



Westford Conservation Trust

Winter 2021 Newsletter



Trust Summer 2021 Activities Review



Invasive Plant Control Ongoing Effort (MAM) - For the 10th year in a row a few dedicated volunteers have been trying to control the very invasive Mile-a-Minute vine found here in Westford by hand pulling. The wet spring and summer contributed to a large crop of the plant at the three sites we've been monitoring. Two of the sites are near Stony Brook. Almost 100 pounds of vines were harvested and disposed of this past summer. Our main goal is to try and keep the seeds of the plant from getting into Stony Brook where they could be carried downstream. Seeds can stay viable for many years. Note MAM

(triangular leaves) along the Brook on the Acker-Dean-DeSilva Trail in the picture on the left.



Invasive Water Chestnut - This year was a very challenging fifth season for our Invasive Water Chestnut Project at Stony Brook. We are still concentrating on the area of Stony Brook as it flows near the town well toward Stony Brook Conservation Land.

This year we found several sites that were behind some of the edge plants along the brook which made it more difficult to survey, with one site in particular producing most of the invasive plants pulled. Also, multiple trees were down across Stony Brook due to storms and wet weather impeding water flow and access to the pull and survey sites.



Field Mowing - In an effort to keep Pageant Field, part of the Trust's [Prospect Hill](#) property and our Hildreth Meadow property, relatively free of invasive species and prevent reforestation, we perform an annual mowing in the fall. Thank you to the two volunteers who do this work.

Trails - Trail Steward volunteer members under the leadership of Bill Harman continue to maintain many of the trails here in Westford year-round. Another dedicated group of volunteers specializes in the heavy lifting by chainsawing and removing large trees that block our trails. This year the volunteers removed 91 trees. As you walk the trails and you see a downed tree across the trails, a submerged bridge, or some other issue, please click [here](#) to send an email to the trail stewards.



The Trust is continuing its trail re-blazing project. Some of the trails re-blazed this year by Trust members are Beaver Brook, Greystone, and Snake Meadow Brook trails. Main trails are marked with yellow blazes and connector trails (connecting between sections of the main trail) are blue. In some cases blue blazed trails feed off the main trail but end in a short distance where private land begins. Check the maps on our website to see if the trail you want to hike has a [colored trail map](#).

Calling All Authors - by Editor

Bet you have something to say to or share with other Trust members and friends. How about writing an article or a book review for this newsletter? We can't promise to make you famous or put your name in lights, but we can put it in CAPS or italics or BOLD...

We welcome your observations and photos...of the birds in your yard, the last birdfeeder you lost

to the Westford bear, your efforts thwarting the deer eating your hydrangeas, the last walk you took with your little kids and the treasures they found and delighted in along the way. Maybe a note and picture of the fairy garden your kids created in your garden, or your recommendation and critique of the latest binoculars you purchased. How about a Letter to the Editor or a response to an article you read in this newsletter?

Everybody's tired of Twitter. Take the time and [CLICK HERE](#), compose and select "Newsletter", and we'll be happy to include your contribution in a future newsletter.

Scout Projects - A 2021 Review by David Ebitson

Westford's woodland trails provided a place for many residents to find a moment of quiet solitude and relaxation while enjoying the beauty of nature's changing seasons. In the last year or two many of our trail structures started to show their age. Our trail signage was in need of maintenance and our trail headers needed trail posts. Our Scout troops again helped us to meet the challenge of working the trails ensuring we have a safe and enjoyable walk. For their dedication and commitment to our community we thank them. Below you will find several Scout projects finished this year.



At the Milot Road entrance to the Stone Arch Bridge Trail, the weathered kiosk fell to the ground and became covered with leaves. The old kiosk was removed and a new kiosk was built, painted and installed at the entrance. Anchored firmly into the ground with cement and painted to withstand our New England weather, it will provide our visitors with a map and history of the trail for years to come. Thanks to Scout Jack Sielian who completed this project.



