

American Chestnut Land Trust, Inc.
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NEWSLETTER

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Editors: Ellen and David Farr

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Report from the President

You may have noticed that we added a line to our letterhead that indicates that the American Chestnut Land Trust is preserving the natural and historical resources of Calvert County. The reason for this is that our name may suggest to some that ACLT is only about chestnut trees. But before rushing to become the Port Republic Land Trust or adopting some other geographic name that is typical of Maryland land trusts, we should remember our historic connections, which started with Flippo Gravatt, at one time a world expert on the chestnut.

This connection was brought to life recently when Arnold Petty reported that two visitors came to install branches from another old chestnut in an attempt to generate seeds from our namesake tree. They didn't leave their card, so I called Dr. Hebard at the American Chestnut Foundation's Meadowview Farm in Virginia. He said that it was not his crew, but he suggested that I call Darren Corrigan at the U.S. Department of Agriculture. In passing, Dr. Hebard inquired as to the condition of the seedlings that he had provided for our chestnut arboretum. I promised to check to see if they had flowered this year.

It turned out that it was Darren Corrigan and an associate who raised the "foreign" branches in plastic containers to the top of our tree. They will return in late August or early September to recover any burrs. As an avocation, he is part of a statewide group that is involved in efforts to restore the chestnut to Maryland. Arnie had taken them to another ridge to examine some chestnuts that he had helped Flippo plant some 35 years ago. These trees had been tagged and numbered, so I asked Arnie for a tour. There are several that are alive and have reached impressive heights as well as some offspring. From time to time Mark Switzer has been marking the surviving chestnuts with ribbons, so be alert as you walk the trails.

As you see from the articles in this newsletter, there are important issues facing the Board of Directors this summer. Since the harvest of Virginia Pine five years ago, we have not been actively managing the ACLT forests. Now we must review the various forest management plans and respond to the advice of our consultant forester.

Meanwhile, our collaboration with the State in the Parkers Creek watershed has reached another level, as we undertake to assist in the management of Warrior's Rest as a natural heritage preserve, and we will be calling upon both "expert" and "non-expert" members to be come involved in this project.

—Ralph Dwan

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Annual Meeting

The American Chestnut Land Trust annual membership meeting will be held on *Saturday, October 28*. The meeting will convene at 10 a.m. at Saint John Vianney Church off Main Street in Prince Frederick. The meeting will be followed by lunch and guided tours, including our new "boardwalk" on the swamp trail.

Acquisition/Management of the Jett Property

After lengthy discussions, The Nature Conservancy in cooperation with the Natural Heritage Division of the Department of Natural Resources of the State of Maryland has negotiated for the purchase by the state of the Jett property (Warrior's Rest), which forms the southern border of Parkers Creek and adjoins the ACLT property at several points. Settlement took place on August 14. As a condition of purchase and under the conditions set forth in the settlement documents, a management plan must be established for the maintenance of the property. The existing structures will remain in place, however public access will be limited and the property will be maintained on a limited-use basis to provide habitat for wildlife and for further scientific and educational activities.

The ACLT has been approached by the State of Maryland to serve as the manager of the property and to participate as an equal member of the Inter-agency man-

agement team. The seven-member management team will consist of three members from the Department of Natural Resources, three members from the American Chestnut Land Trust, and one member from The Nature Conservancy. Under the terms of the settlement documents, the ACLT, serving as the property manager, would be allowed to negotiate leases to the existing buildings and collect fees for use in order to provide operating funds. We have developed a management agreement that is currently under review by the Department of Natural Resources. It is hoped that this plan will be approved prior to settlement to maintain a presence on the property.

Ralph Dwan has asked me, as a member of the Board, to serve as the chair of the initial Warrior's Rest Task Force. In addition, the Board has appointed Dan Hamilton and Peg Niland to serve as the ACLT members of the management team. Critical to all long-range planning discussions will be the ability of this property to generate income. The Board of the ACLT has adopted the position that no general funds will be used for the maintenance of the property, except for limited expenses to be reimbursed from revenue. As we await final transfer of the property, we will be soliciting suggestions about possible uses for the property and thereby possible revenue. Initially we will probably maintain the main house as a year-round residence. While the location of the main house lends itself for use as a conference center, if we were to upgrade the property, it would be imperative that remodeling costs could be recovered quickly from collected fees.

