



# Friends of the Great Swamp



FrOGS

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Judy Kelley-Moberg and Jill Eisenstein, Editors

## *Experience the Great Swamp*

*Paddling among the gnarled roots of towering silver maples under a cool green canopy speckled with sunlight, you enter a hidden wilderness. Great blue herons perch on snags and only the whistling sound of wood ducks in flight breaks the silence. Beaver dams must be portaged and if you're lucky, you may see an otter slipping in and out of the river, or an elusive wood turtle.*

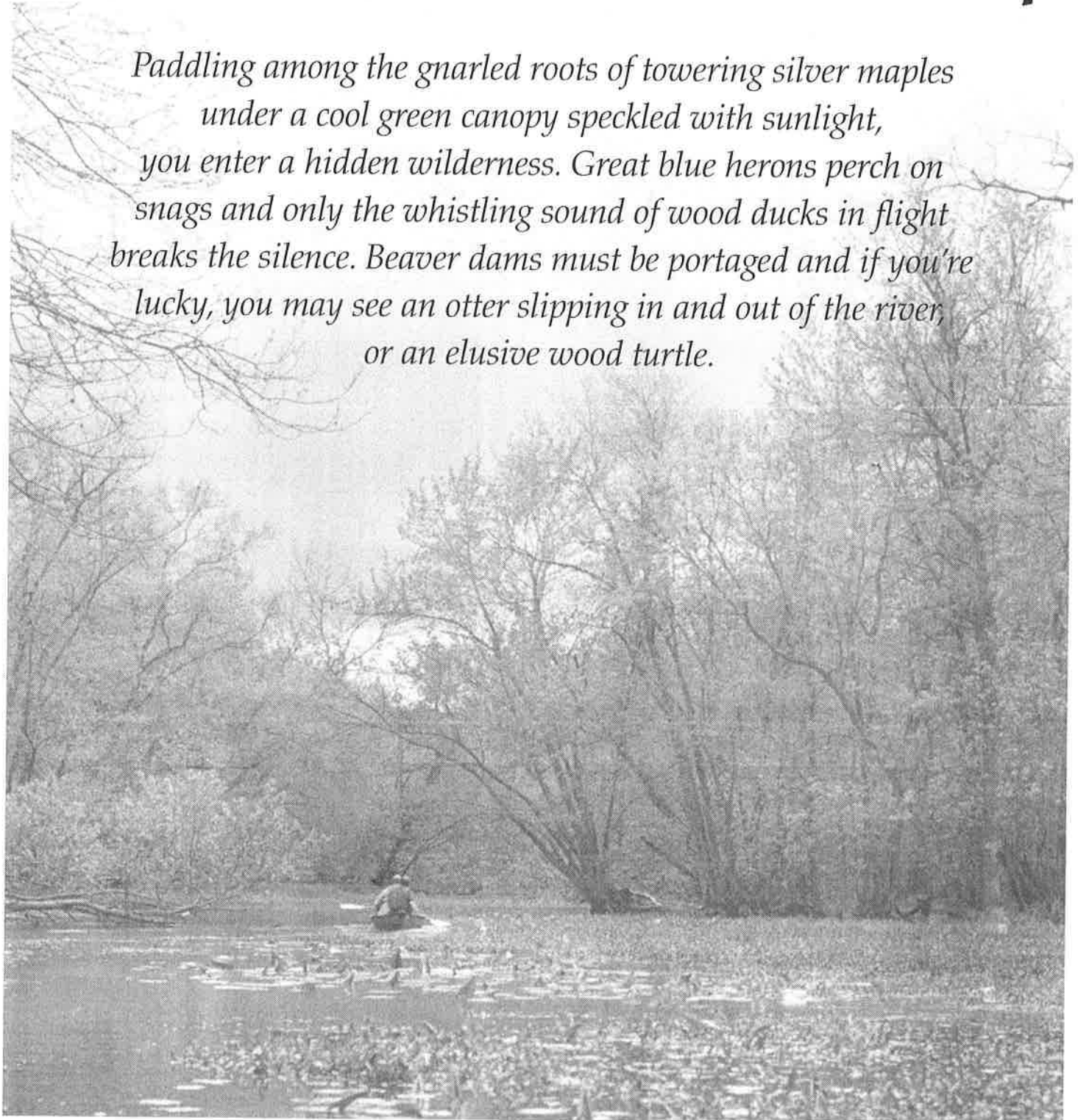


Photo by Jim Utter

# A Native Species Pushed to the Brink

At dusk, during the toughest, snowiest, mid-winter weather, a small rabbit came down the path from our woodshed to the birdfeeder near the house. The rabbit's head and ears were small and rounded giving it a "baby bunny" appearance. We put out fruit and greens along with the birdseed. The rabbit started appearing with regularity—even in daylight. On several occasions we saw it spring into the air and deliver a few good kicks to squirrels that got too close.

Almost all of the "cottontails" seen on the lawns and in the gardens of suburbia are "non-native" EASTERN COTTONTAILS that were introduced in the 1940-50's as a game species.

The NEW ENGLAND COTTONTAIL is the only NATIVE cottontail found east of the Hudson.

