



## Westford Conservation Trust

### Spring 2022 Newsletter

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### **A Capstone\* Event - by David Ebitson**

This spring the Westford Conservation Trust was faced with two large projects to complete. The first project was clearing and re-opening a trail which follows both sides of the scenic Vine Brook from Powers Road to Liberty Road. The other project was creating a trail connecting our Hildreth Meadow property to Burns Hill, providing an enjoyable hike for the hardest of individuals.



Burns Hill Link.

The Lyberty Trail was unused for several years due to construction around Powers Road. Covid concerns focused our trail stewards' attention on maintaining Westford's existing seventy five miles of trails. There were over thirty-five fallen trees blocking the Lyberty Trail and the Burns Hill Link, two damaged footbridges across Vine Brook from heavy spring rainstorms, and trails hidden by several years of leaves. It looked like it might be another year before these trails would be completed. We were very fortunate that local resident Tom Provost cleared a path through a particularly large stone wall (the photo shows the wall section) to allow the manual trail construction of the

On April 4, 2022, the Westford Trust received an email regarding sponsorship of a Capstone event for three Westford Academy seniors.



We scheduled a Zoom meeting to introduce the three students to our supervising trail stewards and present our projects. The Capstone event was scheduled for five weeks, which included one week for school vacation. (The photo shows Michael Greene laser measuring a flooded trail for future installation of boardwalks).

We started on Monday, April 11th, working two projects simultaneously. One project was the Lyberty Trail with Academy seniors, Jacob Power and Jordan Kohen working with supervisors Ron Gemma and Dave Ebitson.

Academy senior Michael Greene worked on the Burns Hill Link with supervisors Gerry DiBello and Rich Strazdas, All supervisors were board members of the Westford Conservation Trust.

The Burns Hill Link Trail begins at Hildreth Meadows, a small pasture the Trust restored in 2018. It follows a Collins property trail easement granted in 2019 and crosses over Vine Brook and joins the Burns Hill Loop Trail.

There were many obstacles from Hildreth Street to Burns Hill. Michael Greene and supervisors Gerry DiBello and Rich Strazdas spent the first few days clearing rocks and stumps until they reached a yearly flooded section. Michael quickly learned how to use a laser instrument to measure the length of the flooded section of the trail easement for a required boardwalk.



Michael and the team moved years of accumulated small dead branches and rocks deposited by the glaciers retreating north thousands of years ago, and rocks left over from stone walls built by the early settlers of Westford when clearing their fields. (The photo shows the rocks along the Burns Hill Trail extension).

Out of the mud and past the rocks, they moved onto a trail where the wind had blown down 19 trees and tree branches over the years. The chainsaw crew came in and cut them up into manageable lengths for removal.

After a week the trail was cleared of trees and branches and was raked clean of debris to allow safe passage. The view of the adjacent pasture and the wooded area is an ideal site for observing wildlife.



Approaching the third week, Michael and the team reached the Burns Hill Trail, still clearing trees and branches. Finally they reached the end at the Burns Hill yellow loop trail. The Burns Hill Link was now ready for signage and blazing to assure no one would lose their bearings on a new trail walking from either direction. Blue paint was selected to designate a spur trail from Burns Hill to Hildreth Meadows. (The photo shows one of many trees blocking a trail).

Michael skillfully applied trail blazes in accordance with the Appalachian Mountain Club guidelines. Three trail posts were installed to indicate key entry points on the trail. Michael soon realized the challenges of farming years ago in Westford by the number of rocks that needed to be removed when digging a hole for a trail post. It was a skill he would use several more times in the following weeks. With the blazing completed, the Burns Hill Link will be utilized once the boardwalks are installed across the muddy sections of the trail.

[The Lyberty Trail](#) crosses Vine Brook and extends from Sugar Maple Lane off Powers Road to the end of Lyberty Road and back to Powers Road on the other side of the stream. With Jacob Power, Jordan Kohen, supervisor Ron Gemma, and later Michael Greene, we started the project at the trailhead on Sugar Maple Lane. There are four designated parking spots for trail hikers entering Sugar Maple Lane from Powers Road. The trailhead is on the right off the sidewalk.



