

GCA CONSERVATION WATCH

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Southern Magnolia - Magnolia grandiflora

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New Orleans Meeting of the GCA Conservation and National Affairs & Legislation Committees

At the invitation of the two New Orleans GCA clubs, the Conservation and NAL committees had an extraordinary opportunity to hold their December business meeting in New Orleans. Members of The New Orleans Town Gardeners and The Garden Study Club of New Orleans organized a guided bus tour of the city, a flyover of the Louisiana coast in small planes and a forum on coastal restoration involving conservation groups and public and state officials.

The committees had been scheduled to visit New Orleans in October 2005 to study the importance of wetlands protection and restoration in coastal Louisiana. As we all know, Katrina ravaged New Orleans at the end of August 2005.

New Orleans members guided a bus tour through a city that fourteen months later still bore the marks of the human suffering caused by the flooding. Roofs with holes chopped out showed how water levels forced desperate residents up and out of their homes in hope of rescue. Neighborhoods where only two or three houses still stand told their story, as did the wounded beauty of old parks and gardens drowned in the muddy floodwaters. FEMA trailers providing temporary homes for displaced residents were still ubiquitous.

While committee members had been somewhat prepared by the graphic damage reports in the news media, an aerial view of Louisiana wetlands from small passenger planes offered another perspective on the disaster. Flying over swamps and bayous out to the open water of the Gulf of Mexico made clear the dramatic disappearance of productive and protective marshlands.

For thousands of years the Mississippi carried down a full load of silt from its enormous watershed to create and continuously renew the marshlands of its delta. Today, a combination of upstream damming and downstream channeling has decreased the traditional silting and has funneled Mississippi deposits far out into the Gulf of Mexico. Additional damage from dredging and a maze of off shore oil and shipping infrastructure has destroyed much coastal vegetation and turned once productive wetlands into open water. Add the natural sinking of wetlands, called subsidence, and rising water levels from global climate change, and the recipe for disaster is obvious. Maps on

view at the Historic New Orleans Collection illustrated how countless hurricanes have threatened the city in the past. The diminished wetlands which once formed a barrier from storm surges and winds now leave the city ever more vulnerable.

As part of a statewide initiative to restore the Louisiana wetlands, GCA New Orleans members asked the Conservation and NAL committees to support Senate 3711, an oil bill which was scheduled for an immediate vote in the House of Representatives. One of the provisions of the bill promised the four Gulf states \$580 million in future royalties from newly approved offshore drilling sites in the Gulf of Mexico. Assurance of this future revenue would allow Louisiana and the other Gulf states to immediately finance coastal restoration plans. The citizens of Louisiana had already amended their constitution to dedicate these offshore revenues to coastal restoration.

The proposal evoked extensive discussion. Emphasis was on the necessity for preservation of the wetlands and hope that lessons learned on the Gulf Coast would be replicated in other areas of the U.S. Some committee members expressed fear that endorsing this bill would appear to support drilling off other coasts. Ultimately, the committees voted in favor of endorsing S.3711, with the qualification that GCA members view this as an extraordinary circumstance and a means of acquiring permanent funding for coastal wetland restoration and maintenance.

On December 6th a letter was sent to Louisi-

ana Governor Kathleen Blanco. It set forth the committees' position, including a statement urging the formation of a coastal management commission to coordinate plans and their implementation with the Army Corps of Engineers. S.3711 passed in its entirety on December 8th.

Without on-the-ground observations made possible by the New Orleans meeting site, the members of the national GCA Conservation and National Affairs and Legislation Committees would have had an even more difficult time formulating their position on this question. Its complexity and the conscientiousness with which they gathered, utilized, and communicated resources exemplify how Club representatives who serve on these committees carry out their responsibilities. In the same spirit, they and others will convene in Washington, D.C. in February. No wonder GCA and its position papers are taken seriously when delegates take them to meetings with their state congressmen and women!

*Anne O'Brien
Columbine GC (XII)*



“Food Bill”

“Food Bill” catches our eye, and makes us realize that this might be something we should be interested in. This is the kind of attention the Farm Bill needs.

The Farm Bill is an omnibus bill that determines what you eat and how it is grown. It is renewed on a fairly set schedule. Each Farm Bill is given a name, the current one under consideration is called the “Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002.” This bill affords the opportunity to take a comprehensive look at food and agriculture and rural policy.

