

■ NORTHWEST CAMP IN CONNECTICUT ■

A Continuing History of Balancing Preservation with Recreation



■ *Norm Rosensweig arrives at NW Camp on snowshoes from Route 41 and Bear Mountain. All photos courtesy of Rod Parlee.*

For many a good reason, change comes slow to Northwest Camp primarily due to its difficult to access location high on a wild and remote northwest shoulder of Bear Mountain where it meets the New York and Massachusetts borders. An ecological paradise of this nature needs constant protection and vigilance more than change, so as to not love this area to death.

In 1949, a special Committee of the CT Chapter was given the directive to expand its field of operations and decided to mail questionnaires to the four hundred members and ask about general camping areas in CT. The results proved positive; a small but sincere minority endorsed camping around Mount Riga. The Mount Riga Corporation was convinced that the AMC cared about preservation of the wild. So began the “Mount Riga Project” which eventually led to the acquisition of “Northwest Camp.”

When Harold Pierpont and John Ensor, investigating for the CT AMC, first reached out to folks on Mount Riga on July 15, 1950, they were fortunate to find a group of people representing the Mount Riga Corporation sitting on a porch at the McCabe Camp on Riga Lake. Among the group was Louise (McCabe) O’Brien who was a staunch friend of the Chapter and the treasurer for the Corporation. After conveying that the AMC was a group interested in preserving, not despoiling the wilderness, they were friendly at once. Robi O’Brien, Robert and Louise O’Brien’s son, still stays in contact with the Northwest Camp Committee to this day.

In 1951, Don Pratt and his camping subcommittee selected a “lovely spot in a hemlock grove on a bank above a rushing stream” and named it the “Northwest Camp”. The cabin was constructed with only hand-tools and was known as the “Mount Riga Project” for a cost of only \$159.09 plus rentals. American chestnut logs suffering from blight and leaning against hemlock trees (dead for 30-years but still sound) were brought in from the surrounding forest, shaped and fit into place like a puzzle. Thanks to many folks like Seymour Smith, John Ensor, Don Pratt and Horace Whittier the Northwest Camp cabin stands strong to this day.

The development of the “Mount Riga Project” was accomplished with a minimum of publicity outside of the AMC. The land was initially leased to the AMC by the “Mount Riga Corporation” and according to the *History of Connecticut Chapter Appalachian Mountain Club, 1921-1981* there was a commitment that “the permanent sleeping quarters at Northwest will not be expanded without permission from Mount Riga Corporation”. At the corporation’s request, use of the property was to be restricted as much as possible to AMC membership.

For many years, the camp was mostly accessed by foot with a backpack up Bear Mountain on a three-mile Undermountain trail from Rt 41 in Salisbury. Now, in the winter, it is mostly accessed from the other side of Bear Mountain to a trailhead by all-wheel drive vehicles even though most roads leading to the cabin are closed for the winter.

In 1957–58, trail cutting, and exploitation were major concerns. A CT Chapter philosophy was established in opposition to further expansion of the camp, erecting shelters and cutting of new trails all in the interest of keeping the area wild. In 2000, a letter from the Alice Combes, President of the Mount Riga Corporation to Andrew Falender, Executive Director of the AMC brought to light the “unfortunate” publication of a 1999 book published by the AMC. Due to a chapter in the book which invites the public to utilize their private lands which they claimed amounted to trespassing. Also, she further insisted that the publication be removed from all bookshelves and be completely withdrawn from distribution. She continued with concerns about another AMC and CT Forest & Park Association (CFPA) book published in 1992, exploiting a trail on their private property. She was concerned about unapproved trails leading to the A.T. and mentioned a mailing to AMC members showing the exact location of NW Camp with their private properties appearing as the Appalachian Trail system. Leading up to 2020, many phone applications and internet maps continued to exploit trails in the area of the camp including the unblazed Bee Line on Mount Riga property. Trails were inaccurately advertised as leading up to and going through the cabin even when the cabin was under a strict quarantine protocol.

To this day, the trail is labeled on internet maps as a blue-blazed trail leaving the impression it’s part of the CFPA blue-blazed trail system and open to everyone! The Committee is devoted to removing unwanted trails from the internet apps and agrees that the internet should not dictate how the NW



■ *Seymour Smith in front of Northwest Camp cabin in 1953.*



■ Northwest Camp cabin beyond the stream.

Camp property is managed in a continuing effort to keep the area as wild and safe as possible.

Another tough task of managing this land is balancing preservation with recreation in such a sensitive area. The rustic but cozy Northwest Camp cabin is constructed of rare American chestnut logs, tucked away under an old-growth Eastern Hemlock forest canopy in an environmentally diverse area in the

very northwest corner of Connecticut. It is located within the Taconic plateau, a core forested area that provides essential ground and surface water linkages to a surrounding mosaic of calcareous wetlands and important lowland forests. It serves as a coarse filter or matrix to capture the habitat requirements of a full array of southern New England forest species.

