

Burroughs descendant Lutz Warren brings light and air to local environmentalists

Can Burroughs and Leopold help us recover some practical joy while we save the planet?

By Trish Adams

Julianne Lutz Warren, great grandniece of Catskills naturalist John Burroughs has more than genes in common with her famous forbearer. She earned a Ph.D. in wildlife ecology and conservation biology and authored a ground-breaking book on the father of conservationists, Aldo Leopold. She is president of the board of the John Burroughs Association at Woodchuck Lodge and she spends a lot of time traveling and speaking to people who are deeply concerned with the state of the planet.

At the Rural Life Symposium on Saturday, Lutz Warren re-calibrated the attendees' collective angst by inviting them to look at the environmental crisis through the eyes of the

guys who saw it all coming. The outlook of her talk, "Land Stewardship in the Spirit of Aldo Leopold and John Burroughs" wasn't bleak at all. In fact, Julianne Lutz Warren thinks tortured environmentalists everywhere need to recover some practical joy as they fight to do the right thing every day.

Lutz Warren tellingly captured the torture of green guilt, where conservation-minded folks worry constantly that the environmentally friendly actions they take are merely cosmetic and futile and that far too little is being done on a macrocosmic scale. In her travels, Lutz Warren also sees, particularly among the pure and young a "bitterness, anger and despair towards past generations" for their cavalier wreckage of the environment. She sees people consumed with minutiae and tortured calculations of whether 'tis nobler to eat fish raised on a farm or caught in the wild. "This," she sadly concluded, "is a burdensome way to live."

Lutz Warren used the thought of Leopold and her great grand-

uncle to take the crowd past the "letter of the law" and into something more livable. "What would the ideal Rural Life look like? And how can we get there?" These were questions that Lutz Warren did not profess to answer, but merely to set working in our minds. She did this by walking us through the evolving and overlapping philosophies of poet Walt Whitman (1819-1892), Whitman's acolyte Burroughs (1837-1921) and Leopold (1887-1948), who was nursed on Burroughs' wisdom. These three great eco-thinkers witnessed America's transformation from "inexhaustible" wild and farming riches, through what Whitman called the "sleeping tensions" inherent in American progress, into the days of industrialism, the nascent conservation movement of Teddy Roosevelt's era and on into the triumph of the motorway, automobile, factory and the decline of the family farm.

Both Burroughs and Leopold could see the holocaust writ large and warned of the "wasteful and destructive spirit," the "brutal, devil-may-care way" we were ravaging mountains of resources (Burroughs) until we were destroying the health of the land wholesale, sending soil downstream, exterminating whole species, and using resources to destructive and thereby unethical ends (Leopold). Both Burroughs and Leopold came to develop an ethos — a spiritual and moral contract but one founded on a strong intellectual and scientific basis — of living with the land in a more balanced and joyful way.

