

## **D.C. Highlights**

### **GCA NAL Meeting, February 25-27, 2014**

*The 2014 edition of The Garden Club of America National Affairs and Legislation meeting took place in our nation's capital. This carbon-neutral meeting was attended by 295 delegates from GCA clubs across the entire country. Forty states were represented. What follows are pertinent highlights of all of our outstanding speakers. While this is by no means comprehensive, it does represent some of the important "take-aways" from this meeting. Included is a one-page list of selected speaker quotes organized around key themes from the meeting. Please use any information in this summary for briefing your local clubs and in your communications with your elected officials. Thank you for attending the 2014 NAL meeting.*

Respectfully submitted,  
Claudia Bell, NAL 1st Vice-Chair  
Elva Busch, Conservation 1st Vice-Chair

### **Tuesday, Feb. 25**

#### **Lindsay Marshall, NAL Committee Chair**

- *"My life was changed because of NAL; yours will be, too."*
- The notion that "nothing is happening in Washington" is simply not the case. Important legislative and policy initiatives affecting the environment are underway.
- It is vitally important that our nonpartisan, issue-based voices are heard on all these issues.
- GCA speaks for the plants.
- Share GCA's mission and grasp the opportunity to create the future.

#### **Jennifer Fain, Conservation Committee Chair**

- Conservation is at the heart of what we do as gardeners.
- Living sustainably is important, but it is not enough.

#### **Katie Heins, GCA President**

- NAL, a memorable and life-changing event.
- Encourages attendees to read the purpose statement of GCA; education and protecting the environment is a primary focus.

#### **Redwoods Fund:**

- \$100,000 left to raise.
- Not all clubs have contributed.
- Money will go to restore bridges and trails in the GCA Redwood Grove as part of the "Bridge the Gap" Campaign.
- Quoted John Steinbeck: the redwoods are our *"ambassadors from another time"*.

#### **Nat Mund - Legislative Dir., Southern Environmental Law Center (SELC)**

- *"Don't underestimate your importance as citizen lobbyists."*

#### Coal ash:

- Dealing with issue of coal ash (residue left after coal is burned).
- Coal ash ponds need to be cleaned up and coal ash disposed of properly to protect the water bodies that are often nearby.
- Voiced concern about the Dan River spill in NC.

#### Fracking:

- SELC opposed to fracking on public lands.
- George Washington National Forest is nearest national forest to D.C., the watershed of the Potomac River, and a possible future fracking site, even though everyone in the local community is opposed.
- SELC is for clean energy and energy efficiency.

#### **Sally Yozell - NOAA Dir. of Policy, Office of Undersecretary of Commerce for Oceans and Atmosphere**

- *"Be energized, not daunted!"*
- We are already seeing changes in local areas because of climate change.
- 2013 - 7 major weather events costing over \$1B each.
- Drought on the west coast is worst in 100 yrs.
- Projected sea level rise in future: 8" - 6'!
- US coastal economy is worth \$6.6 T and is worth protecting.
- *Protecting and restoring our marine resources is critically important to our coastal economies."*
- Superstorm Sandy is causing us to do more long-range planning.
- NOAA talks about the whole nature system based on science and planning.
- Climate change is accelerating.
- Insurance companies are getting on board because of the storm losses.
- Other areas of concern: Barrier Island Bill, Fukushima disaster, invasive species, garbage in the oceans, ocean acidification.

#### **Mindy Lubber, President/CEO of Ceres**

- We need to focus on the business world regarding climate change.
- There's a shift in business from this being a social issue to a bottom-line issue.
- Climate change is here and will impact the world in ways we cannot imagine.
- Opinion of 99% of scientists that it is a worldwide crisis.
- We need a price on carbon.
- *"We have a chance to change the debate; you are the game changers."*
- There will be water wars because of shortages.
- Climate change is affecting every sector: insurance, financial world, businesses, boardrooms, shareholders, employees and consumers.
- Investing in sustainability doesn't show up in the bottom-line overnight.
- Fracking is using a huge amount of water.

