Environmental Literacy: 
Reading Nature at The Walden Woods Project
by Kent Curtis

When the Walden Woods Project spearheaded the national effort to prevent the construction of an office park less than a half-mile from the shores of Walden Pond in 1990, it hoped to draw public attention to the plight of Walden Woods, which was then listed by the National Trust for Historic Preservation as one of America’s Eleven Most Endangered Historic Places. The Walden Woods Project also hoped to use the land it saved to teach others about conservation and stewardship.

Within a few short months, the Project had focused a national spotlight onto its efforts to protect historic landscapes. In the ensuing years, the Project successfully raised the funds to purchase the 18 acres known as Brister’s Hill. The organization raised additional funds to purchase four other threatened properties in Walden Woods that had figured prominently in the life and writings of Henry David Thoreau: the 25-acre Bear Garden Hill site where a 139-unit condominium complex had been planned near Walden Pond, the 25-acre Boiling Spring site adjacent to Bear Garden Hill, the 10-acre Fairhaven Hill site, and the 18-acre Beech Grove site where the The Walden Woods Project and Thoreau Institute are located.

Over the years, the Walden Woods Project has complemented its land conservation efforts by using its archive and library collection and the historic lands surrounding Walden Pond to teach educators about the legacy of Henry David Thoreau and the importance of Walden Woods to American history and culture. Given the weighty existence of Thoreau’s life and letters and the general influence of the local literary flowering in which Thoreau was one of many significant voices, it is not surprising that the Project’s education programs have tended to attract teachers of literature to whom the famous lands of Concord and Lincoln are familiar in name and rich in meaning. To their credit, American literature educators and professors have been the staunchest keepers of Thoreau and his legacy, conveying his importance to generation after generation of American high school and college students. For that reason, English teachers have quite naturally been first in line to engage the Walden Woods Project’s educational efforts.

In coming years, the Project’s education programs will add to its core constituency by emphasizing interdisciplinary study modeled in its conservation lands. [For a listing of 2004 programming, see page 3.] The Walden Woods

(continued on page 6)
Dear Friends of Walden Woods,

The great American philosopher and naturalist Henry David Thoreau said, “I think that each town should have a park, or rather a primitive forest, of five hundred or a thousand acres, either in one body or several — where a stick should never be cut for fuel — nor for the navy, nor to make wagons, but stand and decay for higher uses — a common possession forever, for instruction and recreation.” This statement, even more relevant today than in Thoreau’s time, speaks to the ongoing struggles taking place around the world — battles to preserve wilderness, the rainforest, the oceans, national parks and wildlife refuges, as well as the increasingly important smaller tracts of open space, many of which, like Walden Woods, are near (or in) urban areas and provide millions of people with their only opportunity to experience nature. In a very real sense, we are fighting a global battle to save what remains of our precious natural resources.

We invite you to explore the pages of our annual newsletter and read about our continuing work to protect Thoreau’s land, literature and legacy. You’ll learn about restoration of the historic landscape known as Brister’s Hill, an area where Thoreau first developed his theory of forest succession. The new interpretive trail through this 18-acre property is scheduled to open to the public in the spring of 2004.

We will also introduce you to environmental literacy, the cornerstone of our education programs. The concept of environmental literacy will guide the development of new curriculum for high school students, strengthen seminars for educators and enhance expanded programming for lifelong learners.

Featured in our centerpiece this year are highlights from the collections of the Thoreau Institute at Walden Woods, our education and research facility located only one-half mile from Walden Pond. Since the Institute opened in 1998, it has provided reference services for over fifteen hundred students, scholars and writers from across the United States and beyond.

On the back page you will note that we are launching our new logo and revised mission statement. While the Walden Woods Project and The Thoreau Institute at Walden Woods maintained two separate and distinct logos for the past five years, we recently made a strategic decision to merge the logos to reflect more accurately both the mission and nature of our organization. Moving forward, the Walden Woods Project’s newly integrated mission and logo will reflect our vision of conservation, education and research upon which we have built our reputation.

