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Westford Conservation Trust Fall Newsletter 2018



Westford Conservation Trust Newsletter - Fall 2018

You're Invited - Annual Meeting Thursday November 8th, 7:00 PM

Members and friends are invited to join us for the 2018 Westford Conservation Trust Annual Meeting on Thursday, November 8th, 7:00 pm at Parish Center for the Arts (PCA), 10 Lincoln Street, Westford. A brief Trust business meeting will be held from 7:00-7:20 pm followed by our guest speaker. Light refreshments will be served. Hope to see you there!

Our guest speaker is Jennifer Forman Orth, Mass Department of Agricultural Resources (MDAR) Environmental Biologist, who will present: **Nature's Invaders - Invasive Plants in our Environment.**

Is Mile-a-minute vine dragging you down? Is Asiatic Bittersweet dragging your trees down? Is Giant hogweed making you feel like you have to hide indoors? Jennifer Forman Orth will give us an up-close and personal look at the very worst invasive plants Massachusetts is currently dealing with. Learn how to recognize these invaders, what you can do about them, and how to make smart choices about what's in your own garden. Questions from the audience will be most welcome!

Jennifer Forman Orth is an invasive plant ecologist who works on invasive plant and insect pest issues at MDAR. When she's not trying to help someone get rid of the Japanese knotweed in their yard, you can find her working with the state's Mosquito Control Districts, or teaching people how to recognize the Asian longhorned beetle.

Westford Conservation Trust Members and Friends Projects in 2018

Trail Maintenance

It's been a busy summer for a group of volunteer Westford Conservation Trust members and Board members on invasive control projects and Trust property maintenance. The year-round trail steward program headed by Trust honorary Board member Bill Harman with a group of volunteers continues its effort to keep the town's more than 65 miles of walking trails passable. The heavy snow of early March caused many trees to fall and block the trails. Much effort by volunteers was expended to clear the fallen trees and brush. If you would like to join the Tuesday trail group or would like more information about trails, you can call Bill Harman at 692-3907.



Mile a Minute Control

This is the eighth year of the Trust's invasive control project for the Mile-a-minute Vine (MAM). [Mile-a-minute](#) is a highly invasive vine that can grow up to 6 inches a day. If left to grow unchecked, it will outcompete and overgrow native plants and could cause ecological and economic damage. MAM was first discovered here in Westford in 2010 at what is now the Laughton Farm development on Lowell Road. Since then, other sites have been discovered in Westford and the Invasive Control Committee is monitoring a total of four known sites. One of the sites on Randolph Circle was discovered in 2017 by a homeowner. The picture shows MAM (triangular leaves) on top of other vegetation at the Randolph Circle site on September 7th.



Each summer the Invasive Control Committee has gathered a group of dedicated volunteers to manually remove MAM vines from the known sites. The harvesting is done on seven Saturdays from July to September. This prevents the seeds the plant produces in September (that remain viable for 7 years) from getting into the soil. Much of the MAM vine is found in overgrown conservation areas making it difficult to access. This year has been an ideal growing season with more than 67 pounds of MAM harvested. Considering the very large quantities of MAM first harvested at the Laughton and Grey Fox Lane sites, this is a very small amount and shows that our control program has been a success. Additional volunteers are sought to help in this project. If you would like to volunteer next summer, please send an email to invasives@westfordconservationtrust.org. If you find MAM here in Westford, please email the Committee at the same address.

Hildreth Meadows Clearing

In June of 2015 the Trust purchased a 2.95 acre property on Hildreth Street which was subsequently named Hildreth Meadows. After obtaining the property the Trust had a baseline survey done to verify the property boundaries. The property was mostly overgrown with plant invasives such as Oriental bittersweet, Autumn olive, and Multi-flora rose (a plant that's seemingly all thorns and few flowers). This past summer a contractor was employed to clear out about an acre of the land that, in future, will be mowed every year or so as is done at Pageant Field. The result of the clearing has returned the property to the meadow it once was when used for agriculture. The Trust also plans to add three parking spaces and make the property more visible where a stone wall borders Hildreth Street. Additional future plans are to create a trail on the property that will link up with the existing Blakes Hill trail. Thanks to our Members whose generous donations helped finance this project!



