

# Conservation Watch

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## ***GCA Rides the Tidal Wave of Change in Washington***

From February 23 – 26, 2009, The Garden Club of America's National Affairs and Legislation (NAL) Committee celebrated its 41<sup>st</sup> annual conference in Washington DC. The goals were to educate, inform and update our delegates on critical environmental concerns and potential companion legislation and to spread GCA's message to Capitol Hill. The conference is an intensive, exciting three days filled with opportunities to hear from environmental leaders in non-governmental positions, members of Congress and the Administration. Our GCA Vice-Chairmen provide comprehensive background reports to delegates before the meeting, and update those reports at the conference. Finally, the delegates condense this wealth of information as they prepare to meet with their members of Congress to express their opinions and concerns.

Interest in the conference grows every year. For the first time, there were members on the waiting list who couldn't attend. A full one-third of delegates this year were first-time attendees. The volume of information offered, combined with learning about the political process can be overwhelming for them. For instance, first day briefings from well-known speakers covered issues of climate change, oceans (and the relationship of the two), energy, endangered species, biodiversity, and new sustainable technologies. Fortunately, seasoned delegates are there to assist first-timers as they take in and utilize their knowledge.



*The President addresses a Joint Session of Congress while GCA is in Washington.*

Scheduling members of Congress and representatives from the Administration was challenging, as the obsession with the stimulus package took all their focus. GCA, however, was not to be denied. Our second day, spent “on the Hill,” in the historic Cannon Caucus Room brought us outstanding speakers including Lisa Jackson, Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Nancy Sutley, Chair of the Council on Environmental Quality, and Senator Barbara Boxer (D-CA), Chair of the Environment and Public Works Committee. Many other members of Congress addressed the group on topics from green infrastructure jobs to alternative energy sources.

As we communicated the urgency of our issues to our members of Congress on the final day, there was a mixture of passion, excitement, and respect for the opportunity to express our concerns. The delegates left Washington with a sense of the important influence they have when they express their views to their elected officials. We consistently receive comments about how well-prepared our delegates are and how much our input is appreciated. There seemed to be little doubt that there is now a significantly greater awareness and understanding of environmental concerns in Washington than just a year ago, no matter where the officials stand on particular issues.

Our conference inspires delegates to be active on behalf of environmental legislation not only on the national level, but on their state and local levels, too. The delegates went home exhausted, brains bulging with new information, and with a desire and willingness to help in the mission of protecting the health of our fragile planet for all our children. What follows are a few of the many stories we wish to share with you from this outstanding meeting.

*Derry MacBride, Piedmont (CA) G.C. - Zone XII  
GCA NAL Committee Chair*



Claire Caudill, GCA Conservation Chair  
and Derry MacBride, GCA Nal Chair

## **A New Wind is Blowing in Washington**

As a first time attendee at the NAL Conference, I came away from the meeting full of hope for the future of our planet. Although we learned about the negative picture of climate change and what it means to the natural world, we also learned that there are solutions for greening the planet in ways that will make it more habitable. This is an important moment on Capitol Hill and there is a strong commitment on the part of President Obama and the 111<sup>th</sup> Congress to aggressively address environmental solutions. There are many environmental initiatives in the stimulus plan making this an era of great opportunity for the expansion of research and creative solutions.

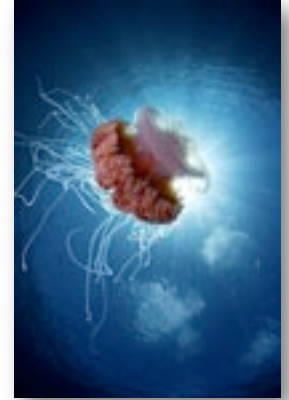
One of the speakers, Vikki Spruill, President of the Ocean Conservancy, drove home the link between the oceans and climate change. As a New Jersey resident who has spent many happy summers at the Jersey shore, I’ve always loved the ocean and beaches. However, no matter where one lives, there is a deep connection with the ocean, and, as Vikki Spruill stated, **“The ocean is the front line in our approach to climate**

**change.”** She then further explained how the ocean is the life support system for our planet, and how it contributes to our economy. We learned that the ocean absorbs excess heat and is the recipient of many destructive discharges resulting from what we do on land. Phytoplankton absorbs carbon dioxide and gives back oxygen. The ocean’s ability to absorb carbon dioxide is decreasing, however, and the harmful impact is exacting a toll. This excess carbon absorption is resulting in a change in PH balance, so that the ocean is becoming more

acidic, causing the coral reefs to dissolve and threatening shellfish and the marine food web. The ocean temperature is warming NOW, and the polar ice cap is melting. The North Pole could be ice-free by 2013.

On the positive side, the ocean is our hope. Ms. Spruill stressed that we need to strengthen its resiliency. She listed the following important measures that can restore the ocean to health:

- Every legislative act must include the ocean environment.
- We must stop taking too many fish from the ocean, and institute a mandate on over-fishing.
- We need to focus on the Arctic, “the earth’s air conditioner.” Any industrialization in the Arctic needs to be preceded by study.
- Full U.S. participation is necessary in the United Nations Law of the Sea Treaty.



To quote Ms. Spruill, “**The only action we cannot afford is inaction.**”

Another speaker, Angela Anderson, Director International Global Warming for the Pew Environmental Group, stated that in 1999 global warming was considered “opinion”. Now we know that the next few years are critical for our planet, and that Congress must be guided by science. Representative Henry Waxman (D-CA), Chairman of the House Energy and Commerce Committee, an early defender of the Clean Air Act, has announced a goal of getting a “cap and trade” bill for industrial CO<sub>2</sub> emission through his committee by Memorial Day, and Senator Harry Reid (D-NV) is a sponsor of a Green Energy Package. Ms. Anderson pointed out that we have leaders who are committed to the environment, and stressed that public education is important for their support. A recent survey by the Pew Foundation found that the most important issues concerning the public today are strengthening the economy and creating jobs. Sadly, the most precipitous drop in interest has been the environment.