As you read this newsletter, we think you will agree that 2003 was a tremendously successful year for the Walden Woods Project. However, we recognize that the success of our mission depends upon the generosity of our friends and supporters. As you make the difficult decision about how to invest your charitable dollars, we hope you will consider making a gift to the Walden Woods Project. We believe that every community and every individual has his or her own Walden — a place of inspiration, reflection or spiritual renewal. With your gift, we will continue to preserve Thoreau’s Walden Woods, while educating a new generation of stewards to discover, cherish and protect the Waldens in their own communities.

We extend our deepest appreciation for your continued commitment to the Walden Woods Project. We join the staff and board in wishing you a peaceful Holiday Season.

Sincerely,

Don Henley
Founder/President

Kathi Anderson
Executive Director

“That land is a community is a basic concept of ecology, but that land is to be loved and respected is an extension of ethics.” — Aldo Leopold
A Sampling of Educational Programs for 2004

- **THE ENVIRONMENTAL LITERACY PROJECT** Piloted as Project Groundforce in the summers of 2002 and 2003, this eight-week summer youth program, a cooperative effort between the Walden Woods Project and the National Park Service, provides middle and low-income urban and suburban youth the opportunity to develop environmental literacy skills and learn about environmental justice issues while providing valuable work for the National Park Service.

- **APPROACHING WALDEN** This teacher seminar is designed to expose an interdisciplinary group of high school educators and education graduate students to the natural philosophy and literature of Henry David Thoreau, the educational opportunities found in natural and wild areas in urban, suburban, and rural settings, and help them weave these lessons into standards-based lesson plans and curriculum.

- **FINDING WALDEN** This teacher seminar invites interdisciplinary teams of middle school educators to engage the landscape of Walden Woods as a case study in developing team-taught, interdisciplinary curriculum rooted in their own communities. It teaches teams of teachers to help their students find the Waldens in their own communities and become better stewards.

- **THE NATURAL SUBJECT** This series of lifelong learner workshops and lectures is organized around the theme of nature as a subject of art, broadly speaking. Each program provides a format for artists, from photographers to poets, performers to painters, who use nature as a subject to present their work, describe their creative processes, answer questions, and offer advice.

New programs in development or underway for 2004 include:

- **THE STEWARDSHIP LECTURES** This lifelong learner lecture series consists of six to eight lectures and discussions annually. Presenters are chosen for their contribution to the ongoing challenge of creating an environmentally literate citizenry. Conservationists, political leaders, activists, and innovators will offer insights and lessons that contribute to good stewardship. Proceedings from each year’s series will be published in a bound volume.

- **WALDEN IS WHERE YOU FIND IT** This youth education project will design and implement standards-based interdisciplinary curriculum for public high school students geared toward teaching the skills of environmental literacy. Curriculum will be designed in the spring of 2004 and an in-school pilot project will be launched in the fall of 2004.

- **ENGAGING THOREAU COUNTRY** VALUING PLACE IN THE 21ST CENTURY This youth program is being designed to introduce middle and high school students to Henry David Thoreau’s historical context and patterns of thought, challenge them to engage the Walden Woods conservation landscape from Thoreau’s interdisciplinary perspective, and guide them in developing strategies to replicate that engagement in their own communities. It is being piloted during 2004 as a growing menu of on-site lessons and activities that can be packaged for programs ranging from one half day to one week.

For more information about the educational programming at the Walden Woods Project or for a calendar of upcoming lectures, workshops, and programs, see our website or contact the education program at education@walden.org.

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**Concord Study Recommends Conservation of Landfill Site**

Strange as it may seem, closed landfills (fondly labeled dumps by the politically incorrect) harbor enormous potential for wildlife habitat and quiet recreation. The 2001 Landfill Study Committee, appointed by the Concord Board of Selectmen to evaluate the most appropriate reuse of the town’s former landfill site, issued a report in April, 2003 concluding that “The Landfill Site would be an important and significant asset to the Walden Pond State Reservation.” The property is prominently located only one-quarter mile from Walden Pond at the gateway to Walden Woods, and is the only remaining piece of unprotected land in close proximity to Walden.

The committee’s six members, representing the diverse interests of housing, recreation, public works and conservation, further recommended that a swap of state land be considered for the landfill site. A seven-acre section of its approximately 30 acres is currently being used by the town’s public works department. The suggested solution of a land swap would relocate these public works activities and allow for the land’s full and permanent protection. The Landfill Study Committee, meeting over a period of a year and a half, researched complex and competing reuse alternatives. The diligence of its members is a credit to the Concord community.