Its range has declined by 75% since 1960 due to the loss of shrub lands, habitat fragmentation, competition with deer and maturing woodlands. The species is no longer found in Vermont and only a few isolated populations still exist in New England. In 2004 there were recorded populations found along the Connecticut border in Putnam and Dutchess Counties. The loss of early successional habitat (young forest) and shrub lands has also negatively affected species like the ruffed grouse, woodcock, chestnut-sided and prairie warblers, eastern towhee, brown thrasher, indigo bunting, blue spotted salamanders, spotted turtle and the bog turtle.

The New York DEC is monitoring potential habitat areas in Putnam and Dutchess County for evidence of the native New England Cottontail. They have small, rounded ears with

a black edge and a dark spot in the middle of the forehead. Since it's often difficult to tell the species apart by sight, fecal DNA is collected for positive identification. Our rabbit was a visual match but just to be sure we took photos and collected plenty of scat.

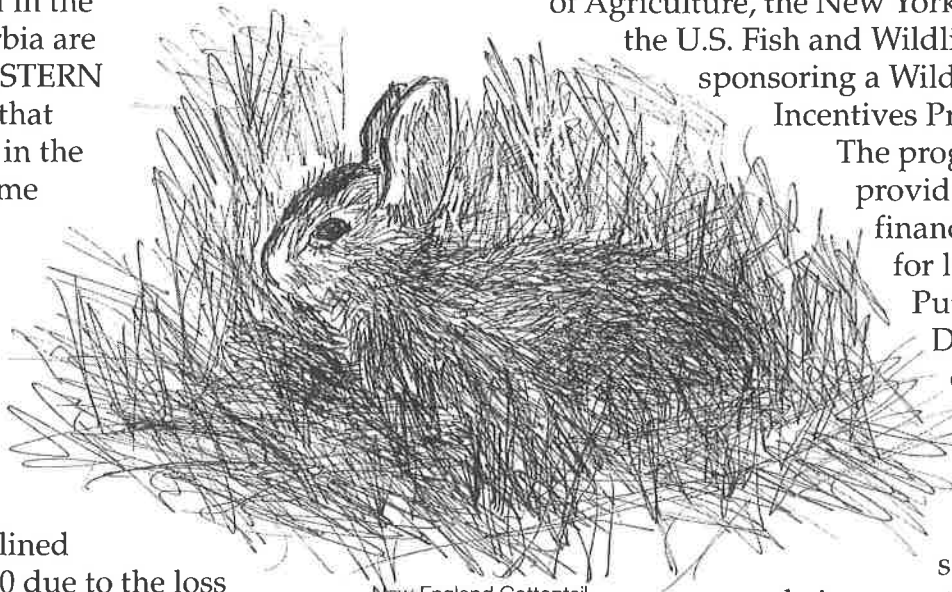
The New England Cottontail is a "Species of Special Concern" in NY and considered a candidate for Federal listing as an "Endangered Species". The New England Cottontail Working Group, composed of the Natural Resources Conservation Service of the U. S. Department of Agriculture, the New York State DEC, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, is sponsoring a Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP).

