

# ANOTHER WELCOME GIFT TO ALT

by Ruth Maher

In the near future the public will be invited to enjoy nature in intimate detail on the land that was the setting for events described in the continuing "Come With Me" series published in our newsletter. It will not be a place for strenuous hiking and climbing. Rather it will be most enjoyable for those who wish to walk slowly and quietly, taking time to look and listen, to note features of biology, botany and geology on the ground, at eye level, and among the treetops.

Visitors will see the results of the big pileated woodpecker's drilling expertise. Looking up into one special pine tree, they may see a wide board attached to a limb. More than forty years ago that board was nailed in place, about five feet above the ground, as the first step in the kids' plan to build an elaborate tree house. The tree fought back with sticky pine pitch that was an effective deterrent, and the first board was also the last. Boys of tree-house age are not enthusiastic about repeatedly scrubbing their hands in turpentine and again in hot soapy water. If that project had been completed, it would now be an inaccessible "high rise."

Recently I went alone to enjoy happy memories of the place that was home for 37 years, where our children grew up, where we became closely acquainted with the birds, animals and plants that shared our territory. In the five years since our departure nature has taken over, allowing the grass to become hay, the shrubbery to reach great height and breadth, some trees to fall and new ones to grow. Nature's tenacity is obvious in the green plants that are thriving in the rain gutters at roof's edge.

As I stood at the pool gate a male cardinal flew within inches of my head. He had emerged from the hedge of yews we planted when the young shrubs were about 18 inches tall. The top of the hedge is now far above my reach.

The water in the pool, unfiltered and uncirculated for five years, has become luxury housing for creatures that are comfortable in murky water. I heard the plop, plop, plop of frogs diving to deep, dark safety in the place where three generations of our family and friends swam and splashed in crystal-clear blue water.


In the pool house were piles of shells from the nuts of nearby hickory trees. The debris and the squirrels' droppings showed me exactly where they had perched to enjoy their feasts. Wherever they buried their surplus will probably become the site of new generations of hickory trees to be enjoyed by new generations of squirrels.

The Avon Land Trust will publicly announce the date when people will be welcome to visit here. Until then it must remain closed.

The dwelling will be demolished. The pool will be destroyed and filled in. Even the pavement will disappear. The land will once again return to its wild state, and there will be little noticeable evidence that human beings ever lived and died there.

I am awed by nature's power to reclaim its own so quickly. But if nature lacked that power, can we even imagine how much of the earth's surface would be barren?

newsletter produced by Olander Design



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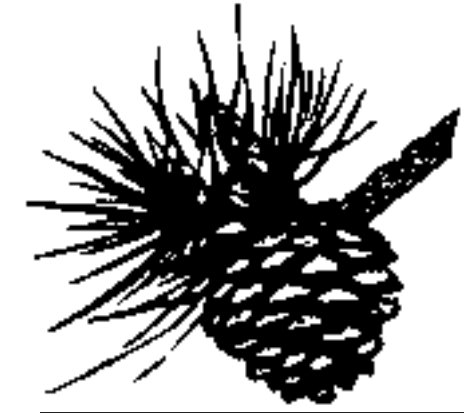
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# THE *Avon* LAND TRUST

A NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION      November 1999

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## Avon Land Trust Call to the Annual Meeting

President Tom Morganti will call the Annual Meeting of the Avon Land Trust to order at 7:30 p.m. on Thursday, November 18th at the Avon Senior Center, 635 West Avon Rd. A brief business meeting will be held

*continued inside*

## WELCOME TO THE AVON LAND TRUST

### President's Message

On a recent Saturday afternoon in September I found myself working the ALT booth at Avon Day, fielding questions from people who stopped by. A middle school kid strolled up, looked at the map display and commented that "there wasn't much green there" (Our properties are highlighted in green). Among the sprawl of subdivisions and serpentine byways he pointed out a couple of large chunks of white—private, undeveloped or farm land. He asked why we didn't just buy up all the white spaces and color them in. By the time I was halfway through explaining that "most land trusts don't have millions of doll-...", I'd lost him to the free balloons of the Republican Party booth next door.