The Farm Bill will be up for renewal this year and there is a groundswell of voices for reform. Over the last century more than 70% of our nation's farms have been lost to bankruptcy or consolidation, the environmental problems have grown, and federal farm spending has ballooned. Most glaring, present policies distribute benefits unequally. Commodity subsidies (given for corn, soybeans, wheat, rice, sugar, and cotton crops), approximately \$20 billion a year, are the main component. Only a third of all farms qualify, and of these farms, a small percentage of the largest receive the majority of the subsidies. The subsidy programs are based on yield, the more you produce, the bigger the subsidy. This stimulates overproduction, which can disrupt both domestic and global markets.

Farmers and ranchers want to protect the environment, but three out of four are

turned down when they apply for the conservation programs in the Farm Bill. There are excellent conservation programs in the current Farm Bill: the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), and the Conservation Security Program (CSP). These, and other programs in the bill, represent tremendous potential for the environment, wildlife, water, open space and protected farmland, but they are woefully underfunded. Their funds must be appropriated each year, unlike commodity subsidies which are guaranteed.



Today many Americans do not have access to healthy nutritious food. Sound USDA nutritional guidelines call for fruits, vegetables, nuts and whole grains to be a major part of the American diet, but at the same time our farm policy does not support the farms that produce these kinds of foods, nor does it help expand consumer access to these products. This inconsistent policy not only increases medical expenses from the effects of poor diets on health, it also puts

the farms that produce our fresh local foods at risk to developers. Local farms are the backbone of farmers' markets. They also provide open space and contribute to the quality of life in their communities.

There are strong forces for change. The high budget deficit puts pressure on Congress to scrutinize support programs. It is more difficult to justify \$20 billion in subsidies since information on who gets subsidies and how much is now entirely reported. Subsidies create conflicts with international trading partners and failure to change them means the U.S. farm subsidies depress crop prices in developing countries—a very bad public relations problem for the U.S. and the image of the U.S. farmer.

New agricultural players are gaining influence—the specialty crop and livestock producers among them. They do not want subsidies, but rather help investing in the environment and support in creating new markets and promoting healthier diets. There are other new players besides—new alliances of farmers and conservation, business, global development, faith-based, consumer and nutrition groups—who are collaborating. The fact that some of these stakeholders are non-agricultural adds to the political clout for reform of the *status quo*.

The American Farmland Trust (AFT) spent a year working with farmers, ranchers, conservationists, agricultural leaders, economists, trade policy experts, and foreign farm leaders to build partnerships and de-

velop a blueprint for a new Farm Bill. The finished “Agenda 2007” was released in May 2006. Its major policy points are as follows:

A Safety Net For Farmers. This would take \$5 billion now used for commodity subsidies to transition farmers to “green payments” for environmental stewardship. Farmers would be paid for improved water quality and plant and animal diversity, treating these as farm products just like corn, beef, milk, and lettuce. Farming is risky business; extreme weather and volatile market prices over which farmers have little control are constant hazards. The safety net would offer farmers more ways to manage risk, including better insurance structures.

Conservation of Natural Resources. Current conservation funding levels are not sufficient for the needs of farmers or the landscape. The AFT calls for a doubling of conservation funding in the 2007 bill. A simplified application process for conservation programs is also needed to eliminate the complex and multiple sign-ups that farmers now have, which also hinder participation.

Expanding Economic Opportunities. Future farm policy needs to help farms be profitable. AFT recommends \$1 billion for profitability grants to spur innovation, improve American farmer access to both domestic and global markets, expand renewable energy, and promote healthier diets. This part of the Farm Bill is enormously important because it can create the proper

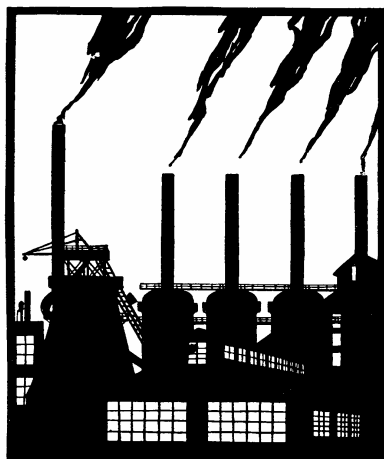
conditions for the growth and use of renewable energy resources from farms.