- 36,000 areas of fracking in the U.S.; 40% are in areas of drought.
- Oil from tar sands is the dirtiest supply of fuel.
- *"Climate change is the debate and economic driver of our time and hundreds of companies are on board."*

#### **Dan Becker - Director, Safe Climate Campaign**

- His gardening background has taught him patience and perseverance.
- This is the 336th month of global warming; the world is at 395 ppm of CO<sub>2</sub>
- 37% of emissions are from power plants (the largest source), the second largest, 33%, is from transportation sources.
- This Congress will do nothing about climate change and will try to reduce EPA funding.
- Concerns about Contract on America challenging the President's rulings on power plants.
- *"Increasing fuel economy in the US is the biggest thing any country has done about climate change ever."* And it saves consumers dollars at the pump.
- Suggests telling Members of Congress to oppose using the Congressional Review Act to stop Administration's efforts about power plant rules and to support full EPA funding.
- Fund mass transit and bike lanes.
- Locally, meet with local officials and encourage them to buy more efficient vehicles, put solar panels on roofs, buy more efficient heat systems, encourage energy savings performance standards, build public support, talk to friends and neighbors about these issues, buy an energy efficient car, answer polls about candidates and the issues.

#### **David Goldston - Director Gov't Affairs Program, National Resources Defense Council (NRDC)**

- Democracy is fragile; groups like ours are needed on the Hill.
- We are entering into the most important debate about determining climate policy.
- June, '14 regulations on existing power plants will be released by EPA. To be implemented in June, '15 and then go to the states with general guidelines from EPA. Each state sets up its own regulations.
- *"This will be the fight of the century. If it goes forward, it will change the tide of pollution."*
- ALEC - American Legislative Exchange Council of industry conservatives is trying to block progressive agenda. Model legislation is being introduced in many states.
- House is now voting on several bills to undo the entire regulatory process dealing with consumer affairs, health, safety, etc.
- *"Do we want to live in an unregulated society?"*

- Pesticides are killing bees and butterflies; NRDC is pushing EPA to ban these pesticides.

**Debra Koons Garcia, Film Producer, "Symphony of the Soil"**

Attendees previewed this 2012 documentary, which explains the wonders and hidden life in the soil, and how our ubiquitous use of synthetic fertilizers destroys the nutrient-rich soil microbes.

- *"For what other natural body, worldwide in its distribution, have so many interesting secrets to reveal to the patient observer?"* Les Molloy
- Humans have a relationship with soil; some are soil-blind, others are exploitive.
- Be soil-conscious. *"How we treat our soil these days in our industrial practices mirrors what's happening in our larger society - take, take, take."*

**John "Chip" Alridge, Founder and Chairman and Teresa Duncan, Senior Project Director, Trust for the National Mall**

- National Mall is "America's front yard."
- Trust is non-profit partner of the Park Service.
- Parks are in need of repair because of lack of funding; there is \$400 M in deferred maintenance.
- Historic structures are in disrepair.
- National Mall is the most visited National Park - 700 acres.
- There is currently a campaign to raise private money to restore the Mall.
- Includes a new project - Constitution Gardens, a high priority on the Mall.
- 38 acres in between some of most visited sites.
- Attempt to make it more accessible, more robust, and more sustainable.
- It will take good science and best management practices.
- Plans for 1000 new trees and 21 acres of new gardens.

**Kristine Kingery - Director, US Army Sustainability Policy**

- Spoke about Net Zero Installation Initiative.
- Army is the largest consumer of energy in the federal gov't.
- We must have secure, uninterrupted power at home and abroad.
- Energy, Water, and Waste are the focus of Net Zero.
- There is currently a competition for pilot projects on federal lands.
- Some sites are very remote and are thus the last homes of some endangered species.
- Types of projects: thermal building, energy efficiency, master planning, xeriscaping, leak detection of potable water, water recycling, alternate water sources, reduction in purchasing materials that will be discarded, green roofs, storm water management, recycling of effluent, earthworks recycling (reusing aggregate), etc.