The cabin sits near the top of the 14,000-acre Schenob Brook watershed basin in Connecticut and drains east toward Sages Ravine. The pristine stream adjacent to the cabin is the source of drinking water and drains to Sages ravine. The threatened Slimy Sculpin fish lives in this stream and watershed. This rare drainage basin has been the target of protection for many years by numerous local, state, and national environmental organizations and public agencies. Also known as a Bioreserve, this watershed owes its uniqueness to the presence of calcareous bedrock which drains to calcareous fens that in the process neutralizes groundwater as it reacts with calcium. This results in alkaline-rich wetlands and mineral-rich groundwater supporting a remarkably diverse assemblage of rare plants, animals and natural communities. Calcareous fens are one of the rarest natural communities and are threatened by land use conversion, changes in groundwater supply, and development.

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) claims that the southern Berkshires has one of the highest concentrations of rare species in the Northeast. Ecologically, it is at the heart of an area that has been identified as one of the world's Last Great Places. The TNC Summer 1991 Newsletter stated that the "Schenob Brook is the richest watershed in Massachusetts: its vast 14,000-acres harbor 41 species of rare plants and animals." The biologically rich area abounds in flora and fauna, some are endangered making it the most biologically fragile region in Massachusetts. The three-state Berkshire Taconic Landscape is globally significant for the conservation of our natural heritage. It contains one of the largest extant contiguous forests in the Northeast and Sages Ravine has

one of only three stands of old-growth forests remaining in Connecticut. All stands have in common an unusually high concentration of rare species and natural communities. Sages Ravine has been called a natural shrine to many primeval wildernesses.

Continuously learning and sharing what makes this fragile and vulnerable property and watershed so unique is a high priority of the Northwest Camp Committee. The resolute and persevering Committee volunteers who manage this self-service facility continue to meet the challenge of balancing the needs of its guests with a safe and environmentally responsible self-service camping



■ After Workparty pose. From left to right: Chuck Doll, Bob Kostic, Trent Link, Jim St Amand, Roy Hoffman, Roy Meadows, Paul Ives, Ken Kostak, John Rek, and Rod Parlee.

experience. Continuously learning and sharing what makes this fragile and vulnerable property and watershed so unique is a high priority. Striving to reduce our impact is a paramount effort.

Since 1996, the Committee has conducted numerous workparties, workshops, studies, and invited many special guests connected

to the natural world surrounding Northwest camp. Trent Link was Chair of the Committee. At a workparty, he and other members noticed that water was finding its way into the cabin so much so that it would freeze on the floor surface. The following Spring, the Committee workparty sprang into action and installed a forty-foot curtain drain and retaining wall upgradient of the cabin to catch the run-off, stabilizing soil, and diverting it away from the cabin which solved the problem. To further facilitate a safe exit from the loft, a new window was installed as an emergency exit that utilized a rope ladder built by the late and former Chair Dave Terrill. Ridgerunners (RR's) continued to be an asset to the Committee by limiting potential problems. Another accomplishment that Trent mastered which focused on safety and reduced forest fragmentation



■ Revegetation Area. Nicole Ives, Jim St. Amand, and Heather Parlee.

was the agreement to order wood off-site from a local farmer. This helped minimize further fragmentation to the intact forest ecosystem understanding that dead trees are healthy for the regeneration of a forest. A cordoned off revegetation area in front and uphill of the cabin was created as well and this was continuously restocked with native plants and trees.

In **1997**, open cabin weekends began with a “Snowshoe Weekend” and “Spring Equinox Social” with the latter culminating with an impressive view of comet Hale-Bopp from the summit of Bear Mountain. A joint workparty with the Trails Committee in '97 and '98 helped with drainage issues on NW Road, regrading in front of the cabin, building an erosion-free stairway to the cabin with rocks, repainting the downstairs ceiling, moving the outhouse, stacking three cords of wood and upgrading the outdoor kiosk. Worth noting was the effort of the Committee to develop a policy detailing the cabin’s historical significance with the purpose of protecting it from overuse and unneeded modernization. This policy was brought before the CT Chapter for review and discussion.

Questions were added to backs of registration cards for dashboards of parked vehicles in **1998**. They were attached to reservation cards in the form of a self-addressed postcard that informed the Registrar of the camper’s experience and led to a quicker response time.