The foundation for this farm policy rest on increased funding for the protection of agricultural land—including a strategic base of the best land, expanded university research, and assistance to help jump start a new generation of farmers. 2007 is a critical year in American farm history, and how the Farm Bill is drafted will have a profound impact on our environment, our landscape, our food supply and our health for years to come.

Michael Pollan, the author of “The Omnivore’s Dilemma” says the problem begins with the fact this legislation is called “the farm bill”—when the great majority of people are very distanced from agriculture. But we all eat. Let’s call it “the food bill”, he writes, and put our legislators on notice this is about us and we’re paying attention.

*Helen Elkins, Conservation Vice Chair
Agriculture
The Gardners (V)*





Global Warming Is Real! Science Says So. Finally, So Do Most Of Our Legislators.

The basic facts of climate change have been accepted by the scientific community. The most recent report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (February 2, 2007) states: "Warming of the climate system is unequivocal, as is now evident from observations of increases in global average air and ocean temperatures, widespread melting of snow and ice, and rising global average sea level...Global atmospheric concentrations of carbon dioxide, methane and nitrous oxide have increased markedly as a result of human activities since 1750 and now exceed pre-industrial values determined from ice cores spanning many thousands of years. The global increases in CO₂ concentration are due primarily to fossil fuel and land-use change, while those of methane and nitrous oxide are primarily due to agriculture."

To stop the destruction of our environment, the public must drastically reduce greenhouse gas emissions. This will require a major transformation of our energy system toward one based on clean, safe and environmentally acceptable energy sources. No single "silver bullet" exists. We must learn to use a combination of different energy sources and different methods of conservation.

The federal government is at last addressing the crucial necessity for legislation, pushed to action by public opinion and by legislation regulating emissions that has already been enacted by several states. In his State of the Union speech, President Bush acknowledged for the first time the threat of global warming. He asked for a nationwide plan to curb gasoline use by 20% in ten years, to be achieved through a massive increase in renewable fuels and automobile efficiency. There are several climate change bills proposed in the Senate:

S.280 Titled the **Climate Stewardship and Innovation Act of 2007**. The bill requires industries to reduce their emissions to 2004 levels by 2012 and then further decrease emissions by about 2% a year through 2020. The measure calls for the nation's emissions to be reduced by two-thirds by 2050.

S.309 **Global Warming Pollution Reduction Act** calls on the nation to reduce emissions to 1990 levels by 2020 and to make an 80% reduction by 2050. Senator Boxer calls this bill, with its steep cuts, the "gold standard".

S.317 Electric Utility Cap and Trade Act of 2007 focuses only on utilities that make electricity. They would be required to reduce their emissions by 25% by 2020. Six major utility companies support this bill.

Industry too is pushing for mandatory controls of emissions. A recently formed coalition of leading environmental groups and major companies and progressive utilities plan to lobby lawmakers as part of the U.S. Climate Action Partnership. The group wants emission cuts of up to 20% within fifteen years and 80% by 2050. Corporations need to know the rules in order to plan for the future.

Perhaps the most important catalyst supporting strong legislation will be the new *Step It Up* campaign. Citizens nationwide are organizing rallies in their communities, to be held on April 14, to demand a meaningful federal bill. The Natural Resources Defense Council believes that public support will be necessary to pass bold legislation to cut global warming pollution 25 percent by 2020 and 80 percent by 2050.

GCA's official stand is outlined in the position paper on Global Warming.

Audrey Platt,
First Vice Chairman
Conservation Committee
Trustees' GC (VIII)



The Retreating Alpine Ecosystem

Proof of the speed of global warming could lie in a remote Colorado flower-filled meadow. Professor John Harte, University of California at Berkeley, has been closely monitoring the effects of artificially heating the soil for sixteen years. His studies show that the relationship between plants and the soil is nearly as important as atmospheric measurements when predicting climate change.



Arnica cordifolia
 (Missouri Botanic Garden)

John Harte set up a long-term scientific study in a remote Colorado mountain meadow. For about six weeks each summer there is usually a profusion of colorful, perennial and annual wild flowers in this area. They include: glacier lily (*Erythronium grandiflora*), larkspur

(*Delphinium nelsonii*), monkshood (*Aconitum columbianum*), heartleaf arnica (*Arnica cordifolia*), and orange sneezeweed (*Helenium hoopesii*). Fed by water from melting snow, and basking in the high altitude sunshine, the wild flowers flourish. They grow rapidly, producing luscious, thick green leaves, brilliant blooms that attract Colorado native bees, bumblebees, butterflies and hummingbirds, then set seed and deteriorate in a matter of days.