When Lisa Jackson, Administrator for the Environmental Protection Agency spoke she stressed that, “**Having a strong EPA is a necessity, not an option.**” Air pollution and clean water issues are important to public health and welfare.

Representative Earl Blumenauer (D-OR), stated that we need a comprehensive view of environmental issues, emphasizing that the American public “deserves to know and see the whole picture.” He stressed that issues are interconnected, and that we need to address them together. Representative Jerry McNerney (D-CA) spoke about raising awareness of the environment. He pointed out that any time we use an energy source we are threatening something in our environment. He would like to ensure that oil companies use some of their profits for research, and, offered as an example, creating crude oil from algae as a possible new technology for the future. Learning to move forward to create a country of *sustainers*, rather than *consumers*, and becoming environmental champions of a clean, sustainable environment must be the ultimate goals of our 111<sup>th</sup> congressional environmental initiatives, he said.

We came to Washington at a most exciting time early in a new administration. The economic stimulus package had just been passed. President Obama addressed a joint session of Congress during our time there to lay out his plans to restart the economy. The President’s proposed budget arrived in the Congressional offices while we were visiting our senators and representatives. We felt the new wind blowing in Washington. We felt that our message to protect our Earth’s environment was falling on more receptive ears. As Joan George, GCA First Vice President, said in her welcoming remarks, “One can feel the power and purpose in the air upon arriving in Washington - and in our meeting room. And those feelings are contagious.”

*Phyllis Alexander, President  
Plainfield (NJ) G.C. - Zone IV*

**[Author’s Note:** While writing this, I realize that my impressions are only a very small part of the Global Warming issues and reduction of our nation’s “carbon footprint” discussed at the NAL meeting. To learn more about the status of current environmental issues in Congress, I recommend following the National Affairs and Legislation Committee updates compiled

by Martha Phillips, NAL Vice-Chairman. To view the GCA Legislative Update and the GCA Legislative Status Chart, go to the GCA website and look under "National Affairs and Legislation" in "Committees." To receive them via e-mail contact Mary Jane Tooker at: [maryjane@gcamerica.org](mailto:maryjane@gcamerica.org) or call 212-753-8287.]

## Roiling the Waters – Climate Change and the Earth's Oceans

The National Affairs & Legislation conference included a roster of speakers who addressed the problems of global warming from different perspectives. They spoke about the political and technical difficulties of climate change legislation in the 111<sup>th</sup> Congress and of the current state of scientific knowledge about a warmer planet.

The impact of global warming on the ecosystems in the world's oceans was of particular concern to many of the speakers. Because of the immense scale of the oceans, predictions of future events with higher levels of



atmospheric carbon dioxide are theoretical. However, there is general agreement that a more carbon-rich atmosphere will effect changes not seen in the world's oceans since prehistoric times. These changes are not likely to benefit the flora and fauna that inhabit the oceans. To all scientists who study the ecosystems of the oceans, the changes are not merely theoretical, but actual. While it is impossible to foretell the ultimate degree and scope of the effects of a warmer, more carbon dioxide-rich atmosphere, science has already begun to observe the adverse effects of this occurrence, adding immediacy to theoretical concerns.

The publication of the International Panel on Climate Change's (IPCC) final report in December, 2007 put to rest the argument that there was still a debate about the reality of global warming. The World Meteorological Organization and the United Nations Environmental Program assembled the IPCC to assess and evaluate the scientific, technological, socio-economic effects of global warming and to look at options for the mitigation of and adaptation of these changes. Carbon in the atmosphere is increasing at a rate that is in excess of the predictions of 1992. This increase in man-made carbon is affecting all global systems including the oceans.

The process taking place in the oceans involves atmospheric carbon (CO<sub>2</sub>) mixing with seawater, producing acid that in turn lowers the pH of the seawater. Ocean acidification is rapidly changing the carbonate system of the world's oceans. Past mass extinction events have been linked to ocean acidification and the current rate of change in seawater chemistry is unprecedented. Evidence suggests that these changes will have significant consequences for marine flora and fauna, particularly those that build skeletons, shells, and biogenic calcium carbonate. Potential changes in species distributions and numbers could migrate through many of the levels of the marine food web.

Of particular concern is the effect of a more acidic ocean on the world's coral reefs. Biologists estimate that coral reefs offer habitat to 25% of marine species. As earth's most complex and largest ecosystem, reefs are home to over 4000 fish species, 700 varieties of corals and countless thousands of plants and other animals. The world's largest reef is Australia's Great Barrier Reef, which extends over 1000 miles. At an average growth rate of less than an inch a year, this biological wonder predates most civilizations on earth. In addition to the wondrous biological diversity and abundance, reefs provide economic benefits through fishing and tourism and in many cases act as a barrier to hurricanes and adverse storms.

Coral reefs grow from the accumulated skeletons of limestone-secreting animals and plants. These ecosystems lie, as any snorkeler can attest, in the shallow waters of sub-tropical and tropical areas of the world. They have the highest biodiversity of any marine ecosystem. Worldwide, coral reefs have been under increasing pressure from pollution, over-fishing and development in the coastal areas where they abound. In 1997, a small increase in water temperature caused by the El Niño currents caused coral bleaching - a phenomenon in which the

microorganisms that constitute the reef disappear with increased water temperatures, leaving behind bone white coral. One frightening aspect of coral bleaching is that it occurred simultaneously worldwide. This served as a warning to many biologists of the possible adverse events to come with a warmer planet. Although some reefs recovered, The United Nations estimates that already a third of the world's reefs have vanished and that 60% could be gone by 2030.

