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October 3, 2011

Dear Aspetuck Land Trust Member:

We wanted to update you on policy changes we are making in the management of our Trout Brook Valley Preserve which you may eventually read about in the news media.

Trout Brook Valley (TBV) is the largest of our 43 trailed nature preserves. It comprises 1,009 acres in Easton and Weston including the contiguous Crow Hill and Jump Hill preserves. It is our most popular preserve and indeed, that is part of the challenge we face.

The volume of traffic of all varieties has had an impact on the land. We believe the policy changes, which will go into effect in October and are discussed in this letter, will help us to better protect the land and the flora and fauna on it. The new policies will also help Aspetuck Land Trust (ALT) to continue to allow people to appreciate this wonderful treasure enjoyed by so many of you.

Before ALT acquired the property in 1999, when we saved this land from becoming a golf course and luxury housing development, the Trout Brook Valley acreage was protected and closed off to the public by the water company utility that owned it. Since then it has been intersected by a widely publicized 21 mile trail system. The growing popularity of TBV has resulted in a high volume of hikers, particularly on weekends. Until very recently, those hikers could travel most of the trail system with off leash dogs year round.

While limited data is available proving damage linked to dog visits, preliminary findings and observations suggest the impact of high usage by all user groups may pose threats to plants and animals in the preserve. Dogs wandering off the trails into open areas are of particular concern. Unwanted encounters by dogs with both people and other dogs are also a concern since they discourage people who might like to visit the preserve.

The Board of Directors of ALT has come to the conclusion that more study is needed to scientifically identify the most ecologically fragile areas of TBV. Such information is essential to rationally guide ALT in managing the trail network, planning changes to it and in developing balanced policies consistent with both our conservation and public recreation/access mandates for all user groups who now enjoy the land, including hikers with dogs. A year long environmental study is planned. The results will be shared and new regulations will be developed in light of the study's findings when they are available.

Until objective scientific data is available from the study, interim, one year regulations are being posted at TBV trail heads and shared with the public.

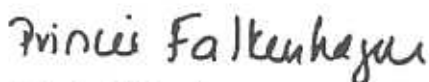
- *The new regulations require hikers in the TBV preserve to keep their dogs on seven foot leashes, under control and to remain on designated trails at all times. Existing regulations require dog owners to also remove animal waste from trail.*
- *In addition, the new regulations specify that dogs, horses and mountain bikes are prohibited at all times from entering the Orchard area. We believe this change is needed to protect the Orchard's role as a major bird nesting and migratory resource. Dogs, horses and mountain bikers are also prohibited from using the magenta trail leading to the Orchard.*

Education efforts are being planned to help the public understand both the shared responsibility for protecting TBV and the importance of viewing dog walking in general at TBV as a privilege rather than a right. Regulations about dog walking on or off leash at other ALT preserves, remain as currently posted.

The Board of Directors of ALT has been made aware of the limited number of locations accessible to dogs. We expect and hope the delicate balance between conservation and public usage and passive recreation will be strengthened by the revised leash policy. We ask the cooperation of visiting dog owners so it does not become necessary to totally ban dogs as some other conservation organizations and government entities have done. For a full report of the rationale for the new policy which was prepared by a special committee of ALT directors, please visit our website at [www.aspetucklandtrust.org](http://www.aspetucklandtrust.org).

In addition, we recognize that many of you will have a point of view on these policies which you want to share with us. Please pass on any such views by mail or by email to David Brant at [DBrant@Aspetucklandtrust.org](mailto:DBrant@Aspetucklandtrust.org)

Sincerely,



Princie Falkenhagen  
President, Aspetuck Land Trust



David Brant  
Executive Director