

ANNUAL MEETING

ELT brought its 2008 events season to a close, as usual, with the Annual Meeting, held this year on Saturday morning, September 13. (The formula for the date of each year's annual meeting is the second Saturday after Labor Day.) After the board members present were introduced and the summer's ELT events were recapitulated, Walter Cliff presented the Treasurer's report. Net income in 2007 was \$18,849, as compared with \$8,535 so far this year, demonstrating the almost universal downturn in donations that non-profits face in 2008. He further reported that ELT has so far protected about 300 acres of land, through its own efforts or through our collaboration with other agencies. Most of this land is in proximity to Egremont's chief water source, the Karner Brook watershed.

Peggy Muskrat, Nominating Chairman, presented two nominees for re-election to the board: Lois Ginsberg and Ursula Cliff. Both were elected. The business meeting then adjourned and was followed by an ELT-sponsored lunch for everyone: one of the pleasantest social occasions of the year. Sign-up sheets were available for people who want to get more closely involved in the work of the land trust and, of course, a call left at the ELT office (528-6626) will receive an enthusiastic response.

Many thanks to the photographer/members who contributed photos to this issue:

*Marilyn Bloom Walter Cliff
Martin Greene Wendy Linscott*

PLEASE JOIN US!

If you're already a member, pass this envelope to a friend who's not yet a member. If you haven't yet joined ELT and love Egremont, use the envelope to become part of the good work.

Last Chance!

The challenge grant for our Green River Fund expires January 31, 2009. The challenge was for \$100,000: the grant would match every dollar ELT could raise up to that amount. So far, we have raised \$90,044.10 to meet that challenge, almost the grant maximum. Those contributions have been matched, and yes, the Green River property has been saved. But the grant remains in place for a few weeks more, and if we can raise \$9,955.90 the grant will match it, and we'll have that total amount (\$19,911.18) toward our next project. It seems a pity to pass up this opportunity, so let's see what we can do.

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Walter Cliff, *Treasurer*
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P.O. Box 132, 71 Main Street
South Egremont, MA 01258

EGREMONT
LAND TRUST



NEWSLETTER
WINTER 2008

Baby Bear Visits Egremont



The North Egremont fire house was filled to bursting with children and adults come to welcome a nine-week-old bear cub, ELT's guest, on Saturday, April 12. The cub is one of black bear triplets born in captivity and destined to spend his life in a zoo, since he could not survive in the wild.

The cub was accompanied by his nanny, Bernadette Hoffman, of the Flag Acres Zoo in Hoosick Falls, NY (now closed), who gave a talk on "Black Bears in the Wild." The talk was informative on the life cycle, diet, and habits of our native black bears, but the star of the occasion was the cub (still unnamed) himself. He arrived with an emergency demand: he wanted his mid-morning snack, so a board member had to be dispatched to the general store in North Egremont to buy some infant formula. This the bear drank from an ordinary baby bottle as he nestled against his keeper's shoulder.

Placed on the floor at her feet, he gazed about calmly at the crowd of his young fans sitting on the floor in a semicircle around him. Massachusetts wildlife regulations ordain that no one from the audience could pet him or approach closer than 20 feet, which, in the case of bear cubs, at least, seems a wise precaution. (Members of the audience could, however, handle a specimen bear pelt spread out for examination.) This very active baby had large, strong, sharp claws, and when he wanted to scramble back up into his keeper's arms, he climbed her as he would a tree, drawing blood from any exposed part of her leg or arm.

ELT is especially grateful to the Egremont Fire Department for offering us the use of their large and comfortable meeting room for this event.



The cub climbs his keeper (right) to reach his bottle (above).

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Aunt Rose's Column

Aunt Rose usually says, in her regular platitudinous way, that you should never put off till tomorrow what you can do today. But now she's changed her tune.

Well! I've got news for you. DON'T make charitable gifts of conservation restrictions in 2008! (That's supposing you've managed to get ahold of a copy of this newsletter before the end of 2008. The folks who put it out have really dillydallied this year.)

In case you haven't heard, we have a new sheriff in town and his name is Barack Obama. He and the congress he controls will raise taxes in 2009 and later. So your charitable contribution of conservation restrictions will be worth more next year than in 2008.

But enough with the good news. And whether you donate a charitable restriction on your land this year or next, don't forget that the Feds have changed the law so that such charitable contributions have more favorable results than

under prior law. Specifically, the limitation on the amount deductible in the year of the gift has been increased from 30% to 50% of adjusted gross income. Thus, if your adjusted gross income is \$100,000, you can deduct \$50,000 in the year of the gift rather than \$30,000 as under prior law.