With the purchase of the Jett property, The Nature Conservancy, the State of Maryland, and many other institutions have recognized the important role that the American Chestnut Land Trust plays in the preservation of habitat on the western shore of the Chesapeake Bay. While our involvement in this project will require many hours of volunteer time to establish a "stand alone project" it offers an outstanding opportunity to preserve, for generations to come, the last pristine wetland on the western shore of the Chesapeake Bay—Parkers Creek.

—Robert Pfeiffer

Warrior's Rest

[The following information was compiled by Jonathan McKnight of the Maryland Department of Natural Resources.]



Warrior's Rest, formerly known as the Jett Property, is a two-hundred and forty-acre property on the south side of Parkers Creek in Calvert County, Maryland, at the confluence of Parkers Creek and the Chesapeake Bay. The site is divided in forest (135 acres or 55%), marshlands (72 acres or 30%), and fields (36 acres or 15%).

The property has approximately 2000 feet of Chesapeake Bay waterfront and 5000 feet of frontage on Parkers Creek.

Soils: The soils underlying the uplands site are of the Marr, Howell, Sassafras, and Westphalia series fine sandy loams. These are relatively fast-eroding soils which are of limited agricultural potential except for their adaptability to tobacco farming at which they excel if not overused. The uplands of the site have historically been used for this purpose. All upland soils on the property will perk.

The soils of the marsh are sedimentary detritus.

Forests: The site's forests are very mature on the steep slopes and in freshwater wetlands and young on the uplands. All of the forestlands have been considerably altered and the fact that the site was once dominated by American Chestnut on the uplands and may have had a substantial cypress component in its swamps means that there have been radical changes in the character of the site vegetation.

Upland woods are generally Virginia Pine succeeding to Tulip Poplar, a typical tree association on abandoned tobacco fields. These woods are carpeted with weedy species, especially Japanese Honeysuckle and *Allium*. Few of the wooded upland areas on the site have been forested for more than fifty years.

The woodlands on the slopes are oak-poplar-beech forest. In the wet ravines, red maple and gum predominate. Where the swamps in the ravines enter the marsh, there is often a transitional fringe of alders.

The forest on the slopes and lowlands are relatively undisturbed woods and contain few weedy species. There is sufficient woodland mass here to support large tracts of forest interior habitat and the woods are a few generations away from becoming classic old growth.

Marshes: Parkers Creek is well known for its diversity of wetlands and four distinct marsh types can be found on the Jett property. These distinct marshes lie parallel to each other between the main channel of Parkers Creek and the toe of the upland slope.

Directly adjacent to the stream channel, a thin band of high marsh dominated by *Spartina cynosuroides* and shrubs, *Iva* and *Baccharis*, has been formed by the deposition of suspended sediments during storms. In some areas this band is expanded away from the existing channel, especially near forming and historical oxbows.

Outside of the high marsh band, the elevation of the marsh drops almost imperceptibly to become a low marsh, often referred to as a salt meadow. This area is dominated by a complex of *Spartina patens* and *Distichlis spicata*, two low-growing grasses.

Beyond the low marsh, a high marsh dominated by Threesquare Scirpus Grass grows on the slightly higher elevation. The interface between the high and low marsh is highly convoluted and often indistinct. Ancillary creek channels flow through the complex, forming wet areas and potholes and the remains of closed channels from slight dips in topography.

At the interface between the salt marsh and the upland edge, a thin ribbon of freshwater marsh is formed by the seepage of fresh water from the cliffs, sheet runoff from rainfall, and the infrequency of saltwater inundation of this extreme periphery of the marsh. In some areas this fringe marsh is only a few feet in width.

Wildlife: With the exception of those species listed below as Rare, Threatened, or Endangered, the upland and wetland species found on the Jett property are typical of those found in the area. The Jett property has a greater abundance of forest interior dwelling species and wildlife species which prefer solitary places and do not adapt well to human disturbance.

Because of the large expanse and diversity of the site's wetlands, the quantity and variety of waterfowl which use the site throughout the year is exceptional.

