

November/December 2006



www.paxriverkeeper.org

Semi-Monthly Update

Patuxent Riverkeeper

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Journey into Whole Thinking

By Fred Tutman, Patuxent Riverkeeper

Different Worlds, Similar Visions

As Patuxent Riverkeeper, I had the unique opportunity to attend a retreat in late August at the Center for Whole Communities in Waitsfield, Vermont. The center provides retreats and other experiences aimed at revitalizing the fusion between people, land, and communities. I was nominated and funded for this experience by the Town Creek Foundation. I had the chance at Knoll Farm to meet a diverse group of people with common interests.

Classie Parker spends her days planning how to better connect with nature. She works in gardens and preserves the fruits and vegetables grown with her own hands. She works with neighbors to get more land in production, better crops, and more involvement from the community. Classie lives in Harlem, New York.

Kevin Dahl lives in Tucson, Arizona. His job is to find, protect, and propagate the seeds and plants of the endangered agriculture of Native Americans. The archeology of our food is his passion and protecting and sharing vital seeds also saves the critical culture and wisdom of our ancestors.

Ted Clements is a young lawyer from Rhode Island who is passionate about the environment. He feels deeply about the importance of protecting land and communities from inappropriate growth. He works at a land trust to save the environment using his legal skills.

Audrey Peterman of Atlanta runs Earthwise, an organization that seeks to get more ethnic minorities engaged in using our national park system.

Erika Allen works for a non-profit group that promotes community-supported agriculture, advocating for food grown "by people for people," that is wholesome, free of chemicals, and which helps build the sense of partnership and community in the Greater Chicago area.



Morning mist rises from the Mad River Valley at Knoll Farm, VT.

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Patuxent Riverkeeper 2nd Anniversary Party

Sights, Sounds, and Flavors

In Fall 2006, we held a celebration marking our second anniversary and brought together our members, volunteers, board members, and others who have helped Patuxent Riverkeeper get its start. High winds and forecasted rain forced the planned outdoor buffet and bonfire to be shifted indoors and into nearby Fairhaven School. Our guests found a 50' table, spread with organic and healthful treats—delicacies both new and unfamiliar—and biodegradable plates, bowls, and cutlery.



Tom Wisner performs at our Anniversary Party.

Together we watched the documentary film, “The End of Suburbia” (review below), and held a group discussion about the social and cultural implications of peak oil usage.

Guests were also treated to an interactive musical performance by veteran folk singer Tom Wisner, using his fascinating collection of drums, guitars, percussion instruments, and more. The festivities concluded with a jam session, using resonant plastic tubes and Tom’s sound effects from trumpeting elephants.

A good time was had by all. Despite the weather, it was a warm birthday party for a watershed advocacy group that is officially two years young.

In the Next Newsletter

Our next issue takes on the timely and controversial subject of growth.

Is it that regional population growth is an inevitable destroyer of water quality, or is the real problem that real estate growth and profits need to be reined in with planning and land use reforms? When do property rights collide with environmental rights?

**Website
Receives
Facelift
Check it Out!**

www.paxriverkeeper.org

Movie Review: The END of SUBURBIA Oil Depletion and The Collapse of The American Dream

by Dick Lahn

We know that we are going to run out of oil but not in our lifetime; and, if we did, the marketplace or scientists would find the next source. “The END of SUBURBIA” scares us by taking a bunch of intelligent people who in no uncertain manner tell us that we are on the down slope of the oil availability bell curve; that no one is paying any attention; and that those of us in the ‘burbs are going to take the biggest hit because we are the most oil-dependent.

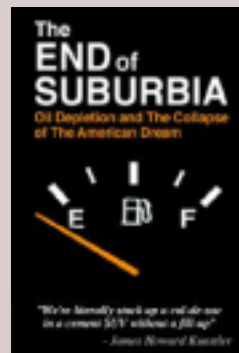
The movie eased into the “dark side” with a historical perspective of black and white *Father Knows Best* clips, the development of the first car, and the creation of the Interstate Highway System, and ending with a showing of suburban developments.

Then down came the boom. Segments of interviews with twelve experts, most with soft science resumes—some you may know:

James Howard Kunstler, *Home From*

Nowhere; Peter Calthorpe, founder of the Congress for the New Urbanism; and Matthew Simmons, CEO of the world’s largest Energy Investment Bank, Simmons & Co. International, with Halliburton and the World Bank as clients.