The Peace Trail meanders through challenging terrain. This trail often requires waterproof footwear depending on the construction schedule of the local beaver population. Fortunately, we have a series of boardwalks and footbridges to assist navigation of wet and muddy areas. The northern trail section has a stream which occasionally becomes too wide to safely hop across. It was desperately in need of a permanent foot bridge. Girl Scout Troop 66305 selected this project and their efforts resulted with a safe crossing. Thanks to Troop 66305 for their commitment and dedication, this project was awarded the Girl Scout Silver

Award for the year 2021.



The Abbot Trail is a small but difficult trail which connects Cummings Road to the Abbot School grounds. The trail crosses a small ravine and stream which our recent spring and summer rainstorms reinforced the need for a footbridge to safely cross. The footbridge required a secure footing and railing as it crossed the small stream and ravine. Again, our Scouts rose to the occasion and this trail is now open for a safe and adventurous path to the Abbot School where in the spring you may see bluebirds utilizing the local birdhouses installed by former classmates of the Abbot School. Thanks to Scout project leader Zoe Musante.



The Kloppenburg Trail on Flagg Road is part of a wildlife corridor stretching from the center of town to Boutwell Brook. The trail has several streams that require crossing. A makeshift log bridge had become rotted with a large muddy area on each side. The structure was definitely in need of replacement. Our dedicated Scouts accepted the challenge of installing a new bridge. They also committed to blazing the trail and installing a new trail post and trail head map. The Kloppenburg Trail on Flagg road is now an excellent trail for all to enjoy nature at its best. Thanks to Scout project leader Gautham Anoop.



There are more than seventy-five miles of trails to enjoy in our Westford trail system. During fall and winter, a fresh coating of winter snow or a covering of autumn leaves make our trails difficult to follow for the novice hiker. The Westford Conservation Trust, with the approval of the Conservation Commission, embarked on a three year project to label our trails with blaze markings. Scheduling blazing on seventy-five miles of trails made us realize we needed help. The Shannon and the Jarvis trails are just two of many where the Scouts have assisted us. They have placed blaze markings on many of our trails and installed trail posts at entry points. Thanks to Scout Troop 195 and Troop Leader Andy Sagemen.

Black Bears Live in Westford - Are You Concerned? by Bill Harman

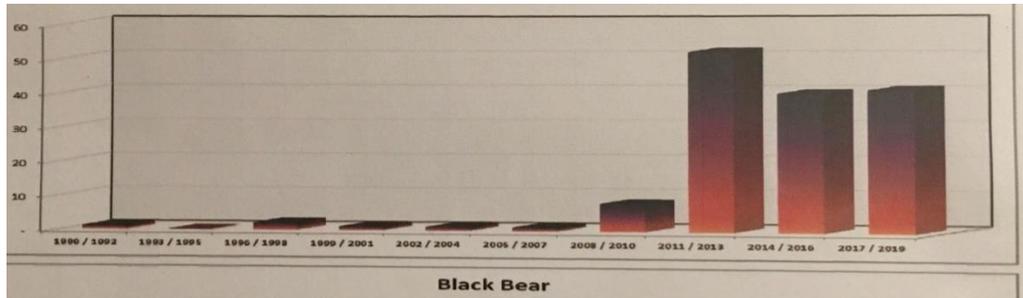


We know that black bears are living in Westford. Let's make a comparison between bears and cars. Every year there are many injuries to people in cars just in our one town, including multiple deaths. Meanwhile the number of injuries or deaths due to bears in Westford is zero. It was zero in all of this year, and actually zero in every year as far back in time as we know. It seems clear that it's far more dangerous to drive in a car than encounter any actual danger from black bears. To take me as an example. I have the nerve to drive in a car, and therefore I have no reason to be concerned about black bears when

hiking in the woods (which I do a lot).