Erythronium grandiflora
Glacier Lily

In this pristine paradise Harte measured out plots and used heat lamps to slowly warm the soil by 3.5 degrees Fahrenheit year round. This project was one of the first attempts to mimic the effects of global warming. Over sixteen years he has observed a remarkable change in the flora. The brightly colored wild flowers died. They were replaced by sagebrush, probably *Artemisia tridentata*, a common woody shrub with evergreen, hairy, tough, grey leaves and dark, brown bark which shred on old

stems in long strips. It has minute greenish flowers. Sagebrush is abundant in many intermountain valley floors and grows in many arid parts of Colorado.

The problem is that prior to the experiment the plethora of wild flowers had created what is called a “carbon sink” as they converted the carbon dioxide briefly into roots, leaves, flowers, and stems or branches. After death the plant material decomposed in the soil where microbes eventually converted it back into carbon dioxide. The Colorado meadow had developed its own cycle of regeneration and it was in balance until the soil was heated. Then the upstart sagebrush grew very slowly, producing few new leaves each year. The dark bark absorbed heat from the sun, raising the temperature further. Microbes in the soil continued to release CO₂ into the air, but the carbon in the soil was not replaced fast enough by the sagebrush’s evergreen leaves.

Five years after the experiment started each square yard of meadow had already lost two thirds of a pound of carbon (roughly equal to a pound of gasoline). The heated meadow plots were now emitting more carbon dioxide than they consigned to the soil. There was no “carbon sink”.

It is hard to imagine alpine plants helping to alter our climate. But multiply this patch by thousands over the globe to see what could happen to our planet’s atmosphere.

Angela Overy
GC of Denver (XII)



America's Drinking Water Sources Are At Risk

At the February 2007 GCA National Affairs & Legislative meeting in Washington the delegates will be discussing bills related to water issues that are coming before the 110th Congress. Of particular concern is the Clean Water Authority Restoration Act (CWARA). CWARA clarifies the wording of the Clean Water Act (CWA) of 1972. It is intended to make sure that primary sources of our drinking water are protected.

Drinking Water

Clean water is essential to our well-being. Maintaining the quantity and quality of our drinking water is in the public's interest. To assure the continuation of safe drinking water, we must vigilantly protect its sources from pollution.

The two primary sources of drinking water are surface water and groundwater. Surface water includes streams, rivers, lakes, wetlands and reservoirs; most surface water is

easily identified. By contrast, groundwater is a hidden resource. It is the water that saturates the tiny spaces between alluvial materials (sand, gravel, silt, clay) or the crevices or fractures in rocks. At one time, the purity and availability of groundwater were taken for granted—but no longer.

Urban and other large-scale water supply systems tend to rely more on surface water resources, while smaller water systems use more groundwater. About half of all Americans obtain a large portion of their drinking water from groundwater, and nearly 95% of rural residents do. Groundwater is pumped to the surface through wells that are drilled into aquifers (geologic formations containing water). Importantly, surface water and groundwater are fundamentally interconnected, and because they often “feed” each other, one can also contaminate the other.

Clean Water Act (CWA)

By the latter part of the twentieth century it was apparent our country had serious water quality problems. The Cuyahoga River in Ohio was so polluted it burst into flames. Lake Erie was declared dead. Urbanized bodies of water such as Boston Harbor, Chesapeake Bay and Galveston Bay were overwhelmed with discharges of sewage and industrial waste. Wetlands were disappearing at alarming rates. Responding to public outcry, Congress passed the Clean Water Act (CWA) in 1972 with the expressed purpose of *restoring and maintaining the 'chemical, physical, and biological integrity of the Nation's waters.'*

The CWA remains the nation's legal mechanism for addressing water quality problems. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is the federal agency responsible for its implementation. While allowing individual states some discretion in carrying out the rulings, the EPA sets standards, issues guidelines, monitors compliance, oversees enforcement, and levies fines.

Over time the CWA has stayed intact, although EPA directives have changed. Their implementation depends in part on the sentiments and philosophy of the political leaders in power. Deadlines for compliance, for example, may be extended; maximum acceptable levels of a particular pollutant may be raised or lowered; more or fewer wetlands may be permitted for destruction.