They succeed in scaring you to death, leaving you wondering how you personally are going to survive this mess.



Riverkeeper Kayak Tourism

Lessons Learned, a Look Ahead

During 2006, Patuxent Riverkeeper piloted a program of Geo-Tourism Tours, using kayaks to get more people into the water so they could become aware of watershed's problems and enjoy its finer points first-hand. The aim is to get people outdoors, involved in physical pursuits, and bring them closer to nature. These tourism excursions make the Great Outdoors more attainable and raise appreciation and stewardship



Riverkeeper Sustainability Tour paddling.

for our region's natural resource attractions. The venture also provides an excellent means for Riverkeeper staff to explore not only our own, but also other nearby watersheds. We received valuable feedback from others about the work we are doing.

Staffer, Lori Edmonds, organized a series of Sustainability Tours, aimed at raising awareness of how our collective living habits and practices contribute to the watershed's health. People were intrigued by the opportunity to learn about what they can do to improve our waterways, to sample new and different foods, and to discover what is being done by others to protect the environment.

We found enthusiastic support for our tours and there were many bright moments, like seeing a mirage a mile offshore near Sotterly Plantation, abundant wildlife in the reed grasses near Jug Bay, moonlit paddles, riotous autumn leaves reflecting off mirrored waters, and munching donuts while the morning mist cleared before a striking river sunrise. The sights and sounds of our waterways left each who participated with "Hallmark moments," and, for some, deeply personal and indelible memories. People appreciated the opportunity to experience the watershed in a guided scenario, the chance to meet new people, and the fact that all the necessary equipment, training, and assistance was provided for a reasonable flat fee.

In 2007, we plan to continue these efforts by expanding our kayak fleet, diversifying the types of boats, and broadening the scope of the offerings and the geographic range of the trips. One exciting facet of this growing venture is the conversion of a newly acquired miniature school bus into the "River Bus." The bus will have ample room for passengers, camping and paddling gear, and other amenities to provision extended day trip and weekend adventures to exciting destinations.

While Sustainability Tours will continue to be available to destinations within the Patuxent Watershed, the River Bus will be suitable for outfitting overnight camping trips in selected watershed destinations, like Assateague Island, Tuckahoe State Park, Allegheny County, and the even the Delaware Gap. Activities will include paddling, tubing, hiking, and perhaps even skiing. Each River Bus trip will have an optimum capacity of 12 paddlers, plus a driver and 1-2 guides. On overnight trips, the bus driver will also serve as a trail chef and quartermaster.



Conceptual drawing for the new River Bus.

This Winter will be spent converting, painting, and adding new safety equipment to the bus. We'll also be planning a renewed Spring roster of trips. Racks are being planned for the roof and trailering capacity for hauling the boats. A new sound system is being planned, too (in case passengers tire of singing Partridge Family songs a cappella).

Seafood Collapse by 2048

A recent study predicted a collapse of all fish stocks by 2048. If current trends of overfishing and pollution continue, this collapse is unavoidable. A study, in the November issue of the journal *Science*, was conducted by a team of ecologists and economists, lead by Boris Worm of Dalhousie University, and funded by the National Science Foundation's National Center for Ecological Synthesis and Analysis. The study focused on seafood originating from the world's oceans; however, similar concerns have been expressed by ecologists about threats to fish in the Great Lakes and other bodies of water, including rivers and freshwater.

The international team spent four years analyzing 32 controlled experiments, studies from 48 marine protected areas, and data from the UN Food and Agriculture Organization's database of all fish and invertebrates caught worldwide from 1950 to 2003. They also examined 1000-year time series for a dozen coastal regions, drawing on data from archives, fishery records, sediment cores, and archaeological data.

"At this point 29% of fish and seafood species have collapsed—that is, their catch has declined by 90%. It is a very clear trend, and it is accelerating," said Worm. "If the long-term trend continues, all fish and seafood species are projected to collapse within my lifetime—by 2048. It looks grim and the projection of the trend into the future looks even grimmer," he continued. "But it's not too late to turn this around. It can be done, but it must be done soon. We need a shift from single species management to ecosystem management. It just requires a big chunk of political will to do it."

The team is calling for new marine reserves, better management to protect against overfishing, and tighter regulations and controls on pollution. Changes can be made to prevent this total collapse. Study areas set up to protect and improve marine biodiversity overwhelming found that the diversity of species can recover dramatically and, with it, the ecosystem's productivity and stability.

