



Sourland Planning Council

www.sourland.org

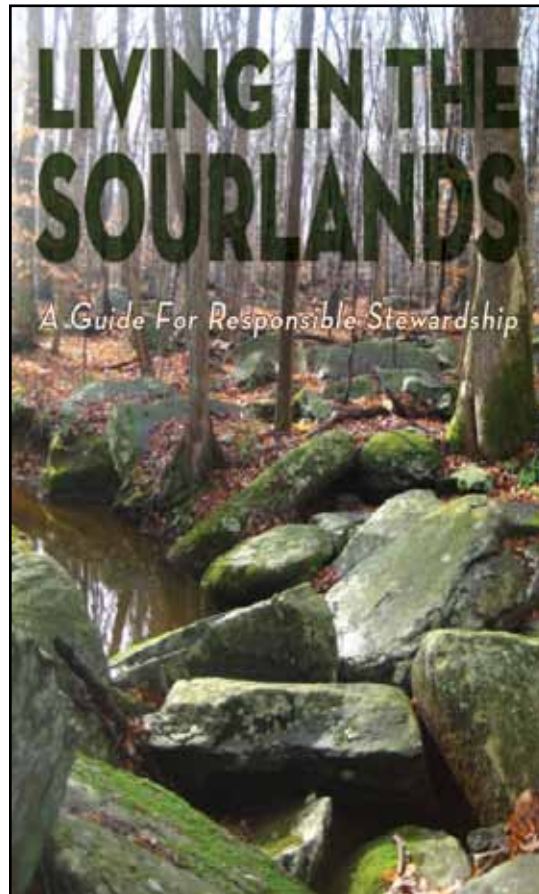
Spring 2010

Stewardship Handbook Coming Your Way

As the surrounding area grows and changes rapidly, the Sourlands are increasingly in jeopardy. But the threats are not all from the outside. Those of us who have chosen to make our homes in this ecologically sensitive area must recognize that we have a special responsibility to preserve and protect the Sourlands, both from outside threats and through the choices we make in our own everyday lives. In the end, if we are to save the Sourlands, we must look to ourselves.

The Sourland Planning Council has created a 44-page booklet to help residents of the Sourlands appreciate the natural wonders around us and to become better stewards of the land. Each chapter describes one aspect of the Mountain's ecology, and provides suggestions on how residents and landowners can make a positive contribution.


Called *Living in the Sourlands: A Guide for Responsible Stewardship*, the booklet includes more than 50 full-color photographs. This spring, SPC will mail a copy to every home and business in the Sourlands—more than 12,000 copies in all.



Partial funding for the project has been provided by the Washington Crossing Audubon Society. As this newsletter went to press, SPC was conducting a special fundraising drive to raise the remainder of the money needed to print and distribute the booklet. (See our appeal on page 6.)

“We focused on issues that are specific to the Sourlands,” says Cliff Wilson, co-editor of the booklet. While things such as recycling and energy conservation are important, he says, these are not concerns that are particular to the Sourlands. Instead, the booklet cover such topics as managing the deer population, providing for wildlife, protecting water resources, dealing with invasive species and restoring the Sourland forest.

“Some of the stewardship recommendations are easy to fulfill, while others require more commitment,” says Wilson. “It is our hope that every reader will find something to

act upon, resulting in thousands upon thousands of ecological good deeds.” 

The Sourland Planning Council is a non-profit organization working to protect the ecological integrity, historic resources and special character of the Sourland Mountain region.

Sourland Planning Council

Meeting information

Sourland Planning Council trustees meetings are held on the first Monday of even months at the train station in Hopewell Borough. You are warmly invited.

Feb 1 Apr 5 Jun 7 Aug 2 Oct 4 Dec 6

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Sourland Journal


Judy Jengo Executive Director

While many challenges are before us in protecting the Sourlands, we have good news to share and much to look forward to.

You've read in recent issues of *Back Roads* about the forest stewardship legislation supported by the Sourland Planning Council. We are happy to report that on January 17, 2010, just before the new legislative session, when all bills that have not yet become law expire, the measure was signed into law. Please see the article in this newsletter about this bright new day for forests in the Sourlands (page 6), and indeed, for forests in all of New Jersey.