**Restored landfill returning to wildlife habitat**

Through a collaborative planning process with the town, The Walden Woods Project and its consultants, Massachusetts Audubon, Sasaki Associates Inc., and Dr. Steven Handel of Rutgers University have fostered a truly innovative landfill closure that will provide habitat and recreation opportunities far into the future. In addition to restoration planning services, the Walden Woods Project contributed over $120,000 in plantings. The collaboration has been marked throughout by vision, careful design and hard work.

Landfills closed and re-vegetated in the customary way with fast-growing, non-native grasses, usually provide only marginal wildlife habitat. Concord’s landfill has been planted with native grass and wildflowers and a scattering of oak, pine, and maple trees. Monitoring indicates that the grassland is developing into quality wildlife habitat. A variety of birds have been seen on and around the site, including nesting bluebirds, red-tailed hawks and Savannah sparrows. A pair of American kestrels and an eastern meadowlark were seen last spring, and butterflies and dragonflies abound. Coyotes, deer, fox and fischer have been observed along with an assortment of field mice and voles. Only 15 miles from Boston, such large expanses of undisturbed native grassland are a valuable but vanishing habitat.

**Entire Site Warrants Protection**

E.O. Wilson, famed wildlife biologist and twice winner of the Pulitzer Prize, has commented, “As a scientist and conservationist, I am devoutly behind the Walden Woods Project initiative to restore the former Concord landfill site to a natural habitat. The preservation of the small area of which it is part recognizes the immeasurable value of the Thoreau tradition. Concord is blessed to be the steward of Walden Woods and hence an environmental and cultural treasure of international stature.”

The Walden Woods Project remains committed to its goal of working with Concord and the state to achieve full and permanent protection for the entire site. We believe there are good options for relocation of the public works activities, and for a state-town land swap that would enable transfer of the property to Walden Pond State Reservation.

The educational and interpretive potential of the property is enormous. The once severely degraded landscape was studied and surveyed by Thoreau and included a favorite small pond he named Ripple Lake. While the long process of restoration may be accomplished largely by nature, a strong public-private collaboration has supplied a major boost. Little more than a stone’s throw from Walden and its thousands of visitors from across the country and around the world, here is one former landfill with many stories to tell, not the least of which can be the enduring value of community stewardship.
I gave heed to the confiding stream, mingled freely with the flowers and...
beyond her identity as a head sketched on a script points to a sense of her published writings; her naturalist Paul Thoreau saw of the depths of a primitive city but want to read rare pamphlet, a Thoreau portrait or a Walden landscape; whether you want a book by John Cage or an essay on a contemporary American writer, come to the library, where the past is always present.

Jeff Cramer, Curator of Collections at The Thoreau Institute's Library at Walden Woods, is the editor of Thoreau on Freedom: Attending to Man, published in 2003 by Fulcrum Press. He is also the editor of Walden: A Fully Annotated Edition. This book's publication by Yale University Press in the summer of 2004 is scheduled to coincide with the 150th anniversary of Walden's first publication. Jeff also has published a book on Robert Frost, interviews with contemporary American writers, and essays on a variety of subjects.
Walden’s Big Birthday

In August of 2004, Walden, the book, will turn 150. And Walden, the place, will celebrate—with good cause. The book that began as a publishing flop in Thoreau’s lifetime, attracted growing numbers of readers down through the twentieth century and shows no signs of slowing in the twenty-first. Its author, as critic Perry Miller wrote fifty years ago, “has now become a god in modern literature.” Miller added, “He was no scout exploring the Rockies. It was enough that the pond lay only two miles south of Concord common. In Walden distance is not measured by spatial units. It has taken us a hundred years to apprehend a little of what Thoreau’s dimen-

The book, due to be published in August 2004, will feature beautiful color images of Walden Pond and Walden Woods taken during the four seasons by nationally recognized photographer Scot Miller of Carrollton, Texas. The photographs will be interspersed with the complete text of Thoreau’s Walden. Scot has been photographing Walden for the past several years and donating a percentage of sales proceeds from his images to the Walden Woods Project. (For further information on Scot Miller’s photography, visit www.suntomoon.com). Houghton Mifflin, the Boston-based publishing company, acquired Ticknor and Fields, the original publisher of Thoreau’s Walden, shortly after it was published. The Walden Woods Project will benefit from a percentage of proceeds from sales of the book. We appreciate Houghton Mifflin’s strong and continuing support.