The most recent wildlife article by Marian Harman (*Eagle Independent*, 5 Nov. 2021) includes a report by Rob Michael who saw a bear crossing Chamberlain Road heading for the Frances Hill Wildlife Sanctuary. The attractive Westford bear photo was sent to Marian with a bear report.

We know from the many reports like these, that bears have been living in Westford for a number of years. It's interesting to look back at these bear reports over time. Those reports, summarized in the following bar chart, show that bears were very rare in Westford until about 2011, which was the beginning of the current period in which bears became fairly common in Westford. Bar chart is by Murillo Fernandes.



Our Annual Visitor - by David Ebitson



I first met Tillie forty-two years ago when we moved to Westford. We chose a corner lot on a country road - a great location to raise children who loved the outdoors and fishing. The location was near a running stream and wetlands with a small pond across the road.

Tillie was slowly walking across the road, having just emerged from the local stream. I sensed she had made this trip before. I was sure she was headed to the small pond across from our house. Walking at a determined pace to reach her destination, she unexpectedly took a right turn into our yard. Was she lost or disorientated?



The early May sun was rising and was warming the soft earth and mulch in our flower beds. She effortlessly climbed over the curbstone and into our yard and slowly walked over to the flower beds and stopped to rest. I was sure after her rest she would continue across the road to the pond and have a lunch of duckweed or water lily. Did I mention Tillie was a snapping turtle with a diameter of approximately 24 inches and a jaw that could snap a two inch branch in half? Her hissing and jaw snapping caused the neighborhood dogs to give her a wide berth. That night I looked into our garden and Tillie had left a pile of mulch and dirt where she had been digging.



Watering the flower bed in August, I spotted baby snapping turtles popping out of the ground heading for the pond across the street. Tillie was a visitor every spring. Her clutch of babies, usually between thirty and seventy, was an annual event each summer. When they hatched out, they would always head for the pond across the road. Certainly Tillie knew a great location to raise her offspring.

Tillie's annual visits lasted for 41 years. Last year Tillie became a victim and was hit by a car on her way to our flower bed. Her shell was cracked and her back legs were injured. I picked her up and placed her in a cool area near the pond's edge where she peacefully remained. I never saw her again. Westford is home to eight species of the eleven turtles found in New England.

If your neighborhood has an area where turtles are annually crossing the road, the Westford Conservation Trust would like to know where. Send us a [short email](#) with the location and species, if known, to our website. Perhaps we can place Turtle Crossing signs in these reported locations.

What Is a CR - by Rich Strazdas

The Trust holds many conservation restrictions within Westford. It even grants CR's to other institutions. What exactly is a CR?

According to the Commonwealth, which reviews and certifies CRs, a conservation restriction is a legally enforceable agreement whose purpose is to ensure permanent protection of specific conservation values while permitting limited land uses consistent with the protection of said conservation values. As an example, Burn's Hill is a 42.5 acre CR protected property under the care and custody of the Westford Conservation Commission.



This broad definition encompasses the variety of restrictions and exceptions that CRs can specify. CRs share many features, but each one is unique: perhaps stone walls cannot be dismantled, or public access must be maintained. Maybe farming rights are ensured for a specified time. The CR can include any reasonable conditions, and the CR holder is obliged to honor those conditions.

An owner can grant a CR to another party simply to add an additional layer of protection to a parcel of land. Any change to the land requires permission from both the owner and the CR holder. This extra layer enforces the original owner's wishes.

The Trust owns 17 properties comprising 104 acres. Two of them have CRs assigned to Sudbury Valley Trustees. The Trust is sole administrator of 12 CRs comprising 159 acres and joint administrator of 15 CRs comprising 435 acres. That is over a square mile, or about 3.5% of town! This has been an active year for Trust CRs, with 7 more, and 209 acres, nearing completion. CRs usually come with baseline documentation that describes the property condition when the CR was created. They also often come with an endowment to support the perpetual administration.

