

American Chestnut Land Trust, Inc.
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NEWSLETTER

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Editors: Ellen and David Farr

Spring 1997

President's Report

When I read the working draft of the new five-year plan that Ewing Miller prepared, I was impressed by his focus on the need for a strong committee structure. While we will be exploring the possibility of additional staff, active committees are essential to accomplish the goals that we set for the next five years. It is encouraging that the current committees have met again to continue the momentum of Committee Day. The finance committee has selected a new accounting firm and we expect the audit to be completed by the end of June.

This newsletter marks our first attempt to include photographs. The Earth Day multi-community cleanup was so successful that we wanted to present a visual report. We are also pleased to have Matt Reeves give us a report on his archeological studies in the Parkers Creek watershed. The studies were funded by a grant to ACLT from the Maryland Historical Trust.

But, the most important news is that we finally went to settlement on the Commodore property, which contains 20 acres of woodland fronting on Parkers Creek Road adjacent to the Russell tract that we purchased in 1990. The sale price was \$70,000 as established by an independent appraisal and approved by the court. One half of that amount was provided by a federal grant administered by the state, awarded to the county, and passed on to ACLT. As part of the same transaction, the court-appointed trustee for the Commodore family executed a confirming deed to clear our title to 20 acres of the Russell tract, which will permit ACLT to have the development rights certified. ACLT in turn executed a confirming deed to the three one-acre lots fronting on Parkers Creek Road reserving a 20-foot right-of-way from the road to the interior of the Russell tract. Those lots had previously been deeded to certain members of the extended Commodore family, who had occupied them for over 20 years. The proceeds from the sale will be distributed under the supervision of the court to the heirs of William H. Commodore. We are grateful to all those who worked on this very complicated project, especially Aileen Hughes, who

was our liaison with the family until shortly before her death.

As we prepare for another Spring Appeal, I want to thank those who gave last year and made it possible for us to match the grant for the Commodore purchase. We are continuing to receive payments on schedule from our sale of transferable development rights (TDRs) in June of 1996, which allows us to reduce our debt on Double Oak Farm, and we are actively negotiating with another potential purchaser. If anyone is interested in buying TDRs as an investment, we would love to hear from you.

Earth Day 1997

A hearty "Thank You" goes out to all of you who volunteered to come out and participate in Earth Day, which was held on a beautiful Saturday, April 26th. People from Governor's Run, Kenwood Beach, Scientists' Cliffs, Dares Beach and Double Oak Road, Parkers Creek and other ACLT volunteers did a great job in improving our environment, including a major clean-up effort along Double Oak Road. A very special thank you goes to the Calvert County Solid Waste Department for providing four huge dumpsters this year.

We have noticed an improvement in the general appearance of roads surrounding ACLT properties over the past several years, with significantly less trash being collected by our volunteers from year to year. This is a terrific accomplishment and we should congratulate ourselves for our increased awareness of the importance of a clean environment.

We are still experiencing, however, some major dumping along Double Oak Road. This year our volunteers filled two, 40-cubic yard containers of major trash collected in the area of Double Oak Farm. We are taking steps to eliminate this problem. Since Earth Day, thanks to Calvert County Highway Department, five "No

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Dumping" signs and a "Road Ends 500 Feet" sign were installed along Double Oak Road. Also, thanks to the White Tail Hunt Club, a sturdy gate has been installed on a small road off Double Oak leading to a major dumping site. These steps, and increased surveillance by county and state police should help in reducing the trash dumping problem.

After the Earth Day clean-up, Governor's Run again hosted a picnic on their beautiful beach. Again, many thanks to the several communities who donated food and refreshments for our hard working volunteers. Good Work!

—Alan Wilson

Birding News

On the ornithological front, International Migratory Bird Day was observed May 10 at the ACLT with several local birders assisting in the annual May Bird Count. It was a

beautiful spring day and, being at the height of spring migration, provided a satisfying number of birds to be seen and heard, including many neotropical migrants such as Scarlet and Summer Tanagers and the lovely-voiced Wood Thrush. Some of these migrants such as the Magnolia, Black-throated Blue, and Palm Warblers, continue further north to breed, but many, including the tanagers, Wood Thrush, and at least a half-dozen warbler species nest in our woods. These species need significant areas of forest in which to breed, and ACLT can be proud to be able to accommodate them. A provisional ACLT Bird Checklist is now available at the main entrance sign-in box. All birds observed on ACLT property or on nearby bodies of water are included, and future lists will indicate species abundance and seasonal information as well.