On the front page of this issue you will read more about a beautiful handbook coming your way, provided at no cost to you. It offers ways, big and small, that you can partner in protecting the integrity of the Sourlands—your Sourlands—for years to come. Together we can ensure that the Sourland region remains one of the truly special places on our planet.

A great preservation story has just occurred right in our backyard. On January 19, 2010, deeds were signed that provide for the permanent preservation of the 340 acre St. Michael's property just outside Hopewell Borough. With the D&R Greenway Land Trust spearheading the effort, preservation was accomplished through an extraordinary partnership with state, county and municipal government commitment and funding, contributions from Friends of Hopewell Valley Open Space and from Stony Brook Millstone Watershed Association, funding from area businesses and from foundations, and crucial donations from over 800 individuals. This special property is comprised of farm fields and woodlands offering beautiful views and as many readers will know, it once hosted the St. Michael's Orphanage. The land provides many environmental benefits and will afford valued recreational opportunity with trails for walking, horseback riding and nature study. The fields will continue to be used for productive farming. In a time of economic difficulty, the preservation of St. Michael's nevertheless prevailed and like others before it, will prove to be a very wise investment.

Looking ahead, please SAVE THE DATE!! July 17. Read in this issue about the 2010 Sourland Music and Arts Festival. This festival promises to be a very entertaining event with more to offer than ever before. 

Email Addresses

Some of the e-mail addresses we have for SPC members are outdated which means those folks are not receiving important and interesting updates. If you would, and especially if you haven't been receiving e-mail news from us but would like to, send a quick e-mail to sourlandpc@aol.com with your correct e-mail address. Thank you!

Oral History

Joe and Bernice Sowsian

As told to
Andrea Bonette

A Peaceable Kingdom

In a place where the steep, rocky Sourland forest meets the gently sloping grasslands of the Amwell Valley, a 163-acre farm has been in the same family for over eighty years. Deeds show that the farmhouse goes back to at least 1836. At the turn of the century the land was nearly all planted in peach orchards. When the Sowsian family, coming from Brooklyn, NY, bought the farm in 1927, the sale inventory included mattresses, farm tools, most of the recently harvested crops, and “46 chickens more or less.” It may have been a bit of an adjustment for the head of the family to go from being a furrier to being a farmer, but the Sowsians made a living and raised six children “off the land” on their farm. The house was heated solely by wood until electricity arrived in 1944. Fresh water came, as it still does, from a gravity-fed spring on the property. At that time there were still plenty of people in the area using horse-and-buggy transportation to make their tax payments and do other errands. For years the family took in “summer boarders”—city families from Bayonne, West New York, and Brooklyn—who shared the family kitchen but had their own bedrooms. These visitors marveled at the beauty of the Hunterdon countryside with its open spaces and starry skies.

Young Joe Sowsian was born at home in 1931, in the living room of the house he still lives in to this day. His first year of school he walked across the fields every day to the one-room Unionville School on Wertsville Road; for his second-grade year he rode a bus to a two-room schoolhouse in Ringoes. In 1938 the East Amwell School opened

as a K-8 school in its present location; after that Joe attended Flemington High School. From an early age Joe was expected to help with the farm work, mowing and raking hay. By the time he was nine he was able to drive the tractor. He learned the secrets of forest mushroom hunting which had been handed down by his Polish ancestors. As he got older his responsibilities increased. He recalls, “They couldn’t wait for me to grow up!” During the 1930’s and 40’s his sister Genevieve worked in a dress factory on Rileyville Road which Joe recalls was a “sweatshop.” Brother Ben had an egg route, delivering eggs from the family farm and some neighbors’ farms to Jersey City and even Brooklyn. The regular social event for young men from the Sourland area on Saturday nights was to walk down Linvale Road to Menchek’s store, where there would be a card game, Parcheesi, and checkers.