In the more than thirty years since the passage of the CWA, progress has been made in reducing pollution and restoring aquatic habitats. The quality of water in our lakes and rivers has improved and drinking water sources have for the most part been protected. But not all our waterways have been protected from pollution or development. In fact not only is all not well, but there are signs we are actually regressing.

The Clean Water Act (CWA) presumably provided federal protection for all our na-

tion's wetlands, whether unquestionably connected to navigable, interstate waterways—or seemingly 'isolated'. However, in recent years the question has been raised as to what waters *are* protected by the CWA. A Supreme Court ruling in 2001 and some subsequent federal agency actions have narrowed the definition of wetlands, streams, lakes and other waters that are protected under the CWA. And developers, the oil industry and other polluters have continued to seek to weaken the Act.

In January, 2003, the EPA and US Army Corps of Engineers announced a new "no protection" policy that significantly reduced CWA protection of many waters. A "no protection policy" means that federal regulators no longer can oppose dredging, filling and polluting of some waters that heretofore fell under the Clean Water Act's jurisdiction. This resulted in a significant number of so-called "isolated waters" being left with *no* federal protections.

Public Drinking Water Supplies at Risk

As a result of this action, many of the waters that are *sources* for much of our nation's drinking water, or which *replenish the sources*, are at risk of losing federal protection. They include headwater streams and wetlands of all kinds.

Wetlands are an especially vital line of defense in protecting water from polluted runoff. They are considered the "nation's kidneys." They filter pollutants and purify drinking water supplies by absorbing contaminants such as pesticides and nitrogen.

They store water and recharge groundwater aquifers, improve biodiversity by providing habitat to plant and animal species, and absorb floodwaters, protecting coasts and homes from floods.

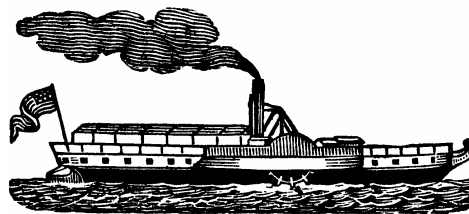
In May, 2006 the Sierra Club released a report which provides state-by-state information on drinking water supplies that rely at least in part on headwater and/or seasonal streams. It is based on EPA data. The states with the largest percentage of people relying on drinking water sources at risk are: Utah (90%); Colorado (83%); Kentucky (77%); Massachusetts (75%) and Maryland (70%). People in the affected areas are vulnerable to having dirtier water or to seeing their costs of drinking water go up due to the increased cost of treating it. The Sierra Club also reports regional EPA authorities are concerned about drinking water sources in several communities, including New York City, Boise, parts of southern California and central Arizona.

Clean Water Authority Restoration Act (CWARA)

The Clean Water Authority Restoration Act, which will be presented in the 110th Congress, seeks to amend the CWA to ensure federal protection for *all* waters of the United States and reaffirms the historic intent of the CWA which is “restoration and maintenance of the chemical, physical and biological integrity of the Nation’s waters.”

CWARA will replace the term “navigable waters” throughout the Act with the term “waters of the United States” and will de-

fine “waters of the United States” as follows: “all waters subject to the ebb and



flow of the tide, the territorial seas, and all interstate and intrastate waters and their tributaries, including lakes, rivers, streams (including intermittent streams), mudflats, sand flats, wetlands, sloughs, prairie pot-holes, wet meadows, playa lakes, natural ponds and all impoundments of the foregoing, to the fullest extent that these waters, or activities affecting them are subject to the legislative power of Congress under the Constitution.”

It is vital that we protect *all* our drinking water sources. In the absence of full federal protection, many states are individually attempting to address the void, but they are no substitute for nationwide protection that was have been provided under the Clean Water Act.

Adhering to the GCA position paper on Clean Water, your GCA Conservation/NAL Committees believe that Congress should rescind its 2003 “no protection” policy directive and **pass CWARA** so that all of our waters will be protected as was the original intent of the Clean Water Act of 1972.

*Suzy Foster, Conservation Vice Chair
Water/Wetlands/Great Lakes
Green Tree GC of Milwaukee (XI)*

Honoring Sally Brown

In the summer of 2006, the three Kentucky GCA Clubs came together to honor Sara Shallenberger “Sally” Brown for her long and active service locally, nationally, and globally in conservation and environmental issues. In appreciation of her activism and accomplishments, the three clubs have provided funding for a 2007 summer Environmental Scholarship in her honor. This scholarship was established to encourage undergraduate studies in fieldwork, research, or classroom work in the environmental field, beyond the regular course of study.