—Leslie Starr

What's Happening

"Digging For The Past"

June 13—Scientists Cliffs Community House
Matt Reeves, ACLT's contract archaeologist, will give a slide presentation and talk on his findings from his year-long cultural resources study of the Parkers Creek critical area. Several prehistoric sites were found throughout the area and a late seventeenth century site was located on ACLT's Russell Tract. Come hear Matt tell of his findings—including the hidden history on Warrior's Rest.

Congratulations are in order for Matt, who was notified May 19, that he has earned his Ph.D. in Anthropology from Syracuse University. Further congratulations will be forthcoming as Matt and his wife Tanya are expecting their first child around the end of May!

Family Day: June 21—Double Oak Farm

Don't miss this annual family event! See flyer insert for more details.

Thank You

Two much needed donations have come our way: The Peter Stathis family has donated a canoe, life jackets, and paddles; and The Nature Conservancy has donated a 1987 Ford Ranger pickup to assist us with our management of the properties on the north side of Parkers Creek. M & W Motors has agreed to maintain our truck at cost!

Brian Treece, one of our recent new members and owner of Banana Banners, has refurbished our aging sign at the main parking lot. What an improvement!

Photo Contest

Keep those photos coming for ACLT's photo contest! Prizes will be awarded in four categories: nature, history, people, and junior division at our annual meeting in October. We're looking for photographs that show the natural resources of Calvert County such as wildflowers, trees, birds, historical landmarks and people. Submit your entries (prints only please) with a brief description of the photograph along with your name, address and telephone number to ACLT, P.O. Box 204, Port Republic, MD 20676. Photographs will be accepted until October 1, 1997.

Comprehensive Plan

Public hearings are beginning soon on Calvert County's Comprehensive Plan. Be informed—review the Planning Commission draft plan (copies available at Calvert County Planning and Zoning) and attend a presentation by county planning staff in your neighborhood. Contact Greg Bowen, Planning and Zoning, at 410-535-2348 for locations and dates of other meetings and presentations.

Land Preservation

The Nature Conservancy, on behalf of the Department of Natural Resources, is scheduled to go to settlement on the 182-acre Turner Family Partnership property by mid-June. This parcel is located on Parkers Creek just east of the recently purchased Somervell I tract and west of the Somervell II tract, also under contract by TNC.

Digging For The Past

The archaeological survey of the critical area of Parkers Creek was completed this past April. The ridge tops adjacent to the Chesapeake Bay and to Parkers Creek were tested for both historic and prehistoric sites. All of the wooded and overgrown fields were tested through the excavation of test pits while plowed areas were examined for surface remains and surveyed using test pits. These test pits were excavated to about a foot in diameter and taken down into sterile subsoil which on average was encountered some 12–15 inches from the surface. All of the test pits were mapped using a compass and a survey tape and were spaced on an interval of 50 feet. The volunteers and I excavated a total of 2,400 test pits. Soil removed from these test pits was screened through wire mesh to determine the presence of prehistoric and historic goods. Prehistoric goods included stone flakes from the manufacture of stone tools and projectile points. Historic goods included ceramics, glass (both window and bottle), nails, and clay tobacco pipe fragments.

The testing revealed a number of prehistoric and historic sites in the critical area. One particularly exciting find was a late seventeenth/early eighteenth-century site on ACLT's Russell tract adjacent to Warrior's Rest. The remains of this site are most likely the residue from a home of an early colonial farmer. Along with this site there were six late nineteenth-century sites located at Warrior's Rest. The majority of these sites are the remains from African-American households present on the land immediately following the Civil War. Test pits excavated to the east of the Warrior's Rest house contained burn materials indicating that the original structure burnt sometime in the late nineteenth-century. Burnt nails hinted that this structure was constructed sometime in the early nineteenth century. To the north of Parkers Creek several more late nineteenth/early twentieth-century sites were located that were also associated with African-American households in the area after the Civil War. Again, several of these sites contained burnt nails and melted glass suggesting frequent house fires during this time period. An early nineteenth-century site was located to the east of the house of White Cliffs (the Freeland's farm) that was possibly the location of a former slave cabin. There were a high number of clay tobacco pipe fragments recovered in this area.