It was a big treat for Joe as a young adult to go to Trenton for really good pizza. And that is where he met and courted a “city girl,” as Bernice Sowsian describes herself. They married in 1954 and Bernice left the big city to settle down on the Sowsian farm. It was quite an adjustment, milking cows, managing a you-pick-it garden for the public every year, canning vegetables, all the countless tasks that go with being a farm family. And a family they were—their five children grew up learning and participating in the same chores. Bernice recalls that, although most of the family’s food was raised right there on their farm, the children thought of the livestock they cared for as pets and

were very reluctant to allow any of their own protégés to be slaughtered for the dinner table. It was a lot of hard work but the Sowsians enjoyed life in spite of the work.

We complain today about potholes and snowplowing but the Mountain roads were quite different seventy years ago. Originally the area farmers were expected to maintain their own sections of the roads, including snow removal. Eventually workers were hired for less than \$1.00 per hour to shovel the snow by hand. Mountain Road was only paved at each end and Township maintenance was discontinued during World War II as too expensive. Because people still relied on access to their woodlots, Joe was sometimes called upon to haul stuck cars out of the woods with his tractor. He was seldom paid for his trouble because he recalls, “they never had any money with them.” Sometimes when Township roads were “plugged up” with snowdrifts, Joe would drive his pickup truck across the fields to access a better-plowed County road. Rileyville Road, now a major thoroughfare, was unpaved, windy and narrow, meandering around huge boulders that could not be moved. Visitors who arrived by train had to be collected at the Hopewell Train Station and brought over the Mountain via this route, at least when snow had not rendered it impassable.

Other well-known institutions in the twentieth century included Adams Air Park off Wertsville near North Hill Road, where in the 1950’s macho young men did skydiving right into the Air Park.

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On the Mountain

Profiles of the Creatures & Features We Protect

Critter Twitter

by Pat Sziber

“So go back outside, walk into the forest or field, take in the first bird sounds you hear. Don’t worry who it is that speaks—you don’t need to know the musician’s name to catch the drift of the music.”

David Rothenberg, *Why Birds Sing*

An insistent chatter from a shrub alongside the path caught my attention. It was a cold, crisp day and the sound was as brittle as the late January air. A small brown bird flitting about the branches paused long enough for me to see that it was a song sparrow, so famous for its rapturous song but uncharacteristically argumentative that day. The quality of the call made me think that the bird seemed troubled and, perhaps, annoyed at my presence. So I moved on, but not without thinking about how challenging it can be to match the call to the species—not so much the songs, but the “tweets.”

While bird songs do have variability within the species, they tend to be unique enough that, with some persistence, we can become pretty good at “naming that tune.” The cardinal’s song poured out loud and clear from a treetop and the robin’s morning song and vespers are probably the most universally recognized arias. But even these birds do not precisely follow the score. They drop a note, slur a trill. We can even wonder if they get tired of the same old tune; the song sparrow actually has up to 30 variations. But the practiced human ear will recognize the phras-

ing and the pitch and say, “aha—song sparrow.”

But what about all the other bird sounds, the non-musical ones: the cheeps and chirps, the twitters and tweets. These are generally referred to as “calls,” as opposed to “songs.” They are simple and brief and usually identical for both the male and the female. Take one notoriously vocal example, the blue jay. This bird has quite a repertoire. We’ve all heard its piercing alarm call when it spots a predator—a cat or a hawk. I’ve noticed that it never—never—approaches the bird feeders without announcing itself, repeating a sharp, two-note phrase until it is joined by other jays. “Food here, food here.” Contrary to the rule of brevity and simplicity, the black-capped chickadee’s onomatopoeic “chickadee-dee-dee” as it comes in to feed is sometimes mistaken for a song. There seems to be a lot of conversation around the dinner table. At the lower end of the decibel spectrum are the dark-eyed juncos who visit in flocks in the winter. Their conversation is soft, high-pitched and sweet, nearly inaudible. Why do they do this?

There are a number of reasons why birds vocalize. It has been long understood that males sing to proclaim their territory and to attract mates during breeding season. But that does not explain why the females of some species, such as the northern cardinal, Baltimore oriole, eastern blue bird and Carolina wren also sing. Or why some birds, such as the northern mockingbird,



Northern Mockingbird

sing long after the breeding season has concluded. Some speculate that they also do it for the sheer joy of singing, a lovely notion but perhaps a bit anthropomorphic. I like it anyway, so I think I’ll keep it on the list.