A member of the Glenview Club since 1939, Sally served as President in 1950-1951 and then became involved regionally as Zone VII Chair and then nationally as Admissions, Conservation, National Affairs and Legislation Chairs as well as becoming a member of the GCA Executive Committee in the late 70’s. She was honored by the GCA in 1978 as winner of the Frances K. Hutchinson Medal for distinguished national service to Conservation. Her nomination read, “Few are her equal in the vigorous pursuit of conservation measures to ensure the continued natural beauty of America”.

Widow of the late W.L.Lyons Brown Sr. who was President and Chairman of Brown-Forman Corporation, mother of four, accomplished artist, dog and cattle breeder, Sally made time over the years to become deeply active in a long list of Ken-

tucky and national boards and organizations, as well as serving as a delegate to four U.N. Conferences on Conservation, Nature and World Population. Locally, Sally was a founder of several conservation and historic preservation organizations, and the list of her notable involvements is extensive. To single out but one, she oversaw establishment of the 600-acre Sally Brown State Nature Preserve along the Kentucky River Palisades in central Kentucky.

Nationally, Sally has worked for the expansion of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, and has sat on the boards of the Natural Resources Defense Council, the Trust for Public Land, the American Farmland Trust, the Nature Conservancy, the Audubon Society, the Woods Hole Research Center, Scenic America, the National Wildlife Federation, among numerous other conservation and environmental organizations. In 2006, Kentucky Educational Television honored this vigorous and visionary woman with the hour-long program “Sally Brown; Force of Nature”.

In her 95th year, Sally’s mind continues to be sharp and her commitment has not dimmed. She continues to challenge all around her to read well and to become active and involved in conservation affairs nationally. She is truly a “force of nature”, still tenacious and challenging, who is deeply deserving of the gratitude and admiration of the Kentucky Garden Clubs of America, and indeed, of all GCA members.

*Mary Rounsavall
Glenview GC (VII)*

ZONE WATCH

Our Farms, Our Food

Statistics show that food less traveled is more nutritious and flavorful, news that seems to be taken up by more and more consumers. Locally grown food from farmers we know certainly gets us closer to the roots of good health. A movement is afoot to support our farms, our food and the markets that connect them. In keeping pace with the times, members of the **Middletown Garden Club** in Middletown, Connecticut have decided to make 2007 the year to get involved with our farms, farmers' markets and local foods.



From our research we learned that the State of Connecticut has the dubious distinction of losing 8,000 acres of farmland every year. If this trend continues, the family farms in the region will be gone in fewer than two generations. Ironically, the city-dwellers who escape to the Connecticut countryside for its bucolic setting are destroying the very environment that brings them here.

A large number of our members already support the Connecticut Farmland Trust (CFT), which formed in 2002 to help farmers and landowners with agricultural easements and technical assistance in preserving land. In a symposium in October 2006 the Trust's director spoke to us about how CFT meets its goals to preserve working farms.

In order to further expand its knowledge of the farms-to-food connection, the Garden Club has scheduled Aley Kent, Northeast Field Coordinator for Heifer International, to speak at a meeting in the spring to which we have invited other organizations. She plans to tell us how farmers' markets have developed in recent years and what consumer participation means to the farmer. Kent works directly with farming communities which seek help with livestock, development of markets and equipment.

These extensive efforts are encouraging to us as representatives of families and citizens who are vested in our regional environment. The vitality of the land, water and air are reflected in the health of flora and fauna, and we share responsibility for these surroundings as well. Ensuring the existence of our nearby farms and their open spaces preserves our aesthetic and cultural heritage, and we receive a wonderful dividend in the form of our own abundant farmers' roadside markets during the growing season.

As we wait out the cold months until the farmers open their markets, the Middletown

Garden Club members will sample winter-season fare when the Conservation Committee invites everyone for a "Taste of the Garden" one evening in February. Nathan Washburn, chef and garden consultant, will demonstrate cultivation and cooking techniques for winter-grown vegetables and herbs. Added to the club's meal will be locally raised lamb, cheeses from our area, and wines from a vineyard not twenty miles away. There are also nearby growers of organic greens and our famous Franklin mushrooms. Many attendees are familiar with these sources, but we hope this event will help spread the word.

