



the oak leaf

SPRING/SUMMER 2012

Farming a Legacy

Cultivating Clean Water and Sustainable Harvests

BY KHARA MCKEEN

David Sheppard, owner of Jersey Legacy Farms—an organic farming operation in southern New Jersey—is preparing for the busy season ahead.

“We’re right in the middle of converting from sprinklers to drip irrigation,” says Sheppard. “Drip irrigation uses two-thirds less water than the traditional methods that my people used for centuries. The reduction in water waste is huge.”

Sheppard comes from a very long line of farmers—14 generations of Sheppard men have made their living farming in southern New Jersey. This deep-rooted connection to land and family inspired David to attend college and earn a degree in agronomy.

“I went to college to study the science of farming to improve our family business,” says Sheppard. “Then I began to think that the pesticides and fertilizers we were using couldn’t possibly be good for

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Above: Farmer David Sheppard with his daughter and grandson © DAMON NOE



Hot Properties

Lummis Ponds Preserve, Cumberland County

Help save 160 acres of forests and wetlands that sustain rare species and help protect the water quality of the Delaware Bay.

We need your help

Just north of the marshes that fringe Delaware Bay, large swaths of unfragmented forest that help protect water quality and offer habitat to many species are facing increasing development pressure. When this property came on the market, we had to act fast. Now, we are working to complete funding.

Why is this land special?

This property fills an important gap in the 1,300-acre Lummis Ponds Preserve that, if developed, would seriously impact the area's forest, ponds and streams as well as the quality of water flowing into Delaware Bay. Thousands of migrating birds nest and feed in the area's dense woods, and rare and endangered plant species rely on the forest and wetlands.

What's the rush?

The opportunity arose unexpectedly. The seller was hoping to sell the property to developers, but we were able to step in quickly to negotiate a two-phase purchase. Now, we have to raise funds to pay remaining expenses on phase one, which closed recently, and for phase two, which will close in 2013.

LEARN MORE

You can help by using the enclosed envelope to make a gift or by calling the New Jersey Chapter at **908-879-7262**.



Above: Scarlet Tanager © BILLS 5 B'S/FICKR, **Right:** Barbara Brummer with mentors Marie Kuhnen and Herndon Dowling © TNC

Director's Letter

BARBARA BRUMMER, Ph.D., *NEW JERSEY STATE DIRECTOR*

With amazing animals discovered in deep-sea hot springs and South American jungles, threats to polar bears, Asian elephants and blue whales, crazy climate and doomsday predictions on front pages, TV, blogs and tweets, why aren't more young people plugged into nature?

Because we are so urbanized? Have too many other pressures? Can't pull away from work or a screen? Whatever the reasons, the conservation movement needs to engage new generations in order to succeed. But how?

The answer, to me, is people. Growing up, my piece of nature was an expanse of New Jersey's Meadowlands. Would my propensity to poke around in puddles and ponds have been sufficient to sustain a passion for conservation?

Not without two people who were mentors to literally thousands: Marie Kuhnen, for many years professor of botany and chairman of the science department at Montclair State University, who died in 2009 at 91, and Herndon Dowling, emeritus professor of biology at New York University, still going strong at 91. Teachers, mentors and friends, this scholarly and somewhat intimidating woman and brilliant bon-vivant of a man transferred their knowledge of and passion for the natural world to 60-plus years' worth of students and colleagues. I am privileged to be one of them.

For former chapter trustee Sandy Bristol, it was his biology teacher for whom he created the Conservancy's Dale K. Miller Wetlands Endowment. For Walt Surdam and his family, who are helping us protect the Manumuskin River, it was Walt's mother. For Joanne Greenspun, it was a friend who introduced her to philanthropy and the Conservancy. For others, it will be Christian and Sonia Zugel (see Page 3), who are working to inspire a global view of conservation.

Who was it for you? And how will you pass that on?