The Lyberty Trail meanders behind the Sugar Maple Condominiums on conservation property. Ron Gemma, Jacob Power and Jordan Kohen worked on the trailhead, and carefully groomed the trail along the conservation land which passed the Sugar Maple Lane complex. (The photo shows Ron and Jacob confirming trail placement). A large amount of Multiflora Rose was pulled from this area of the trail and placed in a large contractor's bag for disposal. Jordan and Jacob used loppers to create a four-foot-wide by eight-foot-high doorway along the path to provide a clear walkway.

After several years of neglect due to construction and the pandemic, the wooded area and conservation land had suffered from litter blown in from Powers Road and Rte. 110. Jacob and Jordan cleaned the trail, wetlands and wooded area, collecting several contractors' bags of litter, Then we started walking east to assess the condition of the trail on either side of Vine Brook.



The trail on the north side of the stream runs along an esker which rises as you walk east. In this area there is an abundance of wildlife such as deer, beavers, numerous species of birds and even a few clusters of garden snakes possibly looking for one of the many frogs we spotted on the edge of Vine Brook. (The photo shows Jordon picking up trash on the trail).

We found seventeen trees and large branches which had fallen and blocked the Lyberty Trail. With the help of Jacob and Jordan, the trees were cut and moved off the trail using a logging canter for the large logs.

Next, the trail was cleared of leaves, ensuring safe passage as we walked along the top of the esker on the north side of Vine Brook.



After the trail was cleared, it was marked with a yellow blaze following the guidelines of the Appalachian Mountain Club. We started at Powers Road and headed east towards Lyberty Road. (the photo shows Jake rolling sections of a cut tree with a logging center).

Jordan and Jacob blazed the trail using a wire brush to clear dust and moss from the bark, and a blazing template of the standard two inch by six inch blaze as they headed east. Progress was quick as they marked the trail, providing assurance to novice hikers that they were still on the trail.

The April rainstorms provided a much needed day of rest for our team but caused a few log jams at the footbridge crossing. As we approached the Lyberty Way Industrial Park, we came to the first of two footbridges crossing Vine Brook at the east end.



At this time Michael Greene had finished the Burns Hill Link and joined us at the eastern end of Lyberty Trail. He was a welcomed addition. We began to clear the trail, accessing two footbridges and the trail west on the opposite side of the stream. The first footbridge was damaged, and the second footbridge was intact and usable. (The photo shows Jordan blazing a tree).

With our team of three seniors and two supervisors we started confirming the location of the trails and creating the trail corridor. Once we cleared the trail the team picked up another two large bags of litter blown into the wooded area and trails. Our Capstone students blazed the trails, providing clarity to the location of the two footbridges. The team then headed west on the other side of Vine Brook clearing several trees and one precarious leaner at the far end of the trail. They finished blazing the trail to the western most terminus.

The team found that beavers had dammed a small stream flowing into Vine Brook resulting in a large backup of water into woodlands on the south side of Vine Brook.



Unfortunately, the footbridge on the far west end had been damaged and washed away by the abundance of rainfall over the last several years. Perhaps this could be a new project? (The photo shows Ron and Jordan repairing a footbridge).

With Ron Gemma providing repairs to a damaged footbridge, the Lyberty Trail project was finished.

With approximately a week or so left of our Capstone event, our student volunteers were eager to contribute their additional time in new areas. A footbridge was in need of repair on the Richard Emmet Conservation Land crossing at the Nonset Stream. Several planks were rotted and damaged and a large tree branch had floated underneath the footbridge, further jeopardizing the structure. With new planks, drills, deck screws, a chain saw, rope and a farmer's jack, the team met at the trail entrance on Texas Road for repair work and carried all supplies and tools to the worksite down the Green Trail at Texas Road and then right onto the Blue Trail to the footbridge.



All rotted and damaged planks were removed. The log that was jammed under the footbridge was cut, tied to a rope, and Michael pulled it free. We replaced all damaged planks and tightened all loose boards and replaced missing and damaged side boards. Repairs were complete! (The photo shows Michael, Jordan, and Jacob repairing a footbridge).

But what was next? At the other end of town, four trail posts needed installation by our very experienced team. We met at the far end of Greystone to install four trail posts and provide continuity as trails crossed from one side of the road to the

other.

It was amazing how efficiently the students worked together as a team. With one more day left of their Capstone project, we received an email and we knew what the last day's project was a large tree that had fallen down at Grassy Pond. We needed a team who worked well together to move the logs and who were experienced with a logging canter. The next morning our Capstone students showed up on time with their work gloves and ready to work. (The photo shows a trail post installed at Greystone Trail).