In **1999**, the Committee re-blazed its boundaries thanks to a land survey that was donated by John Bean, P.E., Professor of Civil Engineering at Central State Connecticut University, and his students. Committee member John Hicks, who also manages National Park property boundaries was also helpful. The Committee helped contribute to a Model Environmental Educational Facilities plan spearheaded by AMC. Plans were in the making to restore sections of the cabin such as the rotting sill logs, the floor and the roof before the cabin’s 50th Anniversary.

The first event in **2000** was the Spring workparty which had special guests, J.B. Gardener who told stories about the cabin in the '60s and Robi O'Brien who was treasurer of the Mount Riga Corporation. An agreement was made to add a gate lock and share the combination with the Mount Riga Ranger, Danny Brazee, Sr. The Beeline to Bear Mountain, a private and unblazed trail that only registered NW campers have access to, was illegally blazed with red blazes. The blazes were removed.

In May of **2001**, a contract was approved for \$10K to improve the foundation and replace rotted sills on the bottom rows of the cabin. By the end of the year, Marc Olivieri and his crew had done a terrific job with the cabin restoration. The entire cabin was raised during the process, and crushed stone was placed below 8x8 ship-lapped timbers. In November, the Committee celebrated its 50th Anniversary. Original cabin builders, previous Committee members, work-party volunteers, plus Chapter and Regional board members enjoyed a good-sized cookout.

The Committee continued its strong collaboration with the Chapter. The minutes of the April 17, **2002** Committee meeting stated that the “CT Chapter will donate \$1,000 per year to fund the depreciation fund for the cabin to be held in a fund in Joy Street.” Four books were purchased that year and added to the camp library thanks to a special fund of the Chapter’s Conservation Committee.

Due to safety matters, the loft with bunks was closed and locked in **2003**. It was determined by AMC’s safety inspection that the rope ladder from the loft window was not the safest way for egress. Even after opposition by many Committee members the Committee searched for a solution. The recording secretary had read in *AMC Outdoors* that thanks to Stephen Jablonski Architects of Springfield, MA, services were rendered at Noble View. For a nominal fee, Stephen drew up blueprints and submitted two plans, one adding a staircase from the loft from the campfire side of the cabin and the other off the back. The Committee favored the construction off the back and the search was on for a carpenter.



■ *Marc Olivieri and Crew.*



■ *Rod Parlee and Chuck Doll at Staircase Project Grand Opening.*

In **2004** after receiving two bids locally, Tom Bindas and his AMC Roving Construction Crew completed the construction. The Committee was the proud recipient of a \$10,350 AMC Small Facilities grant for the “Staircase Project.” Only \$3,526 was expended from NW Camp Reserves. The project opened the loft, added more loft light with skylights and hexagon windows and most importantly allowed for a safer egress. In August, the Committee received a Certificate of Occupancy and enjoyed a cabin celebration. The Committee expressed much gratitude

to Paul Cuhna, Roger Scholl, Norman Simms, Paula Burton, and Tom Bindas with his crew for their encouragement, funding, and work.

Due to safety concerns, all railings leading to the stream were replaced

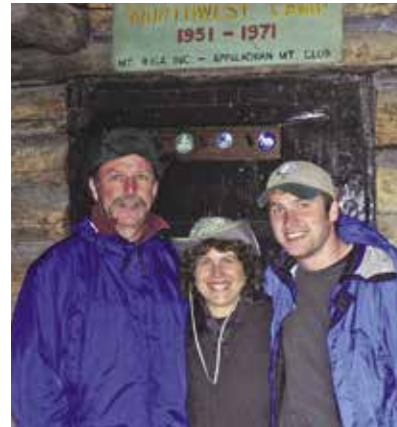
in **2005**, thanks to a donation of cedar from Trent Link. Caretaker Dan Green added amenities to the cabin. Jim St. Amand donated and installed a slate counter top. A Conservation Director was added to the Executive board, and the Committee received an AMC grant that helped us publish an updated brochure which contained low impact use information and updated cabin rates. To share the Committee's commitment to stewardship and environmental awareness with the idea of thinking globally and acting locally, the Committee agreed unanimously to adopt a "Conservation Code" and post it in the cabin.

Conservation Code of Northwest Camp, Salisbury, CT

Adopted on January 17, 2005 unanimously by the NW Camp Committee

- I will respect all living things, and the natural environment on which they depend, for each is a link in the chain that supports life on earth.
- I will never buy or sell endangered animals or plants or the products derived from them.
- I will make use of the natural environment in such a fashion that no species will disappear as a result of my actions.
- I will strive to stabilize the global population of humans and their livestock, for these compete directly for space and sustenance with the other living things on earth.
- I will utilize nonrenewable natural resources sparingly and will utilize renewable natural resources no faster than their ability to be regenerated. I will not waste fuel or other energy supplies.
- I will not pollute the environment so as to degrade the quality of the air, soil, or water; and I will otherwise set an example of good conservation conduct.
- I will respect the environment wherever I go and will support the defense of nature by others, including officials and organized groups.
- I will call attention to cases of pollution and other abuses of nature, both civil and military.
- I will rejoice in the beauty and wonder of nature all the days of my life.

