

Fall 2020



Westford Conservation Trust Newsletter



The Westford Conservation Trust is a private, non-profit, non-governmental organization incorporated in 1984 under Massachusetts law for the purpose of preserving land and other natural resources. The Trust is a charitable, 501-C3 organization, for which all donations are tax deductible. The Trust is managed by a volunteer Board of Directors. Since its beginning, the Trust has acquired a number of open space areas and trails through both direct ownership and permanent conservation restrictions.

Westford Conservation Trust Spring & Summer 2020 in Review



Trust volunteer members have been busy during the summer. Despite the pandemic, much work outdoors has been accomplished.

Mile-a-Minute Invasive Control Project

Many thanks to all the volunteers who helped during some hot and very humid days in our MAM control events for 2020. Vines were harvested at Grey Fox Lane, Laughton Farms, Randolph Circle, Acker Land, Pilgrim Village, and a site in Littleton. The quantity of MAM vines harvested in 2020 was clearly impacted by the “moderate to severe”

drought conditions in Westford. The season total was about 11 pounds which was harvested at six sites. In 2019 we harvested 105.5 pounds at just five sites.

New Site for 2020: Acker Trail at new Boy Scout Bridge (pictured) - While hiking in August one of our volunteers spotted some vines that were growing near a new wooden bridge installed late in 2019. All the plants were clustered in one location and we can only guess at how the MAM got there.

Water Chestnut Invasive Control Project



This harvesting season was a bit easier despite the drought as there were several beaver dams that caused the water level to rise at just the right locations for the use of kayaks. We continued to pull and survey the same area of Stony Brook near the Water Dept pumping station downstream to the railroad bridge near Depot St. As usual, we only see occasional water chestnut plants but seem to always come across a 'hot spot' with multiple plants. Each survey has these hot spots but always at different locations.

This year, we saw one of these close to the walking trails near Stony Brook Conservation Land, closer to the railroad bridge. Hopefully, we can continue to do manual pulling to control this invasive for future control efforts. Thanks again to the Westford Water Dept and Conservation Commission for their continued support of this program.

Pageant Field and Hildreth Meadows

Volunteers brush-hogged these two meadows this year. The cutting controls invasive plants like Multi-Flora Rose and Autumn olive from invading the meadows. Work continues on restoring and buttressing the historic Pageant Field stone wall by contractor New England Land Design.

Trust Awards \$3000 in Scholarships to 2020 Westford Academy Seniors and a Former Graduate

Each year the Trust presents college scholarships of up to \$1000 to Westford seniors who demonstrate an interest beyond their studies in the cause of conservation. This year the scholarships were awarded to three Academy Seniors and one former Academy graduate who is now attending college.

Trail Maintenance and Re-Blazing

Trust volunteers were busy this year clearing downed trees on trails (see Troop 195 article). We have also begun a multi-year project of re-blazing the trails with a consistent marking system. We are using the Appalachian Mountain Club trailblazing standards as a guide. In general, yellow blazes denote a main loop trail. Blue typically denotes secondary trails that may end at a private property boundary line. Two stacked blazes denote a trail junction. Two stacked blazes offset to the left or right denote that the trail turns left or right. Red or Orange blazes denote minor or connector trails.

Membership



We are always looking for new members and folks who want to become Trust Board Members. You might see one of these new signs on our trails. If you'd like to volunteer or get involved [click here](#).

Scout Troop 195 Trail Maintenance Projects 2020 - by David Ebitson

This year the Westford Conservation Trust started a three year project to blaze or place assurance markers on all trails. These markers help those hikers not familiar with our trails, particularly after a winter snowstorm. The markers are placed on trees in accordance with the Appalachian Mountain Club standards.

This year we started to fall behind our schedule of blazing our 70 miles of trails. The schedule became further hampered by a severe windstorm in May, resulting in countless trees blown down over a wide path of Westford woods from Groton to Tyngsborough which blocked many of our trails. We realized we needed to clear the trees from the trails before the blazing projects could

begin. It was a sizable feat and a daunting task clearing 140 trees from our seventy-plus miles of trails.



The Village View Trail

with 12 downed trees across it was a real challenge. The Village View Trail joins up with the Kissacook Trail and had four more trees across the trail. We needed help!

