

Old Saybrook Conservation Circular

Vol. 4 / Spring 2017

What Does Conservation Mean ~ to Us ~ Here and Now?

Conservation issues have been much in the news lately, with proposals and controversies about the protection or development of America's lands and bodies of water. These are international issues as well, of course, but environmental concerns of all kinds are not only global but deeply local too. Everyone -- without exception -- needs to be involved in conserving water, energy, air quality, food production, all natural resources -- just to begin the list.

Especially today we cannot entirely depend on federal or state government to protect the quality of our environment and the sustainability of our resources. Consumers, voters, and investors see that they have the responsibility and the power to push environmental initiatives at all levels. States will almost certainly have fewer federal resources to draw on in coming years and will thus have to actively promote their own environmental agendas. (California, for example, has long been a leader in environmental policies with its air pollution legislation and development of clean energy; now it is set to defend its ambitious laws against the loosening of federal regulation.) Individual communities and regions too will need to promote their own priorities and find ways to meet their special concerns. What can we do, here and now, in Old Saybrook? How do we balance our vital interests in a strong economy with our recognition that conservation is essential to our public and private lives?

To a certain extent the public controversies about conservation are caused by different meanings of that word. The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines it as "a careful preservation and protection of something; *especially*: planned management

of a natural resource to prevent exploitation, destruction, or neglect" and that is probably the definition the environmentally concerned would first think of. But Wikipedia's definition is different in important ways: "the ethical use and protection of valuable resources, such as trees, minerals, wildlife, water and others" and this definition too is widely agreed upon. The Business Dictionary goes still further in this direction: "Usage, improvement, and protection of human and natural resources in a wise manner, ensuring derivation of their highest economic and social benefits Conservation is achieved through alternative technologies, recycling, and reduction of waste and spoilage, and (unlike preservation) implies consumption of the conserved resources."

The difference between these two aspects of conservation may well be the basis for serious misunderstandings in public discussions of the issues: legislators and business usually see themselves as working to support **protection for continued consumption**, while "conservationists" and non-profit organizations focus on preserving and **protecting from development**. Both perspectives are valid, though usually in different contexts. The only way to ensure that our views on these issues are heard is to participate actively in local, state, and national discussions -- but when we do, we need to know what aspect of conservation we are advocating for. We must be clear in our communication with our representatives, and here in Old Saybrook our selectmen and our Land Use department, making sure they know which view of conservation we are arguing for in particular contexts.

But these two perspectives on conservation need not -- should not -- be seen as competing with each other. Protecting resources to prevent exploitation need not conflict with protecting resources for economic and social benefits. The Nature Conservancy points out that balance is key to reconciling both approaches to conservation: "We use natural solutions to meet the needs of both people and wildlife." Although Theodore Roosevelt is commonly seen as the outstanding conservationist of the famous family, a new book, *Rightful Heritage: Franklin D. Roosevelt and the Land of America* (Brinkley), focuses on FDR's initiatives both to protect 118 million acres and to push for economic growth.

Our challenge, like FDR's, is to make these two goals complement each other. Old Saybrook can be proud of its protection of the Preserve and its essential habitat for wildlife, of the headwaters of three rivers. No one imagines that Long Island Sound should be protected in the sense of "set aside" but there can be no argument that its health is essential to our own quality of life, nor that the conservation of energy and water has a direct impact on our private cost of living and on the cost of managing the town. Old Saybrook plays a key part in that protection, as it has done in the past. The Conservation Commission and other town commissions and departments have set aside the Preserve and other protected lands, managed parks, participated vigorously in Connecticut's solar challenge, established fish ladders, among other initiatives.

But even beyond these, conservation can be of enormous economic benefit here: Old Saybrook is ideally situated to develop eco-tourism as an increasingly important contributor to the town's

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What Does Conservation Mean continued...

stability. What could we do to lead tourists to explore more than our beaches? What public transportation and walking paths could connect the Preserve, the Connecticut River areas, and the beaches? How do we link our natural resources to make them more accessible? Do we need more bicycle paths or sidewalks, more transportation from one area of town to another, better maps of our attractions, more education about our marshes and the extraordinarily rich ecology of our delta, more easements linking town park areas, more focused vacation-advertising?

We have twin goals for conservation in Old Saybrook: to protect our natural resources for the long term welfare of the environment and to develop those resources for the benefit of residents and visitors alike.

News

A few weeks ago The Sierra Club newsletter wrote that “local leaders across the nation are realizing that [developing] clean and renewable energy will help create jobs and boost local economies, and protect the health of families across communities,” citing examples among 23 city councils committing to 100% renewable energy within the next 20 years.

The Associated Press reported (July 11, 2016) that Old Saybrook is one of five sites chosen by the state’s DEEP and Audubon Connecticut in a new effort to protect local bird species on state-owned and privately held lands, and landowners can be eligible for grants to promote protection efforts.

Conservation Commission Members

Richard Esty, Chair
Emily Grochowski, Vice-Chair
Nina Garrett, Secretary
Jerry Brophy
Kacey Constable
Donna Leake

Anyone who is interested in serving on the Conservation Commission should send a resume and letter of interest to First Selectman Carl Fortuna with a copy to Richard Esty, Commission chair.

Advice from a River

**** Go with the flow ** Slow down and meander **
Be thoughtful of those downstream ** Go around the obstacles ** Immerse yourself in nature ** Stay current
** The beauty is in the journey!****

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Announcements

Visit us at our “Conservation Commission of Old Saybrook” Facebook page for conservation news, updates and local events. We cull the best of local and regional conservation news and posts in all realms - from concerns about climate news, invasive plants, fish and wildlife updates, to vernal pools and our own thousand-acre Preserve. “Like” us and post your feedback.

Dont’ miss Old Saybrook’s **Earth Day** celebration on April 22, 2017. The Conservation Commission will sponsor a table with exhibits, lists of town properties of interest, and information about our projects. This year’s **Earth Day** will focus on climate literacy to empower global citizens with knowledge to inspire action for environmental protection. Check out **www.earthday.org**.

Useful Information

The following organizations’ websites provide not only information about conservation efforts in a wide range of contexts but also suggestions for engagement and activism at any level.

National Resources Defense Council -- nrdc.org

Audubon Society -- audubon.org

Sierra Club -- sierraclub.org

BlueGreen Alliance -- bluegreenalliance.org

Yale Environment 360 -- e360.yale.edu (e-magazine from the Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies)

Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection -- ct.gov/deep

Connecticut Fund for the Environment -- ctenvironment.org

Look Around You for ...



The **Eastern Striped Skunk**; its Latin name, *mephitis mephitis*, means bad odor. Although its long silky black coat with white stripes was formerly used for coats, the skunk is in no danger of exstinktion. Its mating season starts in early spring, and six kits, on average, are born in early May or June. The skunk is omnivorous, eating insects, small mammals, bird eggs, carrion, fruit, nuts, and grasses, but it is in turn eaten by great horned owls. A skunk will display a range of warning signs before spraying: if it twists around to point both its head and its tail at you ... best to retreat, slowly.

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