Amidst wintry conditions in **2006**, the Committee hosted a "Lighten Up" backpacking workshop by three Eastern Mountain Sports employees followed by a spring leadership training session. Despite imperfect weather over the Trails Day weekend, Leave No Trace (LNT) Master Educators of the Education Committee; Leo Kelly, Dale Geslien and Nate Shedd conducted a successful LNT Trainer Course. Principles and teaching methods were discussed at length with accompanying activities. Rod Parlee, Camp Conservation Director was one of three who passed the rigorous train-the-trainer weekend session at the camp.



■ *LNT Master Educators: Leo Kelly, Dale Geslien, and Nate Shedd.*

'90s, *Yankee Magazine* described him as "Tree preservationist of the decade." A book titled "Treehugger" was published about his real-life heroics. Matt proved his theory that the Eastern Hemlock tree stand surrounding NW Camp is old growth by cutting the cross-section of a fallen 7-inch Hemlock and counting 116 tightly compressed rings. Matt completed a study of the forest around NW Camp and recommended the Committee preserve it for the next 100-years and beyond. He also developed a knack for predicting bear sightings.



■ *Northwest Camp Caretaker Jim St. Amand.*

For Committee recruitment the Chair continued to attend Chapter events with the tri-fold display board to gain interest in Northwest Camp workparties and events. At the workparties, the Committee completed the finishing touches to the cabin such as chinking and waterproofing with Trent Link once again donating material and constructing railings and posts.

Eastern Hemlock trees that shade the cabin were the subject of a study done by Matt "Twig" Largess, who is a nationally known arborist. In the

In **2007**, Chuck Doll was presented a wooden plaque shaped like the State with a NW Camp patch logo etched in the northwest corner for serving as Committee Chair for seven years. Chuck was Chair during rigorous times when the cabin went through a major restoration, was partially closed temporarily, and reopened with a new highly structured staircase. The Committee also had to deal with the loss of former Caretaker Dan Green who died in a sailing accident. As a tribute to "Danny Boy" nationally known arborist Matt "Twig" Largess planted an 8-foot-tall yellow birch during a ceremony attended by many family and Committee members. Later that year, Caretaker Jim St. Amand and Registrar Joni Kafka stepped down from their positions. They had performed a lion's share of the work for the Committee since 2000.

Questionnaire outreach once again proved positive in 2007. Networking at

AMC annual events and outdoor retail stores resulted in the most successful outreach. The Committee utilized an elaborate tri-fold display that dazzled everyone who approached it. A detailed NW Camp Committee questionnaire was handed out to everyone with information about the physical environment, Committee's needs conveyed along with asking for Committee membership. The balancing act of not exploiting the cabin location, but needing volunteers to manage it continued. Findings from the questionnaire revealed that those who had stayed at the cabin had a "great" experience and had little knowledge of the uniqueness of the rare watershed area in which the cabin is situated. Nor did they know that it sits in the shadow of an old-growth Hemlock forest of which only 0.5 percent of old-growth remains in the eastern U.S. Many workshops were suggested such as LNT, Ridgerunner training, wildlife tracking, outdoor cooking, SOLO advanced first aid, mycology, bog habitats, avi-fauna, botany and silviculture. Most importantly eighteen respondents requested to be notified of Committee events and five signed up to be on the Committee. Five are still on the Committee to this day.

Sue Ives was elected Camp Registrar and Paul Ives as Caretaker in **2008**. Sue accepted reservations primarily from her



■ Rod Parlee with exhibit tri-fold.



■ A cold dip in Sages Ravine.

telephone with limited hours during the week. She did a thorough job at explaining the details of reserving the camp. In addition to the many requirements in the new by-laws, the newly elected Committee Chair Rod Parlee served as liaison with the Mount Riga Corporation helping to coordinate security issues. As part of citizen science, the Committee conducted a "Riffle Bio-assessment" of wadeable streams by Volunteers (RBV) in Schenob Brook. The collection and identification of "most wanted" macro-invertebrates are used to identify streams with excellent water quality. This was the first RBV the Committee participated in with the assistance of CT DEEP.

Sam Fernandez, a member of Troop 162 from Columbia, CT constructed



■ New moldering privy.

the first-ever two-crib system moldering privy for NW Camp. The privy was constructed in Columbia with the help of other scouts and organized by Committee Co-chair, Tom McGrath. Sam and his troop delivered it in January of **2009** by attaching ski-like runners on the bottom and sliding it one-third of a mile uphill on the snow to the exact planned location. The specified site was pre-approved by Sean Hayden of the Torrington Health District.