Scout Troop 195 and Troop Leader Andy Sageman needed a community service project and contacted the Trust for suggestions. I suggested trail maintenance. Troop 195 headed by Andy along with his son AJ committed to the task. I walked the two trails with them and asked if they would need help with the tree clearing. Andy said, "The scouts will take care of it". Andy cut up the trees and the Scouts cleared the trails. He obtained several trailhead marker posts and equipment to install them from the Westford Conservation Trust. The Scouts officially identified several potential new trailhead post locations and before long the trails were cleared and identified with Westford trail posts.



Troop 195 and Andy were not done yet! They asked for a blaze color scheme for the Village View Trail. Troop 195 picked up two paint kits from the Westford Conservation Trust inventory and blazed the trails in accordance with the Appalachian Mountain Club procedures. With 140 trees to clean up in 2020 we were very pleased to have Troop 195 on our team.



The Village View Trail and the Kissacook Trail provide an excellent trail to enjoy nature at its best. The Kissacook Trail brings you to the top of a 416 - foot hill. You will find many interesting sites and features as you walk these two trails - such as a Lintel or a small stone footbridge over a stream built approximately two hundred years ago. When you reach the top of Kissacook Hill, rest in the granite classroom. Please thank Troop 195 and Troop Leader Andy Sageman and AJ for all their hard work.

Nabnasset Conservation Land by Bill Harman

I'd like to call your attention to an attractive area of natural woodland and trails near Edwards Beach in Nabnasset. This is town-owned Conservation land. The main trail entrance is directly across the road from the driveway into Edwards Beach – marked “you are here” on the accompanying map. Starting from there, the main trail winds among huge white pine trees. There are also two trailheads from Williams Avenue and a trailhead at the end of Woodbine Terrace. These trails are used regularly, and the main trail is firm enough for bicycling.



Conditions in the woodland are good. Local people are picking up litter and taking care of the area. There is one exception in an area near the end of Hemlock Road where dumping of leaves and clippings has been a problem for many years. The Conservation Commission has recently addressed this problem by sending letters to notify the public that dumping of any kind, including biodegradable leaves, is not allowed on Conservation land.

The whole neighborhood around this Conservation land on all sides is good for walking, too. The streets are quiet with little traffic and are generally level. We see many walkers and bikers, including children, in this area.

Trail Mapping - by Rich Strazdas

In September, the 13th edition of *Westford Trails* exceeded 400 copies distributed in less than 18 months. Whether due to Covid or health consciousness, Westfordians have a huge appetite for the outdoors, and the Trust is thrilled to fulfill that need.

What goes into making a trail map? It starts out as an ugly mess, with lots of source data overlaid. From Westford GIS, we obtain property boundaries, ponds, streams, contours, walls, forests, marshes, roads and bridges. From various mapping websites, existing trails and crowd-sourced GPS tracks give the map creator a good idea of the area. (Many of these sites have incorporated my existing map data!)

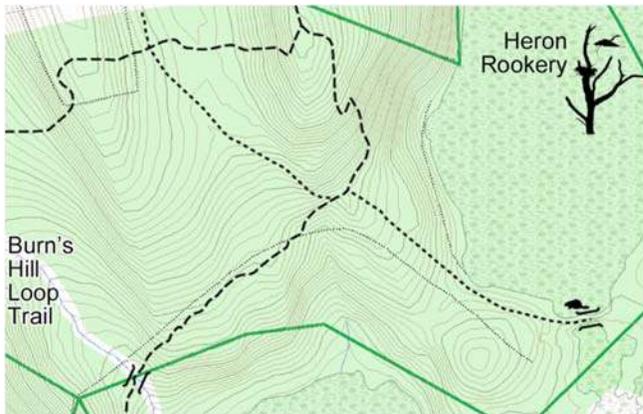


Early in the process, I decide on the map scale. Art as well as science play into this. My maps are outlined by the roads that enclose the trail network, giving them a sense of place. Making the finished image uniform length and width determines the scale.

Of course, one has to actually hike the trails to see what is really there. This is the fun part,

visiting all the trails identified earlier, discovering new trails, and exploring herd paths. The latter are unofficial trails, created by herds of animals (or people) taking the path of least resistance to somewhere desirable. My favorite definition is: a herd path forms if the number of passing feet is greater than nature's erasure mechanisms. My GPS tracks (shown in red) are added to the nascent map.

The engineer in me is not satisfied with a "sort of" accurate map. GPS tracks from consumer units are rarely accurate to better than 50 feet. So I go out again on the trails, tweaking the estimated trail to account for stream and wall crossings, distances to turns, local contours, or any features that help place the trail.



