

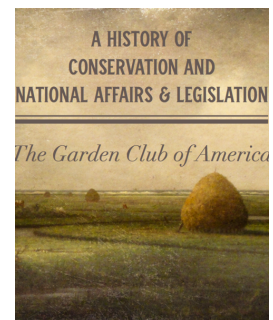
Meeting of the GCA National Affairs and Legislation Committee February 28 – March 1, 2018 Washington DC

Thank you for the opportunity to represent the Litchfield Garden Club at the NAL meeting this year. As always, it was a great chance to renew acquaintances and make new friends. And learn a great deal.

The meeting was packed – 27 delegates from Zone II clubs attended and several hundred from across the country. So many historic as well as recent hard-won environmental and conservation accomplishments are currently under challenge and at risk of being overturned that the level of energy and concern among delegates was noticeably higher than usual.



The Garden Club of America has been extremely conservation minded ever since its founding in 1913. When it became obvious that just studying and promoting good conservation practices in our clubs was not enough, GCA launched the National Affairs and Legislation Committee so that garden club members could readily get information and guidance about what's going on so they could influence federal decisions affecting air, water, parks, forests, pollinators and the environment. * [The history of the Conservation and NAL Committees](#) was updated recently and posted on the GCA website on both committee's landing pages – look on the right-hand side under “publications.” It's quite a story.



* As a 501(c) (3) organization, GCA can lobby on public policy issues and promote specific policies and solutions but cannot endorse candidates for elective office or get involved in “electioneering.”

On Monday afternoon, attendees were briefed on how best to present their concerns and issues to their members of Congress. We then walked from our meeting past cherry blossoms and star magnolias to the Wilderness Society where we enjoyed wine and hors d'oeuvres in the Ansel Adams Gallery while admiring the 80 original images donated by decades-long Society supporter Adams. Wilderness Society president Jamie Williams implored us to oppose the recently-approved oil drilling in the Alaska Native Wildlife Reserve and take-backs of invaluable protected public lands designated under the 1906 Antiquities Act, including Bear Ears and Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monuments.



Tuesday was devoted to briefings by experts and advocates about the urgency of taking action on climate change, the threat to native plants and pollinators, the Southeastern Grasslands Initiative, seed diversity, food security and sustainable agriculture and threats and opportunities ahead for agriculture-related conservation programs when Congress takes up the farm bill. Transportation Secretary Elaine Chao downplayed the necessity for environmental reviews before moving ahead with the new infrastructure programs. Power couple Wendy and Hank Paulson described their work on the Risky Business Initiative to mobilize business in favor of addressing climate change. Diane Lewis updated us on her Great Healthy Yard Project and former House & Garden editor Dominique Browning told us about her remarkable transition from gardening to climate activism. Doug Tallamy gave his familiar compelling message on behalf of "Insects: the Little Things that Run the World."



Hank and Wendy Paulson with Linda Fraser, former NAL chair

On Wednesday, the scene moved to the Ways and Means Committee hearing room in the Longworth House Office Building, an unexpected last-minute change of venue necessitated by arrangements for Rev. Billy Graham lying in honor in the Capitol rotunda. Republican and Democratic Senators and Representatives described their efforts to secure sensible environmental policies despite administration efforts to terminate programs, make deep funding cuts and reduce environmental staff. Returning favorite presenters included Senators Sheldon Whitehouse and Amy Klobuchar and Representatives Debbie Dingell and Earl Blumenauer.

The highlight of Wednesday's briefings was a riveting presentation by investment guru Jeremy Grantham accompanied by mostly gloomy graphics and slides about what he calls "the Race of our Lives" to achieve a sustainable world before catastrophic climate change occurs. One bright spot: acceleration of green technologies have now made renewable power and battery storage cheaper (even without government incentives) than the operating cost of coal and nuclear power.

On Thursday, NAL attendees returned to Capitol Hill to meet with their legislators. I had a very productive meeting with Jessica Brown, the legislative assistant for environment to Elizabeth Esty, the representative for the Connecticut 5th Congressional



L-R: Jessica Brown, Martha Phillips, Rep. Esty

District which includes Litchfield. Jessica remembers our visit from last year and was happy to report that Rep. Esty is an active member of the 70-member bipartisan House Climate Solutions Caucus, a so-called two-by-two group because a member can join only when accompanied by a member of the other party. (Reps. Himes and Larson from Connecticut are also members.) The caucus has sought to identify economically viable policies to reduce factors contributing to climate change. For example, Rep. Esty and Sen. Chris Murphy have sponsored HR 2995/S1406 to create a national version of Connecticut's Green Bank to leverage investments in green energy projects. Rep. Esty also introduced HR 4992 to require notification of municipalities within 30 miles of power plant permit applications---this was in response to federal procedures that denied Sherman, CT residents input into decisions to build a power plant in nearby Dover, NY. She has been a big advocate for Wild and Scenic designation for the Lower Farmington River.

The scheduled joint meeting with Senators Murphy and Blumenthal was derailed by a series of back-to-back Senate floor votes so instead we met with TJ Storey, Sen. Blumenthal's LA for conservation, transportation and infrastructure and Mike Bednarczyk, Sen. Murphy's LA for energy, environment, and transportation. They described both senators' extensive environmental efforts, including joining with the 39 cosponsors of S.569 to permanently authorize and fund the Land and Water Conservation Act; sponsorship of S. 1054, the GCA-supported bill to promote botanical sciences; S. 33 to require congressional and state approval of national monument designations under the Antiquities Act as well as compliance with procedures under the National Environmental Policy Act. Both senators have supported legislation to prevent areas off the coast of any of the New England states from being leased for gas or oil



1 Connecticut attendees at our meeting with Senator Blumenthal

exploration or production and preventing seismic testing from being done in these waters because of harm to whales and other sea life. They described their efforts to respond to cross-state pollution from a York County, Pennsylvania coal plant that affects Connecticut's (and

other states') compliance with clean air standards limiting ozone. Connecticut has been trying since 2016 to get EPA to enforce its regulations and the CT DEEP testified at an EPA hearing on February 23. A comment period runs through April.

Just as the meeting was concluding, Sen. Blumenthal made a brief appearance between votes and reiterated his support of environmental protections in the face of systematic efforts by the administration to curtail EPA and the Department of Interior. He also reminded us about his efforts to prevent the sale or development of Plum Island.

With meetings concluded, everyone dashed for trains and planes for the trip home. It was clear that it will require dedicated and strenuous efforts to hold on to environmental achievements and prevent environmental standards from being systematically weakened. Enactment of bold action to deal with climate challenges is clearly not in the offing.

The three legislative assistants to our delegation are eager and available to help garden clubs in the environmental policy area. They encouraged us to let them know about conservation and environmental policies of interest or concern to us. Their contact information:

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