In August of **2010**, Director of Chapter and Volunteers Relations Roger Scholl and Regional Director Dale Geslien joined the Committee

for a weekend of old-growth forest, mushroom identification, and Perseid Meteor Shower hikes. Other special guests included nationally known arborist Matt "Twig" Largess and mycologist Henry Smith. Twenty-six people participated in a hike down to a waterfall in Sages Ravine and up to Bald Peak to view the annual meteor showers. Later in the year, the Committee performed membership outreach by showing off its detailed tri-fold at different events such as EMS Club Day which they did for seven years in a row. The Committee was apprehensive about exploiting this secret, sensitive and hard-to-get-to place but understood the simple fact that "users flushed out abusers."



■ 60th Anniversary Cabin Replica.

In **2011**, Sean Hayden, who previously helped the Committee with the moldering privy has now become a certified professional in soil erosion and sediment control and a certified soil scientist. He offered his services with helping the Committee deal with constant erosion upgradient of the cabin. Sean offered a free site-assessment and designed ways to control erosion

without the impacts from heavy equipment. On Saturday, August 13, 2011, the Committee hosted a well-planned 60-year celebration as a tribute to the long-standing Northwest Camp cabin and the former Committee members who made it possible. The night before the celebration, participants and planners were treated to a spectacular viewing of over 20 Perseid meteors from the summit of Bald Peak. Back at the cabin the next day the Committee offered chocolate raspberry cake along with a miniature (almost identical) cabin made from pretzels and graham crackers. Of the thirty or so participants, some of the original crew was present such as Don Pratt, Joan Ensor Katan, Charlie Katan and Norm Sills. Sincere thanks to the dedicated long-time AMC members including John and Marge Hicks as well as Carol Langley and Paul Thoma who both worked diligently for over a year, organizing the celebration.

A front deck, cantilever roof and a fusible hot-air vent above the wood stove were constructed and installed by the Committee under the direction of the newly appointed Caretaker, Don Klein in 2012. The fusible link vent allows the cabin loft to heat properly if the fire door leading to the loft is closed as instructed. For the first time in modern memory the cabin weekends were booked for the entire summer and most of the year. The Committee continued to strive to minimize impacts to the sensitive watershed due to the increased cabin usage while recognizing the path to sustainability with the main goal of leaving no trace. The proper management of NW Camp and the surrounding property is only made possible due to the passion and dedication of its volunteer members.



■ 60th Anniversary pioneers; John Hicks, Donald Pratt, Joan Ensor-Katan, Charlie Katan, and Norm Sills.

In 2013, caretaker Don Klein continued to take pride in organizing workparties and managing the cabin with 125-acres, responding expediently to minor fix-it issues on a regular basis. Registrar Craig Kennedy took the time to answer the myriad of questions associated with every reservation; tracked bed-nights and even initiated



■ Registrar Craig Kennedy, Caretaker Don Klein, and Treasurer Paul Thoma.

an e-mail database of camp users. Financial Liaison, Paul Thoma managed finances and submitted financial reports prior to every meeting. Trails Chair, John Hicks organized boundary workparties for the

Committee and the National Park Service, donated loads of cordwood and attended all workparties. In addition to A.T. Day and a Winter Snowshoe weekend, the Committee hosted its annual Perseid Meteor Shower Weekend in August. After a delicious cookout, Felicia Ortner a Connecticut Master Wildlife Conservationist, and



■ A local resident, the Red-spotted Newt.

a bear enthusiast, presented her PowerPoint presentation “The Bear Reality” which provided education about bears and helped dispel common misunderstandings. The Committee then presented the Canadian film “Being Caribou” about a husband-and-wife team Karsten Heuer (wildlife biologist) and Leanne Allison (media environmentalist) who follow a herd of 120,000 caribou on foot across 1,500-km of Arctic tundra. Both presentations were projected from the tent platform which served as a stage. Then it was off to Bald Peak where 11 stargazers saw 59 streaking meteors on Saturday night and 38 on Sunday night between midnight and 1 am.