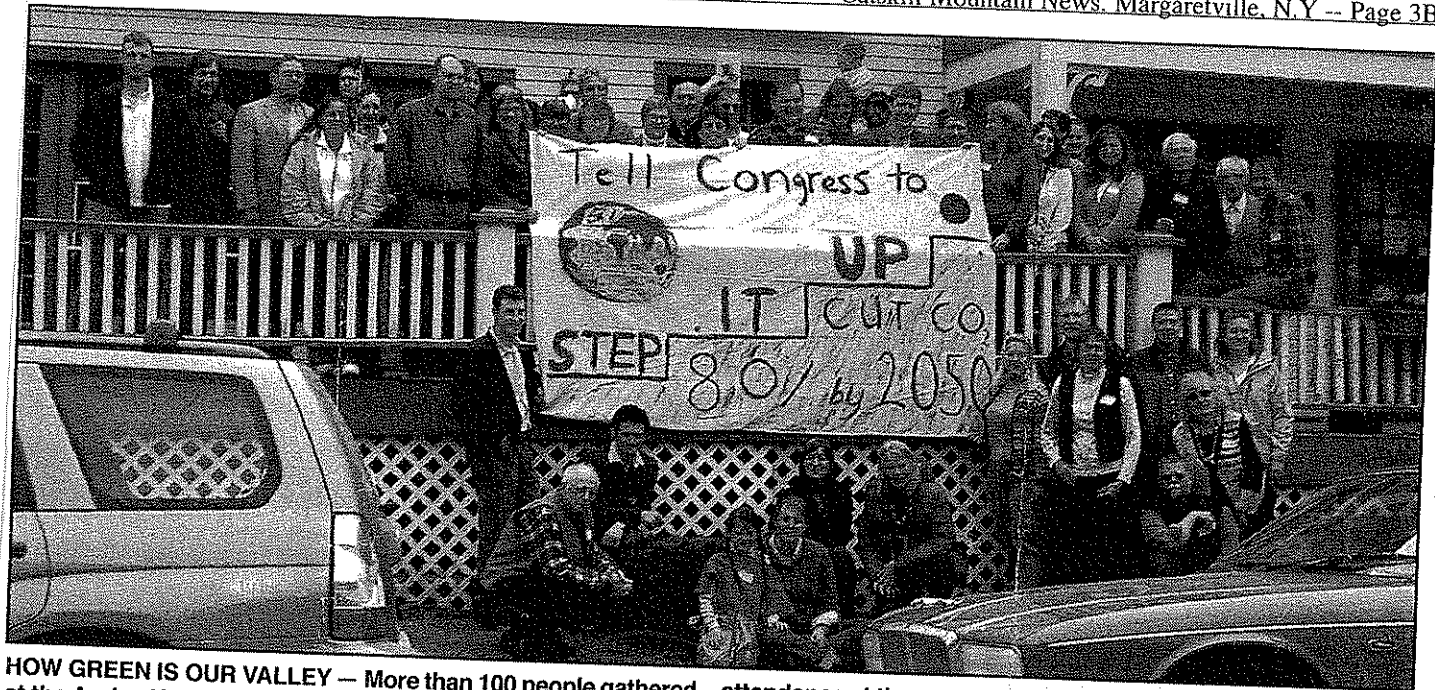
Burroughs, who came to see nature as our friend or our foe, "depending on our relation to it," said that the good life is one that "fits itself into the scheme of things," and that, "as a moral and spiritual being," humankind "stands on a higher plane" where love was itself a complex under-

standing of conscience in relation to our surroundings. He gave as an example how unmindful clearing of farms and pastures in his Catskills homeland had banished the natural enemies of the woodchuck, leaving the farmers' rodent foe to wreck havoc without any population check.

Between Burroughs' birth in 1837 and Leopold's death in 1948 (ironically he died helping an Iowa neighbor fight a brush fire) the population of the U.S. grew from 12 million to 146 million. The transition of that population from preponderantly rural life to mostly urbanite was completed in their lifespans. The discipline of "ecology" had arisen, but for Leopold, like Burroughs, the love of the land was more than science, it was an ethic where the notion of prosperity is one of "land health," where the ecological system is able to nourish and replenish itself. Leopold wanted humans

to learn to live creatively, abundantly and consciously within that system rather than trying to control and re-engineer it.

Like the farmer who would never straighten his creek, who leaves the dead tree hollows and falls for the owls and groundlings, Lutz Warren thinks it is possible for us to move toward a more abundant understanding of the land by referencing these early ecologists. She left her audience with the questions she raised at the beginning: "What is the ideal Rural Life and how can we live it? Is it really possible to take it all and keep a landscape wild and free?" She still didn't have the answers, but in Burroughs and Leopold, we can replace the stasis of existential angst with an "abundantly" conscious framework that breaths and grows along with the world we live and work in. She encouraged us all to take these two thinkers with us for guidance on that path.



HOW GREEN IS OUR VALLEY — More than 100 people gathered at the Andes Hotel for a one-day symposium, "Rural Life in the Catskills: A Forum on Food, Water, and Wood for the Future" and gathered on the hotel veranda to show their support for the "Step It Up 2007" National Day for Climate Action. Noted Catskills ecologists, conservationists, forestry experts, and sustainability-minded farmers and landowners were all in

attendance at the symposium, sharing ideas to "Step It Up" for an ecologically AND economically viable Catskills. The symposium was sponsored by a real "bio-diversity" of regional and environmental organizations, and Andes Hotel hosts Ed and Sally O'Neill provided locally grown, gourmet "slow food" bounty for the appetite and the soul. Read all about it on the next two pages.

— Photo by Trish Adams

JULIANNE Lutz Warren, president of the John Burroughs Institute at Woodchuck, and Mike Burger, director of bird conservation for Audubon, New York, spoke at "Rural Life in the Catskills: A Forum on Food, Water and Wood for the Future" at the Andes Hotel.



