



Back Roads

Sourland Planning Council

www.sourland.org

Summer 2008

The Fifth Annual Sourland Music Festival

This year's Sourland Music Festival, at the Hillsborough Golf & Country Club on July 19, was again a wonderful event. The setting was great, the music was wonderful, and the whole atmosphere was like a family reunion in the heart of the Sourlands, with children playing and folks dancing under the full moon.

Nine bands played music that ranged from folk to jazz to blues and R&B—several more than last year—and everyone agreed that it was a fine line-up.

The show began with John Brunner & the Sourland All-stars, made up of members of our board.

The food was sumptuous, anchored again this year by Nomad Pizza, and featuring the popular blueberries and whipped cream.

The Planning Committee of Tom



Kilbourne, Jim Popik, Seth A. Grossman, and John Brunner worked for six months to plan and organize the festival. Thanks to them and to all our volunteers and

local sponsors for their generous contributions of time and financial support.

The Sourland Music Festival is an annual celebration of local musical talent and people who wish to conserve the Sourlands, its environment and history, and contribute to the efforts of the Sourland Planning Council.

Thank you!



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Nomad Pizza

...and our planning team:

Tom Kilbourne
Seth A. Grossman
Jim Popik
John Brunner

...our volunteers—

**and all of you who
came to the Festival!**

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.

Meeting information

Please come!

The Sourland Planning Council trustees hold meetings on the first Monday of even-numbered months at the historic Hopewell Railroad Station on Railroad Avenue, just off North Greenwood Avenue in Hopewell Borough, at 7:30 p.m. You are warmly invited to join us.

Oct 6 Nov 24 Dec 1

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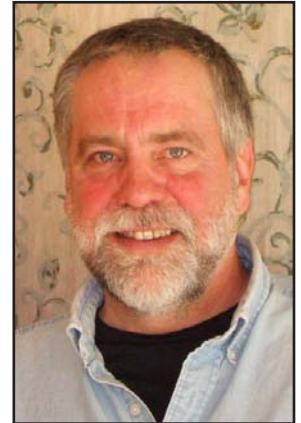
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Sourland Journal

by John P. Brunner
Executive Director



Smart Growth Update

The schedule for completion of the Draft Sourland Region Comprehensive Management Plan has been pushed ahead to September, according to project consultant Frank Banisch (Banisch Associates, Inc). Rough drafts will be circulated in early September to members of the Project Team, and a municipal meeting schedule will be set up with each of the five Sourland townships later in the Fall for discussion of the Draft Plan.

Planning for SPC's Future

SPC's first Draft Strategic Plan will be completed by September 30, 2008. The Stony Brook Millstone Watershed Association's Watershed Institute Grant Program provided funding to produce the Strategic Plan as well as SPC's first formal Fundraising Plan, which will also be completed by the end of September.

SPC began this process back in March 2007 when the Board of Trustees conducted a Prioritization Exercise that identified specific program areas to be addressed. The Prioritization Exercise also identified a critical need for professional staff to help coordinate organizational development and manage expanding Advocacy & Planning and Education & Outreach programs.

The Strategic Planning process has truly been a collaborative effort between the Executive, Education & Outreach, and Advocacy & Planning committees, as well as the Trustees and staff. As part of the external analysis undertaken for the Plan, I visited and/or spoke with individuals involved with several other environmental organizations active in the Sourland Region. Consideration of the programs and initiatives of neighboring organizations helped SPC to identify program goals that would not directly duplicate the efforts of others. Other sources of inspiration for SPC program goals came from recent planning efforts such as the Sourland Watershed Management Plan, State Wildlife Action Plan, and the Sourland Smart Growth Project.

The SPC expects to formally adopt both the Strategic Plan and the Fundraising Plan at its Annual Meeting in November 2008.

On the Western Front

There are many great vantage points from which to view the Sourland Mountain. Notable among these are the views seen from Wertsville Road and Amwell Road, which both parallel the north side of the mountain for several miles.

One of the most dramatic views of the mountain can be seen from Bucks County, at the top of Bowman's Hill Tower.

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Sourlands Steward

Transforming Your Lawn into a Meadow

by Jared Rosenbaum

Here's some Sourland Mountain magic: the first year we stopped mowing our lawn, four native orchids volunteered in our little meadow. Just two years later, our wildflower season begins with the diminutive spring beauty and ends with the purples, whites and yellows of the fall asters. The process was simple, and the results are magnificent.