Rare, Threatened, and Endangered Species: The Jett property supports an unusual number of rare species. The beach and cliff areas are documented habitat for the Northeastern Beach Tiger Beetle (*Cicindela dorsalis*) and the Puritan Tiger Beetle (*Cicindela puritana*), both federally Endangered wildlife species. The woodlands of the site provide habitat for two state-listed Threatened wildflowers, the Large-seeded Forget-me-not, (*Myosotis macroperma*) and the Solitary Pussytoes, (*Antennaria solitaria*). There is a good possibility that other rare species will be discovered on the site during further field investigations, including the Black Rail and the Greater Siren.

Significant Natural Features: The subject property has three unusual natural features.

The *cliffs* which comprise the eastern slope of the property rise to over 100 feet in height and contain important fossil resources. Calvert Cliffs in general is recognized as a unique miocene fossil deposit and the number of exposed fossil strata at the Jett property is unequaled at any other point.

The "*island*" of upland which rises abruptly from the marsh is a geographic anomaly unknown at any other site. In addition to its unusual physical nature, the island has maintained its natural character better than any other part of the watershed because of its physical isolation from human activity. Undisturbed, the island will act as a seed source for the rest of the watershed, providing the source for the more delicate and vulnerable species which have

survived in this refuge to repopulate the watershed as protection efforts continue.

The *dune line and the mouth of Parkers Creek* are constantly changing shape with the influence of wind and tide. No other tidal creek on the western shore has retained the ephemeral nature of the interface of Parkers Creek and the Chesapeake. Those creeks which once had the characteristic shifting morphology of the subject property have long since been converted into marinas or permanently stabilized for road construction.

Adjacent Open Space: The property lies within the Primary Protection Boundary of Parkers Creek and is one of the two key parcels for the protection of this important natural area. The site is also directly adjacent to the American Chestnut Land Trust, a privately-protected nature preserve of almost six hundred acres.

A New Partner: The Calvert Garden Club

If you have visited the Chesley-Hance Cemetery in the last few months, you would have noticed that someone has been hard at work. That "someone" is the members of the Calvert Garden Club, and we want to thank them for taking on this project. Several of those buried in the cemetery are important figures in the county's history, so ACLT wants to treat their resting place in a respectful manner and welcomes the assistance of the Garden Club.

At the May meeting of the ACLT Board of Directors, Carl Fleischhauer volunteered to prepare the draft of a document setting out a proposed understanding with the Garden Club for the restoration of the cemetery. This document was sent to Mrs. Harms with a cover letter thanking them for their marvelous volunteer work. Charlene Cumberland, President of the Garden Club, responded to the effect that they were prepared to open discussions about improvements to the cemetery, including suggestions for fund raising, if ACLT would commit to a regular schedule of mowing the cemetery once a month from April through September. This has been done and we are looking forward to working with our new partner on this project. Since their group includes landscape designers and they are being assisted by Paula Mask, an expert on cemeteries, we anticipate that they will have suggestions about plantings, fencing, signs, and a brochure.

—Ralph Dwan

What's Happening?

- Plum Point Environmental Land Trust (PELT) was recently granted a \$600,000 loan by the Board of County Commissioners from the Calvert County Revolving Land Trust Loan Fund. This loan will help with the purchase of the bay front Neeld Bay Tract and...

- ACLT and PPELT have jointly received a national honor with a \$1500.00 grant from The Conservation Fund's American Greenways Program. The grant will be used for a design study of a five and one-half mile greenway to connect land of the two land trusts. Such a greenway would provide a connective strip for a nature trail as well as providing an ecological corridor. In addition to the grant award, the two land trusts will be showcased as a national model for innovative efforts to develop a greenway in Calvert County.

- Scenes of ACLT's trails and lands will be featured on the front cover of the national publication of the Land Trust Alliance in its upcoming summer issue!

- Anyone driving by the land trust office recently must be curious about the huge pile of lumber that quickly disappeared. Where did it go? Into the swamp! That's right, we now have a "boardwalk" through the wettest portion of the swamp trail. This project, headed by Joe Turner, is bound to be a valued addition to our trail system.