In May of 2014, Steve and Rachel Svec of the Allen Bird Club of Springfield, MA, volunteered their time and conducted a bird inventory of the cabin area. The Committee hosted numerous meetings throughout the year, participated in many conference calls, attended Volunteer Managed Facilities meetings, attended and tabled at the CT Chapter’s Annual Gathering, and attended, tabled and presented at the 138th Annual Summit. A small solar panel powering an interior LED light strip was installed and added much needed light in the cabin. Prior to the meteor shower viewing on Bald Peak, participants enjoyed a barbecue and two PowerPoint presentations powered by the newly acquired battery powered portable projector. The first presentation was a “Welcome to Northwest Camp,” and the second; “The Elusive Cougar.” Before the showing of the encore movie the “Lorax,” a very loud Barred Owl directly overhead, made his presence known by loudly hooting to another owl deep in the woods making everyone sit up straight in their lounge chairs. Viewers from the cool clear summit of Bald Peak saw an almost simultaneous Sunset and “Super Moonrise,” and streaking meteors with up to fourteen per hour.

For the first time in modern memory, members of the Committee met with the Mount Riga Committee. Issues discussed included management techniques on dealing with invasives, GIS, property boundary monitoring with drones, a mysterious bridge construction on NW Road, vandalism associated with a timber harvest, overuse of sensitive areas, over advertising, trail management, old growth forests and rare flora and fauna.

Continuously learning what makes the fragile and vulnerable NW Camp



■ *Old growth.*

property and watershed so rare is a high priority of the NW Camp Committee. The results of natural resource inventories help the Committee manage the property sustainably and heighten the attractiveness of the camp. In support of recognizing this protection, the Committee began a project in **2015** seeking environmental professionals who would volunteer

their services by conducting an inventory of avi-fauna including strigiformes, bats, bogs and calcareous fens, erosion control, geology, GIS, global climate change, herpetology, hydrology, invasive plants, insects, mycology, natural history including Native American, native flora, old-growth forest ecology, storm water runoff, stream health, vernal pools and wildlife. In exchange for their services, volunteers were offered an opportunity to stay at the cabin free of charge.



■ *Craig Kennedy adding books to the NW Camp library.*

The Committee was thankful to CT Chapter Executive Committee member Bea Holt who made a personal monetary donation to the Committee for the purpose of starting a library of field guides at the cabin. A bookcase was constructed by Trent Link with handles made from Mountain Laurel and is now stocked with an array of field guides for guests. The Committee's high-point of 2015 was the construction of a 250-foot long bog bridge on the Bog Trail for the purpose of reducing impact to a topogenous, oligotrophic bog (aka poor fen) that slowly drains to Sages Ravine on its way past the cabin. The bridge material purchase was made possible thanks to a Special Projects Fund grant from the AMC Conservation Programs Committee. The Committee sprang into action searching for a sill material the AMC staff would approve. After reaching out and networking with associates, it was decided to go with Black Locust which may last 50-years. Charles Besozzi of New England Naval Timbers, LLC supplied and delivered the Locust. The first Bog Bridge workparty was one weekend in June and with the help of four AMC Ridgerunners, Angel Vega and many volunteers, they moved the very heavy material that

was delivered to and stacked in the yarding area. The second workparty took an entire week in August, which was planned in conjunction with the annual Perseid Meteor Shower Weekend cookout and an Owl Prowl, led by Fran Zygmunt of the Audubon Society. The grand opening ceremony of the Bog Bridge was conducted prior to the field portion of the Saturday night Owl Prowl. The completion of the Bog Bridge would not have been achieved without the tireless efforts of the NW Camp Committee and members of the CT Chapter A.T. Committee under the dedicated leadership of Chairman, Dave Boone.

The Perseid Meteor Shower Weekend Extravaganza in **2016** was action packed with nightly cookouts, a LNT mini-workshop and skit performed by six RRs, a Bog Trail Bridge Plant Identification Walk led by Bill Moorhead, an independent consulting field botanist, a report on the Fawn Mortality Project of Northwest CT by Ray Hardy, a CT DEEP Master Wildlife Conservationist, an invigorating Owl Prowl led by special guest Donna Rose of the Audubon Society, Bog Trail Education Project PowerPoint (PPT) presented by Eagle Scout candidate Josh Michna and NW Camp Potpourri PPT of volunteers in action presented by Rod Parlee. In appreciation of the importance and effectiveness of RR's, the Committee donated \$200 to the program and strongly supported a more regimented monitoring and an extended season beyond Labor Day. Josh Michna (of New Hartford Troop 19) and his father, Rich, were active all year planning the completion of the Bog Trail Education Project. Josh raised funds to pay for the publication of a NW Camp Bog Trail Guide brochure with many corresponding (professionally printed and laminated) signposts describing bog indicator species and access to the trail.

Thanks to the generosity of the CT Chapter, a new wood stove was purchased, shipped and installed, all during the month of September. The new air-tight wood stove has a cast-iron door instead of glass, thereby making it safer to use. As a token of appreciation, the Committee agreed to make a plaque or emblem stating it was "Donated by



■ *Bog Bridge construction.*



■ *Bog Bridge ribbon cutting.*



■ *Barred Owl. A welcome evening guest.*

the CT-AMC Chapter in recognition of the role they played in building this beautiful cabin and acquiring this Forever Wild Property.”