We Make the World We Live In

"There's a fundamental tension that has shaped our times," said Julianne Lutz Warren, president of the John Burroughs Institute at Woodchuck Lodge and author of *Aldo Leopold's Odyssey*, at a recent symposium in which she described America's abiding belief that "we can have it all," all of our material desires and the benefit of nature's bounty as well. But, can we?

Speakers addressed this question in their own ways at the Catskill Institute for the Environment's "Rural Life in the Catskills: A Forum on Food, Water, and Wood for the Future" held at the Andes Hotel in Andes, Delaware County, just on the outskirts of the Pepacton watershed. Among them were Nina Planck, a leading expert on farm markets and the author of *Real Food: What to Eat and Why*, Mike Burger, director of bird conservation for Audubon, New York, and Warren. They presented thought-provoking discussions on land stewardship, bird communities in logged areas, the farmer's market movement, the Slow Food Terra Madre Conference and how to enhance markets for local food and forest products.

Julianne Lutz Warren asked the audience to consider the question, "Does sustainability, as it is conceived, really hit the mark?" She pointed out that our current focus on "efficiency of consumption rather than a cap on resource use" leads us to count our every assault on the earth which we then try to zero out with another action. She said we find ourselves asking, "Is it OK for me to eat meat for dinner if I already had it for breakfast? Is it OK for me to order a lobster dinner if I rode my bike to dinner?" This attempt to minimize our impact on the earth by "calculating ecological footprints" can become a burdensome way to live, and so Warren aptly asked, "Where is the joy?"

She turned to the audience again and asked, "What do good lives look like to us?" and, "What obstacles are in the way?" Drawing on the philosophies of Walt Whitman, John Burroughs and Aldo Leopold, she discussed America's perception of nature, land management and ecology. Whitman, who lived from 1819 to 1892, perceived inexhaustibility in the resources of the vast plains. He was uplifted by them. He "had a belief in ongoing materialness and that we could still keep the landscape - that vast Something - in good condition," said Warren. "He believed we could have

it all."

Burroughs believed that man and nature are inseparable: "We make the world in which we live, and it in turn makes us." He said that air, water and fire could sustain or destroy and that nature could be friendly if we are in the right relation to it or unfriendly if we are in a false relationship to it. "Our discipline is to learn the difference," Burroughs knew, according to Warren, that "Prospering means acknowledging our dependence on nature," and he said in 1908, "Our civilization is seriously expensive for our natural resources."

Leopold, born fifty years after Burroughs, "pushed against the country's sleeping tension and the notion that we could have wealth and still have that vast Something," Warren said. "His advice was to understand the land ecologically and to nurture an ecological conscience rather than calculate resource by resource." As an example, he described a farmer in Wisconsin "who threw off reckless utilitarianism in land use; he did not mutilate his stream by straightening or denuding its banks, and he left hollow limbs and down logs for birds and animals."

Through her talk, Warren offered a small history of 19th and 20th century environmental thought which can be used to encapsulate the breadth of views of land and nature and the current dilemma. The tension between the belief that resources are inexhaustible, that we create our own environment and that we are just one element in the web of life has not loosened.

Mike Burger, director of bird conservation for Audubon, New York, reported on a three-year research project conducted in forested regions on how logging affects non-game wildlife. The main thrust of the research was to study the extent to which the changes wrought by forest management affected bird populations. Carrion beetles and some amphibians were also included in the study to indicate levels of animal life in general, since carrion beetles depend on the tissue of dead vertebrates, and the presence of amphibians indicate ecosystem changes. The project sampled four habitat types: Mature forests, moderately logged sites, heavily cut sites and recent clearcuts.

The conclusion was that different wildlife communities associate with different forest conditions but that some can thrive in more than one condition. For example, scientists were surprised that a group of birds which normally favor mature forests were equally abundant in moderately logged stands. However, it was also pointed out that "although birds normally associated with older forests dropped dramatically in the recovering clearcuts, some of these birds could be found in the more open areas."

Following Burger's presentation, one man pointed out publicly that although wildlife has always been regarded to be a public resource, no landowner is rewarded for maintaining it. Privately in the lunch line, Alan Strout from Davenport voiced concern about whether enough planning was going into any of this development discussion.