There were five prehistoric sites located to the north of Parkers Creek on the ridge adjacent to the Bay. While the majority of materials recovered from these sites were stone flakes from tool production, there were several projectile points recovered. The shape and form of these projectile points reveal that the Parkers Creek area was

used by Native American groups since 3000 B.C. (although points from the collection of the Freeland family push land use back to 6000–7000 B.C.) These Native American sites were most likely small hunting camps that were not occupied continuously for long periods. This is based on the absence of ceramics that would indicate long term occupation of a site. There was also a potentially early prehistoric site located on the Goldstein property below Double Oak Farm overlooking Parkers Creek. This site was deeply buried and contained several worked river cobbles.

All of the sites located during the survey speak to the important cultural resources present in the lands surrounding Parkers Creek. Further examination of these sites has the potential to reveal how land-use in the Parkers Creek watershed has changed through time and how Parkers Creek fit into the larger social and economic history of Calvert County and Southern Maryland. Special thanks goes out to ACLT members who assisted in excavation including Art Cochran, Paul McLaughlin, and Beth Niland.

—Matthew Reeves

Burning Issues from the Land Management Committee

On Sunday morning, April 27, the volunteer mowing season got off to a really hot start! A gratifying number of prospective volunteers attended an introductory session on how to operate the Gravely walk-behind mower, and hopefully everyone's interested in mowing was rekindled. Shortly afterward, David and Ellen Farr, fired up with enthusiasm, embarked on the first trail mowing of the year. Things went smoothly at first, and after successfully mowing the parking lot the Farris, ablaze with confidence, set off on the trails. Unfortunately, things heated up a little too much. The post mortuum suggests that sparks from engine backfiring ignited a patch of oil or gasoline. At any rate, somewhere on Gravatt Lane flames began to appear from the mower and the mowing session was cut short. Ellen ran to call 911 while Dave stood valiantly by to monitor the situation. Fortunately, the gas tank was almost empty. The flames never exceeded four feet in height. Even more fortunately, neither Dave nor Ellen were injured. The same cannot be said for the mower. Although it was not as badly damaged as first appeared, all the wiring, handles, gas tank, and battery were severely burned. It was hauled ignominiously out of the woods by volunteers John Lewis and Skip Ford, where it spent the evening in the rain, forlorn and blackened, before being taken back to Elter's Equipment shop for repairs.

While it may be quite awhile before the mower is ready to use on ACLT trails, there is some good news. First, is that much of the repair costs will be covered by insurance. Second, and even more immediately cheering, is that The Nature Conservancy has graciously agreed to loan us a Billy Goat to maintain the trails in the interim. No, this is not an animal, although the idea of tethering a goat along different sections of the trails is not without appeal and would certainly be an environmentally correct way to keep the grass down. This Billy Goat is another kind of self-propelled mower very similar to the Gravely mower. We are obligated to Steve Bunker of The Nature Conservancy for making this possible, and we hope that we will be able to keep the trails in good shape for our summer visitors after all.

—Leslie Starr

Warrior's Rest

With the arrival of spring, there has been increased interest from a wide variety of groups to visit Warrior's Rest. Several educational programs, both formal and informal, will be studying the fossils and the Miocene deposits of the Calvert Cliffs, while other groups will be actively exploring the wetland habitats of Parkers Creek by canoe.

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At time of publication, the management committee has witnessed a five-fold increase from last year in the number of individuals that have enjoyed the quiet beauty of the property. From Anne Arundel Central Middle School students to Paleo undergrads at George Washington University, we are pleased with the level of interest.

In early May, a group of volunteers attacked the abandoned tenant house and surrounding property on the western knoll in an effort to remove the debris from the last occupant, recover recyclables, and secure the property prior to a final assessment of the historical value of this section of the holding. Special thanks to all who pitched in for what turned out to be a very productive day.

Reforestation of the abandoned fields was begun in late April. In an effort to close the canopy and provide habitat for forest dwelling birds, 5,960 trees were planted under the direction of the Maryland Department of Natural Resources and the assistance of Dan Hamilton. Planted in protective sleeves, it is anticipated that these trees will begin to expand the forest habitat within the next five years.

—Bob Pfeiffer

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