Although the future portends an ocean unlike the one familiar to everyone, the news is not all bad. The possibility exists that a warming planet would mean a wider range of coral formation in northern latitudes and at deeper depths. The reefs have shown adaptability as demonstrated by the recovery from the 1997 coral bleaching event and, over time, the microorganisms that constitute a reef may continue to adjust. Other flora might benefit from increased CO<sub>2</sub>, such as seagrasses - the shallow water vegetation common to most coastal areas.

Seagrasses represent another biologically rich and productive marine ecosystem. They create critical nursery grounds for juvenile fishes and important habitat for adult fishes, invertebrates, and mollusks. Several higher order and endangered species rely on seagrasses for a significant portion of their diet (e.g., dugongs \*, manatees, and green sea turtles). Seagrass ecosystems are a component critical to maintaining the biological diversity of the oceans and could be one of the few ecosystems that stand to benefit from increasing levels of CO<sub>2</sub> in seawater.

The oceans are the planet's most complex and largest ecosystem, making precise scientific predictions about the ocean's systems impossible. It appears that reducing or stabilizing atmospheric carbon is currently the best adaptation to the acidification event. The imperative is to act before time passes and possible solutions drift away as atmospheric carbon reaches levels beyond the possibility of reduction.

*Diane B. Stone, Litchfield (CT) G.C. - Zone II  
GCA Conservation Committee - Vice-Chair, Climate Change*

[\* dugong - A large marine mammal which, together with the manatee, is one of four living species of the order Sirenia. The dugong is the only strictly marine herbivorous mammal. Wikipedia]

[Photo Credits: Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History.]

### **How Big is the Ocean?**

Attendees at the NAL Meeting had a chance to visit the new Sant Ocean Hall at the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History. There we learned: Almost all of Earth's livable space is in the ocean. Earth is an ocean planet. Because the ocean is immensely deep and covers 71% of the Earth's surface, its volume is huge. It accounts for more than 95% of the planet's living space. Ocean dwellers use the entire volume. They live in a three-dimensional world that is full of life. And, we learned, the ocean is key to man's survival.



## **Shoring Up the Clean Water Act**

A major agenda item addressed at the NAL meeting in Washington, D.C. was the health of our waters and our wetlands in the United States. The Clean Water Act of 1972 (CWA) is a key cornerstone of environmental protection legislation in this country. To meet its objective of restoring and maintaining the chemical, physical, and biological integrity of the nation's waters, the Act established a federal program to reduce or eliminate the discharge of pollutants into waterways and regulate the discharge of dredged or fill material into wetlands. Former NAL Committee Chair Ellie Kelly testified before Congress in support of this legislation at its inception,

and GCA has been a strong proponent of the Act ever since. In a sense, GCA has served as a collective godparent of the CWA, monitoring its progress, encouraging its vitality, applauding its successes, and coming to its defense when necessary.

Impressive gains have been made in water quality since CWA became law 37 years ago. The percentage of the nation's waters meeting water quality standards has doubled, going from 33% to 66%, and the rate of wetlands loss has decreased sharply. Despite these notable successes, however, the pace of progress has stalled in recent years and serious new challenges are emerging which could jeopardize the progress already made.

### **Erosion of Federal Protection**

The most troubling threat to the Act's effectiveness is erosion of its jurisdictional scope. The current statutory language is not entirely clear on which waters, including wetlands, are protected under the Act. Historically, the



two enforcing agencies – the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Corps of Engineers (Corps) – have interpreted the language broadly. Recognizing that aquatic systems are intricate and interconnected, and understanding the importance of addressing quality impairments at their source rather than downstream, the agencies have asserted jurisdiction over a wide variety of waters in the U.S., including “isolated” wetlands and intermittent streams. However, a number of groups - including developers, industry, and farm interests - have vehemently disputed such jurisdictional latitude, intensely lobbying the Congress and filing cases in courts to promote their position.

Challenges to jurisdictional scope have been given added impetus in recent years by two important Supreme Court decisions. These rulings and subsequent policy guidance from EPA and the Corps have upended the longstanding interpretation of CWA jurisdiction and introduced confusing, costly and time-consuming evidentiary tests which must be met before Federal protection can be asserted for certain categories of waters and wetlands. A recent House committee report documents a substantial deterioration in CWA enforcement actions in the past couple of years, and attributes this decline to the fallout from these Court rulings and implementing policies.

### **Legislative Remedies**

The Clean Water Restoration Act (CWRA) of 2007 was introduced in both the House and Senate in the last session of Congress. This legislation was designed to eliminate any jurisdictional ambiguity and restore the traditional approach adopted by both Democratic and Republican Administrations in the three decades following CWA's enactment. Although hearings were held in both the House and Senate, no votes were taken on this controversial and politically thorny legislation. While all parties to the issue want more clarity on the parameters of Federal protection, one side wants to keep jurisdiction as broad as allowable under the Constitution while the other side wants to narrow jurisdiction markedly.

### **GCA's Response**

GCA's position paper on clean water\* recognizes the importance of protecting our water resources and wetlands and preventing pollution. More specifically, it endorses enforcement of strict water quality standards and pollution permits. In October 2007, current NAL Committee Chair Derry MacBride testified in favor of the Clean Water Restoration Act, noting that the legislation is needed to “reaffirm the original, intended scope of the Clean Water Act guaranteeing all Americans the right to clean water.” This issue has been highlighted at recent NAL/Conservation meetings in Washington, D.C. In their visits to Capitol Hill, GCA delegates have talked to

their legislators about the importance of shoring up the Clean Water Act and have urged bipartisan approaches to ensure that the various waters of the United States, including wetlands, remain protected.

[\* See GCA Website for "Position Papers."]