**Mary Palmer Dargan, Zone VIII Conservation/NAL Representative**

- "E-Cycling 101" - a treasure hunt of recycling, panning for gold.
- E-cycling is recycling of components or metals in electronics or e-waste.
- Conserves natural resources - tin, iron, aluminum, and gold.
- Reduces environmental impact of this waste, creates donations to schools and families and non-profits, creates new jobs, and protects the public health.
- What can be recycled? TVs, old phones, electronic boards, cell phones, printers, cartridges, cables, DVD players, cameras.
- "Wipe" computers before recycling them.
- EPA guidelines - "redesign, reuse, and recycle."
- Search by state or zip code to find a site to recycle.
- Consider a club project in e-cycling.

#### **Diane Lewis, MD - Bedford Garden Club Member**

- "The Great Healthy Yard Project"
- Chemicals on our lawns are ending up in our waterways and causing us harm.
- How we take care of our yards is how we take care of our water supply.
- Ten times as much chemical goes on our lawns as in agriculture.
- There is a link between the chemicals on our lawns and diseases that are caused by hormone disruption.
- Children are most susceptible.
- Possible problems associated with chemicals: infertility, ADHD, autism, breast and prostate cancer, diabetes, lymphoma, Parkinson's, lung cancer, bronchitis, and asthma.
- Take the Pledge - change the mindset; care for your yard without pesticides.
- Website: [thegreathealthyyardproject.com](http://thegreathealthyyardproject.com).
- Book being released June 1: *The Great Healthy Yard Project: Our Yards, Our Children, Our Responsibility*.

#### **Tiernan Sittenfeld - Senior Vice-President, Gov't Affairs, League of Conservation Voters**

- Goal of LCV - get pro-environment candidates elected and hold them accountable.
- Publishes annual scorecard after surveying hundreds of votes.
- Seeing Congressional dysfunction.
- The Tea Party and other Republicans are going after cornerstone environmental legislation.
- There is a new Senate Action Task Force on Climate Change.

#### **Martha Phillips - NAL Vice-Chair Legislative Update**

- Federal budget process is behind schedule.
- Fiscal Year '15 budget will begin Oct 1.

- The general outline has been determined.
- Most of budget has been eaten up by entitlements.
- What is leftover is the non-defense discretionary spending portion, a very small piece of the budget.
- Our message is that environmental programs shouldn't take a disproportionate amount of the cuts.

#### **Suzanne Booker Canfield - NAL Assistant Vice-Chair Legislative Update**

- Discussed GCA position paper on Clean Water.
- Discussed problem with the broad definition of what waters are covered by the Clean Water Act.
- Obama administration through the EPA will have an announcement in March about rule making regarding which water bodies are included in regulations. Urges support of the administration and the EPA in this regard.

#### **Rich Innes - NAL Washington Consultant**

- Urges attendees to advocate for full funding of the Land and Water Conservation Fund at \$900 M (now at \$300 M); this is the 50th Anniversary of LWCF.
- Urges legislators to allow tax incentives for conservation purposes.

### **Wednesday, Feb. 26**

#### **Congressman Rodney Frelinghuysen (R-11<sup>th</sup> New Jersey)**

- Has worked hard to preserve and protect open space and watersheds in the Highlands region of NJ, NY, PA, and CT – a critical source of drinking water in the most densely populated metropolitan area in the U.S. In this session of Congress, introduced legislation to extend the Highlands Conservation Act through 2024.
- The House and Senate Appropriations Committee did come together to produce the Omnibus Appropriations agreement for 2014 - a daunting task, with “die-hards” on both sides of the aisle polarizing the debate.
- *"It is our right to petition Congress."* There is an important role for GCA members in educating their legislators and serving as voices of moderation and common sense. Club members should visit their Congressmen back in their home states.