It seems that birds like to stay in touch with their own kind. Geese honk to coordinate movement in flight. The cardinal, so attentive to his mate that he will feed her during courtship, chips constantly around the feeder until she joins him. Nestlings stretch their necks and squawk in demand when a parent approaches with food, then settle back down into the nest and whisper when sated. Family members call to one another when the young have fledged to keep the group together. Alarm calls are communally recognized. In fact, researchers wonder if there is a universal language of distress that all animals know. We see that squirrels also react to the blue jay’s predator alert.

Getting back to the song sparrow, I thought I’d like to become more adept at identifying its twitter, so I looked it up in a guidebook on sparrows. The call note is described as a distinctive tchenk, tchip or chimp which, the book states, is a useful aid to identification. Well, that should help me nail it next time.

Animal vocalization is an incredibly fascinating field of study. Most animals are hard-wired for the sounds they make, including all mammals except whales


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Oral History: Joe and Bernice Sowsian

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Once finished with that, they would repair to Hillbilly Hall, where their bravado-fueled behavior sometimes required the assistance of State Police to calm things down.

Today the farm has moved into the twenty-first century but some things have not changed. The property is a designated spot for the annual World Series of Birding and is so admired that one birder wrote to the Governor urging its preservation as "Probably the most beautiful farm in the country." The Sowsians still are running a working farm on the land and still keep cows as they always have done. They own both sides of their end of Orchard Road. The cows know this and wander freely (and slowly) to and fro across the roadway, back and forth to the old spring. All the neighbors are aware of this and respectfully wait for the cows to complete their crossing. Joe says "the cows have the privilege of walking across the road."

Joe and Bernice put the farm, twenty-seven acres of woods and the rest cleared land, into permanent farmland preservation in 1997. They enrolled in a special warm-weather grassland program to provide nesting habitat for bobolinks, upland sandpipers, and other birds that do not have a lot of options in this part of the state. People ask permission to paint watercolors of the surroundings. It is a peaceful place to watch the sunset and one of the best "dark skies" spots in the area to view the heavens at night. The north slope of the Sourlands is a good place. 


2010 Sourland Music and Arts Festival

Though snow may still be on the ground here and there, let us think warm thoughts about the coming 7th Annual Sourland Music & Arts Festival, Saturday July 17th, from 4-11. Staged upon the Polo Field at Hillsborough Country Club, this event is always a memorable Sourland experience for family and friends. Enjoy the lovely views of the Sourlands, and great local music and food. There's always a nice breeze running along the ridge.


New this year will be our first foray into the local arts scene. We understand there are many notable arts and crafts folk living in the Sourlands and its environs, and we are offering them space to show and sell their wares. We would like to invite painters, sculptors, potters, and photographers. By sharing your gifts, you will help the Annual Sourland Music and Arts Festival become a true showplace for the unique character and culture of the Sourland Mountain Region. If you or someone you know would like to be part of this, please contact Caroline Katmann at carolinekat@comcast.net.

The Silent Auction will run from 4-8pm during the show. From a donated basket of goodies and gift cards from Whole Foods Market Princeton, to a week's vacation in Long Beach Island, or perhaps a cave home in Le Loire Valley France, all the auction items are a great chance to support the Sourland Planning Council. If you or your business are interested in sponsoring the festival through advertisement or the auction, get in touch with Deb Fabricatore, (908) 369-5977.

Last year's music included hard hitting blues, funk, and R&B, bluegrass, jazz, classical violins. So plan to stretch out your blanket and chairs and talk with neighbors, make your way over to the food and beverage tent, or just gaze into the clear sky above the Sourland Mountain. This will be a summer event not to miss.

Information and discounted tickets are available online at the web site www.Sourlandmusicfest.net. Help support the important work of the Sourland Planning Council. 

Spring Plantings: Go Native!