*Judy Schoonmaker
Middletown GC (II)*



BOOKS

WorldChanging: A User's Guide for the 21st Century, edited by Alex Steffen.
Abrams, New York, 2006.

As I write this, I am in the deep midwinter in a Pacific Northwest that has been experi-

encing uncommonly fierce weather. When I venture out among friends, I hear the word "change" bandied about with increasing frequency. The context, of course, is *climate* change and the effects of global warming. Maybe, we are grudgingly acknowledging, the world really is changing. The somewhat ominous tone of our remarks reflects not our usual disquiet about cultural change but rather our gathering sense of a self-inflicted common peril.

But the word "worldchanging" used as the title of the book under review has a different and more positive connotation. It is not about "our changing world." Rather, the reference is to our ability, indeed our obligation, to change the world. *WorldChanging: A User's Guide* starts from the premise that we face a common peril. It summons us in the name of our common humanity to use both ingenuity and plain old common sense to *change* our world. By telling us what ordinary and not so ordinary people all over the world are doing to improve the plight of refugees, or effect political change, or power their homes with renewable energy, or more widely extend the benefits of health care, or breed Barred Plymouth Rock chickens, or (dear gardeners, am I getting warmer here?) teach our grandchildren the joys of growing their own food, this book draws us into the global effort to build a sustainable society. *WorldChanging* is an encyclopedia, a compendium - a cookbook if you will - of exemplary attitudes and behavior to lead us to a greener future. It is a reference book, not intended to be devoured at a sitting (though like eating edamame, it is hard to stop read-

ing it). Buy it for your family and put it in a handy place with the atlas or the dictionary or, well, the computer.

Which brings me to the nub of this: Start a dialog with your children by asking them about WorldChanging. Chances are they will be familiar with it, not as a book but as the “green” website worldchanging.com. Organizationally based in Seattle, WorldChanging is a “place” in cyberspace where excellent writers from all over the world report on and examine ideas for creating a better world and invite readers to post responses. Well edited and designed, it has been called by *Wired* magazine “the most important website on the planet.” (Also ask your older children about *Wired*, or better yet, read it and tell them you do.) If you have been yearning to enter the “blogosphere,” worldchanging.com might be your best portal of entry.

This feels a little bit like “You’ve read the book, now see the movie.” We definitely live in a multi-media world, and now we have a handsome door stop of a book derived from a website. The whole point of course is to reach as many people as possible, to show us the challenges we face, to offer some solutions and to inspire ever more innovation. As Al Gore states in his foreword, this book is meant to give us a vision of a bright future and “the courage to think in fresh ways and to act to meet this planetary crisis head-on.”

Reading and thinking about WorldChanging has brought to mind the “serenity prayer.” In its most familiar version we ask

for the “serenity to accept the things we cannot change, the courage to change the things we can and the wisdom to know the difference.” This prayer is now generally attributed not to an Irish or Celtic source but to Reinhold Niebuhr. In Niebuhr’s original version there is a small but vital difference in wording: Niebuhr asks for the courage to change the things “which should be changed.” He calls us to action. WorldChanging does too. This book serves to remind us that we cannot achieve serenity through passivity.

*Catherine Roach
Seattle GC (XII)*

Crowe, Thomas Rain. Zoro’s Field: My Life in the Appalachian Woods. Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2005.

Technological innovations affect not only us but our environment as well. With each new innovation that we adopt, we lose some measure of direct connection with our natural environment. Reading Thomas Rain Crowe’s memoir, *Zoro’s Field*, one becomes aware of the disconnect that occurs in our daily lives.

Crowe lived alone in a cabin in western North Carolina without technology for four years. During this time he used wood as a source for heat and cooking, grew and preserved his food, and bartered with friends for necessities. Timepieces, television, electricity and indoor plumbing were not present. Material life was pared back to the essentials.

For Crowe this venture is in part an affirmation that one can come home again. After a childhood in western Carolina, he had lived in the north, Europe and California influenced by the environmentalists of the mid- 20th century. For the reader, Crowe's account is an affirmation of our interdependence with the flora and fauna with which we share this planet.

We learn how to build a root cellar, manage a swarm of bees, care for tools and plant a garden. We hear the hoarding squirrel rolling nuts in the crawl space overhead and the slithering sound of the black snake that gets nourishment by eating the squirrel. These vivid accounts enliven the tale of daily work.