Furthermore, in cases where the value of your gift exceeds the limit on deductibility in the year of the gift (e.g.: your limit is \$50,000 but the value of the gift is \$800,000) you can carry over the excess to each of the succeeding 15 years. Under prior law, the carryover was only good for five years. The result under new law is---in this example--- a total deduction of \$800,000 as contrasted with total deductions of \$180,000 under the old law.

Finally, there is one other possible change (pay attention: I said possible) in law in Massachusetts that would lead you to postpone the charitable contribution to 2010. That is, the new Massachusetts tax law approved by the Governor last summer provides for the first time a credit against your Massachusetts income tax for contributions of a conservation restriction. However, the Governor returned the legislation to the legislature stipulating that it must now be modified by the legislature to become effective only for charitable contributions made in 2010 and to limit the credit to 50% of the appraised value of the land, but not more than \$50,000 and not more than the donor's tax liability. The legislature is still working on this and we will have to wait and see what they finally produce. And I don't have to tell you that law-makers may be stingy with tax credits in hard times.

Benefit Luncheon Highlights Tea

We know that the spring has truly arrived in Egremont when Chef Terry Moore invites members of the Egremont Land Trust to enjoy a delicious meal and wonderful social event at his restaurant, The Old Mill. Sunday, May 18, was the eighth time that our member, Chef Terry, generously provided the venue for this much looked-forward-to occasion when we enjoy seasonal produce, some from local farms and hear a speaker from the community. Hors d'oeuvres and cocktails accompanied the greeting of old friends and new. Then we feasted on a salad of Equinox Farms baby greens with goat cheese and raspberry vinaigrette, followed by a choice of either pan-roasted halibut with lobster sauce, basmati rice, and snow peas, or grilled tenderloin of beef with red wine-shallot sauce, potato gratin and baby carrots. Merlot and Pinot Grigio were poured. Old fashioned strawberry shortcake complemented the demonstration and serving of artisanal teas from Verdigris of Hudson NY.



Tea expert Kim Bach

Our speaker at this year's luncheon was Kim Bach, the owner of the specialty teashop in Hudson. She described the history and geography of tea consumption throughout the world and demonstrated several artisanal tea creations that "offered a world of mystery and flavor waiting to unfold from within." Using centuries-old techniques that have been handed down through generations, the display teas, initially just a small mass of vegetable fiber, opened during steeping to reveal the long leaves and flowers they are made from, gradually unfurling in glass vessels to dramatically reveal the camellia, chrysanthemum or jasmine within. Each table had an opportunity to savor a different one of these precious teas.

When the snow melts and the mud dries out in the Berkshires, watch your mailbox for the announcement of our next spring event.

EGREMONT LAND TRUST DONORS 2008

Many, many thanks to all our members, who make the land trust's work possible! And please let us know if you discover an error in this list.

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Matchmakers Available

To bring together farmers and the land farmers need, Berkshire Grown has taken on the role of marriage broker. The organization's More Farms More Food committee has already assembled a growing list of landowners who are willing to have their fields used for agriculture, usually without charge. While the committee is still welcoming landowners from all over Berkshire County, it is now looking even harder for farmers in search of land. If you fall into either category, please call Berkshire Grown at (413) 528-0041 to learn more about the program.

Children Launch Their Boats

On June 10, late last spring, ELT hosted a field trip of kindergarten and first grade children from the South Egremont School. Accompanied by teacher Julie Milani and assistant Barbara Delmolino, the students walked down Main Street from the school to the ELT office, many of them carefully carrying the boats they had constructed out of all natural materials. ELT board members talked with the children about the role of a land trust in the community and then showed them the impressive rattlesnake skin sloughed off by the timber rattlesnake that accompanied herpetologist Randy Stechert to an ELT meeting several years ago. (The skin is framed on the ELT office wall. The nameless female rattlesnake is presumably still flourishing.) There followed a lively discussion about the New England rattlesnake, nicknamed the Gentleman of the Forest because he always gives fair warning before he strikes.

Following a snack of homemade cupcakes and juice, the children launched their boats into Karner Brook from the bridge beside the office and watched them sail downstream, headed for Long Island Sound.



Right top: The boats begin their voyage.

Below: Children admiring the timber rattlesnake's discarded skin.