Little Patuxent River Clean Up

On Saturday, November 4, thirteen eager volunteers met at the Wincopin Parking Area for the Patuxent Branch Trail near Savage, Maryland. Once assembled, they made their way to a site of vernal pools along the banks of the Little Patuxent River. The area had severely flooded during heavy rainfall in the last

week of June, leaving the area littered with debris. The site is down an embankment from Vollmerhausen Road, a major thoroughfare traveled

by commuters and school buses. The heavy traffic adds to the trash littering the already flooded area. Howard County Recreation and Parks graciously provided trash bags and trash pickup for the event.

Together, the volunteers were able to remove nearly 450 pounds of trash, including a large tractor-trailer tire from the floodplain of the Little Patuxent River. Some other intriguing items removed from the area included a bicycle, a spool of approximately 200' of telephone wire, and a rusted metal wheel rim.



Volunteers work together to roll a large tire.



Volunteers pose after a morning of cleaning the riverbanks.

Patuxent River Summit 2006

Over two hundred people gathered on October 6th for the first ever Patuxent River Appreciation Days/ Patuxent River Summit. The event brought together scientists, elected officials, regulators/enforcers, citizens, and business interests to look at the issues facing the future water quality of the Patuxent. Distinguished guests included Senator Bernie Fowler (retired) and Governor Robert Ehrlich.

Dr. Walter Bonyton of the Chesapeake Biological Labs began the proceedings with a visual presentation tracing the evolution of efforts to protect the Patuxent from the 1950s to the present. Key findings included that, while point source pollution sources, such as waste water treatment plants, have made great strides in improving their technological efficiency at treating sources of key contaminants, the nonpoint sources from urban runoff, fertilizer-based nutrients and growth-related factors, are growing at an alarming rate and with unrelenting consequences. Literally, the spiraling growth of new construction and ever-expanding population in the watershed is burying the river in silt, sediment, and nutrients.



Participant Rogard Ross poses a question.

The value of the Patuxent Summit for participants was not so much that the data presented was purely new information, but instead that it was a focused session where all the data was in one place, with the chance to deliberate with experts. In this focused setting, the “smoking guns” became cannons. The sneaking suspicion that we are losing the war to save this tributary was revealed as a certainty, unless we overhaul our tactics and pull together before it is too late.

This raises the need for growth management in terms of how we build and accommodate new growth. It raises the bar for the technologies and the lawmaking approaches we use to mitigate the predictable effects growth has on the environment. Here are some thoughts about key themes that emerged from the Summit:



*Moderator & Panel:
What's being done to protect the River?*

Growth is coming?

The persistent mantra that “growth is coming” is almost like forecasting rain after the flooding has already begun. It is misguided to dismiss pollution as an acceptable by-product of population growth. It suggests unfairly that we are hypocrites if we accept growth but also demand clean water. Yet, the issues in front of us are not to do the impossible (stop all growth), but instead to find ways to balance the equities of those people seeking to grow wealthy from this trend against those who have raised the alarm that unmanaged growth will foreseeably kill our rivers and our way of life.

Property Rights!

The entire way of life and doing business that converts our natural resources to cash has become a war of attrition between those who support responsible growth practices and those who take no responsibility for the broader environmental problems facing us all. Property owners and developers would have us believe that we are powerless to object, because their investment rights are superior to our environmental rights. Many are unwilling to look at alternate ways of profiting or developing because it is not in their personal self-interest to do so, and they have amassed deep influence over the lawmaking and law enforcement process to advance their aims. Additionally, it happens because we let them get away with it.

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Political Will...

The persistent cry that we lack political will is an ironic one when we consider that our government is one allegedly of, by and for the people. Does the political will of today actually represent our collective societal willpower, or have some parties gained undue advantage over the governmental machinery? Is it possible that our attempts to protect our waterways, while accommodating those who profit from their pollution, have produced a sort of paralysis? Blaming the problems on the failure of politicians to do the right thing almost seems like a cop-out. We elected these people and we continue to re-elect some of them. In theory, OURS is the political will. The solutions lie with us and not solely with elected officials.

