

American Chestnut Land Trust, Inc.
Post Office Box 204
Port Republic, MD 20676

NEWSLETTER

Volume 8 – Number 3

Editors: Ellen and David Farr

Summer 1994

Annual Meeting

The American Chestnut Land Trust annual membership meeting will be held on *Saturday, October 15*. Mark your calendars! The meeting will convene at 10 a.m. to be followed by lunch and guided tours, including the Michael Farm.

Since we have been pushing the capacity limits at the Christ Church hall, this year's meeting will be held in the hall of Saint John Vianney Church off Main Street in downtown Prince Frederick. Trudy Mihalcik (586-1674) will act as coordinator, so please contact her to volunteer your help.

President's Report

Summer is a time when we all want to slow down and relax. The picnic at the Michael property was therefore a very appropriate summer activity and served its purpose of introducing this latest ACLT project to our members and our neighbors north of Parkers Creek. But now, despite the heat, the serious work has begun. Applications for loans from the Maryland Environmental Trust (MET) and the County's Revolving Loan Fund have been submitted, negotiations are going forward, and the Special Fundraising Committee has met and reported to the ACLT Board (see Gary Loew's article).

Starting from the proposed payoff schedule submitted to MET, the Committee set as its goals the raising of \$100,000 in 1994 as part of the down payment and raising a like amount through pledges over the next 5 years. Obviously, this means a campaign to solicit major donations ranging from \$1,000 to \$5,000 and upwards. As Gary said at the picnic, we want everyone involved and we understand that many supporters can't make that level of investment in this project.

The Committee was divided over whether a contribution pledge form should be included with this newsletter, partly because the form is going through revisions and partly because supporters may not understand the importance of their investment until they have been briefed on the project individually or in small groups. Gary and I, as co-chairs of the Committee, decided to include the most recent revision with a return envelope to give you the opportunity to sign on now with the understanding that we will, in the next two months, be approaching individual members and neighbors. We will also be approaching

foundations, but that takes time and careful preparation. One encouraging development is a grant from BG&E in the amount of \$2,500 to help us fund the production of a video on Parkers Creek that will assist us in explaining the importance of the project.

On behalf of the ACLT board, I want to thank all those who worked so hard to make the June 25th picnic the success that it was. In particular, I want to thank our host, Kenneth Michael. We know that it is not easy to undertake a bargain sale of the "farm" that has been so important in his life and that of his family. In the process, he has become one of our best spokespersons for preserving Parkers Creek.

—Ralph Dwan

Land Acquisition and Preservation Committee

We have several acquisition and preservation activities moving forward. I will report on two of interest at this time and will use most of my space to respond to questions about the Michael Property acquisition since that is our biggest financial challenge.

Scorr Property. This is a interesting activity for the ACLT since we are acting as an intermediary (like the Nature Conservancy) to assist Mr. John Crane with preserving two properties to the south. The ACLT will purchase the properties and place environmental easements with the Maryland Environmental Trust (MET) on them and then resell them to Mr. Crane who will sell a small number of building sites (2-4) and the transferable development rights (TDRs) to recover his costs and preserve the balance of the acreage. No ACLT funds are involved. The ACLT does receive 2 TDRs worth approximately \$2,300 each for its assistance. All transactions should be complete by the time you receive this newsletter. [For more details, see article on "Working with a Conservation Buyer" on page 4.]

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Wallace Addition. The Board approved the purchase of 1.9 acres to be added to the Wallace property subject to a favorable report by Art Cochran. He and Mark Switzer have walked the property and believe it to be a worthwhile addition to existing properties.

Michael Property. Those of you who were able to attend the picnic found, I think, a beautiful 130-acre parcel on the northern slope of the Parkers Creek watershed and learned much about our reasons for initiating this acquisition. We are indebted to Ken Michael for sponsoring this event—even the weather cooperated. Since many of you were not able to attend, I would like to review some of the information we provided and respond to some of the questions we received during and since the picnic.