As the bloodroot, spring beauty and trout lily wake to greet the spring, and you gear up to tackle spring plantings, please consider choosing native species of trees, shrubs and flowers. The Sourland Planning Council Stewardship Handbook you will be receiving (see the front page article in this issue of *Back Roads*) will provide handy info about natives and invasives. You can also ask your garden center to point out native species in their inventory and/or contact Bowman's Hill Wildflower Preserve regarding their native plant sales (spring 2010 dates: May 8, 9, 15, 16) and/or visit their website at <http://www.bhwp.org/> for information about native plant species. Some area environmental organizations also have native plant sales periodically; check for announcements in the paper. Thank you in advance for your efforts! 

Forest Stewardship

by Jared Rosenbaum


With the recent passage of the Forest Stewardship bill, New Jersey land owners have new options in caring for their woodlands. Landowners are better able to protect and enhance all of their forest's resources, not just timber values. Those with over five wooded acres can qualify for farmland tax assessment; by joining the new Forest Stewardship Program*, they may do so with the aim of caring for their land without having to harvest firewood or timber to meet arbitrary income goals.

This new program frees foresters and other consulting environmental professionals to do their best work in our forests at a time when active management is desperately needed to repair our degraded environment. These professionals can advise landowners on stewarding their forests for a wide spectrum of benefits, including carbon sequestration, clean air, rainwater purification, and, not least, supporting our rich natural heritage of native wildlife and plants.

Under the old system, Woodland Management plans featured some stewardship aspects, but the obligatory tree harvests and culling biased the plans towards developing valuable timber stands with the goal of cutting them. Culling of monetarily less valuable tree species like flowering dogwood, tupelo, black birch, ironwood, and sassafras was common, and the resulting canopy gaps in the forest frequently were an open invitation to invasive plants. Woodland Management plans are still an option, but are mainly for those whose primary interest in their forest is exploitation of its timber resource.

As the largest remaining contiguous forest in Central New Jersey, the Sourlands are ecologically important as such. Our woods host neotropical migrant birds like scarlet tanagers and wood thrushes, which need large, uninterrupted stretches of habitat. Further fragmentation of the Sourlands forest will cause us to lose many rare and beautiful plant and animal species.

With the new Forest Stewardship Program, we have a collective opportunity to restore our local environment to health and abundance. This may be the most meaningful, active, and rewarding means we have to locally address the global environmental crises that threaten our planet.


Restoration-oriented forestry will be different from the forestry of the past. It will not remove trees without assuring that the forest can regenerate. It will manage primarily for native plant and wildlife diversity, not for timber value. It will tread carefully in the more ancient groves, where many conservative species make their last stand. It might help our forests recover their shrub and wildflower layers after decades of overbrowsing by deer. Most of all, restoration forestry will help restore our living systems to full health even in the midst of homes and roads, by teaching an art and ethic of stewardship to landowners. 

* This new state program is not to be confused with the federal Forest Stewardship Program (FSP), which helps non-industrial forest owners develop comprehensive, ecologically sound management plans. The new state program also features Forest Stewardship Plans, but the state Plans confer an additional benefit: differential tax assessments.


We Need Your Help!

Thanks to a generous grant from Washington Crossing Audubon Society, we have been able to fund part of the effort to publish and distribute the upcoming Sourland stewardship handbook, *Living in the Sourlands*. Writing, photography and layout have been accomplished entirely by devoted volunteers, making this a very cost-effective project. But we really need your help to ensure that every Sourlands resident receives a copy.

If you can make a contribution toward this costly mailing—no matter how small or large—we will be most grateful. Your donation will truly have a lasting impact because the information provided will serve the Sourlands and its inhabitants for a long time to come. Only through the good stewardship of many can we hope to ensure the long-term viability of this extraordinary place we call home. We can do this, if we do it together.

If you can help, please write a check to: Sourland Planning Council and mail it to Sourland Planning Council, PO Box 72, Hopewell, NJ 08525 by April 22, Earth Day. We look forward to expressing our gratitude to donors in the next issue of this newsletter. Thank you in advance for anything you can do. 

Thank you, D&R Greenway!

We want to thank and congratulate D&R Greenway Land Trust for its extraordinary preservation efforts. Over 20 years, the Trust has saved more than 22 square miles—14,000+ acres—an area roughly the size of Manhattan. Some of these lands are in the Sourlands. 

Stewardship Handbook Launch!