Money to Clean Up Our River

Money was treated as a subject too vast to be adequately covered in the Summit. Is it possible that there is no point spending money to clean our watersheds until we first eliminate the practices that degraded them? Have we institutionalized pollution by making cleanups a regular line item in a broader culture that expends money even where such expenditures alone cannot possibly produce a clean river? Is lack of money a root cause or just an excuse that absolves us of responsibility? The pay-as-you go approach to pollution makes a sub-industry out of remediation. Strictly speaking, the lack of funding could be a symptom but never the real cause or reason we don't have a clean river. This raises real questions about our ability to chart a course for solutions, stick to them, fund them, and then commit the willpower, money, and social policies needed to really solve the problems. We should also be wary about monetary shortfalls created where polluters have left us holding with the bill.

Education

The premise that we can bring about sweeping change in our environmental culture merely by educating people and hoping they will do the right thing seems naïve. Certainly education is important for present and upcoming generations. In addition to teaching citizens to appreciate and enjoy natural resources and showing them how they directly impact the environment, we also need to educate them how to advocate effectively and how to fight within the law for the birthright of a river with swimmable fishable waters. Educating people that we individually are collectively part of the problem is also vital—as long as we do not overlook the willful and indifferent pollution caused by those who pollute wholesale for profit. It is not fair to lump pollution caused by people leading normal lives with that caused by negligence and indifference created by business interests profiting from it.

The Call to Action

Senator Bernie Fowler had the last word, a much deserved privilege and honor. He has become a living symbol of the outrage suffered by a generation over something of great value that was taken away -- a productive river and way of life that has now been replaced by hollow promises and regulatory double-talk. Our abundant shellfish harvests have been replaced with a paper marker, signed "property rights." The standard of a clean and healthy river has been replaced instead by a "flush fee" that, instead of delivering the clean rivers it promises to subsidize steadily growing wastewater plants and facilitates burgeoning new growth in our watersheds. Broken promises and meaningless sound bites are the real challenge for the post Bernie Fowler generation. Bernie emphasized that older citizens like himself serve as the collective memory and conscience that can help the rest of us quantify what we have lost and what must be regained. You simply cannot take a clean river from people who have a clear recollection of what it was once like. This lowering of our clean water standards has taken decades; the only hope of recovery is that we can keep reminding people of the possibilities. Bernie's legacy and message to us all IS the call to action; never give up, and to not accept anything less than the best when it comes to clean water.

Note: We have ordered a transcript of the 2006 Patuxent Summit and will post on our web site.

NOTICE TO DEVELOPERS

St. Mary's County Waives Environmental Regulations - Rules Them to be too Onerous on Developers

By Bob Lewis

Leonardtown, Maryland, October 12, 2006 — St. Mary's County officials ruled today that developers no longer have to abide by those pesky little *environmental* regulations. In a unanimous ruling, the St. Mary's County Board of Appeals granted developer P.F. Summers carte blanche license to develop without regard to environmental restrictions in the *St. Mary's County Stormwater Management, Grading, Erosion and Sediment Control Ordinance (adopted 05-13-2002)*.

Last summer, the local watershed protection organization, Potomac River Association, filed the appeal, which precipitated today's decision. PRA argued that the grading permits for six lots of the 58-lot *Woods at Myrtle Point* subdivision could not meet the terms of the local ordinances. Under section 4.4.3.h of the ordinance, development is forbidden on lots with excessively steep slopes.

Throughout the past two and a half years of site clearing and roadway construction, Maryland Department of the Environment inspectors—more often than not—reported that the site did not meet the State's stormwater control requirements. At least three times, stop work orders were issued for egregious violations. In one instance in which a sediment trap had become overwhelmed with mud, tank trucks were brought in to flush the mud out of a trap and down into the river. In an email to a local resident, MDE inspector Gregg Kolarik stated that this instance was more than just an oversight, but clearly intentional and criminal in nature. No fines were levied.

Testimony on the track record of the subdivision, the erodible nature of the soils, and the decreasing depth of Mill Creek was not welcome by the Board of Appeals. The chairman repeatedly stated, "Keep the testimony to the grading permit for the six lots."

Countering neighbors' testimony that mud routinely filled Mill Creek after every rainfall of an inch or more, P. F. Summers representative Jim Gotsch told the Board of Appeals that brown waters entering Mill Cove Creek, a tributary to the Patuxent River, did not contain pollutants, saying "It's like coffee."

The Board of Appeals has 60 days to issue the written ruling on the case, *Potomac River Association et al v. St. Mary's County*. PRA president Erik Jansson told media representatives that they will wait for the written ruling before announcing plans to appeal to the Circuit Court. They have 30 days to appeal.

