



Northwest Camp



NW Camp Committee Annual Report for 2019

Submitted by Rod Parlee, Chair and Conservation Director

The NW Camp Committee had a successful year managing the cabin and its surrounding 125-acres high on the Taconic Plateau below the summit of Bear Mountain. The rustic but cozy cabin is constructed of native American chestnut logs, tucked away under an old-growth Eastern hemlock forest canopy in the remote and environmentally diverse northwest corner of Connecticut. The Committee volunteers managing this self-service facility continue to balance the needs of its guests with a safe and environmentally responsible self-service camping experience.

The pristine stream adjacent to the cabin drains to Sages ravine and is part of the unique Schenob brook watershed drainage basin. It consists of a 600-foot ravine, cascading waterfalls and a stand of Connecticut's largest 100-acre plus, old-growth stand of ancient forest. Pockets of up to 350-year old hemlock straddle the border of Connecticut and Massachusetts. Beyond providing essential biodiversity, the oldest trees in a forest capture the most carbon. Increased carbon sequestration by forests such as these are required now more than ever to increase negative emissions and stabilize CO₂ levels. This rare watershed has been the target of protection for many years by numerous local, state and national environmental organizations and public agencies. In recognition of this protection the Committee is seeking professionals that would volunteer their services by conducting an inventory of native flora, invasives, wildlife, herpetology, avi-fauna, old-growth forest ecology, mycology, ichthyology, vernal pools, geology, GIS, natural history, hydrology, climate change impacts, storm water run-off, etc. Continuously learning what makes this fragile and vulnerable property and watershed so rare is a

high priority of the Northwest Camp Committee. The results of these inventories will also help us manage the property sustainably and heighten the awareness of our guests. Striving to reduce our impact is paramount!

Many productive Northwest Camp Committee, Volunteer Camp & Cabin Committee (VCC) and CT Chapter meetings took place throughout the year. In addition to the Annual Summit, Annual Gathering and Appalachian Trail (AT) Day the two-annual NWC workparties (first Saturday in May & November) resulted in the completion of many tasks. The Executive board of the Northwest Camp Committee also contribute a great deal of time and energy to the VCC throughout the year.

In early March the Committee hosted its first ever “Snowshoe Frolic” which consisted of a 2-mile trek in fresh powder around the canopy of the old-growth Hemlock grove. Afterwards, everyone was treated to Hot Chocolate with peppermint sticks around the campfire.

Some improvements to NW Camp took place during the summer. A new wood box was added with the cabin roof extended above it and a new bridge was placed over Bog brook. Bear encounters around Bear Mountain and the cabin increased. The Committee encouraged registered users to carry with them a whistle, bear bells or maybe even bear spray. Packing food securely inside the cabin with the door latched is now a necessity. The Committee will be installing two Bear Boxes, one by the cabin and one by the tent platform with the assistance of the Chapter’s Trails Committee. Conflicts with wildlife are primarily caused by inappropriate human behavior.

The 2019 Perseid Meteor Shower Extravaganza had clear skies each night. Prior to the meteor shower the group hiked to a classic fen on the way up to Brace Mountain loaded with lush grasses, sedges, rushes, wildflowers, salmonberries and cranberries. Our special guest a Botanist and Lichenologist, Steve Messier identified numerous plants and lichens. After a tasty cookout and our ceremonious annual \$200 donation to the Ridgerunners, the group hiked up Mt Riga and even though the Moon was bright, 5 streaking meteors and three satellites were observed. One satellite puzzled everyone, because it didn’t move, it just stayed in the same spot and flashed. On the way down from Mt Riga Steve Messier pointed out many glowing (in the dark) lichens found at the bottom of certain trees. The next day hike down to Brassie Brook Shelter we learned that we were overshadowed by a very large and unique stand of Sassafras on both sides of Bear Mt Road and the AT. Sassafras (*Sassafras albidum*) is a member of the laurel family having both ovate and lobed aromatic leaves. The next night, after another tasty cookout with loads of watermelon for dessert, our special guest Steve Messier put on his PowerPoint presentation and enlightened us with lichen slides and real samples of the colorful lichen we had seen along the trail. That night, on the summit we counted 13 bright meteors and 6 satellites and there was that same geosynchronous satellite we saw the night before. A geosynchronous satellite is a satellite in geosynchronous orbit, with an orbital period the same as the Earth’s rotation period. Such a satellite returns to the same position in the sky after each sidereal day, and over the course of a day traces out a path in the sky that is typically some form of analemma. Steve Messier also inventoried plants and mapped out an area under the dense hemlock within the heavily impacted zone near the cabin where revegetation areas may be cordoned off. The Committee is grateful to Steve for time he spent at NW Camp during the Perseid Meteor Shower Extravaganza.

For twelve consecutive years the Committee has donated funds to the AMC/ATC Ridgerunner (RR’s) because they value the program and how the RR’s closely monitor the AT and cabin area and promote Leave No Trace principles. The Committee continues to observe the 2017 Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that requires that the RR’s visit and monitor the camp when possible. While at Camp the RR’s run through a checklist of items that help the Committee monitor the cabin and surrounding property. The Committee is very thankful that in 2019 the RR season began in May and ended in early September but in the future, extending the program through October would be most beneficial.

The hope remains alive that this well managed sensitive piece of property, through the committee’s collaborative and information sharing process will ensure and sustain its long-term health and viability for future generations to enjoy.

2019 Committee Roster with Volunteers

Rod Parlee (Chair, Conservation Director) *

Art Mauger (Secretary) *

Craig Kennedy (Registrar) *

Donald Klein (Caretaker) *

Paul Thoma (Treasurer) *

Tom McGrath (Outgoing Co-Chair)*

Al Puches (Chapter Treasurer) *

John Hicks (Past Chair/Caretaker/Registrar) *

Carol Langley (Cabin Monitor)*

John Rek (Past Chair/Caretaker/Registrar)*

Roy Hoffman (Past Chair/Caretaker/Registrar)

Trent Link (Past Chair/Caretaker/Registrar)

Joel Hoffman (Cabin Monitor)

Greg York *

Ethan Rain*

Eric Harvey

Tom O'Connor

Joe Parenteau

* denotes Stewardship Award with more than 30 volunteer hours