Lawns have become so common that we now take them for granted. However, the lawn has an interesting history as a decadent statement. European nobility originally used vast lawns to flaunt the amount of unproductive land they could afford to keep. Throughout the last century, the reasons for having a lawn have changed a bit, but we're often accomplishing much the same goal as the old-fashioned aristocracy: keeping both our sources of food, and the natural world, as distant as possible.

Americans now maintain over 30 million acres of lawn; we use 70 million pounds of pesticides on them per year; and 30% of the water consumed on the East Coast goes to watering them. Lawns contribute to erosion and flooding events, and the mowers and blowers we use to maintain them are horrible polluters, emitting 10 to 34 times more hydrocarbon per hour than a typical car.

Converting part or all of your lawn to a meadow is an easy way to surround yourself with beauty and intricacy. It's also a good way to save money, time, and the environment.

Here are three ways to create a meadow. I've organized them in order of increasing commitment. Each requires

mowing just once a year, or even every other year, to prevent a shrub habitat from developing.

1. The Easy Meadow

Select an area of your lawn that does not get a lot of foot traffic, and stop mowing it. You can introduce seeds of native grasses and wildflowers, if you like. Over time, your young meadow will recruit from nearby sources and grow in diversity. If your meadow is dominated by one type of plant, or if alien plant species become a problem, consider one of the ways below.

2. The Caretaker's Meadow

Set up your meadow, as above. Then, plan some daytrips to places with beautiful native meadows: Bowman's Hill Wildflower Preserve, just below New Hope, PA, is surpassingly beautiful. Ask about wildflowers and grasses you like, and introduce them to your meadow, as seed, plugs, or from potted plants. You will be working as nature's gardener, hastening diversity and increasing the beauty of your meadow.

As seasons change and new plants arrive, your meadow will be a great and patient teacher. Get a wildflower guide and learn your plants as they bloom. As you learn, weed out non-native species to create the richest habitat.

3. Building an Ecosystem from Scratch

Young meadows sprung from turfgrass are sometimes slow to loosen the grip of those non-native grasses. Folks who wish to recreate the native prairies that once

continued on pg. 7

Beautiful Native Plants for a Sourlands Meadow

Joe-Pye: Tall plant with whorled leaves and purple flowers in autumn.

Milkweed: Butterflies and wonderful fragrance.

New England Aster: Fall blues

Indian Grass: Slender, tall and graceful.

Goldenrods: Golden blooms. Not the source of hayfever, as commonly believed: that's ragweed.

Little & Big Bluestem: Showy native prairie grasses.

Wild Geranium: A mid-spring beauty.

Golden Ragwort: An adorable flower of spring.

Helen's Flower/Helenium: Beautiful bright yellow.

Bee Balm & Bergamot: Fragrant plants cherished by hummingbirds and butterflies.

All of the above are easily grown from seed, will spread on their own, and are widely available. Beware of generic "meadow mix" seed mixes which frequently contain few if any native species, and many imported invasives like dame's rocket.

Resources:

Bowman's Hill Wildflower Preserve (www.bhwp.org): Information, seeds, and beautiful meadows.

Ernst Conservation Seeds (www.ernstseed.com): A source for locally native plant seeds and mixes.

Books:

Noah's Garden: Restoring the Ecology of Our Own Backyards, by Sarah Stein

The Once and Future Forest: A Guide to Forest Restoration Strategies, by Leslie Jones Sauer

Newcomb's Wildflower Guide, by Lawrence Newcomb

On the Mountain

Profiles of the Creatures & Features We Protect

Goldenrods & Asters

by Pat Sziber



New England Aster
& Goldenrod

Somewhere between the lush dappled green landscape of mid-summer and the orange and umber of fall, there is the splash of yellow and violet that announces the approach of shorter days and cooler nights. The herald is September, and its signature blooms are the goldenrods and asters that turn meadows and roadsides into a calico canvas that beckons shutterbugs, painters, butterflies and bees to capture this fleeting summer sweetness. All too soon, the wildflowers will nod under the weight of the first killing frost.


Take the time to examine these dazzling beauties, say, on a slow walk along a country road. On close examination, the mustard-y yellow and lavender stalks of flowers that embroider the fields disclose a dizzying variety of form and hue. *Newcomb's Wildflower Guide* lists no fewer than thirty species of goldenrod and thirty-nine of aster, which make up a nice chunk of the astoundingly large, complex Daisy Family of plants, formerly known as the Composites. While some are strikingly unique, the traits of many species within each genus are so similar that even the most experienced field naturalist can feel a bit uncertain when it comes to pinpointing a plant's identity.