Upon being told of the Board of Appeals ruling, Kolarik said in an email, "Losing the appeal is a huge blow to the citizens of St. Mary's County. They just don't realize it."

Bob Lewis is Executive Director of the St. Mary's River Watershed Association.

Preacher for the Patuxent: The Movie

"Preacher for the Patuxent," a movie which took more than five years to complete, honors and recognizes the achievements of and Bernie Fowler, former Maryland State Senator, champion of the Patuxent River, and state environmental pioneer. During the course of the video, Bernie tries to realize his lifelong goal: restoration of the Patuxent to the clarity and purity it enjoyed in the 1950s. In the 1970s and 1980s, Bernie and his fellow crusaders had great success in moving forward this agenda. Today he and his cohorts fight an uphill battle against time and conflicting priorities to realize this heartfelt dream.

Filmmaker, Frank Cervarich, has DVDs of "Preacher for the Patuxent" available for purchase for \$20. Orders can be mailed to Capital City Communications, PO Box 60015, Potomac, Maryland 20859. Checks are payable to Capital City Communications. Visit www.ccitycom.com or call 301-762-2956.

2007 Draft Work Plan

Executive Summary: Patuxent Riverkeeper has an ambitious array of projects planned for 2007. The involvement of volunteers has helped the organization stretch its capacity beyond the realm of paid staff and full funding. We work on a continuum of citizen and stakeholder engagement, outreach, hands-on projects, focused advocacy and developing the infrastructure for a long range and viable watershed protection group that works on issues affecting the entire Patuxent Basin.

Our work in 2007 includes some exciting targets:

Patuxent Roughnecks. The roughnecks work crew will be pushing further north on the main stem of the Patuxent and on the Little Patuxent in order to clear fish barriers and also make navigation possible for paddlers seeking to access the river.

Paddle Trail Website. The Riverkeeper is partnered with several other groups to design and publish a public website with practical resources to help paddlers learn how to use the growing water trail along the Patuxent.

Stormwater Reforms. Patuxent Riverkeeper is working with a coalition of advocates and legislators to bring about substantial changes in the way that sediment and storm water run-off are regulated in Maryland. We will be conducting a public interest advertising campaign to help raise the public awareness of the need for change.

River Patrols. Our plans are to beef-up river patrols in the southern portion of the river. In the past, we have lacked a deep-water boat suitable for those sections. With that problem resolved (new boat!), the bright red Patuxent Riverkeeper motor launch will become a familiar sight during 2007, investigating the problems of the river below Benedict to the Chesapeake Bay.

Geo-Tourism. The response to our 2006 paddle trips was encouraging and we will be expanding the tour in 2007 with new destinations, new equipment, and a broader range of destinations. We are also partnering with other Waterkeepers in the region to offer more diversified tourism excursions.

The Annual Patuxent Clean Up. We will continue our efforts to grow the Annual Clean-up with new sites, more sites, and a wider network of partners and volunteers.

Patuxent Sojourn 2007. Patuxent Riverkeeper remains a participant and partner in the Annual Patuxent Sojourn and its aims for introducing visitors, new and old, to the premier attractions of the watershed.

Advocacy. We are stepping up the volunteer and staff resources in order to resolve complaints faster and track issues and complaints in our files for improved resolutions.

2007 Growth Management Summit. Based on the findings of the Fall 2006 PRAD/Patuxent River Summit, we are planning an interim mini-Summit in the North of the watershed to look at growth management concerns and their implications for the future of water quality in the river.

For up to date information on these programs and activities or information about how you can become involved, contact us at 301-249-8200 and/or check our web site regularly, www.paxriverkeeper.org.
Note: Our Bi-Annual Progress Report of our activities will be posted on our web site in early December.



Public Opinion of Election Results

Patuxent Riverkeeper recently asked members or boosters of our work from each of our seven counties to weigh in on how they think the changes brought about by recent elections will affect the environment, in general, and the Patuxent River, in particular.

I suspect those cherished local causes already backed by just-elected Democrats will move to the forefront. But, for big issues—meeting the goals of the 2000 Chesapeake Bay Agreement, restoration of major tributaries of the Chesapeake, sweeping reform in response to global warning—more than a flip-flop in political party control is necessary for clear cut victories. For these major environmental issues to succeed will require motivating and involving the whole population of the Chesapeake Bay watershed, having them rise up with one angry voice to protest the condition of our environment and refusing to be silenced until wide sweeping improvements are clearly discernable.