In 2017, the Committee offered its sincere condolences to John Hicks and his family on the loss of his wife Marge Hicks. She was a lifetime member of the AMC and will be missed. For fourteen consecutive years, the Committee donated funds to the AMC/ATC Ridgerunner Program due to their close monitoring of the A.T. and cabin area and promotion of LNT principles. The Committee received a return on their investment with

the first ever Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) signed by the Southern New England Regional Trails Supervisor, Andrea Franklin. Again in 2019, a more efficient version was signed by Liam Gregan, the Southern New England Ridgerunner Coordinator. While at NWC the RRs now run through a checklist of items. For several years the Committee has organized a Spring training session at the Cabin for the new RRs so they are familiar with the MOU and the Camp reservation policy. For many years, a cookout to thank the RRs has been held in conjunction with the Perseid Meteor Shower Extravaganza. Clouds prevented viewing the Perseid meteors, but participants were treated to a view of the International Space Station on a predicted path overhead from Bald Peak as part of the kick-off to the 9th Annual NWC Perseid Meteor Shower Extravaganza. The Friday night Owl Prowl included Audubon’s Fran Zygmonts’ in-depth PPT presentation of North American Owls. Mr. Zygmont called in Barred Owls over the Bog Trailhead under the dry Hemlock canopy during showers on Friday night and again Saturday morning in the sunshine. On Saturday, Rich Michna impressed the group with his drone demo from the parking lot and later showed a panoramic video with a portable PPT projector from the drone 200’ above the cabin and the Riga plateau. All the RR’s arrived for the cookout and gave a brief talk on what they experienced for the summer and how they thought the new MOU requiring cabin monitoring worked very well, recommending it again for next year. Many in attendance voiced ardent support for the RRs and stated that they would like them to stay in Sages Ravine through Columbus Day. Saturday night, monitor and singer/songwriter Joel Blumert entertained the party with his classic songs. When it got quiet, Committee member Rich Michna connected his Sibley’s bird calling app to an HMDX speaker which transmitted Northern Barred Owls caterwauling. In flew a Barred Owl 20-feet above the campfire and perched on a limb. The call roused up many owls in the cabin area as they hooted all night.

In 2018, many productive meetings of the NW Camp Committee, Volunteer Camp & Cabin Committee (VCC) and CT Chapter took place throughout the year. In addition to the Annual Summit, Gathering and Appalachian Trail (A.T.) Day, the two-annual NWC workparties (first Saturdays in May & November) resulted in the completion of many tasks. Committee members attended the VCC Spring meeting at Lake Ponkapoag. In March, the Committee held a well-attended “Snowshoe Frolic.” Later in the year, the AMC required the front door language stating “Members Only” be replaced with a newer front door sign. Non-members had not been allowed to reserve the cabin during winter months as far back as the ‘50s. Two nights of clouds and heavy rain hampered viewing of the 10th annual Perseid Meteor Shower Extravaganza for the third year in a row. Before the rain, participants were treated to a drone demonstration on Bald peak by Vice-chair Rich Michna. Later back at the camp the Committee made their annual RR donation and a took photo with Michael Baggot representing the RR’s. A drone video filmed from the summit the night before was projected out the cabin front door with a portable projector through the pouring rain onto a big screen under a canopy!



■ *Keith Spaar leads a LNT Workshop.*

When it cleared the next day, CT-AMC Education Committee Chair and LNT Master Educator, Keith Spaar presented his 3rd annual LNT presentation to workparty participants at the camp prior to the May workparty. A lengthy discussion took place on how NWC could be more sustainably managed, and campers could

have less of an impact by utilizing LNT techniques.

In 2019, the Committee learned more about the pristine stream adjacent to the cabin that drains to Sages Ravine and is an integral 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 ancient forest. Pockets of up to 350-year old Hemlock straddle the border of Connecticut



■ *Positioning a Bear Box with Tom McGrath and Don Klein.*

and Massachusetts. Beyond providing essential biodiversity, the oldest trees capture the most carbon. Increased carbon sequestration is required now more than ever to decrease negative emissions and stabilize CO2 levels. This rare watershed continues to be the target of protection. In recognition of these facts, the Committee continued to seek professionals who would volunteer their services by conducting an inventory of many natural resources. Continuously learning what makes this fragile and vulnerable property and watershed so rare is a high priority of the Committee. The results of these inventories will also help the Committee manage the property sustainably as well as heighten the awareness of its guests. Striving to reduce impact is paramount!