The program would provide services and financial support for landowners in Putnam and Dutchess who enter into a conservation agreement to develop shrub and early successional habitat on their property. Prime habitat

might include native shrubs like red osier dogwood, choke cherry, winterberry, sweet pepperbush, and alder as well as hardwood and fruit tree saplings. Visit [www.edf.org/cottontail](http://www.edf.org/cottontail) for more information.

Rabbit pellets collected on sites in the Towner's section of Patterson were almost all found under multiflora roses at the edges of old farm fields within 20 feet of a shrub wetland. Although we enjoyed watching the rabbit that came to our feeder, the confined habitat and non-native food supply encouraged predation and illness. The rabbit disappeared in late March.

Article by Judy Kelley-Moberg  
Sketch by Jean Hannon



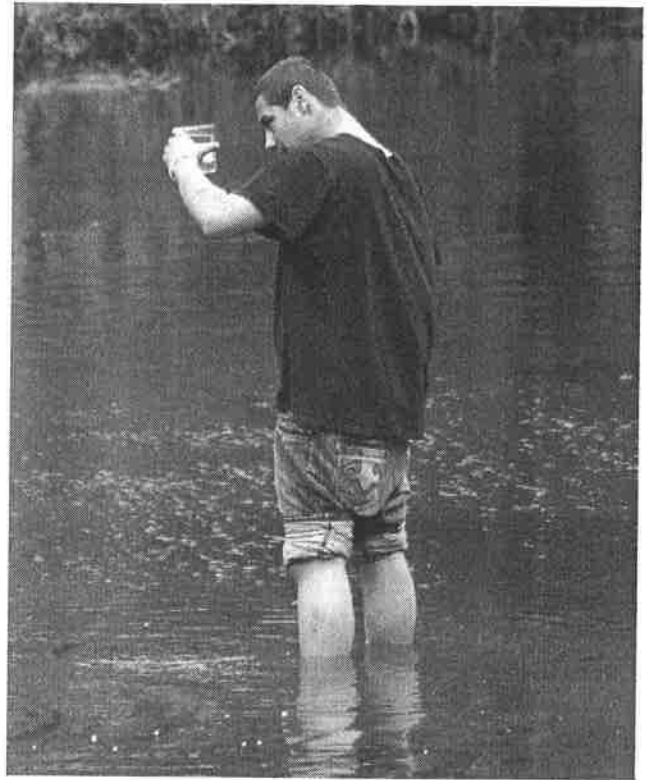
New England Cottontail

# Cleaning Up the Clean Water Act

The Clean Water Act was passed nearly 40 years ago (1972) but there has been a history of confusion about exactly what “waters” it protected. If the “water” was located in an isolated wetland, a tiny tributary or an intermittent stream that did not directly connect to a larger navigable water system or did not extend over state boundaries, its protection under the law was in question.

As part of the Obama Administration’s clean water framework, a draft “Waters of the U.S. Guidance Document” was released on April 27th of this year. The Guidance Document clarifies which waters are protected under the Clean Water Act and fall under the jurisdiction of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the Army Corps of Engineers and the NY State DEC. Headwater streams, ponds and wetlands as well as smaller intermittent streams and wetlands are clearly included under the umbrella of “protected waters” in this document.

On Wednesday, May 11th a public announcement of the Guidance Document took place at the Green Chimney’s launch, right in the middle of the Great Swamp! The selection of this venue for the announcement



Regulatory Branch of the Army Corps of Engineers, Willie Janeway, Regional Director of the DEC, and Dr. Jim Utter Chairman of FrOGS. They all spoke in support of the Guidance Document and how it would enhance protection of wetlands like the Great Swamp and all its headwater streams. They emphasized the importance of partnerships and coordination with states, local communities and the public to protect public health and improve water quality. Dr. Utter spoke about the value of wetlands like the Great Swamp as important wildlife habitat, its ability to store and filter the water and its value as a recreational and educational resource.