Why is this property important to the ACLT? It has long been an ACLT goal to preserve Parkers Creek and the surrounding watershed. We view preservation of the Michael property as key to that goal. Without our intervention now, this 130-acre section of farmland and woods will become a residential area with 35 home sites. At this time, the northern slope of the Parkers Creek watershed is substantially undeveloped and the undeveloped area comprises a small number of fairly sizable parcels. The Michael property is the only property zoned and ready for residential development: Permits are in hand and site engineering is complete. In fact, Mr. Michael has been approached by other developers who would like to develop the property if he does not. In short, it is ready to go to housing. If this parcel were to be developed, it would not only increase the probability that adjacent and nearby property owners would follow suit; it would also substantially increase the value of their properties making future intervention by us, or any other group, an impossibly expensive proposition. If we have any intentions at all of preserving the watershed, we must act now. There are other factors which have influenced our decision to act including the natural values of the property, Mr. Michael's willingness to work with us, and our strong sense that the major properties between our current holdings and those on the western shore will be preserved. But these considerations are all secondary to our principal objective of preserving the watershed.

Are we paying fair market price? We have not yet signed a contract, however our current working offer is below market price. The Michael property is more valuable than surrounding properties because of its developable status (The appraisal will be based on the estimated value of the 35 home sites.). Although our appraisal is not yet final, current estimates place the value between \$1.2 million and \$1.6 million. Our current offer is \$800,000.

Why is Mr. Michael willing to sell below market price? Mr. Michael has agreed to a "bargain sale." In essence, this means that he can claim the difference between the appraised value and the contract price as a con-

tribution to the ACLT and receive a tax deduction. The value of the deduction and the true worth of the property to Mr. Michael is therefore dependent on the appraisal. That is one of the reasons why we have not concluded negotiations at this time.

How is the ACLT financing this acquisition? The initial financing plan is to obtain two no-interest loans for \$200,000 each: one from the county and one from the Maryland Environmental Trust; to obtain at least \$100,000 in contributions; and to finance the balance with a loan from Mr. Michael. The loans will be paid off over 5 years through a combination of grants, contributions and sale of development rights.

What happens if the ACLT can't pay off the loans? Ordinarily, when the ACLT purchases a property, it is converted to an Agricultural Preservation District (APD), transferable development rights (TDRs) are granted, and the TDRs are sold to recoup our costs. In this case, we may initially convert all of the property excepting 3-4 building sites into an APD. The value of the building sites plus the remaining undeveloped portion should be adequate to secure the loans. Thus, in the worst case, we would sell the building sites plus the larger site for residential development to pay back the loans.

What will become of the house on the property? There have been many suggestions: To use the house as an office; to rent it; to create a shared office for the ACLT and related groups (e.g. Plum Point Land Trust, Calvert County Farm Trust, etc.); or to sell the house and surrounding acreage as a home site. However, there are no final plans at this time.

Will the property require a caretaker? We do not believe that the property will require a caretaker. We will have to manage the property as we do all of our existing holdings. Hopefully, new ACLT members who live nearby will join us in this effort, as have many members from the Kenwood area who have joined us in preserving the parcel purchased adjacent to Governor's Run.

What is the status of the large parcels between existing ACLT properties and the Michael Property? The Maryland Nature Conservancy is actively negotiating for the Jett Farm, and we know of no current plans to develop any other properties between ACLT holdings and the Michael property. We remain optimistic that the major portion of the watershed can be preserved substantially as it is today in farms and woodlands.

How does this property fit into the over-all county zoning plans? The Parkers Creek watershed is designated as a critical natural area in both county and state land use plans. Both county and state agencies have been supportive of our efforts to preserve the watershed. In fact, the state is committed to reimbursing the Nature Conservancy for the Jett Farm with Program Open Space funds.