Millions of dollars or not, the Avon Land Trust does have a wish list, the short version of which is as follows:

- ▀ Ridgetop land (wetlands and non-wetlands): this would include property on Avon Mountain and above Secret Lake, sought for its unique environment and rare plant and animal species. The Town of Avon has helped us greatly in working towards this goal.
- ▀ Tunxis Plantation (riverfront-unbuildable lots since the flood of 1955): many of these plots (some tiny) have been family owned for generations and exist as "camps" along the Farmington River.
- ▀ Other riverfront properties: Avon has over 16 linear miles of riverfront land, some owned by the town but much of it in private hands. The ultimate goal (20 years? 50 years?) is a "linear park" linking town properties, vastly increasing recreational use and adding to the ecological health of the river.

Anyone who's been a resident of Avon for more than 10 years can see the growth that has taken place in town. Today, tomorrow, and in the years to come, we will all need a "green place" to go, and that is the stuff that wishes are made of.

Tom Morganti  
*President ALT*

## Project Osprey Takes Wing

by Rick Dubiel

Inspired by recent osprey sightings while kayaking on the Farmington River, members of the Avon Land Trust seek to welcome these relatively new visitors to our area by erecting one or more osprey nesting platforms along the river. Anyone interested in helping with this project, either by scouting out good locations, soliciting donations of materials, providing labor, or coordinating with town officials and neighboring land trusts, please contact Rick Dubiel at 693-1938.

*continued inside*

# Avon Land Lovers

by Ruth Maher

## Mary Frances Watrous

The following quotation is from the Foreword of *Avon Natural Resources and Environmental Considerations* by Mary F. Waterous:

*"...by a dedicated scientist and environmentalist, Mary Waterous of Avon. This unique and very readable guide to Avon's natural resources is testimony not only to her consummate skill as a scientist, but her love for the land and its wildlife as well. Her genuine concern for the wise use of the environment is evident throughout..."*

Talcott Mountain Science Center Press, 1977

I'm sorry I never had the opportunity to know Mary Waterous personally. Fortunately, I do know Harry Spring, Vice President of ALT and former biology teacher at Hartford Public High School. I am indebted to him for providing the information for this article. In fact, he wrote most of it.

Mary Frances Waterous was born in Manila, the Philippines, eldest child of Mary Frances Mills Waterous and Dr. Willard Waterous, Captain, U.S. Army. Mary was educated in the American School in Manila, where Dr. Waterous had established a military hospital in 1919. The hospital still exists under the direction of a church group. The Philippine government erected a memorial monument to Dr. Waterous in recognition of his service to the nation.

When it became evident that Japan was about to take control of the country, Dr. Waterous had his wife and three children evacuated to California while he stayed to maintain the functions of the hospital. He

was taken as a prisoner of war and survived the Bataan Death March.

Mary and her brothers completed their secondary education in California. The brothers enlisted in the Navy, and Mary matriculated at Mount Holyoke College where she majored in geology and minored in biology. Among her classmates was our former governor, Ella T. Grasso. Mary's mother came to live in Northampton where she soon joined a "tea" group of ladies who met weekly to make bandages and other supplies for military hospitals. One member of the group was Mrs. Calvin Coolidge.

Upon graduation Mary went to work in the Army War Office. At the end of the war she joined the staff of The American Museum of Natural History in New York, where she worked with Margaret Mead.

Later Mary began her teaching career in California, moved to a school in Seattle, then back to New York. During her tenure in Seattle there was an incident that offers a wonderful cameo of Mary's personality and her gift for teaching. She was told that an innovative move in the school system would add a class of first graders to her schedule of secondary-level biology students. At a loss as to how to begin an introduction to science for five-year-olds, she was inspired to say, "Let's take a field trip." As Mary herded sixteen youngsters across campus, a severe earthquake struck. The ground groaned, rumbled and heaved, the trees swayed violently, and Mary had sixteen terrified kids all trying to climb into her arms at once. Instinctively she shouted, "Oh, isn't it wonderful of God to send us an earthquake right in the middle of science class? Let's make some observations! Who can tell time? Here's my watch. See how long it is between tremors. The rest of us will watch and try to remember

everything that happens to the ground and the trees." Sixteen children suddenly became junior scientists, their attention focused on scientific observation rather than fear.

Mary's gift carried throughout her teaching career, which brought her to the faculty of Hartford Public High School and, finally, to a Professorship in Geology at the University of Connecticut. When Mary joined the faculty of HPHS, it was Avon's good fortune that she chose to live here.