- Look for ACLT's booth as you visit the Calvert Farmland Trust's benefit at Patterson Park on September 16 and at Patuxent Appreciation Days at the Calvert Marine Museum on October 7 and 8.

- ACLT board member, Ewing Miller, has recently been appointed to the board of directors of the newest of land trusts in the county, the Cove Point Environmental Land Trust and holds the position of secretary.

- Our administrator, Peg Niland, has recently been appointed by Governor Glendening to the Lower Western Shore Tributary Strategy Implementation Team, whose task is to meet nutrient reduction goals in Maryland waterways.

Business Advisory Group Established

On June 15, members of the Calvert County business community were given a first-hand look at the American Chestnut Land Trust. Denny Murray, long-time member of the land trust and a developer in the county, invited 27 guests to a dinner at the Rod 'n Reel Restaurant to meet our board of directors, see a slide show, and ask questions.

Following that evening, a core group of business owners are now part of a Business Advisory Group that will assist ACLT and strengthen our ties with the community.

Environmental Fund for Maryland: The Workplace Giving Alternative

ACLT continues its affiliation with the Environmental Fund for Maryland (EFM), a federation of 21 non-profit environmental organizations, that is dedicated to raising funds for its member organizations through workplace giving campaigns.

EFM makes it convenient and easy for you to assist in the crucial effort to save Maryland's natural heritage. In most of the campaigns, employees may designate contributions, made by payroll deduction, to one or more of EFM's member organizations. Gifts designated to EFM itself will be divided equally among all of the member organizations.

Last year during the campaign season (September through December), EFM relied on a group of volunteers officially dubbed "Friends of EFM." These volunteers are employees in the workplaces where EFM was admitted to participate in the payroll deduction campaign. Friends spread the word about EFM in their workplaces, passing out brochures, hanging posters, networking, or simply by talking about EFM at the water cooler.

If you are an employee at a workplace where EFM will be participating in the charitable campaign, we need you to spread the word—tell others about ACLT and EFM! For more information call either Jim Eacker, EFM's Executive Director (410-461-9199) or Peg Niland (410-586-1570).



Logo of the Environmental Fund for Maryland

First Annual ACLT Family Day

The First Annual ACLT Family Day, held on July 22 at Double Oak Farm, was enjoyed by adults and children alike despite the heat and humidity. The Second Annual Family Day will be held at a time other than the dog days of summer. Throughout the day eighty-five ACLT members and family members enjoyed games and partaking in the great feast, all of which (except the barbecue and dogs) was supplied from Diana Niland's garden on Double Oak Farm.

Face painting was a great success with the children who had their faces painted first and then decided to test their own creative skills by painting on the backs of their hands.

Dave Bohaska contributed his skills as fossil identifier. Some of his fossil bones were borrowed for the scavenger hunt.

The heat put a damper and hold on many of the activities but the scavenger hunt participants were able to find all of the items on their lists. A few enterprising hunters raided the kitchen for egg shells and Peg's dog Taz lost a few dog bones to scavengers looking for a piece of bone.

Next year we plan to add many more events and hope you all will be able to join us. The trails at Double Oak Farm are looking great. Double Oak Farm really is a wonderful place to visit—on a cooler day.

—Mimi Lacouture

Forest Management Choices for ACLT Property

The Board of Directors is reconsidering its Forestry Management policies. This article will introduce you to the issues and invite your observations and comment.

Since 1987, the ACLT has purchased five major properties and has placed each of them into an Agricultural Preservation District (APD). In each case, our forester has developed, at our instruction, forestry management plans that call for timber stand improvement (clearing invasive underbrush, cutting less desirable species, planting, etc.), timber harvesting (both selective and clear cutting), and replanting. Depending on when the properties were logged last, the timber harvesting is scheduled between 1995 and 2015. We have already logged two sections: 13 acres of primarily Virginia Pine opposite Gate A (Scientists' Cliffs) which was replanted with the experimental hybrid chestnuts, Loblolly Pine and a small section of black walnuts; and about five acres off Parkers Creek Road which is being allowed to regenerate naturally.