What happens if other important properties of interest to the ACLT become at risk before the Michael property is paid off? The ACLT has limited resources and the ACLT board of directors is constantly reassessing its pri-

orities. At this time, preservation of the Michael property is our highest priority and we have devoted most of our financial resources towards this goal. We do not foresee a reason to change direction at this time. Nonetheless, the ACLT was initially created to respond to the potential loss of the Gravatt property to development, and we may have to react again until we have achieved our goal of preserving the watershed. We are familiar with all of the surrounding properties and have contacted most of the owners—many are members of the ACLT. We are aware of no other (immediate) threats at this time.

Why should I invest in this property? “Invest” is the key word in this question. If you would like to see the Parkers Creek watershed preserved in its natural state—available to you and your children and your children's children for all time—you should invest in this property. Only a public/private partnership can achieve this goal. Although both state and county agencies have designated the Parkers Creek watershed as a critical natural area, they cannot by themselves make this a reality. They cannot move quickly enough, nor can they devote large amounts of public funds solely to this cause. They can, and have, supported us. More importantly, our personal contributions add up to an indication of concrete citizen (voter) interest in this goal. This, in turn, has attracted official support and aid. The Calvert County revolving fund loan program (from which we will borrow) and the state commitment to eventually purchase the Jett property from the Nature Conservancy are examples. I recall a conversation with Senator Fowler several years ago when Peter Vogt and I met with him to discuss ACLT goals. He made a comment which has influenced me to this day. He expressed his appreciation and support for our goals and his willingness to support and added that it was a pleasure to work with a group that was seeking only cooperation—not money. He then went on to state how important it was to him, as a legislator, when seeking the support of others, to be able to demonstrate local (voter) interest and commitment to a project. He stated that there was no better indication than a group of people who had committed their personal resources.

Finally, I would like to give you a more personal response—the one I offered at the picnic. As do we all, I contribute some time and money to many groups: Former schools, professional societies, social organizations, community groups; environmental organizations and others. In most cases, the benefits are elusive and intangible and my contributions are minuscule relative to the cause. The ACLT is different. Contributions go directly to land that is preserved forever. I can see it and walk in it today, and I know that I cannot even imagine how many people will benefit in how many ways in the future, but I know they will. I believe any contribution to a Parkers Creek natural area is an investment which will return its cost many times over.

How much should I contribute? Only you can answer that. It will take some large contributions to achieve

our financial goals; however, many small contributions add up. Furthermore, simply gaining many new contributors of any amount and new members enables us to demonstrate to others the true community support for our goals. No one can do this alone.

—Gary Loew

What's Happening?

Throughout the year, the ACLT helps protect the environment and encourages others to do so through its outreach activities. During the last few months we have:

- Donated \$100 to the 1994 Calvert County Envirothon team, sponsored by the Calvert Soil Conservation District. This team placed second in the state!
- Hosted a lunch for a coastal resource evaluation team comprised of representatives from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and the Coastal Zone Management Programs of the Maryland and Alaskan Depts. of Natural Resources. They were given a slide show, trail hike and a great lunch.
- Participated in a meeting with Maryland Bicycle Advisory Committee hosted by the Calvert County Open Space Committee. Board member, Paul Berry, represented the ACLT in learning how Calvert County could become a more “bicycle friendly” county.
- Presented a talk and slide show in Hagerstown for the Dept. of Natural Resources’ “Protecting Floodplains and Other Sensitive Areas: Why and How” workshop for statewide county planners. Member Bob Pfeiffer gave an outstanding presentation.
- Hosted a field trip/staff retreat to Parkers Creek for the Maryland Office of The Nature Conservancy. Ralph Dwan was on hand to greet the staff as they enjoyed coffee and donuts during an overview of the ACLT watershed objectives and a slide show.
- Attended a workshop, The Heritage of Southern Maryland, hosted by Senator Paul Sarbanes and Representative Steny Hoyer. Several of our board members attended and Paul Berry has become our follow-up representative to the Southern Heritage Coalition.