After the announcement and speeches everyone focused on the river and the beauty of The Swamp. Students from Green Chimneys released the trout they raised in the classroom and demonstrated their mastery of instruments used to gather water quality data. Chris Hendershot from the Clearpool Education Center provided canoes and a lifeguard (Ryan). Dr. Utter took some of the officials and their staff on a short paddle in the Great Swamp. The participants were encouraged by the enhanced protection for the “Waters of the U.S.” as defined in the draft Guidance Document.



Judith Enck, EPA Regional director and Willie Janeway, Regional Director of the DEC

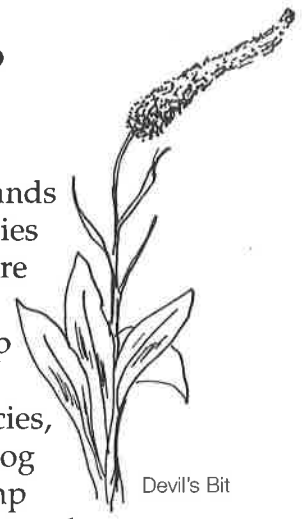
honored Green Chimney’s focus on environmental educational and FrOGS’ work in protecting the Great Swamp. Green Chimneys hosted the event and Executive Director Joe Whalen introduced EPA Regional director Judith Enck, Richard Tomer, Chief of the

*Article by Judy Kelley-Moberg  
Photos by Don Turner*

# Have You Seen a Calcareous Fen?

Calcium rich (calcareous) limestone, deposited in ancient seas and metamorphosed into marble by continental collisions, forms the bedrock beneath a good portion of the Great Swamp. The marble is relatively soft, but has been an important resource for the area and is still mined next to the Great Swamp in the center of the Town of Patterson. You can see the white marble outcrops as you drive Route 22 north from Patterson. Some, such as those visible near the intersection of Routes 22 and 55 in Pawling, have been weathered black, presumably from car exhaust.

the State with high quality fens. They are among the rarest wetlands in New York, and since the species that occur in these ecosystems are specialized, they are often uncommon. In the Great Swamp Watershed our calcareous fens support a host of these rare species, including the *State Endangered* bog turtle and *State Threatened* swamp birch, the spreading globeflower, and devil's bit.

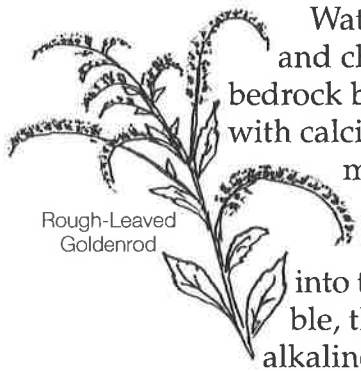


Devil's Bit

Calcareous fens are small (about an acre) seepage areas that occur over marble bedrock in the calcium enriched soils that edge the Great Swamp. They can be found in Dover at Oblong Land Conservancy's Slocum-Mostachetti Preserve.

The ecological communities of calcareous fens are degraded when the hydrology of an area changes, such as occurs in urbanization and agriculture. The addition of surface runoff with its nutrients and increased flow gives the advantage to larger, faster growing plants that choke out the more specialized fen species. Invasive species like purple loosestrife and phragmites are especially damaging. Due to their rarity, fens are protected under most wetlands laws. They are frequently not identified and filled in or drained because of their small size. We need increased public awareness of fens and their unique communities so local stewardship plans are developed to protect and preserve them.