Due primarily to the fact that it is the County's agricultural preservation program that has enabled us to sell off the transferable development rights (TDRs) and to preserve these properties with minimal annual tax burden, we have considered the properties primarily as agricultural land, to be managed as tree farms. Recently, because of the extensive damage from the ice storm, our forester has recommended that we harvest, through clear cutting, about 60 acres on the west side of Scientists Cliffs road between Gates B and D (leaving a 50-foot visual barrier adjacent to the road). The Board had already been discussing whether to reconsider our current land management policies. This recommendation has caused us to accelerate our deliberations.

As we have concentrated on land purchase, we have developed five independent forestry management plans without much thought to their long term impact, or how the land might be managed differently as a unit. However, more recent land acquisition and preservation activity has caused us to think in broader and longer terms. We have purchased Double Oak Farm on the north shore of Parkers Creek; The Nature Conservancy (TNC), on behalf of the Maryland Department of the Environment, has completed settlement on the 240-acre Jett Farm, and is initiating discussions to protect through environmental lease or purchase of an additional 800–1,000 acres on the north shore adjacent to Double Oak Farm. So we have begun to consider, rather than separate plans for each parcel we purchase, a single plan for the entire ecosystem in the protected portion of the watershed, which takes into full account all of our current and potential future uses of the properties. Specifically, we are considering as an alternative to more traditional land management plans, a plan that would enable us to create a many-hundred acre "old growth" forest environment. The remainder of this article describes some of the pros and cons of traditional land management practices versus creation of an old growth forest. Although, for purposes of debate, the "tree farm" versus "old growth" forest are presented as two mutually exclusive alternatives, it is possible to have different land management strategies at different locations or to combine the two practices, such as by logging at the edges of the protected area while preserving an "old growth" core.

Advantages of Managing the Properties for Timber

The advantages of managing the property for timber are well understood—there are many such tracts throughout Calvert County and southern Maryland. The land is preserved as an agricultural resource in the County. It supports a small timber industry. The harvests produce immediate income to the ACLT for use in other land acquisition and preservation activities. If we were to "farm" 500 acres total, cutting trees every 50 years (about 10 acres/year), we could optimistically expect to net approximately \$16,000 per year, after expenses. In addition, our taxes are considerably lower on this agricultural property than would be the case if it were classified otherwise. The timbered area supports multiple uses including wildlife management, hiking and other passive uses as the forest grows back. Timbered areas may be replanted with more desired species. Finally, timbering is also a means to control disease and to extract value from injured or diseased trees, such as those injured by the ice storm, or dying of red oak disease.

Advantages of Managing the Properties to Develop an "Old Growth" Forest

There are many characteristics of an "old growth" forest that make it a desirable biological resource. Unlike "even age" forests where trees are replanted at the same time, the old growth forest has trees of all ages, from decaying blowdown to very large, old trees, to young trees reaching up through patches of light. The old growth forest, with its high canopy and secondary understory holds moisture and creates an environment unique to that condition. These forests with dark, moist conditions and decaying vegetation increase both plant and animal biodiversity, especially amphibians. Salamander biomass may exceed deer biomass occupying the same area. Since there are no sizable old growth forests nearby, there is the opportunity to create an environment for rare or endangered species, and to create "champion" trees. A mature forest with mixed species is resistant to disease, insect infestation and severe environmental conditions such as drought, fire, ice. By limiting light penetration, it resists the invasion by exotic species such as bittersweet, honeysuckle and poison ivy. It can improve the quality of the water in the watershed. It enhances passive recreational uses such as hiking and camping; and it supports research and educational uses. Finally, it could provide long term

financial gain to the ACLT and the county that exceeds that derived by harvesting timber. Today, there are no true, sizable old growth forests within 500 miles. In another 40-50 years or less we could create a significant attraction.

Next Steps

During the next months the Board will be reviewing these two alternatives, and combinations of alternatives as they apply to the entire watershed. We will be viewing the management practices of other properties in the watershed in conjunction with our own management practices, and determining whether we can create a comprehensive plan for the entire "ecosystem" in the watershed. We will be seeking the opinions and advice of our members, our neighbors, our expert advisors and other concerned groups such as the Parkers Creek Management Task Force. Through this article we invite your thoughts and opinions. Simply write a note to the ACLT and mention land management practices or discuss your thoughts with any of our board members.

—Gary Loew



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