The last speaker, Nina Planck, author of *Real Food: What to Eat and Why*, described the farmers' market movement in the U.S. and Britain. One of the most effective driving forces of producing and distributing "real food" to consumers, the "we

grow what we sell" farmers' markets are on the upswing. She said that farmers make up two percent of the U.S. population (that is, those who make sales of \$1,000 or more). Planck advocated market management and more variety for customers. She said farmers can really profit from these markets: "For every dollar a market manager spends, farmers receive \$18."

Consumers also benefit exceedingly from farmers' markets because the food is so fresh and provides the level of nutrition that our ancestors used to receive. Planck, a farmer's daughter from age nine and a nutritionally oriented individual, debunked many of the myths surrounding egg consumption and its link to cholesterol (there is no link), the myths about saturated fats (they're actually good for you) and she warned listeners to stay away from trans fats. In short, she encouraged people to eat real food and not to eat industrial food.

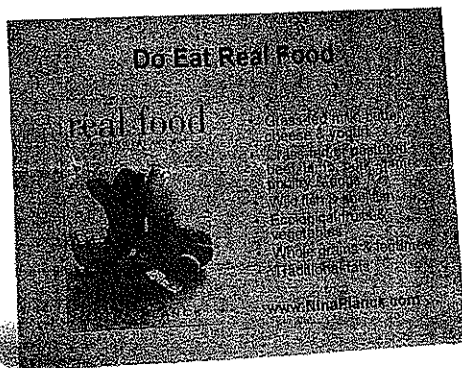
Dan Flaherty and Allison Bennett reported on Slow Food's Terra Madre conference. "Slow food aims to counteract fast food and fast life," said Flaherty as he showed slides of rich and colorful displays of fresh produce. The final session, moderated by Billie Best, was appropriately aimed at the farmers (more than three-quarters of the audience). Discussion covered topics such as "How to build demand" and "Key ways to increase food supply."

Step It Up day, a national day of climate action, coincided with the forum. Forum participants gathered around a "Step It Up Congress: Cut Carbon 80% by 2050" banner calling on Congress to act against global warming. The photo was then posted on the Step It Up web site alongside photos of more than 1,300 communities with their banners. This simultaneous action across the nation was later described as "the largest environmental demonstration in the country since Earth Day 1970."

In past years, the Catskill Institute for the Environment, according to its president, Sam Adams, has been academically oriented. Founded in 1998, it focused on secondary and post-secondary students' environmental education. Recently, it took a new direction to expand its audience, and it worked. "We are totally overwhelmed by the response," said Adams of the 110 forum participants. Dave Turan, enthusiastic outreach coordinator for The Catskill Center for Conservation and Development, said of the turnout, "This is bittersweet because we had to turn people away."

FYI
For background information on the subjects raised in this article, these are the web sites:
Step It Up, go to <http://events.stepitup2007.org/reports/687>
Audubon research project, go to <http://ny.audubon.org>
Nina Planck and Real Food markets, go to www.ninaplanck.com
Slow food and Terra Madre Conference, go to www.slowfoodusa.org and www.terramadre2004.org
Ways to enhance markets for local food products, go to www.farmandfood.org

Story, photos by
Ely White
The Towne Crier



Can we sustain farms, forests and rural life for the future? Rural Life symposium supplies plenty of "real food" for thought

By Trish Adams

More than 100 people converged on the Andes Hotel Saturday to share knowledge and creativity about sustaining Catskills' food ways, resources and rural living in the future. Nina Planck, an expert on farmers markets, rural foodsheds and what she calls "real food," was enthusiastically received as she articulated her philosophy of making an abundant living growing and selling good food. Read more about Planck's vision for our food shed in "Grandma did know best" on the facing page.

The conference, "Rural Life in the Catskills: A Forum on Food, Water and Wood for the Future," was co-sponsored by a "bio-diversity" of environmental and natural resources organizations. Tom O'Brien, executive director of Watershed Ag Council, welcomed everyone, saying "Talking about food in a political way is good for a lot of us," noting that for many who had not grown up in farm country (and even some who had), agriculture has a bad rap. "I grew up with the idea that farming and cutting down trees are bad for the environment. This is a widespread paradigm" that we need to move beyond, he said.