Frank Cervarich, filmmaker
“Preacher for the Patuxent”

Regardless of political, racial, spiritual orientation, human and indeed all living beings have basic needs to survive, so any platform that assists us humans to find our path through the thicket of self interests to reach the goal of protecting the public trust of preserving our basic needs, is the litmus test I use for such questions.

Robert Boone
Anacostia Watershed Society

Often, politicians make pretty speeches about protecting our air, waterways and land from toxic substances and then support toxic environmental policies. I hope the recent election results in leaders with genuine interest and action regardless of party affiliation. The rivers do not offer up safe fish to the party in favor and serve mercury-laced fish to others. We’re all in this together.

Elaine Tutman
Retired Sanitarian (and mother of a Riverkeeper)

Being a politician is a very hard job that has at its core the ability to listen. It is important though, for those who speak out to be clear, succinct and realistic in expressing your goal. The Patuxent should be clear, navigable, and accessible to the public. The private sector should be challenged to find an economically viable way to achieve this goal. This can be done.

John A. Lally
Attorney at Law

I was greatly pleased by how much the environment was discussed during campaign season. The incoming governor and more than one-third of winning legislators have pledged not to raid Program Open Space funding. We heard many statements from Governor O’Malley that he will push better storm water management rules. Addressing global warming for the first time was in the campaign platforms of many candidates. This will help us pass real reforms.

Brad Heavner
State Director Environment Maryland

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No matter which candidate I read about before the election I don't feel any of them really know what is best for the local farmers or the Rural Tier. I do hope we see more real help come for the local farmers and the people that live in the Rural Tier from the newly elected officials. Instead of worrying about how to fatten the pockets of developers.

Jeff Loveless
Little Springs Rabbitry

When I'm on the river, enjoying a quiet moment watching the trees go by, I don't think of the Patuxent as a Republican River or a Democratic River. I see it as the trough of a catchment area, an area that needs environmental help. It's the politician's job (from either party) to ensure programs and policies are in place to safeguard the proper stewardship of these assets.

Jim Dwyer
Patuxent River Paddler

The election of so many officials at the state and federal level who strongly supported cleaning up the Chesapeake Bay offers hope that there will be more effective efforts to clean up Maryland waters, especially the Patuxent River. This trend to better protect our natural resources means that future generations of families will be able to enjoy the beauty and bounty of the river knowing that pollution will be reduced and native plants and animals will rebound. At the same time, we all need to continue working together to insure that our political leaders know that Maryland's residents continue to support strong, effective actions to clean pollution from our rivers, creeks, and streams.

Len Zuza
Watershed Citizen

Will the recent elections help efforts to improve our environment and specifically the Patuxent River? Improving and safeguarding the health of our world should have no political boundaries. Quality of life issues such as the environment can be costly; but the long term benefits will outweigh such costs. While Democrats generally seem to be more willing to provide funding for our environment, all parties, Democrat, Republican, Green, and any others, all must work together to this end regardless of political differences. We owe it to our earth, to our country, our state, and to our Patuxent River.

Ralph Eshelman
Owner and CEO of Eshelman and Associates

WANTED: Riverkeeper Work Vehicle

We have an urgent need for a full-sized, full-powered 4WD pickup truck. Our current short-bed pickup has insufficient frame weight to pull our patrol motorboats and not enough room in the cargo bed to haul trees, roughneck's tools, and the trash gathered from our river cleanups. The 4WD capability is necessary because of the muddy and marshy off-road places where Riverkeeper work is often conducted. We are raising funds during 2007 to acquire a vehicle to serve our needs.

If you have any suggestions, referrals, or leads for where we can find a dependable used pickup truck with a known maintenance history and an affordable cost (commensurate with our non-profit resources), please contact fred@paxriverkeeper.org.

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The purpose of “whole” retreats is to provide activists, community organizers, and others with a brief break away from their everyday lives in order to meet and interact with other people on compatible journeys. The retreats also allow participants to share and collect information about issues of common concern and build a sense of community (albeit a temporary one) on the beautiful 400-acre Knoll Farm overlooking Vermont’s Mad River Valley.