—By Jim Utter, Laurie Wallace & Judy Kelley-Moberg  
Sketches by Jean Hannon & Judy Kelley-Moberg

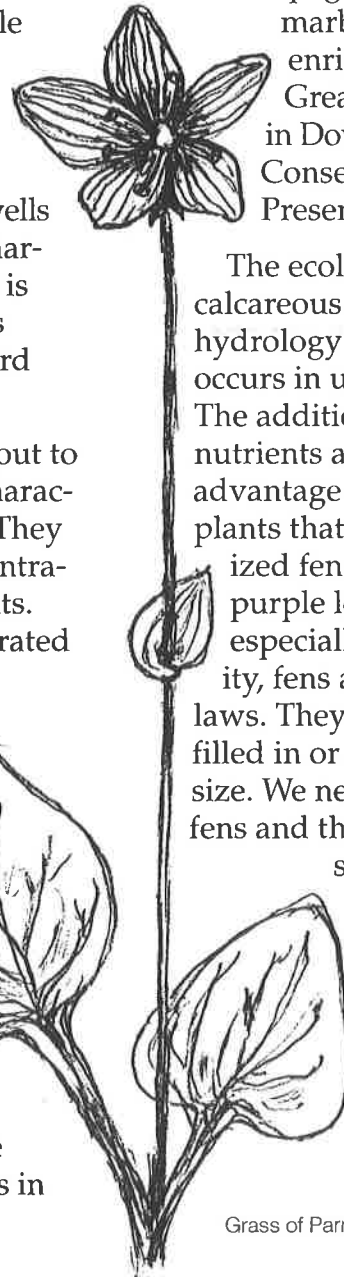


Rough-Leaved Goldenrod

Water moving through cracks and channels in the marble bedrock becomes enriched with calcium and magnesium which raises its pH. Thus when we sink our wells into the Harlem Valley marble, the water we extract is alkaline (pH 6-8.5) and has significant 'hardness', making our standard soaps less soluble.

As this enriched 'ground-water' seeps out to the land surface, it also imparts special characteristics to the wetlands that are created. They have high calcium and magnesium concentrations, but very low levels of other nutrients. Low nutrient levels and consistently saturated soils also inhibit decomposition, so fens accumulate peat or muck. The presence of unique plant species that are adapted to conditions in the calcareous wetlands can help us identify the location of a fen. Some examples are: shrubby cinquefoil, grass of Parnassus, ladies' tresses (an orchid), yellow sedge, cotton-grass and rough-leaved goldenrod.

The environmental conditions leading to calcareous fens are uncommon, but the Harlem Valley is one of only three regions in



Grass of Parnassus



Ladies' Tresses

# News from Oblong Land Conservancy

The Oblong Land Conservancy has hired a new consultant to provide support for the management of our 7 preserves and our 15 conservation easement holdings. John Sullivan lives in Dover, which gives him a head start with the regional ecology. He was previously engaged in research work for Dover Knolls. John's company is "Harlem Valley Ecological, LLC". Welcome aboard, John!

Joining the Oblong Board is Theresa Ryan, employed by Insite Engineering, and very involved and effective as a volunteer on the

Dover Conservation Commission. Another new Board Member is Bill Foscatto, a professional landscaper, and a Village of Pawling resident.

A critical and voluntary self assessment of Oblong operations has begun, with the professional guidance of an experienced consultant, Connie Manes. Oblong will be determining how we measure up in conformance to the recommended standards and guidelines of The Land Trust Alliance. Oblong's goal is eventual accreditation. No volunteer land trust has ever achieved that goal of excellence in New York State.

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## Fen Restoration at Cushman Farms



When the students of Pawling High School, in Mrs. Prendergast's Environmental Science class, asked the Oblong Land Conservancy for suggested science/action projects, Chris Wood and Sibyll Gilbert suggested that a fen off Cushman Road that connects directly to the Great Swamp was in need of trash removal and the control of invasive plants. The Oblong holds a conservation easement on these 127 acres, and the landowner was receptive to such an effort. A group of students, headed by Taylor Dolce and supported by Jimmy Boo and Tandy Torres, volunteered to

take the project on. They researched the science pertaining to fens, and with support from Pawling Conservation Advisory Board Chairman, Mike Purcell, they prepared a power-point presentation, which they "introduced" to their science class. The students then gave the Pawling Town Board a stirring replay! It made a good case for keeping our waters clean.