Above: Christian and Sonia Zugel © TNC
Left: The Bahamas © DWIGHT HISCANO

New Jersey's First Matching Gift Fund

Donors to the New Jersey Chapter have an exceptional opportunity to reach beyond our borders and support Conservancy programs around the world through the Zugel Family Matching Gift Fund for Global Initiatives, established by Christian Zugel, Chair of the New Jersey Board of Trustees, and his family. Supporters who make a qualifying contribution to New Jersey conservation will be able to select the global program that receives their match.

“The Conservancy is having a tremendous impact—both here in New Jersey and across the globe,” shared Christian Zugel. “As parents, my wife Sonia and I care deeply about protecting the quality of natural resources in New Jersey where we’re raising our family. We also appreciate that as the Conservancy works to reverse deforestation in places like Indonesia and

Brazil and protect coral reefs in the Caribbean and Micronesia that we’re making the world a better place for our children’s children.”

The Fund is designed to accelerate conservation achievements in New Jersey and strengthen support of the Conservancy’s global priorities. Gifts of \$10,000 or more, which represent an increase of at least 50 percent in a donor’s annual giving, qualify for a match. In return, the Fund will match the increased gift amount dollar for dollar.

“Sonia and I hope that this inspires people to make that stretch gift and become as excited about the Conservancy’s global work as we are. We think that donors who have always focused their giving on New Jersey will be amazed by the impact that conservation dollars make in developing countries. We want to protect New Jersey and the world—and we trust in The Nature Conservancy.”

The Environment IS the Economy

We are proud to recognize companies that support the Conservancy’s work in New Jersey and those (*) that also partner with the New Jersey Chapter to support programs beyond our borders.

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Corporate Associates (\$1,000–\$2,499)

Aveda
Bayshore Recycling
Conoco Phillips Bayway Refinery
Cytec Industries
Fralinger Engineering, PA



Above: Sue Meserve holding trout © MICHAEL MANCUSO. The Lewis family and friends haul a net with shad in the 1960s © COURTESY OF STEVE MESERVE **Right:** Steve Meserve & friend in rowboat © MARTIN GRIFF

The Voice of the River

Steve Meserve and the Lewis Shad Fishery

BY ERIC ALDRICH

Only a few miles upriver of where George Washington made his famous crossing of the Delaware River, Steve Meserve continues a family tradition that has endured every spring since 1888. It's the Lewis Shad Fishery, the only remaining commercial shad fishery on a river that once supported scores of them.

Using methods almost identical to those of his great grandfather, Meserve and his assistant shove a 19-foot rowboat from a small island off Lambertville, N.J., easing out a long seine net as they move across the river. When they arc and return, a crew of friends and family on shore starts hauling in the net. They sort the catch: a few shad keepers and smaller shad and catfish that get returned to the river.

Meserve, a computer programmer, learned the ropes at age 13 from his grandfather, Fred Lewis; Lewis learned from his father, William P. Lewis, who started the fishery as a teenager in 1888, one of five commercial shad fisheries on this stretch of river. In 1896, they each caught more than 10,000 shad a year.

Shad's Ups and Downs

As old records attest, shad catches have long had ups and downs, but numbers declined sharply in the 1940s due to pollution. "In 1949, we caught only three fish after 30 days," Meserve says. "By 1953 and 1956, we had zero. No shad at all."

Meserve's grandfather forged relationships with biologists who were studying the American shad's decline, showing them

how to use a seine net and sharing his records. The scientists provided irrefutable data linking the river's oxygen depletion to pollution.

"The Voice of Action"

With state and federal policies that followed, the river is now far cleaner, but shad numbers are still low. In 2011, Meserve hauled in only 43 shad, making his "commercial" fishery more of a hobby than a money-maker. Many vexing problems remain, like large ocean fisheries that kill countless species as byproducts.

"My great-grandfather was a very stubborn man," Meserve says. "He always felt that, when things start getting bad, you keep going. You create partnerships and keep going. He was really the voice of the river, the voice of action."