Trail News: Trail Names to Change

It took about four and a half months for the trail system to completely recover from the February ice storms, although limbs will undoubtedly continue to fall and care should be taken when walking in the woods, especially on windy days. Peter Vogt initially cleared the yellow trail from the Chestnut Bridge to the Frog Pond by working weekends for about a month. A professional crew headed by Clinton Goad came in with several chain saws and a skidder and had most of the rest of the trails in good shape by April. Art Cochran and his chainsaw, together with one or two other volunteers, put in two hard days on April 16 and June 26 to clear the west loop of the blue trail on the main/west tract and a last stretch of the east side trails. (April 16 was also the day an American Bittern chose to

spend time in the larger main entrance tobacco field. This was a special sighting, as these reclusive birds are seldom seen in the first place, and then more normally in their usual habitat of marshes.)

Now that the trails are “back to normal,” we can resume work on the projects described in last winter’s newsletter: Revising the map and trail guide, re-blazing the trails, and establishing a new circuit on the east side. The map revision remains a major undertaking, although an updated version of the current trail guide should be possible this year. As trails coordinator I have thought a lot about the trail names and while the present system of colored loops has served the purpose, I think that assigning a particular and perhaps descriptive name to each trail might better identify the trails and make the system easier to understand. As it is now, the four main trails on the east side are blue, blue and red, red and yellow, and yellow, with a small white circuit coinciding with the blue and red loops. The colored blazes marking the trails could stay the same (although blue is soon changing to purple to reserve blue for boundaries) but each of these trails would have a name independent of its color. Possible names include the Flint Trail for the westernmost part of the blue trail in honor of its builders and, as it is already known by some, the Swamp Trail for the easternmost/outer loop of the yellow trail where one always gets wet, and the Bamboo or Garbage Dump Trail for the red and yellow trail that goes past the privy. I would greatly appreciate feedback on this idea, and particularly suggestions for trail names.

Work has begun on the expanded east side trail loop, although creation of the new stretch behind the properties on Scientists’ Cliffs Road may not happen until the vegetation has died back in the fall. Part of the June 26 work effort included constructing a footpath branching left from the extension of the Weems boundary trail just before the steep downhill. This path (the Turkey Trail) joins back with the old trail further south and east than the original junction and thus covers more ground while avoiding the steep hill. (This steep hill will remain an optional shortcut for those with less time or more desirous of aerobic activity.) It should be possible to have the existing east side trails blazed by the end of the summer.

These are your trails. Enjoy them and let us know how they can be improved.

—Leslie Starr

Land Preservation:

Working with a Conservation Buyer

On July 13, the Maryland Board of Public Works approved the acceptance by the Maryland Environmental Trust (MET) of a deed of conservation easement from ACLT covering a 30 acre tract of forested land on the west side of Route 2/4 in the watershed of Helen’s Creek. This action cleared the way for ACLT to enter a new venture that will eventually preserve 146 acres of woodlands.

The key person in this venture is a conservation buyer by the name of John Crane, who has already preserved hundreds of acres around Helen’s Creek under the County’s Agriculture Preservation District Program. With the assistance of our attorney, John C. Prouty, he put together a proposal that was accepted by the ACLT board. We agreed to purchase the property in a bargain sale from the current owners and then to sell it to John Crane after the property was recorded as an Agriculture Preservation District (APD), TDRs were transferred, and the deed of conservation easement to MET was also recorded. The purchase and resale of the initial tract went to settlement on July 27 with the proceeds from the resale being the consideration from the purchase, so that the only expense to ACLT has been in staff and volunteer time. To cover these “expenses,” ACLT retained one TDR, which was sold at settlement for \$2,300. An additional TDR will be retained from the other tract, when the second purchase/resale takes place within 12 months.

The ACLT board feels that this is an important precedent-setting venture, as other conservation buyers may well be attracted to such an arrangement. Land is permanently preserved at nominal cost to ACLT and we have no responsibility for future management. We want to acknowledge the assistance that we received from the Trust for Public Land and The Nature Conservancy as advisors on this project.

—Ralph Dwan

A Chance to Explore Parkers Creek by Canoe

When: October 1
Time: 9 AM 12 PM 3 PM

Trip Leader is Vivian Marsh, ACLT member and Southern Maryland Senior Regional Planner for the Maryland Department of Planning.