From many walks, far flung geography, and diverse backgrounds, all these people shared a vital “sense of place” in their home communities, with deep ties to the landscape that surrounds them. All seek to live in close harmony with nature and have a deeply personal sense of alarm over the deplorable state of the land stewardship ethic in our country.

Knoll Farm

At Knoll Farm, nearly everything is reused, recycled, and environmentally friendly. Visitors are assigned their own tent. The nearby meadows and pastures are used to generate sheep’s wool, food for the farm, and other essentials for local consumption. We took our meals in a huge barn, decorated like a sort of club house, filled with antiques, musical instruments, and other curios. At the base of a rolling hill next to the barn, is a natural drainage pond where you can take an ice cold dip with the mist of the valley floating over you.



Knoll Farm co-founder Peter Forbes and others plant trees.

was refreshingly “New England crisp” and the leaves had just started to change.

Everyone worked on the farm, taking on various tasks such as working in the garden or cleaning in the kitchen. We hiked the fields and trails. Some gathered in the afternoons to play barefoot soccer in the pasture. (In fact, several of us are still nursing aches, bruises and minor injuries from these exuberant games.) We woke to the sound of gongs echoing over the meadows and greeted the day with silence for the first few hours before gathering in a huge yurt on the top of a hill. There we shared work and life experiences, insights about “community,” and insights about social change. We mused about the future of the planet and the role each of us hope to play.

Essentially, we created a small community in Vermont in order to get better perspective on the communities from which we came.



The electric car parked and the communal barn at Knoll Farm.

The loos there are composting toilets. There is an electric motor car to get around the grounds.

All of the food served at Knoll Farm is organic, leans toward vegetarian, and is lovingly prepared on-site. Most of it comes from the regional “food shed,” meaning that it was grown locally and is part of a network of local growers and producers.

The farm is isolated and during the week-long retreat there is very little contact with the nearby town. Yoga and meditation instruction is available. Visitors receive instruction on how to carve wooden bowls and spoons from locally harvested timber. The carving provided a relaxing pastime while we talked, reflected, and enjoyed the fresh mountain air—in late August, it

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What I Learned as a Riverkeeper

A week away from my everyday life revealed to me many things—some were personal and others may also apply to other environmentalists. While in the harmonious environment of Knoll Farm, I realized that I am not by nature an adversarial person; yet most of my daily work is spent in a contentious environment. I am heavily affected by environmental factors that are stressful and where the stakes are quite high. I realized that I work for change in my surroundings because there is so much about the environment that makes me profoundly unhappy and to seek change. My nature and conscience requires me to do what I can because I am incapable of being silent or complacent and I feel compelled to do what I can. My heightened awareness



Ted Clements and Helen Whybrow work on their carving skills.

of environmental problems produces the tension to act.

Yet, when surrounded by the more harmonious environment in Vermont, my natural state of being was very different—more low key and relaxed. I realized that many people appreciate the environment but are unable to make the sacrifices required to actually engage these issues full-time. I am fortunate to be able to do so.

But, activists like me are fighting for values that are deeply entrenched in our own self-esteem. To those on the sidelines, because they have less information, it is sometimes possible to conclude that those of us who feel compelled to act are part of the problems we seek to solve. We probably seem like extremists to some.

and so we work to change society even while estranged from it. Als, the desire to make the world a better place is sometimes an expression of the instinct to survive intellectually. Protecting/improving the world makes the world seem more sensible to those of us who see its problems. Still, advocates for change nonetheless find themselves fighting battles for issues that others may not even recognize as problems. It was affirming to meet people fighting for issues in different settings that had such close synergy to my own work.

Since embarking on this work as Patuxent Riverkeeper, I have instinctively viewed the world in terms of a watershed or sphere of influence for an entire river system. The dialogues and knowledge exchanged at Knoll Farm revealed to me that there are much deeper spheres of influence in any region, tied to “food sheds” (where the food supply comes from), “idea sheds” (where people share a common view or understanding of the world), and the core sense of connection that people have to their location (their sense of place). The unifying element **IS** the connection people feel to their community.

After my Knoll Farms experience, I was able to close the loop on what I tend to reference as “community character.” which is an expression that has been hard for me to define in the past. It is nothing more than the sense of place. For those who think of natural resources as commodities, the sense of place enjoyed by indigenous people is an incompatible value. You cannot in a practical way destroy natural resources for profit unless you first abolish the sense of place shared by the people most closely connected to the surrounding land and natural resources.