The partnerships and persistence of Fred Lewis—and now his grandson—are smart strategies, according to Eric Olsen, The Nature Conservancy's Delaware River Basin project manager. "That's what we strive toward. Our work in the Delaware River and Bay is long-term and focused on protecting, restoring and maintaining functioning ecosystems, which includes American shad and other fish that rely on fresh and salt water.

Because of our supporters, we aim to see the Delaware's health improve, and with it more shad—enabling the connection between the river, the Lewis Fishery, and the surrounding communities to continue. It's a centuries-old tradition we want to see live on."

Hunting for Forest Health

For many, hunting is an important part of family and community life, passed on through generations. New Jersey native Rich Gehring knows the value of tradition well; he comes from a long line of avid outdoorsmen. Today, Gehring's own son, Wyatt, accompanies him to hunt white-tailed deer at Muckshaw Ponds Preserve in Sussex County.

"I've been hunting Muckshaw long before the Conservancy owned it," says Gehring. "I love being outside. It gives me a chance to enjoy the simpler side of life."

In addition to forging generational bonds, managed hunting helps maintain forest health, preventing deer populations from growing beyond available resources and damaging forests on which we all depend for flood protection and clean water.

"A managed hunt program protects forests by keeping deer numbers at a reasonable level," says Conservancy land steward Scott Sherwood. "Our data shows this program is vital to keeping local ecosystems healthy."

New Jersey sportsmen like Gehring also help local conservation efforts by providing hundreds of volunteer hours per year.

"Hunters like Rich help us manage our lands more efficiently," says Sherwood. "They are partners in conservation, not just by regulating deer populations, but also by removing invasive plants, building kiosks and benches, clearing trails, cleaning dump sites and planting native trees."

For Gehring, giving back to the land is second nature.

"To be able to enjoy something you have to invest in it," says Gehring. "We take pride in caring for the preserve."

He also believes volunteering has inspired his son.

"Wyatt has learned just how important it is to protect special places like Muckshaw," says Gehring. "Hopefully someday he'll be out here with his kids, teaching them the same thing."

Below: Rich and Wyatt Gehring ©THERESA GEHRING



Passing the Torch of Conservation

True conservation is as much about connecting people to nature as it is protecting our lands and waters. In today's digital world, young people are growing up without meaningful experiences in nature—the most often-cited influence on adult attitudes about the environment. Thanks to your continued support, The Nature Conservancy is working to address this growing disconnect.

In New Jersey, we have partnered with Pass It Along, a community service organization that seeks to mobilize youth as community partners. Together, we've developed an environmental steward program for youth volunteers that involves working alongside Conservancy staff on our nature preserves. Projects include building steps and bridges for our trail networks, planting trees as part of forest restoration efforts and pulling invasive plants. The program helps volunteers and their parents discover the natural features in their community while learning why it is so important to protect and care for them. Since the partnership began five years ago, Pass It Along volunteers have contributed more than 2,000 hours of volunteer service to The Nature Conservancy.

"Through this experience, we hope to inspire the next generation of conservationists and environmental leaders," says Eric Olsen of The Nature Conservancy. "These kids are gaining an appreciation for their natural environment as they contribute to our goal of building the base of future conservationists—one stone step at a time!"

Above: Volunteers take a break after installing preserve steps © TNC

A River of Memories

BY DAMON NOE

At Maurice River Bluffs Preserve, wild rice marshes sway in the breeze, dragonflies zip through the air and ospreys nest in the river for which the area is named. It is a sight that has greeted landowner Richard Weatherby for more than 60 years.

“I was born and raised here,” Weatherby says. “My grandfather was here during the Great Depression, and he lived in the same homestead with my father and uncle for almost 40 years, until he died.”

The family’s long residence in the area granted them an inholding—an area of privately owned land within a larger nature preserve—when the Bluffs area was purchased by The Nature Conservancy in 1999.

Now retired, Weatherby is as much a part of the scenery at the Bluffs as the birds that nest there. He spends hours each week caring for the land and enjoying the solitude and memories that flow from the river.