## **Outlook**

The prospects for legislative action to restore the scope of Federal protection under the CWA remain uncertain. On April 2, 2009, Senator Russ Feingold re-introduced CWRA in the current session of Congress and we expect that Congressman Oberstar will introduce a bill on the House side in the near future. While the composition of the new Congress may suggest more support for such measures, the legislative agenda this year is unusually crowded, and we know that the opponents of CWRA are well-organized, well-funded, and have considerable political clout.

No matter what happens on the legislative front, important changes can be anticipated at the administrative level. The new leadership at the White House and EPA are aware of the jurisdictional issue and appear committed to addressing it. Both Nancy Sutley, the new head of the White House Council on Environmental Quality, and Lisa Jackson, the recently appointed Administrator of EPA, referenced the problems with Clean Water Act enforcement in their remarks at the February NAL/Conservation meeting. In the not too distant future, we may see significant revisions to the policy guidance implementing the relevant Supreme Court rulings, along with invigorated clean water enforcement activity and renewed emphasis on scientific analysis in making jurisdictional determinations.

*Claudia Bell, Little Compton (RI) G.C. – Zone I  
GCA NAL Committee, Vice-Chair – Water/Wetlands*

## **Less Carbon = More Jobs**

The thought of revitalizing our economy with green jobs is inspiring, but how will it actually work? What will those jobs look like? How many can actually be created? The United States is on the cusp of finally enacting federal laws that will cap global warming pollution. The focus of how this will affect our economy has never been greater. The economic stimulus package passed earlier this year underscores the economic necessity of creating new jobs by reinventing our energy supply. Opponents of such actions argue that a cap will hurt business and consumers. But will it?

A popular speaker at the NAL conference was Jackie Roberts, the Director of Sustainable Technologies at the Environmental Defense Fund (EDF). Ms. Roberts shared with our members her belief that tens of thousands of workers in hundreds of communities are poised to benefit from a nationwide cap on carbon emissions. If the U.S. commits to capping carbon emissions, says Roberts, manufacturing companies from the coal country to the rust belt will see a surge of customers looking to cut pollution, reduce energy use, and expand their use of renewable energy sources such as wind and solar.

EDF, together with Duke University, completed a study that demonstrates how such an energy cap will equal new jobs. (found at: [www.cgsc.duke.edu/environment/climatesolutions/](http://www.cgsc.duke.edu/environment/climatesolutions/))

The study maps sources for five different climate solutions and how they will create jobs from the supply of raw materials and manufactured parts to the local marketing of end products. The ultimate market driver – the consumer - also stands to gain from the use of new technology. These five climate solutions studied were the following:

1. LED lighting.
2. Concentrated thermal-solar.
3. Auxillary power units.
4. Managing hog waste.
5. Energy efficient windows.

Although this study specifically lists all the raw materials, components, manufacturers, retailers, and wholesalers who could be involved in implementing these energy solutions, government and the financial markets would also have to participate. In order for jobs to be created, Roberts points out, loan markets must be opened up for long term financing and tax breaks initially may be needed. Funding for efficiency and renewables would help as well, she says.

Examples of jobs that connect climate change solutions with job creation have been disseminated in the popular media. A recent story on CBS News highlighted former Maytag employees in Iowa who have found new manufacturing jobs in making parts for windmills. Another, a former auto industry worker in Michigan who is now making large-scale machine parts for wind turbines, said, "I look at the future of the wind industry, and this is a positive place to be. It's nice to be part of something that's growing and creating jobs. I think people in communities like mine need to reinvent themselves and apply their skills to the green energy revolution."



How many green jobs could be created from the economic stimulus package we are hearing so much about? The EDF estimates one and a half million! But federal assistance cannot compare to the potential for the flood of private investment in solutions that can result once these programs take off. Jackie Roberts enthusiastically remarked that all of this can be achieved once it is accepted that a cap on carbon emissions will unleash new creativity, new customers, and new jobs. (To learn more, look for [lesscarbonmorejobs.org](http://lesscarbonmorejobs.org).)

*Elva Busch, Santa Fe (NM) G.C. - Zone XII  
GCA Conservation Watch Editor*

### **Native Plant Use on Federal Lands**

In recent years, every part of the U.S. has experienced record setting weather events. Native plant communities are being affected by climate change, increasing wildfires, urban expansion, severe droughts, expanding energy development uses, and non-native plant invasion. Federal government agencies manage more than 600 million acres of land in our country, almost one-third of our land mass. There is a growing critical conservation need to develop native plant materials, which the current commercial market does not adequately supply, in order to manage our American public landscape.

Another speaker at the Washington NAL meeting was Peggy Olwell, Plant Conservation Program Manager at the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). Attendees learned about a program dealing with land restoration following devastating wildfires or following the eradication of invasive plants. Because wildfires are increasing and because the BLM's seed purchases for restoration were primarily non-native species, the federal government in 2001 established the interagency Native Plant Materials Development Program, or "Seeds of Success." This program ensures a stable and economic supply of native plant seeds for restoration and rehabilitation on public lands. In 1992, only two types of native seeds were commercially available; by 2007, 122 native species were available through the program.





**Student volunteer hand-seeding native grasses in a restoration project.**

Members learned that the process of bringing native species to market is lengthy and complicated. Eco-regions must be assessed. Native seeds must be collected following rigid protocols. Priorities for seed selection include restoration values, determining successional (early, mid and late) species, and the types of plants needed. Seeds must be evaluated and germination protocols established. Field trials must be conducted so that there will be a sufficient collection for future production. Foundation seeds are passed along to growers in private, commercial operations. Bulk seed storage capacity must be developed. And, finally, public agencies establish contracts to purchase native seeds from the private growers. This program has been a public/private success story. BLM native seed purchases today exceed non-native purchases as a result.