Administration varies according to the property, but there are common duties. Boundaries are checked to ensure their integrity. Typical incursions are dumping of trash or yard waste, or even erecting private structures. Monitoring reports are added to the CR's dossier. Wetlands are to remain as is. Trails are cleared or established as the CR permits. Signs, bridges, boardwalks and blazes are added and maintained within the CR's conditions.

Does this sound like a lot of work? It is, but it takes place outdoors in natural surroundings! Is there a parcel that you frequent? One where you naturally pick up any trash? Would you like to become a property steward and receive training on simple monitoring techniques? Have we got a deal for you! Click [here](#) to Contact the Trust for fun with a purpose.

Earn Awards for Hiking the Trails of Westford - by Rich Strazdas

Are you one of the hundreds of Westfordians who have purchased our Trail Guide in the last few years? Our friends at Muffins on Main have been selling them like hotcakes (or scones). Would you like to explore new trails in new parts of Westford? This is the best time of year to experience fresh air. Mosquitoes are gone, ticks are minimal, the heat is past, the ground is dry. Get outside! Become a frequent hiker! The Westford Conservation Trust is continuing its recognition program for dedicated hikers like you.



Last fall we recognized a bumper crop of awardees in our inaugural year. Two levels of recognition are supported. Visit every one of the hiking areas in the 13th edition of the Westford Trails guide book, and you qualify for the Explorer Award sticker (at left). This is awarded on the honor system. Simply keep track of your progress on the handy sheet (page 71) near the back of the guidebook. When you have visited them all, send an email to: awards@westfordconservationtrust.org. Each family member can qualify for the award. At the next Trust annual meeting, we will applaud your effort and award a sticker that can be applied to any smooth surface. Or you can

arrange to receive it any time afterwards. Fame awaits you!



But wait! Westford has over seventy-five miles of documented trails. Visiting every trail network may not be enough! Why not hike every trail in town? Do so and receive the Redliner Award (at left). The same rules apply: use the trail guide sheet and the honor system. Redliners mark their maps with red lines as they finish each trail segment. Because the trails are complex networks, you have to hike some trails more than once to hike every trail, so you'll enjoy well over seventy-five miles of outdoor fun. See you on the trails!

Get to Know Backyard Invasive Plants - Japanese Knotweed



Next spring and summer, check your property for this highly invasive plant. You will see it on many of the roadsides and private properties here in Westford. It may have pretty white flowers in August and September but if not controlled, can take over and smother out the plants you want to keep. Japanese knotweed is a tall herbaceous perennial that can grow to over 10 feet in height. As with all members of this plant family, the base of the stem above each joint is surrounded by a membranous sheath.



The stems are smooth, stout and swollen at joints where the leaf meets the stem. Stems resemble bamboo. Although leaf size may vary, leaves are normally about 6 inches long by 3 to 4 inches wide, broadly oval to somewhat triangular and pointed at the tip. Minute, greenish-white flowers occur in branched sprays in summer that develop into small winged fruits. Seeds are triangular, shiny, and very small, about 1/10 inch long. If you have this plant on your property, take steps to control it. A web search will yield some ideas on how to control it. One way is to cut it down when it starts growing and keep cutting or mowing it throughout the year.

Emmet Land January Hike

Saturday January 8, 2022

10:00 – 11:30 am

Location: Emmet Conservation Land - meet at Trailside Way, off Powers Road in the town parking area off the cul-de-sac, Westford MA



With over 500 acres of protected open space, the Emmet Conservation Land and Mass Audubon's Nashoba Brook Sanctuary provide miles of trails to enjoy. Join Trust member Kate Hollister as we explore some of them in the quiet winter season. Snowshoes or traction cleats are recommended depending on conditions. Sociable dogs on leash are welcome. Walks are free of charge, no sign up required. For further information, call Kate at 978-392-6802

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Editor: Gerry DiBello



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