Traces of Commerce in North Egremont

Egremont history buffs continued their exploration of the town's past on August 16 this summer under the leadership of ELT's unofficial historian Nic Cooper, who is in fact a retired history professor. The subject was North Egremont and its role as a commercial center for farmers and other country dwellers for miles around during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The village's population might have been only 100, but its catchment area was far greater, and almost every house in the village center functioned as a store, selling groceries or shoes (at least two shoe stores, where, at least in the beginning, shoes were also custom made) or meat or dry goods, or services: there were many carpenters, a singing master, at least two dressmakers a family of house and carriage painters, and, amazingly, a harp teacher. For such a small place there seemed to be a lot of competition, but Nic pointed out that these early residents knew what modern mall owners know: more competition means more customers. The census of 1855 listed the occupation of many village dwellers as "laborer." These, Nic speculated, probably worked as hired hands on outlying farms.



Many of these original houses remain, although of the oldest, Jacob Spoor's house, built in 1736 at the corner of Route 71 and Boice Road, only the foundations remain. The original part of the Elm Court Inn was built in 1790, and always functioned as an inn and, for much of its history, as a post office--the first in Alford and Egremont. The large building on Prospect Lake Road, now a private residence, was the Baptist church, moved around the corner from its original site on General Knox Lane. It was always unfinished and unheated, and in winter services were held in church member's barns. The bottom floor was added after the building ceased to be a church. Later in its life it functioned as a boarding house, and the large room on what is now the second floor was a ball room. (Ghosts of Baptists past must have looked on in horror.)



Left: The village center a hundred years ago.
Right top: The original church is clearly visible in the top two-thirds of this residence

Green River Walk

On August 3, a group of nature-lovers gathered at the home of Stephanie Bergman on Route 71, just up the road from ELT's most recent land acquisition, 22.5 acres whose borders are Route 71 and the Green River. Stephanie is the Director of Education for the Housatonic River Museum, to be built in Pittsfield, a museum created to celebrate the role of rivers in our landscape. Stephanie, who holds a Master's degree in Environmental Education and a Bachelor's degree in Biology, had agreed to lead ELT members and friends on a morning interpretive stroll down to the river.



We followed a path along the field that is planted in corn by Turner Farms, local farmers, who, together with ELT, maintain the path that allows fishermen and hikers access to the river. The group stopped several times along the way to ask our enthusiastic leader to identify plants for us: the blue cohosh, distinctive with its bluish green foliage and blue berry-like fruit; the daisy fleabane, a member of the aster family; jewelweed, an antidote for poison ivy; the choke cherry bush; and Japanese barberry, an invasive.



At the river's edge, Stephanie picked up a river stone and turned it over to show us a caddisfly case, attached to the rock. The caddisfly has aquatic larvae. When the pupal caddisfly is ready, it will cut through its case, swim to the surface, and emerge as an adult, a small moth-like insect.

Stephanie educated us about the three parts of a river: the riffle, where small rippled waves flow over a shallow stretch of the river, often over a rocky bed of gravel; the run, which is the faster, unencumbered stretch of the river; and the pool, which is stiller and deeper water at a "bump-out" along the river's edge.

The group expressed fervent thanks to Stephanie for showing us the lovely Green River and sharing her knowledge with us. ELT is hoping to organize a wildflower walk in the spring, again under Stephanie's guidance.

Bird Walk 2008

The highlight of this year's ELT bird walk, on April 27, was a red-tailed hawk that seemed anxious to be sure we all had a good look at him. He flew from tree to tree, accompanying the birders for some distance, and posing obligingly for photos. Birders had gathered as usual at 7:30 on a Saturday morning at Jug End State Reservation and set out under the enthusiastic guidance of our long-time leader, Brian Kane, of UMass. Jug End has been the site for this annual walk because it is public land with plenty of parking and provides a variety of habitats: meadow, streamside, and forest. Like the birders themselves, the bird list is different every year, although it includes lots of familiar faces. Here is this year's list:



- | | | |
|--------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------|
| Great blue heron | blue-headed vireo | northern cardinal |
| *bittern | blue jay | eastern towhee |
| canada goose | american crow | field sparrow |
| mallard | tree swallow | song sparrow |
| turkey vulture | tufted titmouse | white-throated sparrow |
| red-tailed hawk | black-capped chickadee | chipping sparrow |
| american kestrel | white-breasted nuthatch | brown-headed cowbird |
| mourning dove | ruby-crowned kinglet | red-winged blackbird |
| *chimney swift | american robin | purple finch |
| downy woodpecker | hermit thrush | american goldfinch |
| yellow-bellied sapsucker | yellow-rumped warbler | |
| norther flicker | black & white warbler | |
| *eastern phoebe | common yellowthroat | |

* The starred birds were observed close by before the walk.



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Apart from the general store and the post office, little of the one-time commercial bustle remains in North Egremont---only the many handsome houses testify to the village's comfortable mercantile history.

Left: The village center a hundred years ago.
Right top: The original church is clearly visible in the top two-thirds of this residence

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