



## The Donna O'Neill Land Conservancy

A NON-PROFIT CORPORATION

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Dear Conservancy Patron:

*The Conservancy* lists lower age limits for most of our walks and hikes. Currently, most daytime *Conservancy* events are open to children ages 6 and up. Evening and special events are usually only open to older children.

We wish we could accommodate all ages at all our events and would therefore like to explain our rationale for instituting age limits. Because every *Conservancy* staffer is either a parent or works closely with children on a day-to-day basis, we are acutely aware of the need to get today's kids away from TV and gaming consoles, out of the house and into the vanishing natural spaces left around us. We're familiar with Richard Louv's provocative book *Last Child in the Woods*, and understand the importance of early contact with Nature. But alas, our facility is not always the best for outings with pre-schoolers, toddlers, and younger children.

Most of our interpretive programs are scheduled to last at least two hours. Because *The Conservancy* is on private land, everyone must be escorted in and out through a locked gate. Thus patrons are not free to come and go as they please. As the parent of any pre-schooler knows, two hours can be a VERY long time for a child not in the mood for planned activities. Whereas school-aged children must learn coping mechanisms to survive the academic regime, younger children are still focused on their own needs. When those needs are not being met, unhappiness results.

Rather than attending a formal program, parents, relatives, and friends are better off, in many cases, taking toddlers and preschoolers to a local city, county, state or federal park with *open access*. Younger children don't require interpretation. Instead, they need to explore nature at their own pace, rolling in the grass, digging in the dirt, looking at bugs, and just enjoying sunshine and blue skies—or rain! Places calling themselves “parks” tend to work much harder at providing facilities to accommodate people. *The Donna O'Neill Land Conservancy*, on the other hand, is not a park. It is a wildlands reserve—a place set aside primarily for animals and wildlife. Our people-oriented facilities are limited *by design*.

However, we realize that patrons with younger children want to be able to come out to *The Conservancy*, too! To accommodate you, we will try to include a few events throughout the year which are designed for the younger set. These walks will cover smaller distances to accommodate shorter legs, and include less lecturing and more hands-on, participative activities younger kids will enjoy. And we'll plan for flexibility. If it is just “one of those days” and a youthful encounter with Nature needs to be terminated early, we will understand!

Sincerely,

Heidi A. Keller  
Executive Director

*revised: 9/2008*