

To inspire curiosity and build knowledge
about plants and wooded landscapes

in order to enhance life,
preserve nature and
advance sound stewardship practices.

Highstead

Spring 2008



To the Members and Friends of Highstead

Like forests and landscapes, institutions change and develop through time. Over the last twenty-five years Highstead has emerged from an inspired idea to a beautiful landscape and a well staffed organization that is helping to conserve other landscapes locally and regionally. We invite you to learn more about our work and to join us in our studies, in explorations of our broader countryside, and in our ongoing efforts to ensure that we leave the lands throughout our region in better shape than we received them.

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A few years ago one of our board members likened Highstead to a large aircraft: loaded, fueled and ready to take off. Today, I am pleased to report that our voyage is well under way. In this newsletter you will learn that we have accomplished much and are expanding on past efforts. In recent months we have hired new staff, launched a new web page, doubled our land area and forged ahead with a major expansion of our "Barn" headquarters to accommodate our many new activities and programs. Starting from our grounds and extending into the surrounding region, we are offering a range of programs this year that highlight our collections, our research on forests, invasive plants and wildlife, and our many connections to the land. From Redding and throughout New England and New York we are reaching out to collaborate on regional conservation efforts to protect the forested landscape and to manage it well into the future.

There are many ways for you to join us in these activities – read our newsletter and website, join us for a birdwalk, art program, ecology lecture, and conservation workshop, or take an informal stroll through the mountain laurel or Clethra on one of our open days. When you do, please share your thoughts and your own inspirations and help us in our continued growth and work.

David Foster
Chairman



David Foster is Director of
the Harvard Forest at Harvard
University and Chair of the
Highstead Board.

Highstead Land Area Expanded

Through the addition of extensive forests and meadows, Highstead land holdings have been expanded to approximately 105 acres. Along with Highstead's other natural areas, the new land will be permanently protected from development. Highstead now forms a large conservation linkage with lands owned by the Redding Land Trust, The Nature Conservancy, Town of Redding and extensive private land that is protected with conservation easements.



New Web Page Launched

www.highstead.net

Interested in knowing more about Highstead, its programs, its collections and the ecology and conservation of New England? Our new web page provides information, maps, articles, photographs and links to many relevant sites for information about our activities and the entire region. Working with David Foster, Julie Pallant and Elaine Shiramizu the Highstead staff intends to keep this site current and engaging. Please feel free to share your suggestions and comments.



*Bill Labich – Regional
Conservationist at Highstead*

Regional Conservation

Forging Collaborations across New York and New England

Across the southern New England region, development is nibbling away at forests and farms. From eastern New York to Rhode Island and Cape Cod, from Long Island Sound to the Berkshires, and across Vermont, New Hampshire and Maine, residential and commercial development continues to pave soils that were recently nurturing trees, other plants, and a myriad of insects, birds, amphibians, reptiles and mammals. These forests are our reservoirs for air, water, genetic diversity, and carbon storage. We lose them at our peril.

The awareness of this problem is widespread. In fact, scores of local, regional, and statewide land trusts, watershed associations, planning boards, open space committees, garden clubs, state agencies, foresters and others are engaged in environmental efforts, some decades long and many flush with successes big and small. Many of us share the conviction that the natural infrastructure of our landscapes must be conserved if we are to sustain our quality of life.

Upon learning of the Wildlands and Woodlands proposal to protect 50% of the landscape in forest across southern New England, the Highstead Board recognized that such a bold conservation vision could only be implemented by a broad grassroots effort. Consequently, in order to assist these local efforts, Highstead created the Regional Conservationist position to advance conservation throughout southern New England and New York State by fostering collaboration among many existing efforts (see Box 1 following page). In filling this position Bill Labich brings experience as a land use planner and forester in southern New England as well as a facilitator of regional conservation collaborations and partnerships.

Since October, Bill has sought to understand the breadth of current conservation activities and the potential for increasing forest conservation across our region. In the process Bill has established working relations with over 45 conservation leaders in the fields of land protection, forest ecology, philanthropy, government, environmental advocacy, and forest management. He has begun to develop an increasing knowledge of national models for conservation partnerships and collaboration.

Bill is finding fertile ground for the application of his efforts through work with regional conservation partnerships as well as in his coordination of the Wildlands and Woodlands Partnership (W&WP), a multi-state collaboration of 38 public and private organizations and agencies that have joined together to implement the Wildlands and Woodlands vision (see Box 2). Bill is working closely to support

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regional conservation partnerships through direct participation with four groups: the new MassConn Sustainable Forest Partnership located across the two-state border, the Westfield Forest Partnership in western Massachusetts, the North Quabbin Regional Landscape Partnership in north-central Massachusetts and the Quabbin to Cardigan Conservation Collaboration that extends from Massachusetts into New Hampshire. He is also exploring similar partnerships across Connecticut.

Bill will be mentoring two interns this fall in collaboration with these regional partnerships to increase their capacity to conduct regional and landscape-scale conservation efforts. He will be sharing lessons from his research on the Highstead web page and new Wildlands and Woodlands website as well as through presentations, articles and other media. Finally, Bill will work with other groups to organize several events to help foster collaboration (see Box 1, below).