#### **Susan Lammert - NAL Vice-Chair for Agriculture**

Under the recently enacted Agricultural Act of 2014:

- The Conservation Title of the Act includes \$57 billion for conservation programs over the next decade, a \$6 billion cut.

- Incentives for overproduction of certain crops are still in place. There was no reform of agricultural subsidies so taxpayers will bear the risk of planting marginal land.
- Of the total funding for Agriculture excluding food stamps and nutrition (SNAP) - 45% goes to crop insurance, 23% goes to commodity programs, 28% goes to conservation.
- SNAP is 79% of the Farm Bill appropriations.

#### **Congressman Rush Holt (D-12<sup>th</sup> New Jersey)**

- We need to act on climate change. Deniers of climate change don't see the facts that are right in front of their faces.
- Even though we don't have public lands in New Jersey, he is a supporter of public lands as well as the Land and Water Conservation Fund.
- The Endangered Species Act is 40 years old and during this time no designated species has been allowed to become extinct. These endangered species are essential for survival of the human species.
- *"Lobbying is not a dirty word; it is addressed in the U.S. Constitution."*
- The backlog in our national parks is considerable. With reasonable increases in funding, we can keep the parks accessible to all at reasonable rates. We can afford to do what we need to do.

#### **Senator Jack Reed (D-Rhode Island)**

- It is important for us to educate the next generation about the natural world and the environment. In an effort to reconnect kids with nature, make learning fun, and enhance environmental literacy, authored the No Child Left Inside legislation.
- EPA should be thoughtful and balanced in issuing its regulations, but its authority to regulate should not be impaired. Worked hard to keep anti-EPA riders out of the Omnibus Appropriations Act of 2014, and will continue to oppose other initiatives, including the recent McConnell proposal, to exert control over EPA power plant regulations.
- Priority attention should be given to investment in water infrastructure – sewers and wastewater treatment facilities. Without such investments, waste will seep into our waterways and contaminate our drinking water. These investments should include “green” infrastructure, using natural processes to protect against pollution.
- *"Wisdom sometimes seems to be going out of style."* We need to stress that *"good environmental policy is good economic policy"*. We are all paying the cost of pollution and reducing pollution is *"the smart thing to do, not just the right thing to do"*.

#### **Georgia Schell - Conservation Vice-Chair for Partners for Plants**

After describing the Partners for Plants program which focuses on habitat restoration projects to preserve native plants, Georgia recognized each of the 40 clubs that has a Partners for Plants project underway.

**Charles Richmond - Director of Rangelands Management, U.S. Forest Service, Department of Agriculture**

After thanking the GCA for its help with various projects, Mr. Richmond and GCA President Katie Heins signed a Memorandum of Understanding which continues the GCA/Forest Service partnership for the next 5 years.

**Frances Trafton - NAL Vice-Chair for Transportation**

- GCA has a century-long history of concern and action on highway beautification. Other issues related to transportation include: air quality (reduced emissions); energy use (fuel efficiency); promotion of native plantings along highways in lieu of invasives; aesthetic and safety concerns involving billboards; and support for alternative modes of transportation to the automobile.
- Committees in both the House and Senate are currently drafting a new transportation bill as the current two-year law known as "MAP-21" is set to expire in September 2014. In visits to lawmakers this week, delegates could advocate for a longer-term (5 to 6 year) bill that would allow long range planning by regional and local transportation departments. We should emphasize that any new legislation should continue funding for the Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Program and should not erode key provisions of the National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA).