Please join us on Saturday, May 22nd to celebrate the publication and release of *Living in the Sourlands*, the first ever Sourlands Stewardship Handbook (see our front-page article). Enjoy an inspiring walk, if you wish, and a talk. Learn how to be a good steward of the special place we call home.

Event location: Ted Stiles Preserve at Baldpate Mountain. Time: 2 p.m. Meeting place: Parking lot of Fiddlers Creek Road. For directions please visit www.njtrails.org. Click on Mercer County, then on Ted Stiles Preserve.

Please RSVP at sourlandpc@aol.com. Your RSVP will be confirmed, more information provided, and any questions answered.

Hope to see you there!



Frogs swimming in a vernal pool (Judy Jengo)

Poets Corner

By an Old Stone Wall

Blocked by steeple bushes, wild cherry
and four-foot weeds I can't name,
I glimpse flashes of pink, deep purples.
Wading through brambles
I discover a low stone wall
where showy clusters of columbine
trespass from crevices
and nod in the tall grasses.

Planted with coral-bells and lilies,
my grandmother may have known
old fashioned columbine as
ladies' britches, granny's bonnet,
or little doves, and for an instant

I spy her on her hands and knees,
digging in her prize rose garden,
fingers knuckled with arthritis,
and recall how she brought me
a bouquet when I was in bed
with June grippe, ten years old,
my first give of flowers—
sweetness and thorns.

~ Norma Voorhes Sheard

On the Mountain Critter Twitter

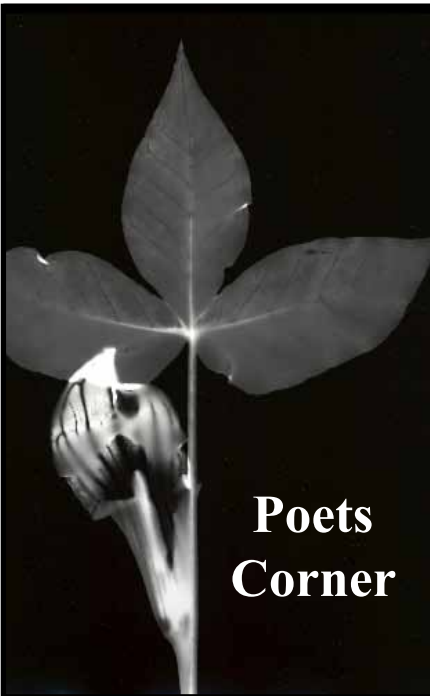
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and dolphins who, like songbirds,
learn their dialects. One could spend a
lifetime learning and appreciating the
ways that animals communicate. If you
want to start with birds, here are a few
references.

*Why Birds Sing: A journey into
the mystery of bird song*, by David
Rothenberg (Basic Books, 2005) is a
musician's exploration into the myster-
ies of birdsong.

Bird Song: A Natural History, by
Don Stap (Oxford University Press,
2005) delves into the science and lore
of birdsong.

The Macaulay Library at the
Cornell Lab of Ornithology is the
world's largest archive of animal
sounds and video of all animal groups.
<http://macaulaylibrary.org>





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Visit Our Website www.sourland.org

It features

- A virtual tour of the Sourlands
- Maps of the Sourlands
- A calendar of events
- News and information about the organization and our planning initiatives
- A history of the Sourlands
- Links to related organizations
- The full Sourlands Smart Growth Phase I Report

Thank you!

The Board of Trustees thanks everyone who generously responded to our annual End-of-Year Giving Campaign. The SPC Trustees have instituted the End-of-year Campaign as an annual opportunity for SPC supporters to make a contribution that is above and beyond the yearly membership dues. And if you missed the opportunity, it's never too late. You can donate through our website, www.sourland.org, or by mail: PO Box 72, Hopewell, NJ 08525.

Visit Our Sourlands Store

New Jersey's Sourland Mountain Softcover, 162 pages, by T.J. Luce \$21.00

Plush Red-breasted grosbeaks & scarlet tanagers: squeeze them and they sing! \$8.00

Bumper sticker: Save the Sourlands.org bumper sticker \$1.00

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Andrea Bonette at
(609) 466-0641
abonette@comcast.net.**