A cabin structural analysis was conducted by Rich Michna and some improvements to the 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 campers to carry a whistle, bear bells or bear spray. Packing food securely inside the cabin with the door latched is now a necessity. Later in the year, the Committee installed a Bear Box near the tent platform with the assistance of the Chapter's A.T. Committee. The Committee acknowledged the fact that conflicts with wildlife are primarily caused by inappropriate human behavior.

The Committee continued outreach by tabling at events. It had active and consistent participation from Caretaker Don Klein, Registrar Craig Kennedy, Treasurer Paul Thoma and Past Co-chair Tom McGrath. All four of these executive board members joined the Committee in 2008. The longest and most active standing member of the Committee John Hicks was once again a valuable asset to Committee progress. Art Mauger, a current Cabin monitor who recently retired from the CT DEEP, and had been involved with workparties for over ten years, was elected as Committee Secretary.

The 11th annual Perseid Meteor Shower Extravaganza had clear skies each night. Before the meteor shower, the group hiked to a classic fen loaded with



■ *Lichen presentation by Steve Messier.*



■ *Natural lichen display at NW Camp.*

lush grasses, sedges, rushes, wildflowers, salmonberries, and cranberries on the way up to Brace Mountain. Our special guest Steve Messier, a Botanist and Lichenologist, identified numerous plants and lichens. After a barbecue and ceremonious annual \$200 donation to the RRs, the group hiked up to Bald Peak, where 5 streaking meteors and three satellites were observed. One satellite puzzled everyone because it did not move. It just stayed in the same spot and flashed. On the way down from Bald Peak, Steve Messier pointed out many glowing lichens found at the bottom of certain trees.



■ *Caretaker Don Klein locks cabin for first time ever.*

During the next day's 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 Mountain Road. Sassafras (*Sassafras albidum*) is a member of the laurel family having both ovate and lobed aromatic leaves. The next night, 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 thirteen streaking meteors, six satellites and the same geosynchronous satellite we saw from the night before. 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 could be cordoned off.

In March of 2020, the Committee purchased and received a "Tidbit" stream temperature monitor to record stream temperatures of Schenob Brook 24/7. Working with the CT DEEP Volunteer Stream Temperature Monitoring (V-SteM) network would be another step toward encouraging citizen science at NW Camp. In December, the novel Coronavirus, COVID-19 worldwide pandemic was out of control and infection rates continued to rise. Northwest Camp has been closed and locked up since St Patrick's Day. While the cabin and outhouses were locked for nine months, members of the Committee inspected weekly and experienced no vandalism. What they did notice was a massive number of parked cars and people on trails and in the woods, especially on weekends. Posted "Closed" signs deterred most hikers from hiking up to the cabin. The Committee met seven times and struggled with the details of opening or closing. Many pinch points related to the detailed disinfection process of reopening went unresolved. Most helpful in the process was Jess Wilson, Director of AMC Volunteer-Led Camp and Cabins Director, COVID Compliance. Acknowledging that winter months are the most popular and inherent risks are sometimes unavoidable, the Committee unanimously agreed to reopen in December. NW Camp was the third of eight Volunteer

Camp & Cabins to reopen. As requested, the AMC agreed to allow a seven-day self-disinfection which opened the doors to an every-other-weekend reservation. The Committee along with the assistance of Jess Wilson continued to monitor federal, state, and local guidelines, and the operating procedures were updated accordingly.



■ Old growth Yellow Birch in Sages Ravine.

Although some challenges remain in the future, within the last 70-years the hard working and resolute NW Camp Committee volunteers who have a passion for their work make it all possible. The 125-acre Northwest Camp and Cabin is Connecticut's only volunteer managed facility and has endured many years of successful lodging and management in its rustic, structure made from historic American Chestnut trees.

Without the unwavering commitment from our current Caretaker Don Klein, Registrar Craig Kennedy, Treasurer Paul Thoma, Secretary Art Mauger, Tom McGrath, Cabin monitors, Committee members, Workparty volunteers, AMC Assistance and Chapter support, the Camp would not be in the great shape that it is in today.

The hope remains alive that this very well-managed and fragile piece of property, through the Committee's collaborative and informative sharing process will ensure and sustain its long-term health and viability for future generations to enjoy.

“The Appalachian Mountain Club promotes the protection, enjoyment, and understanding of the mountains, forests, waters, and trails of the Appalachian region”

– Rod Parlee

Northwest Camp Committee Chairs 1996–2021

- 1995 – 1996 Roy Hoffman
- 1997 – 1999 Trent Link
- 2000 – 2006 Chuck Doll
- 2007 Rod Parlee and Jim St. Amand
- 2008 – 2009 Rod Parlee
- 2010 – 2016 Rod Parlee and Tom McGrath
- 2017 – 2021 Rod Parlee