Most goldenrods are classified in the genus *Solidago*, from the Latin *solidare*—to strengthen or unite—a reference to healing qualities, according to Webster's online dictionary. In New

Jersey, they occur in nearly every habitat type, ranging from sand dunes to damp woods. The most familiar form is the arching, elongated cluster of flowers, such as the familiar rough-stemmed goldenrod (*Solidago rugosa*). But flat-topped clusters such as the lance-leaved goldenrod (*Solidago graminifolia*) are also common in our area. The flower clusters, which range from pale lemon yellow to deep gold, are a good place to start if you want to try your hand at identification. But you are going to need to sort out the endless variety of leaves as well—length, shape, fuzzy or not fuzzy—and they can be infuriatingly tricky. All goldenrods are insect-pollinated, not wind-pollinated. Once their wings are warmed by the September morning sun, tiny native bees and honeybees alike are drawn to the flowers like a magnet.

The asters, all in the genus *Aster*, Latin for star, are no less challenging. The purple New England aster (*Aster novae-angliae*) is the one that comes to mind as the classic aster of our region: tall, lots of large deep-colored flowers. But many are white, like the common heath aster (*Aster pilosus*), or pinkish like the smooth aster (*Aster laevis*.) Most are field flowers, but some are specialists of other habitats, such as the white wood aster (*Aster divaricatus*) which is found throughout the Sourland forests, and the salt marsh aster (*Aster subulatus*) found along the coast. You

can rule out these habitat specialists when you are traipsing through a meadow, but you would still be left with more than thirty species with similar leaves and color. But give it a go! The satisfaction you will gain comes not only with the proud success of identification, but you will also gain a deeper appreciation for the deft hand of nature that created such infinitesimal detail and endless variety in our common wildflowers.

It is good to know that both goldenrods and asters will be willing volunteers in your garden. Learn to recognize the leaves that pop up in late spring, then let them have their way. An ambitious heath aster that sprang up in my own garden provides a baby's breath-like filler for late summer bouquets. And goldenrods provide a fresh splash of color when other blooms are past their prime. Resist dead-heading! Finches will bob on the seed heads, fueling up for those first frosty mornings. Even in winter, the dry brown stalks bowing to the first snowfall or glazed with frozen rain beg to be captured by camera or watercolors. 



Board member/guitarist Jim Popik
at the Sourland Muisic Festival

Sourland Slow Hikes

A New Program of the Sourland Planning Council

All hikes are
free of charge.

The Sourland Planning Council invites you to explore the mountain by joining one of our “Slow Hikes.” The Roaring Rocks picnic hike was a roaring success; see the photos below. We also have added a new fall hike to the program—Rocktober, cosponsored with the Stony Brook Millstone Watershed Association. Led by SBMWA’s Jeff Hoagland, Rocktober will focus on the geology of the mountain.

We call the hikes “slow hikes” because we will take the time to become immersed in native habitats—observing birds, woodland wildflowers, animal tracks, and the growth cycles of the forest. We will share lore, insights and appreciation of central New Jersey’s last great wilderness—Sourland Mountain.

All hikes are free of charge, but pre-registration is mandatory. Details about meeting time/place and trail condition will be provided upon registration. Please register by email. Folks who don’t use email can call John Brunner to register: 215 962-9851.

ing your yard or fields to rich native plant communities that support abundant birdlife and other wild creatures. Hike length: approximately 2 hours. Time: Late morning.

To register, please contact Jared Rosenbaum: jared@palaceofculture.org, 609 651-2705.

Oct. 18 Somerset Preserve Montgomery	Rocktober Jeff Hoagland
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Join this family friendly hike to celebrate the rugged rocks of the Sourland Mountains. Learn about the mountain’s origin, and the forces that gave shape to this mountain while exploring some of the Sourland’s nooks and crannies along the trails of the Sourland Mountain Preserve in Somerset County. This hike will be lead by Jeff

Hoagland, naturalist and Education Director of the Stony-Brook Millstone Watershed Association.

Please register in advance for this program by calling the Watershed Association at (609) 737-7592.