**Senator Susan Collins (R-Maine)**

- Delegates attending this meeting need to understand how important their voices are in Washington; it's so powerful when you come and educate lawmakers on environmental issues. If Members of Congress don't hear about conservation in their home states, they're not likely to fund key programs such as the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) and the Forest Legacy Program.
- Sen. Collins told the story of why the Common Sense Coalition was formed: It was a disgrace to shutdown the Government last fall – Congress failed the American people. She heard from the small businesses near Acadia Park who were losing substantial revenue during the peak season. Watching the debate spectacle on C-span, it was just rants from each side with no plan to move forward. After outlining a plan, she went to the Senate floor and challenged her colleagues to stop fighting and start legislating for the American people. Immediately, her cell phone starting ringing with calls from her female colleagues in the Senate, followed by a few good men, and together a bipartisan group of 14 worked night and day to come up with the plan that was ultimately adopted. Hopefully, this Common Sense Coalition will foster bipartisan efforts on other important issues.
- *"It is a false choice to pit the environment against the economy."* In Maine, the environment IS the economy. Federal seed money in conservation



leverages big returns since investments can generate tax revenues. Outdoor recreation contributes \$1.7 trillion to the economy. The LWCF and Forest Legacy program are key to providing investments in conservation that are good for both the economy and the environment.

- *"I'm a strong supporter of the Clean Air Act which has come under assault. Maine is at the end of the nation's tailpipe."*
- Mercury is one of the most persistent and dangerous environmental pollutants, and reducing this threat is one of her priorities. Addressing the need to identify mercury "hot spots", she introduced the Comprehensive National Mercury Monitoring Act.
- In response to a question from a delegate about getting more women in politics, Senator Collins noted that women think they're never quite "ready" for the job. *"To discuss trade policy, a woman thinks she needs a Ph.D. in economics while a man just thinks he needs to drive a Honda."*

### **David Yarnold - President and CEO, National Audubon Society**

- Today's National Audubon Society is not your grandmother's Audubon. Today there are nearly 500 local chapters and 22 state offices nationwide to engage its members in conservation action. And today there is an unparalleled network of conservation groups working together to protect the planet.
- Climate change is a great threat to the habitat of birds and other wildlife, and we are already seeing that migration and reproduction patterns have been altered by a warming climate. Audubon has been working on climate change issues for a decade.
- This spring Audubon will be issuing a new study focusing on the impact of climate change on birds. Gardening and bird watching are the number 1 and 2 hobbies in the U.S. The study's release will make bird lovers take climate change personally. Importantly, their motivation to address climate change will relate to their love of birds, not their politics.
- *"GCA is a potent political force"*. Legislators need to hear about climate change from local residents, and GCA clubs can partner with local Audubon chapters to promote education and interest in climate change in their communities.
- *"It is absolute nonsense to think that conservation belongs to one party."*

### **Congressman Earl Blumenauer (D-3<sup>rd</sup> Oregon)**

- One piece of advice for GCA advocacy efforts: *"Don't be too gentle, don't let us (Congress) off the hook."* The issues are simply too critical for the future of our children and grandchildren. We cannot be too measured and understated in our approach if we want change to happen.
- Regarding the issue of funding for environmental protection and conservation: suggests that GCA not settle for a "fair share" of available discretionary funds. These programs have received more than their share

of cuts in recent years. EPA, for example, has been subjected to draconian cuts resulting in a dramatic reduction in enforcement actions.

- Incentives to discourage development in vulnerable areas. When we do make progress, we must not back away. One distressing example of retreat is H.R. 3370, a bill coming up soon for a vote that would dismantle reforms to the National Flood Insurance Program that lawmakers passed just 18 months ago. H.R.3370 would retreat from risk-based insurance rates, dissolving incentives that would discourage people from living in vulnerable, flood-prone areas.
- The Farm bill. Although the final bill did retain some important conservation provisions, it does not get high marks. While subsidies to wealthy farmers continue, conservation funding is cut by \$6 billion. We must do better.
- Funding for national parks should become a “crusade” in preparation for the centennial in 2016. The Ken Burns movie on our national parks should be “required viewing” for all Congressmen.
- We need a stable source of funding for the transportation bill.
- GCA’s conservation/environmental agenda will not cost the government in comparison to what the Government will have to spend if Congress fails to act.