All equipment (including life jackets) will be provided. Bring a drink and energy snack.

For Reservations or Information:
586-0492—June Whitson
586-2226—Caroline Van Mason
586-0529—Mary Loew

Special Thanks

Thanks to Joanne Hildebrand who keeps our office gardens in tip-top shape and has contributed many, many

plants! New this year are 10 azaleas all donated by John Parker. Another special thank you goes to Paul Dennett for his contribution of the video tape, *Chesapeake, Living Off The Land*, by the Chesapeake Bay Foundation. Adding to our film library is *Critical Area and You* and *Preserving Calvert County Open Space*, both loaned for copying by Calvert County Government, thanks to Eddie Dichter and Sherrod Sturrock. *Now all we need is a VCR to play them. Anyone upgrading who would consider donating their old one?*

Fun on the Farm: Michael Cookout a Success!

If you attended the Michael/ACLT cookout introducing the property to our members and friends, there is not much to be added by a simple newsletter article. A good time seemed to be had by all—even the hikers who followed Peter Vogt into the depths of the woods, through weeds and poison ivy, over fallen trees, into the swamp and over the creek! Those less adventurous started their afternoon with a hike to the overlook for a breathtaking view of what very well may be the deepest ravine in Calvert County. The weather couldn't have been better, with a gentle breeze flowing over the shade-covered lawn while children went "camping" and blew bubbles and older kids played basketball and volleyball. Meanwhile, old friends shared laughs, new friends were made, politicians smiled and chatted and most guests toured Ken Michael's lovely home filled with ACLT displays, movies and slides.

Our keynote speaker, Senator Bernie Fowler, introduced by Commissioners Hagner Mister and Pat Buehler, applauded the ACLT members for their efforts to conserve the beautiful farm and woodlands. Sherrod Sturrock spoke on behalf of the Calvert County's Open Space Committee, sharing the goals of the county and how ACLT's efforts complimented the visions held for the Parkers Creek Watershed. Gary Loew, Chairman of the ACLT's Land Acquisition Committee, and Ralph Dwan explained the importance of protecting the Michael Farm, how it fit into our long term plans and its impact on the watershed. Gary went on to explain the financial planning for such a major undertaking and asked everyone to pledge their support. Ken Michael added a special touch to the program as he talked about his history on the property, building the house while still in college, hunting with his two sons and how glad he was to work with the ACLT to see that the property be preserved and open for public use.

The highlight of the day was undoubtedly the "feast" provided by our host—roast pig, steamed crabs, fried chicken, hot dogs, corn on the cob, salads, and soda and beer. Catering by the Rod 'n Reel with special attention by Mr. Michael's friends Mary O'Dell and Gerald Donovan and their catering coordinator, Susan West, was superb!

Special thanks go to the following people for their extraordinary efforts to make the day such a success:

Wilson Freeland • Jim Cawood • Rachael Brunk • Sandy Roberts • Doug Alves • Dan Hamilton • Eric Vogt • Paul Berry • Ed Greene • Gary Loew • Janet Greene • June Whitson • Mary Dwan • Jay Switzer • Joe Turner • Margaret Young • Doris Zitzewitz • Peter Vogt • Susan Simon • Ralph Dwan • Leslie Starr • Mark Switzer • Bob Pfeiffer • Diana Niland • Hannah Toland • Renee Switzer • Charlene Sturbitts • Peggy Saville • Eddie Dichter • Judith Dahmann • Aileen Hughes • Paul Dennett • Beth Niland • Joe Turner • Kirsty Uunila • Allan Wilson.

Welcome New Members

We are very pleased to announce our newest members. The following have joined since last new member listing in our Winter issue. We welcome you all!

Dr. and Mrs. William Gay
Ms. Betty Hartford
Mr. and Mrs. Charles Honnet
Ms. Isa Engleberg and Mr. Allan Kennedy
Mr. and Mrs. Charles Kuhn
Ms. Mimi Lacouture
Ms. Theresa Lloyd
Mr. and Mrs. Harold Matteson
Mr. and Mrs. Edwin Noell
Mr. Richard Simpkins
Ms. Bertha Ulbricht

ACLT Markets Green Aliens!