* * *

SPC’s outdoor programs are an excellent way to explore Sourland Mountain’s treasured places. To ensure the quality of the programs, we have set some guidelines. Pre-registration is required, at which time specific details such as meeting place will be provided. The number of participants will be limited at the discretion of each program presenter. Participants will be required to sign a waiver.

Please dress appropriately with sturdy shoes or boots, etc. Please don’t hesitate to ask for more information

about trail conditions and difficulty. Unless otherwise noted, these programs are designed for adults and older children. Dogs are not allowed.



Sept. 21 Sourlands Stewards: Native Wildflowers & Shrubs Cedar Ridge Preserve Jared Rosenbaum Hopewell

The Cedar Ridge Preserve in Hopewell is comprised of old farm fields and hedgerows that are being restored by D & R Greenway’s Stewardship staff. We’ll walk through meadows of native wildflowers and grasses, and see beautiful native shrubs like dogwoods, blackhaw, spicebush and hazelnut. Land Steward Jared Rosenbaum will talk about the restoration process and about convert-



SlowHikers headed for Roaring Rocks, and enjoying the table rock, on the Roaring Rocks Picnic Hike.



Mountain Folks


Tom Skillman

by Cliff Wilson


Sourland Journal

(cont'd)

Located just a few miles south of New Hope, the Tower provides a stunning view of the western-most front of the mountain. This is where the Delaware River cuts through the erosion resistant diabase rock, and also happens to be the most challenging stretch of rapids along the entire length of the river.

The Tower was constructed atop Bowman's Hill to commemorate what may have been a lookout point for General Washington's troops to watch the banks of the Delaware River for any enemy activity. The Tower is also located adjacent to the Bowman's Hill Wildflower Preserve. For more information and directions go to www.ushistory.org/washingtoncrossing. 

Do you have financial skills?

The Sourland Planning Council is hoping to add someone with financial skills to our board of trustees. If you are at all interested, we invite you to contact our president, Andrea Bonette (609 466-1169) or come to one of our meetings to meet the other extraordinary people who are already serving. 

Do you know a special place?

If you have a special place to share on Sourland Mountain, or know interesting stories of "days-gone-by," we invite you to contact John Brunner, our Executive Director at director@sourlands.org.

Tom Skillman's life is closely intertwined with the history of the area, and he has devoted a great deal of that life to documenting that history. His apartment contains a trove of historical items he has collected in his 96 years of living in the town that bears his family name. The collection includes stone tomahawks and arrowheads ("I found seven in one day!"); Civil War gear; and 34 large looseleaf binders of carefully organized news clippings, photos, letters and documents.

Tom is a great-grandson of Joseph Skillman, one of the founders of the town of Skillman. The names on their family tree—Stryker, Van Cleef, etc.—include those of the Sourland Mountain's original Dutch settlers. Tom's grandfather, for whom he is named, served in the civil war. Although Tom's two sisters have passed away, his two younger brothers, also in their nineties, are still around. Tom's late wife Beatrice was Montgomery's first Township Administrator. A granddaughter graduated from Montgomery High School this year, and he has four great-grandchildren.


Tom grew up on the family farm near Hollow Road. He attended the one-room Skillman School, and later rode the train to and from high school in Bound Brook. At that time, there was a passenger rail station in Skillman, which brought visitors to the nearby New Jersey Neuropsychiatric Institute, known locally at the time as the "State Village," and later called the North Princeton Developmental Center. Today this property is owned by Montgomery Township, which plans to preserve most of it as open space, redeveloping the rest as a "village within a park" called Skill-

man Village.

The railroad bisected the original Skillman farm. Heading north, trains would stop to pick up Tom's high-school classmates in Harlingen, Belle Mead and Manville. (Today, this stretch of rail is used for freight only, but there is a proposal under consideration to reopen the West Trenton Line to passenger service, with stops at West Trenton, I-95, Hopewell Borough, Belle Mead, and Hillsborough, with connecting service to Newark and New York via the Raritan Valley Line.)

Tom's father was a founding member of the Blawenburg Band, playing alto cornet—an instrument that no longer exists. (It doesn't even get a mention in Wikipedia. Apparently the closest substitutes today are the flugelhorn and French horn.) "My father bought cornets for all three of us boys, but none of us took to it," Tom says. The band rehearsed in a blacksmith shop in Blawenburg, and Tom has a photo of the 1901-1902 group, with Frederic Skillman circled.

