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The View from Laughing Springs: Hans Reimann's ecological notes

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Land Ethics Symposium

My broadening awareness and knowledge of how native ecosystems function has truly startled me. I have realized that sustaining these living biomes requires a watershed-wide community of human commitment. All of us who find comfort and relative peace residing here are players in this real live drama unfolding a little differently each spring. Our local world greens up where forest, farmland and stream are dominant features. While preserving farmland is a top priority for most of us in the Cooks Creek Watershed, the quality of the remaining open space, or natural areas, is the true measure of the ecological health of our home area. The Cooks Creek Watershed Assoc. By-Laws are being revised to help foster more community participation and better focus our mission on the quality of native biodiversity in our exceptional value watershed.

In order to more fully advance these goals, I annually attend Bowman's Hill wildflower preserve's Land Ethics Symposium. This year's speakers, marking the 10th anniversary of this event, passed on many new insights while promoting the Symposium's theme: "Creative Approaches for Ecological Landscaping".

The first speaker, Steven Apfelbaum, hails from Wisconsin. His experience in restoring a prairie farm and riparian areas to native ecological health led him to write a book describing the journey: "Nature's Second Chance: Restoring the Ecology of Stone Prairie Farm". Around 40 acres in size, the old farm has been transformed into an oasis of native biodiversity while still growing food for the family. His approach used science based management that virtually eliminates most invasive plant pests while gently nurturing remnant native plant populations. Farming marginally productive areas created unwanted erosion of soil. These areas are now rain garden receivers of storm water. Fish diversity has increased from 1 species to 10. Prairie grassland coexists with more productive farmland; abundant orchards and increasingly healthy riparian habitat attract scores of native birds and insects. Our watershed could benefit from his still developing principles.

The second speaker, Bill Sweeney of PA DEP, is a regional player who is program director at Jacobsburg State Park in the Bushkill Creek Watershed area of Northampton County. I came to know Mr. Sweeney through the Heritage Conservancy folks, and attended an invasive plant workshop he sponsored at a preserve along the Delaware River that harbors the rare walking fern. His focus at

the symposium was sharing his success at creating greenway partnerships in the headwaters areas upstream from the 1160-acre state park at Jacobsburg. He explained that native ecosystems need natural storm events, hurricanes and lightning fires to dynamically keep balance and renewal in our watersheds. His vision helped bring the two rivers Greenway plan into being with community participation through ecologically based zoning practices. This has protected over 3000 acres of woodlands above the state park with the hub and spoke concept of greenways for movement of genetic biodiversity. I for one would like to invite Bill Sweeny to share his insights and experience at a future CCWA dinner.

The third speaker, Peter Johnson, came to the symposium with the theme of: Bridging the Gap: Sustainable Landscapes from Conception to Implementation. Mr. Johnson runs a responsible landscape company that uses sound and innovative practices to build landscapes that conserve and infiltrate storm water. His projects use recycled materials, dry set stone walls and native plants to reclaim streetscapes, backyard erosion zones and introduce pervious surfaces to enhance groundwater infiltration. His company's projects range from the Newark, Delaware Civic Exhibition area next to the Coast Guard Station to a streetscape rehab in Souderton, to a Corporate Campus woodland restoration. His company is called Think Green LLC.

The fourth speaker to grace the audience that day was Bill Cullina, the manager of Coastal Maine Botanical Gardens. His theme was native shrubs and small trees for perennial companionship. Mr. Cullina talked about the crucial role woody plants have served in ecosystems and their ability to interact with native insects. He spoke about how these often overlooked plants that form most of the healthy understory of our forests, edge habitat, and open riparian areas can be easily incorporated into our own personal landscape areas and restored to our deer ravaged forests. Many of these plants are beautiful and vital to birds and insects lifecycles. Woody plants such as red twig dogwoods, native roses, witch hazel, spicebush and rhododendrons can actually be pruned to stimulate flowering and fuller foliage. Fringetree, buttonbush, elderberry, and ninebark all thrive on some form of pruning, proving natives, once again can and should be a larger part of everyone's home landscapes. His insight can help folks understand how to reduce lawns and alien landscapes into more sustainable bird friendly habitat.

The final speaker of this exciting day was Susan Weiler, a corporate executive dedicated to promoting green roofs. Her company is involved in major building projects nationwide that build in and on green sustainable construction principles. These projects range from a new convention center for the Mormon Church in Utah, to the new underground parking garage at the Philadelphia Art Museum. Mrs. Weiler spoke about the relevance of using green roofs to promote sustainability, and a better sense of community in larger urban areas. Ecologically, of course, green roofs conserve storm water, insulate to lower heating and cooling costs thereby reducing water and energy use. But, socially green roofs also provide visual continuity and a calmer sense of place in urban areas. She believes in what Aldo Leopold wrote about how communities are made up of independent parts. All our ethics have evolved this way, with the individual instincts to compete with each

other. The time is at hand to cooperate on new land ethics that enlarge the community boundaries and use all our resources much more sustainably.

Well, all in all, quite a day, with many inspiring ideals and practical concepts that all of us can utilize together to help sustain and enhance our mission in the watershed.

Please, help us in any way you can and as always, Your humble steward, (most of the time), Hans O. Reimann Jr.