

**Meeting with the Vestal Town Board regarding  
A Conservation Management Plan for Vestal Town Parks**

March 23, 2015

The origins of our conservation management plan goes back about four years, when a forestry management plan was prepared for several of the Town's parks. While that plan treated these parks as woodlots, we felt a management plan for the conservation of the natural features of all the Town's parks was in order. This goal was not addressed by the forestry management plan or existing recreational management plans.

To create a conservation management plan, we visited all the Town parks and described the natural features of each one. The document we have prepared covers 20 parks and adjacent Town-owned parcels. These descriptions include an inventory of the principal forest species, but also special features, such as spring wildflowers, rare or protected species, invasive plants, erosion issues, and vulnerability to significant damage by invasive insect pests (emerald ash borer and the hemlock wooly adelgid). This project often required repeated visits at different seasons, careful study of parcel maps, and consultations with fellow biologists.

The report and plan we generated is a foundation and a baseline against which change can be measured. We intend to update and enlarge the descriptions in an ongoing process, and every new edition of the plan will be posted on the CAC page of the Town website, alongside our meeting minutes and other reports.

What do we hope to accomplish in real terms?

1. Several parks are located along the Choconut Creek and other streams. One goal is to increase the stability of stream corridors. Doing so has numerous benefits: reducing sediments and nutrients flowing into the Susquehanna River, enhancing stream and streambank habitats for wildlife, and reducing flood damage. The first step is simple and cost-free: cease mowing close to streambanks (and one of the fields in Jones Park). The second step is to revegetate the stream buffer with native shrubs and trees to stabilize the bank, shade the stream, and provide wildlife habitat. Ideally, the buffers would set off from playing fields by split rail fence. We have been talking with members of the Upper Susquehanna Coalition (USC) about this project and they have encouraged us to seek grants from state programs to support the work. USC also is willing to work with the CAC and town personnel in planning and implementing our suggested improvements.

2. Another goal is to conserve rare and protected species in the parks. Middendorf Park and Jones Park contain some of the richest populations of spring wildflowers in the Town and perhaps the County. These areas require delineation and specific protection; we suggest that such areas be recognized as nature preserves and be accorded regulations and signage that would provide more protection.

3. Other recommendations are specific to individual parks. You will find recommendations following the park descriptions in the plan. None of our recommendations will interfere with the current recreational facilities in the parks.

What we are asking from the Town Board:

1. We seek your endorsement and backing for efforts to obtain grants to carry out the stream

buffer work.

2. We seek your help in identifying stakeholders to work with the CAC in further development of the management plans for individual parks and their implementation.

3. We seek your assistance in securing the cooperation of the relevant agencies of Town services to aid in the implementation of the plans developed.