Finally, it's time to clean up the map. Trails without public access are removed. Remaining trails are defined mathematically so they can be rendered as fancy dashed lines by a PostScript engine. (A side benefit is the ability to calculate trail length. That is how I know there are over 70 miles of trails in town). The various map layers are eliminated or cropped as needed. Significant features are labeled in black. Less significant features are labeled in gray. The title, scale and legend are placed on the map. A picture, usually a trailhead sign, completes the map. With luck,

trails are not rerouted, eliminated or added for many years, allowing me to look at new maps for the Trust website and the next edition of the trail book.

No Man's Land - by David Ebitson

While driving through Westford or walking our trails, I have come upon areas that seem to be magnets for litter. They are usually field or conservation areas between developments or perhaps rotaries or roundabouts where litter such as coffee cups, beer cans and the infamous little nips seem to find a resting spot. I call these areas "No Man's Land".

One morning I entered a conservation land parking area and noticed a discarded set of old broken kitchen cabinets. In another conservation area I found old roof shingles and in another, an old washing machine.

All these items were removed by either Westford Conservation Trust volunteers or the Highway Department. This year's drought has all but stopped discarded plastic bottles and waste from their journey down Stoney Brook to the ocean. I have also noticed there is less roadside litter due to more people working from home and not commuting. Litter is the one source of pollution that we can prevent. Most people do not intentionally litter. We need to develop habits to prevent and remove litter from our roads, sidewalks, trails and the areas that are in "No Man's Land".

We can prevent litter with these easy steps:

1. Make an effort to pick up one piece of litter each day.
 2. Keep all trash and recycling container covers closed.
 3. Pick up after your pet.
 4. Always carry a litter bag on hikes or walks.
 5. Keep a container in your car for litter.
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6. When walking with your neighbors, suggest each one bring along a trash bag.
7. Have a large item to dispose of? Click here for a list of "[How to Recycle Most Everything](#)".
8. Pick up loose trash or litter after garbage collection day.
9. Report large-scale contractor litter to the police.
10. Remember litter attracts litter.
11. Above all, set a responsible example.

Westford Girl Scout Troop 85410 Silver Award by Ellen Spahr



Three cadettes from Westford Girl Scout Troop 85410 - Amelia, Ashley, and Nandana -selected a Pollinator Awareness project as their Silver Award Project. After speaking with leaders in the community including Diane and Rosemarie from the Conservation Trust, the Scouts realized pollinator decline was a real issue in Westford. They set out to do two things - increase pollinator habitat by planting a pollinator garden, and teaching the community ways they could help in their own yards. The girls pitched their project to the Kiwanis Club who generously funded half the project. The other half came from funds the Scouts raised selling Girl Scout cookies. To raise awareness in the community, the Scouts made "seed bombs" to plant in yards and gave them away at Muffins on Main.

A sunny area at the Abbot school was selected for the pollinator garden. It's a favorite spot of the school librarians where birdfeeders are placed, near the bus drop-off and voter entrance. School "historians" told the Scouts that a variety of flowers were scattered about the weeds - donations left over from the annual Garden Club plant sale and herbs that students had grown and planted. A central area around the birdfeeders was edged, cleared of grass and weeds, and compost added. One difficulty was determining flowers from weeds but most were given the benefit of the doubt. Trust members Diane and Rosemarie encouraged the Scouts to add native flowers that would bloom throughout the season so pollinators would have a steady source of food and flowers that were diverse in color and shape to attract a wide variety of pollinators. Transplants and new flowers were planted to add to the existing plants, and watered throughout the dry summer. During visits, the Scouts were amazed by the number and variety of pollinators! One visit mid-day in August they recorded 10 different species of pollinators including wasps, bees, beetles, dragonflies, hummingbirds, and butterflies. If you're at Abbot, stop by and take a look! A Pollinator Habitat sign marks the spot. Amelia, Ashley, and Nandana completed their Pollinator Awareness Girl Scout Silver Award in September.



Poetry Corner

When I am Among the Trees - by Mary Oliver



When I am among the trees,
especially the willows and the honey locust,
equally the beech, the oaks and the pines,
they give off such hints of gladness.
I would almost say that they save me, and daily.

I am so distant from the hope of myself,
in which I have goodness, discernment,
and never hurry through the world
but walk slowly, and bow often.

Around me the trees stir in their leaves
and call out, "Stay awhile."
The light flows from their branches.

And they call again, "It's simple," they say,
"and you too have come
into the world to do this, to go easy, to be filled
with light, and to shine."

Poem © 2006 by Mary Oliver

Autumn on Court Road watercolor by C. Cookingham