Ms. Olwell also charged GCA members to be the voice for plants. Many citizens come to Washington to advocate for issues concerning the animal world.

However, she reminded us, few advocate for our plants. When speaking to our legislators about the issue of climate change, we should be talking to them about the future of our native plants in our areas, she stressed. Ms. Olwell is particularly concerned about the future of our rare plants. Each of our states has been charged through their Fish and Wildlife Departments to develop State Wildlife Action Plans. These blueprints will drive future conservation programs within our states. These plans often do not include plants! We can download these plans on our Fish and Wildlife websites. We should be looking at these to see if we are caring for the future of our native plants in our states. And, both our states and our federal government need funding for native plant work. As Peggy Stewart, Advisor to the GCA Conservation Committee, stated so succinctly, “No plants – no people!”

*Claire Caudill, G.C. of Houston (TX) – Zone IX  
Chair, GCA Conservation Committee*

## **GCA Goes to Washington: How Long Has This Been Going On?**

The GCA was founded in 1913 to *share the knowledge and love of gardening and to restore, improve and protect the environment*. The tradition of activism on behalf of plants received a jump-start in 1921. Mrs. Harold Irving Pratt (Harriet Barnes Pratt) of North Country Garden Club of Long Island (NY) testified at a hearing in Washington concerning imported bulbs. Ever since, GCA women have played a role in influencing legislation regarding plants. The admirable history of the GCA Conservation Committee by Betty Pinkerton of the Tacoma (WA) Garden Club, written in 1999, lists laws passed for which member garden clubs may take credit in 1915, 1920, 1926, and 1930. And this was just the beginning!

GCA efforts swung into high gear as the 1960's approached. The dynamic leadership of Willie Waller of the Bedford (NY) Garden Club focused on the problem of massive broadcasting of highly toxic pesticides. Rachel Carson and her book *Silent Spring* (1962) were just around the corner. Pesticide research now became a dominant issue. As environmental legislation grew, the Legislative Committee, now known as the National Affairs and Legislation (NAL) Committee, was separated from the



*Harriet Barnes Pratt*

Conservation Committee in 1969. However, the two still meet together.

GCA members continued to influence national trends and legislation. In 1971, Administrator William Ruckelshaus of the newly formed Environmental Protection Agency asked Mrs. Waller, now chair of the NAL, for GCA's views on air quality standards and the banning of DDT. She immediately recommended the banning of DDT and increased attention to clean air.

A specific series of steps was codified so that the GCA could be both responsible and responsive to new environmental legislation. First, based on our position papers and updated reports, NAL proposes that a key bill receive our support. The Conservation Committee approves or disapproves. Then, a formal position on a bill is agreed upon and the position is sent to the Executive Committee. Its decision is then communicated to the membership.

The annual legislative meetings in Washington began in the 1970's as a few women led by Ellie Kelly navigated the halls of Congress. Soon the February meeting of the two committees moved to Washington, with appropriate speakers from Congress, agencies and non-profit environmental groups. These were so successful that soon, under the leadership of Judy Boggess, the meetings were opened to any GCA member.

Now, each year, over 300 GCA members come to learn about and to act on legislative matters affecting the environment. Every attendee, after two briefing days, goes out "on the Hill" to discuss key issues and recommend support for bills we support. This year, much of our attention was devoted to climate change and its effects on our oceans, as has been discussed in previous articles. GCA's voice is needed more than ever to help create solutions to this life-changing issue.

*Ann Coburn, Village G.C. (PA) President – Zone V  
GCA NAL Committee, Vice-Chair – Endangered Species  
Former Chair, GCA Conservation and NAL Committees*

*For more information about the 2009 NAL Meeting, see the GCA Bulletin April/May issue.*

## **White House Victory Garden**

Shortly after the NAL meeting in Washington, we learned that the White House will have an 1,100 square foot garden on the grounds. Author Michael Pollan (*Omnivore's Dilemma*) and chef Alice Waters, among others, have been advocating for a White House garden since the inauguration. This will be the first at the White House since Eleanor Roosevelt's Victory Garden during World War II. Fifth graders, shown in the photo, from a nearby elementary school, helped turn the soil.

While this can be seen as a political and environmental symbol, it does send a message that Americans should be eating healthful, locally grown foods at a time when obesity and diabetes are an increasing concern. It also reminds us that we should reduce our reliance on huge industrial farms that use more oil for transportation and chemicals for fertilizer. In the space of this small kitchen garden, fifty-five varieties of vegetables - from a wish list of the culinary staff - will be grown from organic seedlings started at the Executive Mansion's greenhouses. A White House carpenter, who is a beekeeper, will tend two hives for honey. Herbs are being planted as well as a berry patch.

The plots will be raised beds enriched with White House compost, crab meal from Chesapeake Bay, lime and green sand. Ladybugs and praying mantises will help control harmful bugs. It is reported that the total cost of seeds, mulch, and other materials is \$200. There is a renewed interest in gardening in the U.S. because of the current economic crisis. In addition to backyard gardens, there are thousands of community gardens in our country. Food grown in the White House garden will be used there as well as helping supply a nearby soup kitchen for the homeless. As First Lady Michele Obama started work on the garden she said, "You can begin in your own cupboard by eliminating processed food, cooking a meal more often, and incorporating more fruits and vegetables."

*Editor*

**First lady helps turn the soil for the new garden.**



## Project BudBurst

A National Phenology Network Field Campaign for Citizen Scientists

Spring is here. Learn how you can become a citizen scientist and contribute to the body of knowledge of how our plants are being affected by climate change. BudBurst is a national phenology network field campaign to track plants in a local area and contribute valuable information about climate change. Members of the public can observe and report first leafing, first flowering, and first fruit ripening of trees, shrubs, flowers, and grasses in their area.

