

## ON THE WILD SIDE

### The Human Contribution

Linda S. Kollett

We just passed a major landmark for the world human population. The total number of people on the planet has hit 7 billion. This is a huge number. In truth, the actual growth rate seems to be declining, but the sheer number of people is not. This is a topic for interesting conversation. Will the human population follow the traditional path of fast growth followed by rapid decline as resources are used up, or will there be some other result? Conversations encompass energy availability, wars, famine, the role of the growth of prosperity and more. We need to be aware of this and educate ourselves about the issues surrounding the explosion of people on the planet. But I am thinking more locally right now.

Years ago I took an ecology course in college and we went on many delightful and interesting field trips to local ecosystems; roadsides, quaking bogs, fields, mountain trails and more. Wherever we went there was usually a time when the professor would pause, point to the offending object, a cup or bottle, or piece of paper, and say sadly "Man's contribution." That is one of the main things that has remained with me for the 45 plus years since I took that class.

So what is "man's contribution" or in a more politically correct version "the human contribution" to the ecosystems in Norton? Here are some things I know from general conversation with friends who share similar interests. Some access to Land Preservation Land has been restricted because it had become a popular dumping site for trash and garbage. Land near another LPS holding is a favorite disposal site for what appears to be construction waste. Walks along some of the Norton roads are spoiled by large amounts of trash – bottles, cans, refuse from fast food places, even televisions and other electronic equipment. Some of our waterways are spoiled by debris.

There are some positive signs as well. Walks on well-used LPS land stay fairly clean. We used to fill a small plastic with trash on a walk, and now there is almost nothing to clean up. The new



A lovely autumn picture of the Cornish Town Forest on Plain St. is marred by fast food containers. Even more destructive is a television discarded on LPS land.

Tricentennial Park (landscape design generously provided by Dana Rappaneau of the Olde Thyme Shoppe) has opened up all sorts of possibilities for education about native species and provides a quiet place for reflection. It is a very positive improvement over what had occupied the space. It also represents a wonderfully inclusive Norton project, reaching across the population from young scouts to older members of the community and lots of folks in between. Under the guidance of Kathleen Ebert-Zawasky from LPS and her hard-working committee (Mary E.R. Brown, Brendan Jones, Butch Rich, Frances Shirley and Phil Zawasky), the town has produced a remarkable example of a positive contribution to the “nature” of Norton.

So the question is, “What else can we do to improve our contribution to our home town”? Here are some things to consider. First, let’s not throw trash and cigarette butts out the windows of our cars, second, if you see trash, pick it up. You may not want to emulate my 90-year old mother who actually stops people on the street when she sees them dropping trash, and reminds them politely to pick it up – kind of along the lines of “Oh dear, I see you dropped something” - but let’s try to set a good example. Let’s make “the human contribution “ to Norton something to be proud of. Any other ideas are welcome! Can **Let’s Clean up Norton** become a town project?

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