Bill is interested in receiving ideas, comments, and input from Highstead members as well as others interested in conservation and urges all to contact him via email at blabich@highstead.net.

Box 1

Upcoming Events to Engage Partners in Conservation

Highstead is discovering that there is great interest in the Wildlands and Woodlands effort as well as other complementary regional and landscape scale conservation initiatives. To advance these efforts Bill Labich will be organizing numerous events at Highstead and across the region.

Forester to Forester Conservation Workshop

This forum will allow private and public foresters across southern New England to share insights into working with land trusts in order to assist their clients achieve long-term conservation objectives. Foresters have close relationships with landowners and can provide valuable input concerning land protection and property and estate planning and land management.

Woodland Council Coordinators Convocation

Coordinators of six regional conservation partnerships will meet to discuss shared needs and objectives. With their input, Highstead will develop, organize and sponsor a workshop designed to help these partnerships meet shared needs collaboratively.

Woodland Conservation Roundtable

Working with the greater Connecticut conservation community, Highstead will sponsor a roundtable of forest landowners, municipal boards and land trusts from western Connecticut to explore shared issues, concerns, and successes and to assess the need for greater collaboration among the groups.



Box 2

Highstead's Role in the Wildlands and Woodlands Partnership: Assisting Collaborations

A new and innovative conservation effort in New England received a welcome boost this fall when Highstead became the first Connecticut-based member of the Wildlands and Woodlands Partnership (W&WP). This informal collaboration of more than 35 conservation organizations and agencies is implementing a bold vision for land protection that began in Massachusetts, but is spreading through New England and the eastern United States. Subsequently, the Partnership endorsed Highstead's new Regional Conservationist, Bill Labich, as the group's first part-time coordinator.

The Wildlands and Woodlands vision calls for the protection of half of the land in southern New England to be preserved as a combination of large "forever wild" forest reserves, and even larger blocks of privately-owned forests that are managed for their many values: timber, habitat, bio-fuels, recreation, water, food, aesthetics and carbon sequestration. Regional partnerships comprised of existing land trusts, conservation organizations, public agencies and citizens will be encouraged to advance this vision and serve as: (1) sources of landowner information on forest conservation and management and (2) catalysts of land protection.

As coordinator, Bill and Highstead will assist the Partnership to expand as a forum for its member organizations and agencies, and advance regional forest conservation across the southern New England-New York region. Current initiatives sponsored by the Partnership include:

- Launch of a new Wildlands and Woodlands website offering information, contacts and action items;
- Development of a communication strategy for the W&W Partnership that will include a speakers and writers bureau of volunteers who will increase public awareness of W&W through speaking engagements, articles, and other media;
- Organizing workshops to bring the coordinators of regional conservation partnerships together to explore collaboration, fundraising, training, and information sharing;
- Developing new digital maps depicting land conservation priorities in each regional conservation partnership area;
- Advancing policy measures to fund land protection and highlight the importance of forest landscapes.

Barn Headquarters
Expanded



Barn Headquarters Expanded

Members and guests attending Highstead's educational programs and special events this year will find our "Barn" headquarters greatly expanded.

Eleven hundred square feet of space was added for offices, the herbarium, and flexible work areas for staff, students and visiting scholars.

Visitors will find many new features within the original building as well. The library sports a new conference table and carpeting; the loft above was transformed into an archival and map room, with enhanced natural lighting provided by two new skylights; both rooms received a fresh coat of paint. Restrooms were also renovated, and the roof re-shingled.



The entire facility is equipped with a geothermal heating and air conditioning system, which also generates domestic hot water. Geothermal technology is energy efficient and environmentally friendly - approximately 70% of the energy used in this system is renewable energy from the ground.





Highstead Programs



Birdwalk
Azalea Walk
Photo Exhibition
Artist’s Reception
Forests, Water and Climate Change

Clethra Walk
Art Exhibit
Artists’ Reception
History of Forests in Southern New England
Amphibians and Regional Conservation

Saturday, May 10	Birdwalk*
7:00 am	Woodland Ecologist, Ed Faison will lead our annual birdwalk through the variety of wetland, woodland, meadow, and edge habitats of Highstead, focusing on bird-habitat relationships and identification by sight and sound. Bring a pair of binoculars and clothing and footwear suitable for wet ground and some off-trail walking. Beginners are encouraged! Meet at the Highstead barn.
Saturday, May 17	Azalea Walk*
10:00 am	Take in the fragrance and color of Highstead’s North American Azalea Collection on a leisurely stroll through the woodland with our plant collections manager, Kathleen Kitka.
June 14 – August 22	Photo Exhibition – “Floodplain Forests”
	A photographic exhibit featuring the work of Claire Dacey. Claire is an artist and ecologist from Western Massachusetts. In this show, she aims to capture some of the dynamism, beauty, and biological richness of floodplain habitats.
	Viewing is by appointment weekdays 9:00 am - 4:00 pm
Saturday, June 14	Artist’s Reception
9:00 am – 1:00 pm	Meet the artist Claire Dacey during this opening reception at the Highstead Barn.
	Open House & Trails - Visitors are invited to explore the new addition to our Barn headquarters. Walking trails will also be open for self-guided tours of the laurel collection in bloom.
1:00 pm	<i>Forests, Water and Climate Change*</i>
	Paul K. Barten, Ph.D., Professor of Forest Resources
	Paul is a distinguished professor of forest hydrology at the University of Massachusetts who has led recent National Academy of Science groups looking at water issues associated with climate and land use change. Following Paul’s talk we plan on visiting local watershed land where Paul and others can discuss the role of forests in the production of abundant, clean water.