Hildreth Meadow - Before land clearing



Hildreth Meadow - After land clearing

Stony Brook Water Chestnut Project

Beginning in June, Trust board member Diane Duane and her husband Bill, were busy kayaking on Westford's Stony Brook, but not just for the fun of it! This is the second year of an effort to control the aquatic invasive species [Water Chestnut \(*Trapa natans*\)](#), which was discovered on a section of Stony Brook last year by Westford's Conservation / Resource Planner, Carol Gumbart. As part of an early detection control program, they have concentrated on a 2.5 mile section of the brook between the Stepinski well area and the railroad bridge near Stony Brook Conservation Land. Conservation/Resource Planner Carol Gumbart also joined them for a pull and survey in late July. The Westford Water Dept was also supportive of efforts with this project.

Water Chestnut, if not controlled, can form dense floating mats that limit light that's critical to aquatic ecosystems. One nut can produce 10-15 plants and each of these plants may produce up to 20 seeds. Seeds are viable for up to 12 years. In 2017 we pulled 205 lbs of plants but did not survey past the upper section of the brook so there were most likely many more plants downstream.

This year, we completed 5 full surveys over the months of June to the end of August and pulled approximately 89 lbs of the plant in total. Our initial pull in June yielded approximately 40lbs of plants and our final pull in late August yielded 6 plants (plants visible on the kayak accessible sections of the brook though there may be some plants in less accessible areas that we cannot easily find). The decrease in the number of visible plants is encouraging; however this is tempered by the fact that just one plant is capable of producing many more seeds. The Trust needs to continue surveys and pulls in the near future for better control of this highly invasive plant. To participate in this program or if you have any questions or concerns, please contact invasives@westfordconservationtrust.org



Stony Brook - Summer 2018



A single Water Chestnut with multiple seed pods



Water Chestnuts - note jagged leaves



Carol Gumbart collecting Water Chestnuts

Monitoring and Maintaining Westford Trail Structures by David Ebitson

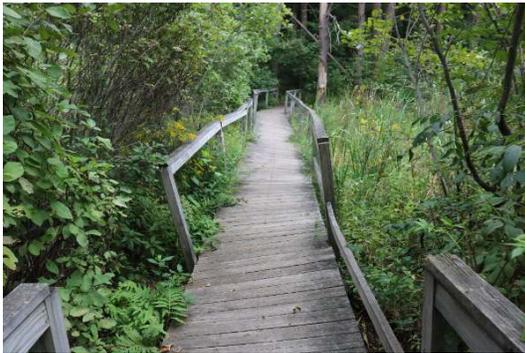


There are more than sixty-five miles of trails in Westford on land owned by the Trust and the Town. Over the last two hundred years our citizens have built various bridges of wood and stone to cross our brooks and streams... eighty-seven are still standing. The oldest are made of carefully laid stone including a small stepping stone bridge off Texas Road. Also, there are countless boardwalks and puncheons. Puncheons are walkways over wet ground made by laying planks or dressed timbers over sills set directly on the ground; these are used throughout our trail system. Picture shows recently installed bridge over Boutwell Brook.

These structures not only provide a safe passage for hikers but also protect fragile plant life and wetlands. This past year Trust members have noticed that a number of structures have decayed. Some structures require maintenance and several may require replacement. Our trail system has expanded over the last several years

adding additional crossings of streams and wetlands. This expansion may require additional structures to protect both the wetlands and provide hikers a safe experience exploring the trail system.

The Trust has created a database of all trail structures crossing wetlands and streams to monitor conditions and provide periodic reports to members. This report will assist the Trust and the Westford Conservation Commission in identifying trail structures which require maintenance and repairs and provide a record of the condition of trail structures as data is collected. This report will enable a proactive effort to prioritize repairs of all bridges, boardwalks and puncheons insuring their safety and stability. It must be noted that in the past many of the structures have been replaced as a result of Westford Eagle Scout projects at no cost to the town. The Trust hopes these projects to continue in the future.