With Mike's help, a small grant was obtained from the Watershed Advisory Council for new native trees and shrubs, and advice on the removal of the invasive plants (mostly russian olive), that were taking over the fen. On "Clean Up Day" (May 7th), Forester Brendan Murphy, from the Watershed Council, led the effort to remove the invasive plants and replace them with native species. Another group of volunteers focused on the removal of trash, at an old dump site. More than 15 volunteers showed up, including Mrs. Prendergast, Tandy's mom and her little brother. It was amazing how much was accomplished that morning! The 3 high school students received credit for community service, and their work may have inspired some of their fellow students.

# Calendar of Events

## July thru August 2011 (\*=WAM Events)

### JULY

Thursday, July 21st

**\*Join the Dutchess Land Conservancy for a walk to "Stone Church".**

Meet at the Dover Elementary School at 4 PM for the afternoon hike.

Thursday, July 21st

**\*Free film screening of "Gasland"**

Co-sponsored by FrOGS at 7 PM at the Lathrop Center (Lakeside Park) in Pawling. "GASLAND" is a timely and somewhat controversial film about hydro-fracking for natural gas. Light refreshments provided.

Saturday, July 23rd

**\*\*"Wood Duck Box Building"**

Co-sponsored by the Dover Conservation Advisory Board, from 9:00 AM to Noon, at Boyce Park, Wingdale

Tuesday, July 26th

**\*Green Infrastructure for Homeowners**

From 7:00 PM to 9:00 PM, at the East Fishkill Town Hall, 330 Rt. 376, in Hopewell Junction.

### AUGUST

Sunday, August 28th

**FrOGS' Route 22 Clean Up Day**

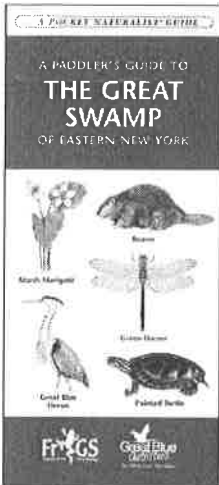
Volunteers Needed! Meet at the Patterson Rec. Center at 10 AM. Call Liz Cowan (845) 878-6104.

Wed., August 31st

**\*FrOGS sponsored Children's Films**

FrOGS hopes to sponsor several short children's films "Lost and Found" and "The Curious Garden" with environmental themes at the Lathrop Center in Pawling. Check FrOGS' web site for updates.

## Paddler's Guide to Plants & Animals in the Great Swamp



FrOGS and Mac Rand, owner of Great Blue Outfitters in Pawling (and a FrOGS' Board member) jointly produced a waterproof pocket guide to the plants and animals most commonly encountered on a paddle trip through the Great Swamp. Mac mentioned how many visitors who kayaked or paddled in The Swamp were unfamiliar with even the most common birds and plants. After months of discussion about which species should be included and which left out, we finally agreed on the contents. Thank you for your persistence, Mac!

The Guide, published by Waterford Press, contains over 140 full color illustrations of plants and animals, each accompanied by a brief text that includes size and identifying field marks. **The Guide is on sale at Great Blue Outfitters on Route 22 in Pawling or it can be yours for a \$50 donation to FrOGS (which includes a membership and the newsletter). See the membership form below.**

**Friends of the Great Swamp** is an organization dedicated to **Preserving the Great Swamp** through educational programs, scientific projects and special events and making all aware of this wonderful resource in our midst.

The generosity of our members and supporters extends FrOGS reach and effectiveness. Contributions support the efforts of the Education Committee, research and this newsletter.