More importantly, Crowe reminds us of the significant experiences we have forsaken by filling our lives with modern ways. We distance ourselves from the calm grounding we feel from prolonged solitude, the delights of sun time, of living by the natural cycle of day into night into day and observing the minute details of the creatures with whom we share our lives.

In all, Crowe opens doors to life's simple experiences, doors that we close every time we turn to technology. More importantly, he speaks of the ecological balances that our "civilized advances" upset, and the potential for severely damaging the planet.

Throughout this work and in particular the chapter entitled "The New Naturalists," Crowe speaks of those who have carefully

learned and written about the intricate interconnectedness of our world. We hear the early voices of Thoreau, Emerson and Kephart; we learn of more recent contributors, including Gary Snyder, Wendell Berry, Thomas Berry, Rick Bass and Wes Jackson.

This fine book has received several awards, including that of the NC Literary and Historical Association for the best book of non-fiction in the state of North Carolina for 2005.

*Marnie Haines
Village GC(V)*

Egan, Timothy. *The Worst Hard Time: The Untold Story of Those Who Survived the Great American Dust Bowl.*

Boston, MA: Mariner Books/Houghton Mifflin, 2005.

Before I read the book under review, art and literature – not environmental degradation - crossed my mind when someone mentioned the "Dust Bowl." Those words conjured up the photographs of Horace Bristol and Dorothea Lange or of Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*, all affecting depictions of migrant workers in California's Central Valley during the Great Depression. (Steinbeck accompanied Bristol on assignment for *Life*; their trip inspired *The Grapes of Wrath*, which won Steinbeck a Pulitzer and a National Book Award.)

Now Timothy Egan has won a National Book Award by shifting our focus back to the Dust Bowl itself – and to those who

stayed behind. Whether out of orneriness, irrational loyalty to “home” or emotional exhaustion, about two thirds of the population of the Dust Bowl stuck it out when their more celebrated neighbors left for California and greener pastures. This is their story.

It is much more of course, for Egan must set the scene on the High Plains: millions of acres of grass supporting bison and Native Americans in an ecological equilibrium; the wholesale slaughter of the bison by Anglo hunters; their replacement by cattle and cowboys; and finally the coming of large-scale agriculture. Sodbusting, the great plowup of 1900 to 1930. Acre by acre (33 million in all), the grass was plowed under despite the objections of cattlemen that “the best side is up.” By the mid-to-late 1920s, a time of plentiful rainfall, the homesteaders (derisively called “nesters” by the cowboys) and the absentee proprietors of factory farms could boast that “wheat was coming off the land like Model-Ts.” Today’s workers at Ford Motor Company may justifiably grumble about hard times, but they need only read *The Worst Hard Time* to gain a little perspective. Successive years of drought in the 1930s turned the High Plains to dust. Winds whipped that dust into fierce black clouds that choked the life out of the nesters’ children.

Egan’s book is a big, sprawling narrative. He literally has a lot of ground to cover, and at times the story careers like a Model-T in a dust storm. He has to inform us about the Comanche, the varieties of grass

on the plains, the Russlanddeutschen, soil erosion, dugouts and half-dugouts, both Roosevelts, the Great Depression, and how to make a batch of hooch. Just as Egan gets going on a story line, he veers off the road. Mind you, you will *like* these digressions; in fact, you will want to know even more about tumbleweeds or the market for skunk hides. Yet what moves this narrative along, what holds Egan’s book in the road, are the stories of the families who migrated westward to the panhandles of Texas or Oklahoma and, despite unutterable hardship, refused to move on.

The Worst Hard Time is of course as much a cautionary tale about the folly of man as it is a paean to the tenacity of the human spirit. Egan, a *New York Times* journalist living in Seattle, writes wisely and well about the unintended consequences of man’s attempts to tame nature. It was an environmental catastrophe - a killing of the land - that rendered the High Plains a Dust Bowl and the sodbusters destitute. A large chunk of our patrimony was irretrievably, and avoidably, lost. It seems fitting to give Egan and his fine book a little ink in a gardeners’ publication entitled *Conservation Watch*.

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Remember, Con Watch is *your* conservation publication. Your ideas, your contributions and your suggestions are needed and welcomed. *Sarah Swinerton, editor.*

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