_\_\_\_\_ participants in my group.

I (am) (am not) interested in adopting a section of the trail system. My preference at this time is: \_\_\_\_\_

Name and address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_