**Phenology** is the study of the timing of life cycle events like leafing, budding, and blooming in plants. The timing of phenological events of many species has changed recently as a result of changing temperatures and rainfall patterns. Small variations in temperature at the global scale can have dramatic and varied effects on the environment. Climate change has the largest effect on plants because, unlike many animals, they cannot move easily from one area to another. As a result, the growing season could start earlier or continue over a longer period of time. The timing of phases of the plant life cycle, known as **phenophases**, is directly affected by temperature, rainfall and day length. By monitoring changes in phenological events such as first bud, budburst, and flowering, scientists can detect the occurrence of climate change.

Climate change affects individual plant species by changing the speed and duration of life processes such as growth rate, the degree of evaporation of available water, and their interactions with birds and insects. Because plant species differ in their sensitivity to temperature and humidity, climate change also affects the kinds of plants and animals that can survive in an ecosystem. While the number of wild plant species can increase because of climate change, most newcomers are species that perform well in human made environments such as roadsides, agricultural lands and urban areas. Species with more specific habitat requirements, on the contrary, can

disappear. Although there are many factors that affect species survival, climate change is considered a significant cause of decreased native plant populations.

To find out how you can participate, go to the Project BudBurst website at: [www.windows.ucar.edu/citizen\\_science/budburst](http://www.windows.ucar.edu/citizen_science/budburst)

Editor

### **Partners for Plants – Who are the “Partners?”**

*Partners for Plants* represents many different partnerships working for the benefit of plants. The program began in the early 1990's as a cooperative agreement between the GCA Conservation Committee and the federal government to assist federal botanists in their work. Since then, the idea has grown to encompass state lands, city parks over 150 acres, and, most recently, county lands. Partnerships can include non-GCA members. This GCA Program today is a joint effort of the GCA Conservation and Horticulture Committees.

The coordinator for a project is a GCA member; the rest of the workers can be anyone wishing to be a partner. (Even four-legged friends have become partners! See the Winter '08-'09 issue of *Conservation Watch* to learn about the Seattle Garden Club's goat “partners” helping remove invasive plants!) The most important partners of all are the plants. GCA is a primary advocate for plants on public lands.

Partnerships can be as varied as the people and places involved. They take place on public lands and use a botanist. There's probably a public site near you that could use your help. Besides the more obvious places like state and national parks, national forests, Bureau of Land Management (BLM) land, consider a nearby military base or property owned by a state university.

Projects are also varied. They may be of short duration, taking a day, last several days, or be done in repeat visits over months or years. [A G.C. of Mt. Desert (ME) project in Acadia National Park has been ongoing since the early 90's.] There are opportunities for many talents. Need more exercise? Partner with someone who needs invasive plants removed so that indigenous plants might thrive. If your back isn't up to this, find a project that involves a plant survey or propagating plants to return to their native habitat. Martha Gay Stewart of the Rochester (NY) Garden Club propagates native wood lilies to return to their Rush Oak Opening project. Involve the horticulture committee in your club as well. Or, consider studying medicinal plants, such as black cohosh or osha.



*River Oaks G.C. (TX) smiling as they work on the Houston Arboretum Partners for Plants project.*

So, as you can see, Partners for Plants projects offer possibilities for many interests and energy levels. It's a great way to be in a beautiful place, help native plants thrive, work with others with an interest in nature, and enjoy the comradeship of working together. You'll feel a real sense of accomplishment. If we've peaked your interest, contact the name below for your zone.

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### **Flower Shows and Conservation – What's the Connection? (Or: Answers to the Question, "What Do You Mean We Have to Have a Conservation Exhibit at the Show?")**

Have you ever been asked to do a conservation exhibit for a flower show and had no idea where to start? Now there are guidelines for creating conservation exhibits on the GCA website. Just go to the Members Only section of the website, click on Committees, scroll to Conservation, and then click on "Guidelines for Creating Conservation Exhibits". The guidelines are also included in the new issue of the *GCA Yellow Book*. Conservation is an important part of the GCA mission, and flower shows represent a great opportunity for educating both club members and the general public. Exhibits may focus on current conservation issues, increase knowledge and awareness of local natural resources, encourage environmental stewardship, promote sustainable and healthy gardening or provide helpful information on "living green." Don't miss the opportunity to promote conservation. I am reminded of a favorite quote that might help when choosing a topic for your flower show conservation exhibit. *"In the end we will conserve only what we love. We will love only what we understand. We will understand only what we are taught."*

(Baba Dioum, Senegalese poet)

*Claire Caudill, G.C. of Houston (TX) – Zone IX  
Chair, GCA Conservation Committee*

#### **Need some suggestions?**

Here are some ideas from around the country of exhibits, many award winning, that are clever, innovative, and just plain fun! Zone VII Representative Lynda Strickler tells us about judging the Southeastern Flower Show in Atlanta recently. The Discovery Division of their show had eight unique and creative exhibits covering topics such as rain barrels, rooftop gardens, and wall and container gardens that addressed limited space issues. Another offered a multitude of environmentally friendly and useful gardening techniques. This one was the winner of the GCA Certificate of Excellence in Conservation.

Zone II has been very busy with flower shows in recent months. The Green Fingers (CT) G.C. included two exhibits in the "The Greenhouse: A Protected Environment" show. The conservation exhibit was called "The Greener House" and their education exhibit was labeled "The Greener Garden." The Greener House focused on ways to reduce our carbon footprint through energy conservation and efficiency in the home. The Greener Garden educated viewers about the life of the soil food web\* and encouraged gardeners to work with this natural ecosystem and to avoid harmful chemicals and synthetic fertilizers. Each exhibit won a major award, according to Conservation Co-Chair Martha Robinson Heard. Both exhibits will travel around Greenwich, Connecticut to different venues.