Saturday, August 2	Clethra Walk*
10:00 am	Kathleen Kitka, Landscape & Collections Manager
	Take in the beauty and fragrance of the sweet pepperbush as you are guided through the swamp and pond habitats at Highstead. Learn about the many attributes that make this native shrub a welcome addition to home landscapes and natural areas.
September 6 - October 31	Art Exhibit - <i>Amphibians of the Eastern United States</i>
	Guild of Natural Science Illustrators of Greater New York
	Viewing is by appointment weekdays 9:00 am - 4:00 pm
Saturday, September 6	Artists’ Reception
1:00 – 5:00 pm	Meet the artists whose works are on display at the Highstead Barn. In a special informal presentation they will enlighten us about the subject matter and personal experiences that inspired their work.
	Highstead’s trails will be open throughout the afternoon for walks.
Saturday, September 27	<i>History of Forests in Southern New England*</i>
2:00 pm	Ed Faison, Woodland Ecologist
	A slide-show of forest change over the past 15,000 years and how it informs the management of our forests today. Following the talk, Ed will lead a walk out to Highstead’s new deer enclosure.
Saturday, October 18	<i>Amphibians and Regional Conservation*</i>
2:00 pm	Michael Klemens, Ph.D., Amphibian Biologist
	Michael is a Senior Conservationist at the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) and has been on the scientific staff of the American Museum of Natural History since 1979. His career has involved almost three decades of herpetological research in the United States and Africa.



Forest Ecology

Local and Regional Collaborations in the Study of Deer and Oak Forests of Southern New England



Ed Faison – Highstead Ecologist

This summer, ecologist Ed Faison and two undergraduate interns will be studying many aspects of oak forests at Highstead, across the landscape around Redding and regionally in Connecticut and Massachusetts.

Forests dominated by oak have been a principal land cover in southern New England for the past 10,000 years, and their acorns have provided a critical food source for forest and domestic animals, as well as people. At the time of European settlement, oaks appear as the dominant tree in Colonial land surveys. However, over the past century maple and birch have proliferated and appear poised to supplant oaks in many forests across the northeast. The extent to which this shift is occurring in southern Connecticut is unknown, but is important to the future of this landscape and the many protected properties in the region including Highstead. With this in mind, we are initiating a modern study of Redding's forests designed to mimic the Colonial land surveys and to assess change over the past 250-300 years.

Meanwhile, beneath the oaks, the ubiquitous mountain laurel is also in decline. “Kalmia” offers beautiful June blooms and is an important winter food for deer. Recognizing our role as a international center for Kalmia collections and knowledge, Ed will join Highstead board member and woody plant expert, Peter Del Tredici, in a new study of Kalmia's current and future role in our forests. This summer the work will investigate the ability of Kalmia to resprout in maturing oak forests and the impact of deer browsing on this process. This initial study will tell us much about the future structure and aesthetics of our woodlands and should lead to ongoing work on mountain laurel.

To our north, a deer six times as large as the white-tail is wandering the forests of northern Connecticut and Massachusetts. Moose were eliminated from southern New England by hunting and land use about 200 years ago. They began returning about 15 years ago and are increasing steadily and spreading south and have a great potential to influence the region's forests. Little is known about their biology, movements or eating habitats in these southern temperate forests and so Ed will be collaborating with scientists from Harvard Forest, the University of Massachusetts, the Institute of Ecosystem Studies in NY, and Connecticut DEP to address all of these issues in Massachusetts and Northern Connecticut. Following up on his work with deer exclosures at Highstead, Ed is assisting in the establishment of six moose and deer exclosures in regenerating oak-pine forests at the Harvard Forest this spring. Over the summer he and two interns will collect information on seedlings, saplings, and herbs from these exclosures and will begin monitoring long-term changes to vegetation that is either exposed or protected to moose and deer browsing.

THANK YOU!

Once again we take this opportunity to express our appreciation to all who have chosen to be members of Highstead. Each individual contribution confirms a belief in the work Highstead is undertaking, and indicates a desire to keep in touch and informed.

To those listed below who have increased their commitment beyond basic membership, thank you for providing valuable funding and support for Highstead's expanding outreach programs now actively advancing the protection and stewardship of land throughout Southern New England.

Our sincere thanks to all of you.

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