Suggested Contributions: *(All Contributions are tax deductible)*

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Supporter \$25 | <input type="checkbox"/> Contributor \$50   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Friend \$100   | <input type="checkbox"/> Patron \$250       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sponsor \$500  | <input type="checkbox"/> Benefactor \$1,000 |

Send your contribution to: **Friends of the Great Swamp**  
P.O. Box 373, Pawling, NY 12564

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Day \_\_\_\_\_ Night \_\_\_\_\_

E-Mail Address \_\_\_\_\_

### WE NEED HELP

If you can lend a hand with any of the following, please check off the box and we will call you.

- |   |                                      |                                   |
|---|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Spring Celebration     | <input type="checkbox"/> Canoe Trips | <input type="checkbox"/> Other    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Educational Activities | <input type="checkbox"/> Art Show    | <input type="checkbox"/> Mailings |



# Thank You

Our thanks to the many volunteers who have given their time, talents, resources and expertise to help FrOGS protect and educate the public about the values of the Great Swamp.

## 1. Conservation Easement

**Beth and Bob Mancini** of Bedford recently helped protect the Great Swamp with conservation easements on Jensen Tree Farm and Burdick Farm in Patterson. The easements were completed with the Westchester County Land Trust and will protect wetlands and wetland buffers in the Ice Pond, drainage as well as wooded wetlands and wooded upland areas on Burdick Farm from further development and associated runoff. Both parcels are integral links in a biotic corridor supporting a diverse range of wildlife, including habitat for threatened species of migrating birds. There is no public access to these properties.

## 2. The Wood Turtle Project

**John Foley** the "Turtle Whisperer," has been a steady helper for Michael Musnick in the Wood Turtle Project. Michael says, "John has a remarkable ability to find wood turtles without seeing them, without even signs of them around." He has located more wood turtles than anyone in the project, including Michael!

**Karen Timco**, the Director of Environmental Services for Metro-North Railroad, has continued to provide gravel for building the ramps between the rails to help turtles cross the tracks.

Turtles often get stuck in between the rails and die from overheating and dehydration.

Cheers to a young lady from Pawling who was so taken with Michael's "Wood Turtle Talk" that she asked for donations to the "Turtle Adoption Program" instead of birthday gifts.

**3. Bill Consiglio** volunteered to help with canoe trips, manned FrOGS' table at "Birds of Prey Day", and spent hours digitalizing the consummate "Great Swamp Conservation Plan". The booklet was funded by an EPA Grant to DEC and contains the results of scientific studies and recommendations developed by the Nature Conservancy. It was published in 1998 (now out of print) but will soon be accessible on line.

**4. Nancy Clark** used her artistic talent to create a three-fold, black and white Great Swamp Plant Guide. Pick one up at the kiosk in the Patterson Environmental Park.

**5. Stancy Duhammel, Theresa Ryan, Bill Consiglio and Marge Josephson** attended a training session before serving as new "naturalist" leaders for FrOGS' spring canoe trips. **Joann Graham, Edie Garvey, and Linda Gould** helped at the registration desk.

**6. Carol Stenroos** represented FrOGS at the Dutchess Watershed Coalition meetings and made all the arrangements for the "Gaslands" film screening.

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## Dutchess Watershed Awareness Month (WAM)

July 2011 marks the third annual Watershed Awareness Month (WAM) for the County. The Dutchess Watershed Coalition planned events to improve the public's understanding and awareness of their local watersheds. See the FrOGS' Calendar or the WAM website <http://dutchesswam.com>.

A **watershed** is land adjacent to a stream, river or a swamp. When precipitation falls, the water flows downhill through the watershed zone which can consist of mountain areas, meadows, forests and our own back yards until

it reaches a stream or river. As the water runs downhill, it can carry with it dirt, oil, road salt, and other materials. Proper land management techniques can clear many of the pollutants from the water by the time it reaches our streams, and our drinking water. The major watershed in the lower Harlem Valley is the Great Swamp. The Swamp River drains the Great Swamp to the north through Dutchess County and the East Branch Croton River drains it to the south through Putnam County.