-Walden, by Henry D. Thoreau: A Fully Annotated Edition, edited and annotated by Jeffrey S. Cramer, will be published by Yale University Press in 2004. Accompanying a newly edited text, the annotations will not only correct errors and omissions from previous editions, but will comprehen-

Beginning in 2004, the Walden Woods Project is collaborating with photographer Scot Miller and publisher Houghton Mifflin on a book entitled Walden: 150th Anniversary Illustrated Edition. The book, due to be published in August 2004, will feature beautiful color images of Walden Pond and Walden Woods taken during the four seasons by nationally recog-

On these lands, program participants will learn the natural history and basic ecology of Walden Woods from practiced local naturalists. They will observe the different stages of forest succession, distinguish native and invasive species, and gather data about plant communities and land-use practices. Experiences in

Environmental Literacy

Environmental literacy refers to a wide-ranging set of tools designed to provide its practitioners with the skills and insights to find, reclaim, protect and cherish the wild and natural places, the Waldens that exist in every community.

Subjected to sand and gravel mining in the 1950s and 60s, then slated for development as an expansive office park in the 1980s, the Brister’s Hill site is now a recovering forest landscape. Land that was severely degraded forty years ago, today hosts stands of young white birch, groves of black birch and quaking aspen, thickets of pitch pine, and is edged by an older oak forest with an understory of white pine saplings sprinkled liberally throughout. Expected to open to the public in the spring of 2004, the site will be the first of the Project’s conservation properties used to impart the practical, hands-on lessons of environmental liter-

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Noteworthy...

WALDEN STUDY AVAILABLE

The National Park Service recently published “Walden Pond and Woods.” The 54-page Special Resource Study, illustrated with maps and photos, contains historical background and a careful and thorough documentation of the natural and cultural resources of Walden Pond and Woods. It evaluates the significance of the area and suggests options for its continued protection. In assessing a possible role by the National Park Service in the management of Walden Woods, the study concludes there is no clear need for new federal roles at this time. It adds that, if requested by local and state government, the NPS would give priority to a revised nomination and boundary adjustment for the Walden Pond National Historic Landmark, currently restricted to the 411-acre state reservation. To order a free copy, contact Project Manager Brian Aviles at the Boston office of the National Park Service. Tel: 617-223-5319 e-mail: Brian.Aviles@nps.gov

THANK YOU, AT&T

Last August, AT&T Wireless kept their promise to remove a cell tower that they had sited very near Walden Pond. After the company realized their initial plan impacted conservation efforts, they immediately began searching for an alternative location. In the meantime, company officials vowed to make the original location a “temporary” site – and they kept their word. “We felt obligated to find a better solution, and we are pleased it worked out so well for all parties involved,” said AT&T Wireless spokesman Marty Nee. It is gratifying to see a major corporation demonstrate genuine respect for historic landscapes. Our sincerest thanks to AT&T for their consideration for Walden Woods and their continuing support for The Walden Woods Project.

CRONKITE NARRATES WWP VIDEO

“If you have built castles in the air, your work need not be lost; that is where they should be. Now put the foundations under them,” wrote Thoreau in Walden. WWP and TRG-Productions of Boston recently produced a new video entitled “Castles in The Air.” Narrated by Walter Cronkite, it includes scenery of Walden Pond and Walden Woods, historic Concord and footage from some of the Walden Woods Project’s programs and events over the years. Pulitzer-prize winning author and naturalist E. O. Wilson discusses Thoreau’s contributions to the American environmental movement, and historian David McCullough describes the compelling need to preserve places like Walden Woods. Don Henley chronicles the evolution of the Thoreau Institute, and Arun Gandhi and Yolanda King explain Thoreau’s influence on the Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr. To purchase a copy of the 20 minute video for $5, including shipping and handling, call 1-800-554-3569 x703.