Tom has a particular fondness for the old stacked-rock walls that survive from the 18th and 19th centuries. "There are some beautiful stone fences back on the Beagle Club property," he says, referring to a parcel off Hollow Road that Montgomery Township has preserved as open space. "I wish there was someone who would preserve them."

How has Sourland Mountain changed during Tom Skillman's life? The large amount of development is obvious, but Tom also notes changes in wildlife, particularly the deer population. "You seldom saw one," he says. "I went hunting a number of times, but I never got one." 

Heads-up For Prospective Property Owners in the Sourlands


by Andrea Bonette

Transforming Your Lawn (cont'd)

ranged into New Jersey may need to reintroduce some signature species.

To start from a blank slate, three methods are commonly used: disking, herbicide, or controlled burns. A seed mix containing 80% native grasses and 20% forbs (wildflowers) should be sown over the cleared site, to create a stable and diverse ecosystem.

You can use your old mower to maintain paths through your meadow. If the annual mow is too much of a strain for it, consider hiring a local farmer or landscaper to cut your meadow after the first hard frost. One can also mow once every other year, leaving seed heads to disperse seeds, and leaving food for birds and other winter wildlife.

Whichever method you choose, you'll find yourself surrounded by life, color, intrigue and complexity. 

Membership Renewal


The annual SPC membership renewal was mailed out in June. If you did not receive this mailing please contact us. Membership dues help SPC meet basic expenses. If you have already responded with your membership dues THANK YOU! If you haven't, please save SPC the expense of a reminder notice and send yours at your earliest convenience, or better yet renew your membership online at www.sourland.org.

What makes the Sourlands different from any other part of central New Jersey is its sixty square miles of contiguous forest underlain by very hard rock. The Mountain is an extremely sensitive ecosystem with a very limited water supply, easily eroded soils, and a mature forest that supports unique wildlife habitats. As a result, property ownership in the Sourlands calls for greater care than it does in many other parts of the state. Land use and development decisions that might not be so disruptive in other environments can, when applied in the Sourlands, erode the very qualities of living here that so attract newcomers.

Take, for example, a key element of living in a traditional "suburban" development—a large, thoroughly watered and generously fertilized lawn. Everybody likes to look at trees, but they can't coexist with a large house, an extensive paved driveway and a sizeable lawn. In the battle between these two opposing goods, the trees often lose. But the largest contiguous forest in central New Jersey—a major source of the region's great appeal—can't afford to lose too many trees to a vision that works fairly well in the suburbs.

In an effort to help new residents on the Mountain to understand the value and importance of a deep, healthy forest, East Amwell Township has created a "Public Information Sheet for Sourland Mountain Protection," which the Township sends to every realtor in this area. It explains the ordinances that are intended to preserve the ecological integrity and special character of the Sourlands, dealing with limits on the clearing of trees and understory, the maximum lot coverage,

limits on farming activities, soil disturbances, and health issues concerning septic systems and wells. The Township asks anyone selling real estate in the Mountain to inform prospective buyers of Sourland property about the restrictions imposed by these land use ordinances. The document also tells prospective purchasers how to find out just what the ordinances say early in the process of selecting a new home or homesite so they can make a truly informed decision. Nobody wants to find out after they've bought a home that the dreams they had for their property won't work and aren't allowed.

Each of the five Townships with jurisdiction in the Sourlands has these kinds of protective ordinances in place, but they differ from town to town. Newcomers who are not aware of these may unknowingly inflict lasting damage on the environment. The Sourland Planning Council, along with our governmental and nonprofit partners, has been working for several years to establish a regional plan that will incorporate our common values and goals for the Sourlands, but while that plan is still developing, we hope that each municipality will develop some sort of "early warning system" for prospective new residents along the lines of the one in place in East Amwell. This is one more way of ensuring that the Mountain remains the magical place it has been for time beyond memory. If you think it's a good idea, please tell your township planning board about it. Copies of the East Amwell document can be forwarded upon request by our president, Andrea Bonette—abonette@comcast.net. 

**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

**Help Preserve the
Somerset Preserve**

**Work details with the Somerset
County Park rangers**

Readers are invited to join the Park Rangers for trail maintenance day in the Sourland Preserve in Somerset County. Dates and times are:

Saturday, Aug. 23 9:00 am
 Wednesday, Sept. 10 5:30 pm

For more info contact Somerset County Park Rangers at www.somersetcountyparks.org or call 908-231-0802 ext. 21

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Sourland Planning Council



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