Always profoundly interested in environmental matters, Mary conducted well-organized studies of the geology, hydrology, zoology and botany of Avon. Some of this information is summarized in her book. The text and detailed diagrams in this book are very enlightening for all who bear responsibility for protecting the natural resources of the town and supporting land-use policies that will enhance the area for the future. Mary defined "The Priorities" as "Floodplains and Wetlands," "Ridgetops," "Retention of Farmland," "Park Development and Forest Acquisition," and "Natural Areas." The information presented in this section made me wish we could go back in time and revise some of our past decisions, but it's not too late for applying our best knowledge in making future choices.

Mary's impact on the development of Avon's environmental awareness is immeasurable. She came to Avon because of its natural beauty and unspoiled character. With her background in biology and geology, she readily recognized land-use and land-management practices that were damaging to the environment.

Realizing that poor land-use decisions were generally based on misinformation rather than callous indifference, Mary set out to educate citizens. Along with other local environmentalists such



*Harry Spring, vice-president of ALT, Mary Waterous, and Bea Murdock presenting Mary the "Environmental Citizen of the Year" Award in 1979.*

as Jim Arute, Hugh Blanchard, Roy Normen, Oliver Thompson and founders of ALT, this devoted Land Lover began to lobby town government for the establishment of a Natural Resources Commission for the purpose of educating and advising townspeople. Mary also lobbied intensely at the state level for the establishment of what is now the Department of Environmental Protection. At the same time several citizens were working with town and state to establish a statutory foundation for the concept of land trusts.

With the publication of Rachel Carson's "Silent Spring" in 1968, the American environmental movement gained enormous momentum. Thanks in great part to the dedication of Mary Waterous, Avon was "way ahead of the times."

Scarcely any aspect of Avon's quality of life has been untouched by Mary's influence. Her touch could have been a gentle tug, an insistent push or a hard yank, but it was always designed to preserve the health of the land and the people. Invariably, at the mention of Mary's name, people have responded, "Wonderful woman. A wonderful, wonderful woman!"

In 1982 the Board of Selectmen named Mary "Environmental Citizen of the Year," one of many well-deserved honors conferred upon her. The final sentence of her book expresses her conviction that every one of us is responsible for trying to understand and protect the world around us. "Each generation is a trustee of the environment for future generations," wrote this devoted trustee who left the legacy of a true Land Lover.



*Mary Waterous delivering academic address at the Honor Society induction at Hartford Public High School.*

## Project Osprey *continued*

In addition to being a magnificent bird of prey, ospreys are also an indicator species, whose return demonstrates the improving water quality of our Farmington River.

## Missing Piece of the Puzzle

by Rick Dubiel

As a result of energy deregulation, Northeast Utilities (NU) is in the process of liquidating its various landholdings across the state. One of these parcels is found right here in Avon, below New Road, along the east bank of the Farmington River.

ALT stands alongside our sister organization, the Farmington River Watershed Association, in urging everyone who is interested in preserving this piece of riverfront property for all posterity to contact NU's principal scientist, Raul de Brigard at [debrir@NU.com](mailto:debrir@NU.com). Tell Raul that NU should do the right thing by transferring the land to the DEP, which already owns the parcels on either side. This will help promote ALT's vision for a continuous greenway along the river.

## Annual Meeting *continued*

to hear reports from the President, Secretary and Treasurer. Four directors will be proposed by the nominating committee. The membership present may also nominate from the floor and election will then take place.

Of particular interest to many ALT members and environmentally concerned citizens is the topic of wildlife "encouragement". Mike McDonnell of the Wild Bird Center in Avon is particularly well qualified to discuss the topic "Basics of Back Yard Bird Feeding". A former high school teacher, Mike now juggles a full time job as a computer support manager at the Travelers and his duties as co-owner of the Wild Bird Center. Mike and his wife Jane have had a longstanding interest in birding and decided to turn this avocation into a business four years ago. Discovering the idea of a center devoted entirely to birding at the Bird Watchers' General Store on Cape Cod, they decided to offer the concept in Avon. Mike has prepared a fascinating and exceptionally informative presentation for us at the Annual Meeting.

The public is invited. See you there!

Harry Spring, *Vice-President ALT*

**NEW MEMBERS WELCOME** As undeveloped areas become more scarce, we find growing interest in the preservation of open land in its natural state. If you are not yet a member, please consider joining the Avon Land Trust in its dedicated efforts to preserve for the future some of Connecticut's great beauty.