STORMY WEATHER

On November 13, 2002, the Walden Woods Project held its second “Stormy Weather” benefit at the Wiltern Theatre in Los Angeles. The event certainly lived up to its billing as “an evening of romance, glamour, fabulous women and beautiful music.” Artists Michelle Branch, Paula Cole, Deborah Cox, Sheryl Crow, Norah Jones, Reba McEntire, Joni Mitchell, Stevie Nicks, Susan Tedeschi and Trisha Yearwood performed a brilliant array of pop, jazz and blues standards along with the “El Nino Orchestra,” all under the musical direction of Larry Klein. Actor/comedian Paul Reiser entertained the guests as they enjoyed the cuisine of famed LA caterer Mary McCucci. Don Henley and Glenn Frey auctioned special items such as a trip to Las Vegas for Celine Dion’s opening night at Caesars Palace, an acoustic guitar autographed by Bruce Springsteen and a walk-on role on “ Buffy the Vampire Slayer”.

To purchase this 18”x24” sepia-toned poster for $15, please call 1-800-554-3569 x703 or use the enclosed order form.

WWP FEATURED IN CATALOGUE FOR PHILANTHROPY

“The Catalogue for Philanthropy” is a nationally recognized publication focused primarily on donor education. The Walden Woods Project was selected from a competitive field of more than 230 applicants. Acceptance in this exemplary publication is an honor for us. For more information, log onto www.catalogueforphilanthropy.org

Environmental Literacy

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nature will be supplemented by research and study in the Walden Woods Project’s library and archive collection and through access to the electronic resources in its technology lab. Here, participants will be able to examine the recorded history of the Walden Woods ecological unit and learn about the various land-use ideas that shaped the landscape of Walden Woods over time. Finally, participants will be encouraged to use literature and environmental philosophy to reflect on the less tangible but equally important realities embedded in the nature and landscape of Walden Woods. Educational programs will challenge participants to consider ways to implement the same skills and approach to their own communities.

Environmental literacy at the Walden Woods Project will emphasize an inter disciplinary appreciation for the challenges and beauty found in our relationship with nature. It will actively target an interdisciplinary audience of educators, students and lifelong learners. Educational programs will teach participants to combine scientific knowledge about nature with historical, philosophical and literary insights into nature, providing tools for reasoned and just conclusions about how best to protect nature. By employing environmental problem solving, participants will develop a deep appreciation for the rhythms of the natural world, and gain the skills to begin articulating their own compelling vision for human-nature relationships in their home communities.

For more than a decade, the Walden Woods Project has been saying that every community has its own Walden. Environmental literacy is designed to empower participants to make that vision reality.

The Walden Woods Project

preserves the land, literature and legacy of Henry David Thoreau to foster an ethic of environmental stewardship and social responsibility. The Project achieves this mission through the integration of conservation, education and research.

Conservation: Preserving and protecting the landscapes of Walden Woods and Thoreau Country in recognition of their worldwide literary, historical and environmental significance, and their capacity to motivate others to identify, study and protect the Waldens that exist in their own communities.

Education: Providing innovative programs built on the philosophy of Henry David Thoreau and grounded in the land and historic resources of Walden Woods and Thoreau Country; programs that foster environmental literacy and social responsibility among students, educators and lifelong learners in the United States and around the world.

Research: Maintaining the rich collections housed in the archives and library at the Walden Woods Project’s Thoreau Institute for scholars, educators, students and life-long learners to advance their understanding of the literature and legacy of Henry David Thoreau.

THE WALDEN WOODS PROJECT & THE THOREAU INSTITUTE AT WALDEN WOODS

We hope you will support The Walden Woods Project, a nonprofit organization. Look for the enclosed envelope to make a donation or to become a member.

You can help us prevent waste by passing this publication on to a friend, recycling it when you’re finished or letting us know if you would prefer not to receive it. Thank you.

The Institute is open by appointment, Monday – Friday, 10 am – 4 pm. To schedule a visit, please call Jeff Cramer, Curator of Collections: 781-259-4730.

For further information:
Phone: 781-259-4700 or 800-554-3569
Web site: www.walden.org
E-mail: wwproject@walden.org

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