[\***soil food web** is the community of organisms living all or part of their lives in the soil. It describes a complex living system in the soil and how it interacts with the environment, plants, and animals. *Wikipedia*]



*Green Fingers G.C. - Greener Garden*



*Green Fingers G.C. - Greener House*

Zone II Representative Frances Trafton shares with us news of other flower shows in her zone. Fairfield G.C. offered an exhibit at the Zone II flower show that displayed information about storm water runoff and tips for homeowners to keep poisons out of streams. In June the New Canaan G.C. will celebrate their 100<sup>th</sup> year with a flower show. Their conservation exhibit will cover sustainable gardens, water, and soil issues. The New London G.C.'s recent flower show included information on geothermal energy. The Stamford G.C. displayed safe garden products for their exhibit at their recent flower show. These four clubs are all in Connecticut. In Rhode Island, the upcoming Newport G.C. will highlight "Glorious Green," the path of organic and natural lifestyles.



*Fairfield G.C.'s Healthy Watershed Exhibit.*

In March, the Founders G.C. in Sarasota, Florida (Zone VIII) held their "Broadway in Bloom" show. Their conservation exhibit, "Revival," focused on Phillippi Creek bordering the mansion where their show was staged, reports their Conservation Chair Lee Ann Gladding. The creek is an integral part of the Sarasota Bay Watershed. The exhibit compared the creek in the early days of settlement of the area to that of today and

highlighted measures used to restore and rehabilitate the creek. Members used archival photos on one display board juxtaposed with recent color pictures of similar scenes on another board. The new photos were taken on a club boat trip up the newly dredged creek.

The Fall Zone V Meeting included two conservation exhibits coordinated with the show theme, “From Roots to Roofscapes,” relates Zone Conservation Representative Suzanne Roth. One, an exhibit by the Four Counties G.C. (PA), showing how green roofs work, won the Marion Thompson Fuller Brown Award. The exhibit showed the benefits of installing a green roof. The display explained how they help the environment by promoting better air quality, reducing storm water drainage, and creating better water quality. These measures reduce roof heat, thus lowering urban temperatures and prolonging the life of the roof itself. The exhibit by the G.C. of Philadelphia (PA) highlighted the effects of the unmanaged deer population on native species. Members told the story of their Partners for Plants project in Valley Forge National Historic Park seeking six native plants that were once prolific within the park and are now endangered or rare. A computer screen displayed eight months of photographs showing the stark contrast between the inside and outside of a 100' X 100' enclosure. One native plant, mature trees and Japanese stiltgrass covered the forest floor while many native plants and small trees thrived within the enclosure.



*Green Roof Exhibit by Four Counties G.C.*

In 2010, the Middletown G.C. (CT) will celebrate its 95<sup>th</sup> birthday by featuring Connecticut’s rural nature and pay tribute to its farms at their “Down on the Farm” flower show. Conservation Chair Judy Schoonmaker plans an exhibit of Connecticut grown and produced items with a backdrop of a farm wagon with huge murals of Connecticut farms, emphasizing locally grown food. They hope to stage the show at a local collection of beautiful barns.

The Lenox G.C. (MA) in Zone I stages a flower show this spring called “Go Green II – Save Our Environment.” According to MaryEllen O’Brien, Flower Show Committee Chair, the club will offer an educational exhibit on “The New Victory Garden.” The conservation exhibit will be done in partnership with the local regional high school. It’s theme, “The Answer is Blowin’ in the Wind,” includes wind projects in their county and at a nearby ski area. The club is already planning for their 100<sup>th</sup> birthday in 2011 and has received approval for their commemorative flower show. The conservation exhibit for that show will be “Conserving Our Water Resource, One Drop at a Time,” teaching its viewers easy ways to save water.

The GCA Conservation Committee hopes that these suggestions will help you determine the perfect conservation exhibit for your club or zone. Please consult your Zone Conservation/NAL Representative for more ideas.

## Club News

### Garden Guild of Winnetka Pilots Docent Training Program at Local Nature Preserve

The closing of the Army's Fort Sheridan presented a conservation opportunity for the Chicago metropolitan area. Openlands, a regional land conservation group, took ownership of 77 acres of the former military base to form the Openlands Lakeshore Preserve. Just twenty-five miles from downtown Chicago and without any private development so common along Lake Michigan, its mile of pristine shoreline and its three ravines provide a unique opportunity to teach conservation.

Members of Garden Guild of Winnetka have joined forces with Openlands to pilot a docent training program. Working closely with Openlands' staff and educational consultant, Garden Guild has helped to craft key messages to be conveyed to visitors. The Preserve will serve not only as a field trip destination for local schoolchildren, but also as a site for adult tours.



*(Photo courtesy of Openlands.)*

Garden Guild docents guide visitors from the top of the glacial ravines, originating just after the last Ice Age, down to the last mile of undeveloped shoreline along Lake Michigan. They view the restoration work occurring in the Preserve's three distinct ecosystems - prairie, woodlands, and oak savanna. These 90-minute tours cover topics such as endangered plants, ravine restoration, water quality, biodiversity, and climate change. This outreach opportunity has drawn a wide variety of Garden Guild members, each of whom is excited to expand her own knowledge, while bringing a fresh conservation message to the public.

*Suzanne Booker-Canfield, Ph.D. - President  
Garden Guild of Winnetka (IL) – Zone XI*

[Note: Openlands Lakeshore Preserve is a 2009 Founders Fund finalist.]



## **Connecticut Club Tackles Conservation Challenges with Great Programs**

The Fairfield (CT) Garden Club has been working on the issue of storm water runoff and water quality for some time. A panel discussion that was open to the public and well received, took place in November of 2006. Participants included local environmental experts from the Fairfield Department of Public Works, the Long Island Soundkeeper and state legislator, and The Nature Conservancy (Saugatuck River Watershed Partnership). The panel addressed the state of the watershed, downstream consequences, and individual responsibility. An Exposition was included with exhibitors for pervious paving techniques and materials, organic land care science, rain garden design, and a demonstration by grade school children about storm water runoff through the use of handmade diorama demo tanks.