The mountain top meeting “Yurt” at Knoll Farm.

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Suggested reading about land, food and community:

Geography of Nowhere: The Rise and Decline of America's Man-Made Landscape...

By James Howard Kunstler

(describes the evolution of our American land use culture from past to present)

The Omnivore's Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals

By Michael Pollan

(describes where the food on your plate comes from and the tradeoffs that flow from our food choices)

American Mania: When More Is Not Enough

by Peter Whybrow

(describes the stress, overwork, and rampant dissatisfaction permeating modern America)

Our Stolen Future: How We Are Threatening Our Fertility, Intelligence and Survival

By Theo Colburn et al

(describes patterns found in research on man-made chemicals and their effects on animals and humans)

For information about the people listed in this article:

Classie Parker: Manhattan Land Trust, Five Star Garden: (google)

Erika Allen: Growing Power, www.growingpower.org

Ted Clement: Aquidneck Land Trust, www.aquidnecklandtrust.org

Audrey Petermen: Earthwise Productions, www.earthwiseproductionsinc.com

Kevin Dahl: Native Seeds/Search, www.nativeseeds.org

Patuxent River Naval Air Station Tree Planting

Cub Scout Packs 1203 and 561 from St. Mary's County, Maryland joined Patuxent Riverkeeper and the Naval Air Station Patuxent River Environmental Office on Sunday, November 19, to plant trees. The group planted nearly 200 trees, including pine, river birch, oak, locust, and indigo bush. The planting site was located on the naval base at a firebreak, a gap in vegetation or other combustible material that is expected to slow or stop the progress of a wildfire. The firebreak had become too large and needed to be replanted with native trees along the edges. The site was within close proximity to both the Patuxent River and several fishing ponds. The additional trees planted will help reduce runoff affecting both the river and the ponds.



Scouts from Packs 1203 and 561 picking out trees to plant.



A scout and his family plant a tree together.



A father and son team work to plant a tree.

Patuxent Riverkeeper Environmental Pledge

Stewardship

Don't Waste. Conserve, re-use and recycle everything. Use in moderation petrol, electricity, drinking water, and heating fuels. Refuse to support the unsustainable culture of “more” and “excess.” Right size your lifestyle to embrace the culture of “enough.” You'll be happier and won't have to work so hard!

Love Nature. (She will love you back). Walk. Paddle. Run. Pursue your personal outdoor passion. Watch less television. Observe nature and become a part of her rhythms. Nature is not something external to us; we are part of nature. When you spend enough time listening to the world, she will talk you and tell you what to do.

Leave no trace. Look for new ways to minimize your footprint in nature and on the river. Use boat pumpout stations. Use rain barrels at home, compost, use biodegradable products, leave the native trees on your lot, and celebrate nature intact and unspoiled by walking lightly wherever you can.

Education

Shop Smart: Spend your dollars on products that are kind to the environment. Drive pollution and waste out of the marketplace. Educate the manufacturing community and your neighbors to raise the standards for products and services that do not pollute. Make pollution unprofitable!

Strive to achieve a toxic free lifestyle. Drive dangerous, noxious and polluting chemicals out of your lifestyle, your household, and your business activities wherever possible. Find alternatives that don't poison our surroundings.

Tell a friend. In fact, be an evangelist for positive environmental change. Conservation only works if everybody practices it. Be intolerant of people, practices and systems that pollute. There is strength in numbers. Become a part of the majority!

Eat right and live well. 99% of the trash and junk we pull out of the river happens to be generated by junk food products that are bad for you and should not be in your body at all—let alone in your watershed. Get these products out of your lifestyle and there will be less of them to clean up later. Your health care costs will go down too!

Advocacy

Fight for Land. Clean up the rivers and the lands nearest you. People tied to land and with a sense of place have a stronger sense of community—strong communities are the best defense against the destruction of our natural resources. Historically, the way to break the spirit of a people has been to first sever their ties to land and place. Join a clean up. Give something back. Get involved. Foster local change any way you can!

Vote Green. Require your elected official to support meaningful, not symbolic, efforts to protect the environment. Reject elected representation that lacks vision or leadership to make environmental preservation an uppermost priority.

Support Local Agriculture: Save Local Open Space and protect the environment from the practices and corrosive chemicals often found on factory farms that usually end up in the environment. Save money, buy better food grown with pride by your neighbors and without the transportation costs and markups found in conventional stores.