A recent bridge repair project - Before repairs were made, the bridge was twisted and not level



Bridge - After leveling
Repaired by David Ebitson, Bill Harman, and
Larry Willard

What's in your Backyard? - Recognizing and Controlling Invasives



Mile-a-Minute is only one of the many invasive plants found here in Westford. Plant invasives like Oriental Bittersweet, Japanese Knotweed and Garlic Mustard are very common. In the worst case, Bittersweet can climb and then kill trees on your property. The following link to the publication [A Landowner's Guide to Invasive Plant Management](#) published by Westfield Watershed Invasive Species can help in identification and control of invasives. Pictured: Garlic Mustard.

The Power of Water - by Rich Strazdas

In spring 2018, the Trust received an inquiry from a local business on Route 110 for help in identifying trail maintenance opportunities. Trust founder and honorary board member Bill Harman was pleased to show them the trails from Lyberty Way, in their backyard. He discovered a troublesome bridge, really just a plank, that needed to be repositioned to make it barely usable. Old photos from the fall of 2012, when the trails were initially scouted, compared to today from the same viewpoints show the power of water to reshape a streambed in just a few years. The water course has changed significantly, and trees have aged or fallen. These before and after pictures show how the bridge that was quite adequate 5.5 years ago is pretty sketchy now.



It's also important to note what hasn't changed. Observe the healthy tufts of grass in the "before" picture. Can you identify them all in the "after" picture? Through flood, freeze and thaw, they have stood their ground. Everything you've read about plants and soil stabilization is true. (If you've ever tried to remove grass or any "rooty" weed, you know this well.) And cat-o-nine-tails have colonized the new island in the stream.

Click [here](#) to view Westford's Watershed Action Plan. The map shows the Vine Brook watershed. Do you live within these 2.05 square miles? On this map, the intrepid bridge is at the "e" in Vine Brook south of 495. All the rain that falls in the watershed north of that bridge will make its way under it. It's easy to follow the brook upstream past the Burns Hill loop trail. But then its tributaries go through small marshes and sometimes disappear underground, as in the Trust's recently acquired property on Hildreth Street.

New Woodland Trails at Nabnasset School By Bill Harman

Come Walk With Us

Explore new woodland trails at Nab School

Saturday
October 20th
9 AM or 10 AM
(two walks)

Suitable for families with young children.

parking for Saturday

For information call 978-692-5501

Sponsored by
• Healthy Westford Committee
• Westford Recreation Department

Next to Nabnasset School is a woodland including several new trails. The land is pretty flat and the trails are wide, so it's an easy walk. The trails were cleared and marked as one of the regular Tuesday morning trail projects.

The Nab School trails were made possible with the support of parents of children at the school, Jeff and Alisha Hillam. They introduced the idea of using the woodland as part of the school program, and helped to explain things about the animals and plants people can encounter in woods. Currently the school children are developing a name for these trails.

To celebrate these new trails, the Healthy Westford Committee has organized a community event to walk the trails on Saturday October 20th. There will be two guided walks at 9 am and 10 am. The flyer includes a trail map and also shows the parking area where the walks will begin.

The new Nab School trails are on town owned property, and are available for everyone to enjoy on weekends. These trails are particularly convenient for people in that neighborhood who can walk to and from the trail without using a car.

Guided Trail Walk Schedule for 2018

Saturday November 3rd, 9:00 - 10:30 am

Join Westford Conservation Trust director Lenny Palmer who will lead a walk through the south section of the Stoney Brook Conservation Land (formerly the Stepinski Property). This walk is appropriate for all ages, but the area is not suitable for baby strollers. Sociable dogs on a leash are welcome. Parking is at the back lot of the American Legion Fields off River Street, entrance is between 13 and 17 River Street. For additional information call Lenny at 978.392.9876.

Saturday December 1st

At the time this Newsletter was released, December 1st is a tentative date for a guided Saturday walk. Please consult our website or Facebook page for the most current information.



Facebook



Westford Conservation Trust Website

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