“I remember being here when I was two years old,” he says. “People say you can’t remember back that far, but I remember. My uncle would throw me in a bushel basket and put me in the front of the boat.”

As late as the early 1970s, Maurice River Bluffs was a productive sand mine, drawn on by local companies to manufacture asphalt for new roads. The area’s proximity to the river later made it a target for residential development or further mining.

“There was talk of putting up big exclusive houses on the hills, or tunneling under Silver Run Road and loading sand by the river,” says Weatherby. “I am really glad the Conservancy bought it instead.”

Thanks to supporters like you, sand holes and dipper sticks have disappeared in favor of a healthy understory and maturing forest.

When asked how often he brings his own family here now, Weatherby smiles and shakes his head as though the answer should be obvious.

“They absolutely love it. My granddaughter’s kids now are old enough that I can start taking them on the trails. My son and his boys are down here enjoying the land and river every chance they get.”

The Conservancy’s relationship with landowners like Richard Weatherby helps us create sound conservation results that benefit both nature and people—of all ages and generations.

“You guys have done a really nice job here,” he adds. “It’s a beautiful property, and I hope it stays that way for eternity.”



Above: The Maurice River, a view from the Bluffs © DAMON NOE, Bald Eagle © DAMON NOE, Pink Lady Slipper © DAMON NOE, Richard Weatherby © DAMON NOE

FARMING A LEGACY from Page 1

our soil—or our water supply.”

In 2006, David left Sheppard Farms, the family-owned farm label started by his great-grandfather and run today by David’s two brothers. “I wanted to start fresh and focus my energy on creating an all-organic farming operation.”

Partners in Conservation

In 2009, Sheppard teamed up with The Nature Conservancy, which owns and manages several nature preserves near lands the Sheppards have farmed for generations. In exchange for an organic-farming lease at the Gandy’s Beach Preserve, Sheppard completes restoration projects like invasive species removal, helping achieve dual missions.

“At Gandy’s Beach, David has reclaimed fallow farm fields that had been completely overrun with invasive plants,” says Les Frie, the Conservancy’s stewardship manager in New Jersey. “These invasives were threatening Gandy’s surrounding forests, which provide important habitat for wildlife like migrating birds.”

Today, the Conservancy and David work together on conservation projects at Jersey Legacy, including the conversion to drip irrigation. “When less than one percent of the water on our planet is available freshwater,” says Bob Allen, director of conservation programs, “water conservation projects like these are critical to conserving resources we need to survive.”

In New Jersey, The Nature Conservancy works with farmers like David through the Private Lands Program. The program engages private landowners to help develop conservation projects that focus on protecting freshwater and improving forest health.

With your support, the Private Lands Program allows landowners to work with Conservancy staff to implement sustainable practices on their lands, as well as connecting them with state

grant programs and monetary incentives for related conservation projects.

Because of you, we are working to balance the needs of people and nature—ensuring that the lands and waters upon which we all depend are protected for future generations.

“We’ve really expanded our impact by working with area landowners,” says Frie, “well beyond what could be achieved through working on Conservancy lands alone.”

Farming for our Future

Jersey Legacy Farms is one of the largest and most successful organic farms

in south Jersey, supplying produce to retailers like Whole Foods Market. For David, going organic was a no-brainer: “The economic benefits of an organic label coupled with the many environmental benefits made for an easy decision.”

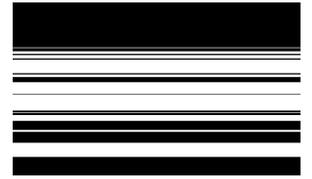
Today, as David readies his farm for the busy season ahead, he has a new partner in conservation: his daughter Michele. “My daughter wants to learn the family business, and with any luck someday my grandson will too,” he says. “It gives me a certain sense of satisfaction knowing that the changes I’m making today will create a sustainable future for the next generation of Sheppard farmers.”

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Above: Kayaking the Maurice River © TNC

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