#### **Robert Bonnie - U.S. Department of Agriculture Undersecretary for Natural Resources and the Environment**

- USDA worked very hard to ensure that strong conservation provisions were retained in the recently enacted Farm bill. *“Although the level of funding for conservation (in the Farm Bill) has been reduced somewhat, we were pleased where we ended up given the current fiscal environment.”* Covered initiatives include programs for conservation easements and stewardship and reduction of nutrient run-off in areas such as the Chesapeake Bay and the Great Lakes.
- USDA is involved in executing pieces of the President’s Climate Change Action Plan, particularly working with ranchers and farmers to mitigate the effects of climate change.
- U.S. Forest Service. Recent fire seasons have posed extraordinary challenges for the Forest Service. Fire seasons are 60 to 80 days longer than in the past and the fires are burning twice as many acres. Firefighting is consuming half of the Forest Service’s budget, compared to the 10-15% percent norm in previous years.
- In 7 of the last 10 years, the Service has had to transfer money from other departments to fight fires. The President’s budget proposes the establishment of an emergency fund so firefighting would be treated like other natural disasters.

#### **John Podesta - Senior Counselor to President Obama**

- Admires the fact that conservation has been at the core of GCA's agenda since the organization's inception.
- Addressing climate change and reducing carbon levels in our atmosphere is the central challenge of our time. The U.S. should become the global clean energy capital of the world. The cost of inaction is incalculable – in 2013 alone, the price tag on natural disasters was \$110 billion. The U.S. cannot do this alone; we must work toward a global response to the climate change challenge.
- The President's Climate Change Action Plan is the blueprint for moving forward. A key component of that plan is setting limits on carbon emissions for new and existing power plants. We already set limits for arsenic, mercury and lead, but we let power plants release as much carbon pollution as they want. EPA has proposed limits on carbon emissions from new plants and is moving forward to address emissions from existing plants by June of this year.
- The President's plan also calls for action to cut carbon in the transportation sector, increase renewable energy production, and establish standards to protect infrastructure from damaging floods and other natural disasters.
- Encourages GCA members to look for partners in their local communities to find climate change solutions. Also, let legislators know about the actual effects of climate change you are witnessing, talk about the issue with neighbors, and engage the business community in understanding the economic consequences.
- Others areas of interest to the President that are reflected in the GCA agenda include: cleaning up the Chesapeake Bay, restoring the Everglades, ensuring a robust Land and Water Conservation Fund, and preserving wilderness. (Mr. Podesta noted that the 112<sup>th</sup> Congress did not designate a single acre of wilderness – the only Congress in recent memory not to do so).
- In conclusion, a quote from the President's recent remarks ... *"our goal is ambitious, but nothing gets done if we don't think big. Let's make big plans together."*
- In response to a question about the status of rulemaking on Clean Water Act jurisdiction, Mr. Podesta indicated that he could not make promises, but was confident that the rule would be out in the near future.

#### **Senator Johnny Isakson (R-Georgia)**

- The greatest treasure we have is our natural resources and we have to work in harmony with the environment.
- Conservation easements are a cost-effective way to preserve natural land.
- Supports nuclear energy as a non-carbon alternative.
- While supporting the essence of the Clean Water Act, believes we must be balanced in defining its coverage. *"We can't regulate every puddle in America."*

**Peter Byck - Environmental Filmmaker**

Mr. Byck, our final evening presenter at the Cosmos Club, enlightened attendees with a preview of his next film production, *Carbon Nation 2.0*, the first of a series of short films. This particular one features ranchers and dairy farmers and how they are improving the soil on their lands and changing their ecosystems. Mr. Byck creates productive conversations about our environment, especially with those who may not even believe in climate change.