Julianne Lutz Warren, a great grandniece of famed Catskills naturalist, John Burroughs and a noted naturalist author herself, opened the symposium by asking us to consider "Land Stewardship in the Spirit of Aldo Leopold and John Burroughs." Lutz Warren's book, *Aldo Leopold's Odyssey: Rediscovering the Author of a Sand County Almanac* has been called "not just the best book we have on Leopold, it might well be the best book we've had on any

conservation intellect." You can read more about her vision of living abundantly and consciously in our environmentally stressed times (below).

Mike Burger, director of Bird Conservation for Audubon New York, took participants down a pragmatic path, presenting the results of an exhaustive three-year study that looked at birds, amphibians, and insects in various forest habitats, from heavily covered mature hardwood forests to more moderately covered woodlands and even "clear-cut" stands with only a few trees. It's hard to believe, but most New York forestland is still privately owned and so wise landowner forest management is critical to healthy forests and wildlife systems in the Catskills.

Even "clearcut" can be wild kingdom

Also hard to believe, but there is actually less forest disturbance (read: cutting) now than in the days of early white settlement. Having many fragmented pieces of woodland can give a disproportionate advantage to predators and parasites (they like to do their dirty work on the edges of forestland), but most of the study results show that various species are living successfully in more than one type of forest landscape. Some birds, like the worm-eating warbler and scarlet tanager, actually prefer "disturbed" forests. None of the species studied lived in just one habitat exclusively. This is good news for responsible landowners who want to adopt a management plan that includes a healthy balance of wildlife, even if their stand is not mature forest.

For the forest and wildlife conscious property owner, the publication *Wildlife and Forestry in New York Northern Hardwoods: A Guide for Forest Owners and Managers* is available for download at http://ny.audubon.org/forestry_manual.htm. Like Tom O'Brien, Burger agrees that it's time to educate folks past the misconception that cutting trees is always a bad thing.

"Talking about food in a political way is good for a lot of us."

— WAC Exec. Director
Tom O'Brien

In fact, the tide has turned so far that "sustainable forestry" is now being considered even within the hallowed ground of "forever wild" conservation easements.

One landowner echoed a common complaint that New York private forest landowners pay some of the highest property taxes in the nation, and that the long lead time to timber harvesting (it is often decades between harvests) can exceed the pocketbook — and the lifespan — of landowners. Burger agreed that an important next step in forest management is figuring out how to better reward landowners for their stewardship.

After a "real food" lunch supplied by hosts Ed and Sally O'Neill, and a reading by Sally Fairbairn of her essay "A Place in Mind," Real Food proponent, author and farmers market expert Nina Planck regaled the

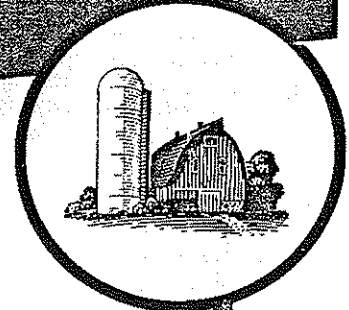
crowd with her philosophy of clean, healthy, "accountable" food produced locally and delivered and sold regionally. (See facing page.)

Dan Flaherty, the Watershed Ag Council (WAC) Small Farms Coordinator and Allison Bennett, co-owner of Berried Treasures and former WAC Farm-to-Market Manager, gave everyone a trip to the international Slow Food conference "Terre Madre" they attended in Torino, Italy as U.S. delegates. While at Terre Madre they were reminded of some creative ideas from food producers in other countries: diversifying and expanding our own local food offerings with products like specialty cheeses and value-added dairy like yogurt and sour cream, as well as preserved meats like prosciutto and salami.

Those ideas were echoed and expanded in the final panel discussion of the day, moderated by Billie Best who works with Regional Farm & Food Project, a farmer-focused, nonprofit serving the Hudson-Mohawk Valley foodshed. She was joined by Bennett, Challey Comer, WAC Farm-to-Market Manager and Collin Miller, WAC forestry specialist. You'll read their take on the advantages and challenges of growing sustainable food and forest product markets in an upcoming edition.

The Rural Life symposium was led by the Catskill Institute for the Environment and co-sponsored by WAC, the Catskill Center for Conservation and Development, the Catskill Forest Association, NYC DEP, NYS DEC, Agroforestry Resource Center, Bard Center for Environmental Policy and the Olive Natural Heritage Society.

**Rural Life in the
Catskills:
A Forum on
Food, Water, and Wood
for the Future**



Saturday,
April 14
Andes, NY