Starting this year, the ACLT will be selling its delicious bamboo shoots (in season, which extends from mid-April to late May), poles, and plants, as well as Oriental Bittersweet, known for its decorative red berries in the late fall. Both of these "green aliens" were introduced in 1947 on what is now ACLT land at the request of the previous owner, G. Flippo Gravatt. ACLT Charter member Joe Showalter remembers the day he and two helpers drove to the garden of a Dr. George Darrow in Glenn Dale, near Washington, to obtain the bamboo. This initial (1947) planting established the large patch near the Frog Pond (next to the east end of the yellow trail), and some time later another planting was established about midway along the yellow/red trail overlap. Both the bamboo and the bittersweet are doing well—one might say *too well*. Our ACLT Land Management Committee's goal is to stabilize the populations near their present limits and harvest surpluses as a renewable resource, hopefully bringing a modest income to the trust.

Oriental Bittersweet (*Celastrus orbiculatus*) is an escaped garden ornamental native to eastern Asia. A member of the staff-tree family, this green alien counts as its nearest native relative on the ACLT the exquisite Strawberry-bush, or Hearts-bursting-with-love (*Euonymus americanus*). The latter plant is *strictly protected* on the ACLT and elsewhere, but we will gladly sell you berry-laden branchlets of the bittersweet. The berries (*not edible*) keep indefinitely when dried and add both orange (the berry sheath) and red to a Thanksgiving or Christmas arrangement. Let the ACLT know and we will get you some bittersweet at nominal cost. If you can, also help us market it to area florists or wholesalers.

Our ACLT bamboo is *Phyllostachys nuda*, a temperate species native to Tang-si, Chekiang (Che-chiang, Zhe-jiang) province of central coastal China. The mountainous interior of this province has a climate very similar to Calvert County's, which helps explain the success of the ACLT patches. *P. nuda* was transplanted from China to the Plant Introduction Center in Glenn Dale by Frank Meyer in 1908, and apparently from there to the nearby Darrow residence. All these transplantings involved rhizomes, so unless the bamboo has been eradicated in Tang-si or Glenn Dale, our bamboo has living clones in both of these places. Some of the 1000-plus bamboo species, have very long (but poorly known) flowering intervals, in some cases over 100 years. It appears that the ACLT bamboo is at least 86 years old, and perhaps much older. Some future spring—who can say when—our bamboo will begin to flower and will continue to do so over the following few years. The small ear-like flowers will reveal the bamboo for what it really is—a giant grass. By pouring all of its energy into flowering, our *Phyllostachys nuda* will weaken and probably die. Its various clones will flower within a

few years of ours and are doomed as well. Will any of the seeds sprout and take root in the wild? Another mystery! Some is OK, but too many is not!

ACLT is marketing its bamboo poles—specially dried, trimmed and sized—at the Farmers Market on Rte 2/4 just north of Port Republic. Or call me at home (410-586-0067). The price ranges from about 50¢ to \$4.00 per pole, depending on length and diameter. The largest are over 2 inches in diameter at the base and, if you like, can be over 20 feet long. Fresh poles, easier to work and attractively green for temporary applications, can be ordered. Labor and transportation are donated, so all proceeds go to ACLT. Bamboo uses are almost unlimited—bean poles, tomato stakes, fishing poles, basketry, measuring sticks, furniture, picket fences and gates, trellises and arbor, etc. Bamboo is also unexcelled as craft material for children. You can easily coach your child to make cups (without a lathe), chopsticks, napkin and finger rings, wind chimes, skewers, straws, flutes and whistles, teepee and flag poles, dippers—there's no end! And yes, we also let the National Zoo people occasionally harvest the local bamboo, as they have in the past, as food for their elephants and rhinos, and of course, the giant panda.

—Peter Vogt



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