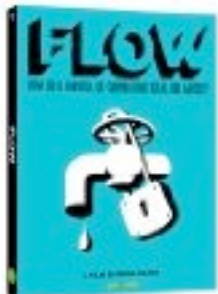
Along with nearby Sasqua Garden Club (CT), a second event happens on April 22, 2009 in conjunction with **Earth Day**. This free event will be open to the public and provide lectures and exhibits. Husbands, the “true lovers of lawns,” will be invited to the **“Going Green in Your Own Backyard”** event. Two speakers, leaders in organic lawn care and pesticides, will teach attendees about the benefits of using organic lawn care practices and limiting the use of pesticides in our everyday world. Jay Feldman, Executive Director of the national organization Beyond Pesticides, will speak about the harmful effects of pesticide use in our homes, our yards and our children’s schools and playgrounds. Increasing evidence points to the hazards to our children when pesticides are used at the places they play. Chip Osborne, President of Osborne Organics, works with municipalities, schools and homeowners developing effective natural turf management programs. Mr. Osborne, Chairman of the Marblehead, Mass. Recreation, Parks and Forestry Commission, will share his experiences in greenhouse and turf management.

The Fairfield club understands the importance of public education and the enforcement of existing environmental laws, as well as the benefits of creating tax incentives for different approaches to home building, landscape design, and paving projects to improve storm water runoff and water quality. This upcoming event will help their community promote these goals.

Of note is the fact that new technology in storm drains which collect, analyze, and filter out heavy metals and other pollutants is now a test case in the town of Norwalk, Connecticut. This issue will continue to be followed by the Fairfield Garden Club. The club is also planning a rain garden to serve as a model for education and inspiration. Heather Crawford, the “*Rain Garden Lady*,” of Milford, Connecticut, will help us design the garden.

*Alice Cooke, Conservation Committee Chair  
Fairfield (CT) G.C. – Zone II*

## **Media Reviews**



### **DVD – FLOW: For the Love of Water**

Are you looking for a timely and important issue to fire up your garden club or, even better, your community? Show the DVD FLOW, Irena Salina’s eye-opening and alarming documentary about water, our most essential resource. You will be assured of thought-provoking discussion as a result and perhaps a call to action about this most serious issue.

Salina takes us around the world, examining the tug of war between private interests and public health. Under the guise of progress with projects funded by the World Bank with the intent of supplying the poor with clean, fresh water, third-world countries try to reduce their enormous debt by making shortsighted deals to sell their water rights to multinational water companies. In return, these companies supply a water tap and a water bill to people with little money to pay for their formerly free resource! These people then go to polluted streams, get sick, can’t work, and the vicious cycle of poverty continues. Meanwhile, the water companies from other countries thrive.

In the U.S., Salina focuses on a Nestlé bottling plant in Michigan. The company pumps water from the ground for their many products at low cost to the company, but at great cost to the environment and nearby residents. The water table has been drastically reduced while Nestlé rakes in huge profits. Nestlé brands include: Nescafe, Hot Pockets, Purina, Stouffers, Butterfingers, Baby Ruth, Gerber, as well as bottled waters including the Nestlé brand, Perrier, Poland Springs, and Pellegrino.

The film also examines the unpoliced bottled water industry and lack of government regulation for safety of our tap water. The question that comes to mind while watching the video is, “Should anyone really own water?” FLOW is an hour and a half long and is available on Netflix. Don’t miss it!

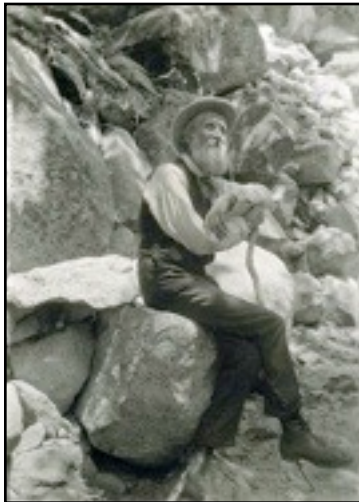
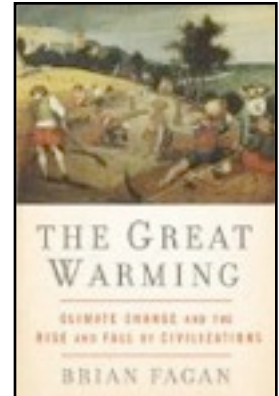
*Ann Lyman, Piedmont (CA) G.C. - Zone XII  
GCA NAL Committee, Vice-Chair - Forests and Redwoods*

## **The Great Warming: Climate Change and the Rise and Fall of Civilizations**

by Brian Fagan

Through his look at history, archeologist Brian Fagan explores past climate changes in this New York Times bestseller. By the use of tree rings, ice cores, coral reefs, computer weather models, and satellite photos, Mr. Fagan finds evidence of an often ignored side effect of rising temperatures – drought. Could history repeat itself? The book explores the possibilities of adaptation.

*Editor*



**A Passion for Nature: The Life of John Muir** by Donald Worster  
John Muir, at the age of 29, undertook a thousand mile walk from Indiana to the Gulf of Mexico. He had been the victim of a factory accident that temporarily blinded him. He never went back to his tools, seeking an independent way of life on earth. With his strong feeling for nature, this lean and bearded man roamed everywhere, from the Yosemite Valley to the Mojave Desert, fighting the good fight for conservation. His articles and books prepared the way for the modern environmental movement. Read this comprehensive illustrated biography of one of our most famous lovers of nature.

*Editor*

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