We looked at the trail map, noted the tree location and off we went. Three trees in one group had fallen across the trail. We definitely had the right team in the right place. While the supervisor cut the trees up into manageable lengths using all safety precautions, the students removed all pieces off the trail and raked it clean.

The Trust recognizes the hard work and dedication of our Capstone Project senior along with our Trust mentors to complete these multiple projects in support of the community's use of Westford's Trails!

\* A high school Capstone project is a way for students to demonstrate the culmination of skills and knowledge gained through their academic career by completing a long-term, multi-faceted project. It's typically performed at the end of a student's high school career.

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## Abbot School Trail - by Bill Harman



The trail from Cummings Road to the Abbot School is useful for walking to and from the school, but it is also a pleasant woodland walk for everyone. There is a lot of variety in this woodland (old stone walls and interesting topography), and it has been used for nature walks for the Abbot School students.

It's an uphill walk from the road to the school. The uphill topography is part of Prospect Hill, the highest hill in Westford. Near Cummings Road the trail crosses a small brook where we are blessed with a new footbridge (photo), built last year as a scout project by Zoë Musante. Viewing the brook at different places we can see that it's just a trickle in the beginning and grows more and more in volume as it runs downhill.



The trail between the road and the school includes two different routes (see trail map). The main trail is marked with yellow blazes. I usually follow one route walking uphill and the other coming back.

Among the many native trees and plants are several alien invasive species, notably Bittersweet and Burning Bush. Around the new footbridge is a worrisome patch of bittersweet, including some huge vines.

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## Ecologies - A Game Review by Mark Minnucci

Admire gorgeous nature art as you build and destroy food webs



#### Publisher's Overview of *Ecologies*

- Players: 1-6
- Playing Time: 60-90 minutes
- Ages: 12+ (8+ rules incl.)

"In *Ecologies*, you build and maintain food webs in diverse biomes around the world. Each biome has a different ecology, and gives unique rewards when it is healthy and balanced. But watch out; your opponents may decide it's easier to disturb and degrade your ecosystems than nurture their own. Designed by a biology teacher, the game includes 77 unique organisms, 7 biomes, and beautiful

vintage Victorian art."

#### Mark's Review

We're all taught in school that plants consume sunlight, herbivores consume plants, carnivores consume herbivores, etc... This simple academic concept becomes surprisingly engaging, in the card game *Ecologies*. Beginning with a biome card such as a desert or tundra, players work to build a healthy food web from the ground up with plants and animals that thrive in that biome. Special cards allow you to enhance your ecosystem or to disrupt your opponents.

The best feature of *Ecologies* is its artwork. Any fan of historical nature art will be pleased to flip through or even display these cards. The gameplay is simple to learn and it's fun to negotiate card trades with your opponents at each turn. The game is portable and quick to set up.



*Ecologies* is a great teaching tool for pre-high school children, but a mediocre game for older children and adults. It requires a large play area for two players and it's not clear how six players could easily play together. The game's simplicity leads to a low replay value, even if you'll be building a unique set of ecosystems each time. The solo mode of the game has potential, but the publisher acknowledges in the rules that some cards won't make sense when playing alone.

Buy *Ecologies* (and its expansions) if you're looking for a creative way to get your children to learn about the natural world. Pass, if you're looking for a new adult game night favorite.

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## Nip The Knotweed - A Manual Control Method



Invasive Japanese Knotweed is taking over riverbanks, hillsides, roadsides and other disturbed soils. It spreads through roots and rhizomes, cuttings and seeds, crowding out native species and desired ornamental plants. Got knotweed on your property? Try out the [nip the knotweed technique](#), which is a series of cuts over several years. This is one of a few manual techniques that is showing promise at controlling knotweed without herbicide application. Start planning now to for your first cutting in May/June.

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## O'Brien Farm Gets a New Footbridge - by David Ebitson



The O'Brien Farm has been a part of Westford history going back to the 1800s. You will find the historic farm on a quaint country dirt road in the Parker Village section of Westford. Walking down the country dirt road with stone walls on each side, you can catch a glimpse of the historic barn through the trees as it was years ago. (The photo shows O'Brien Farm from upper Vose Road).

A conservation restriction (CR) granted to the Town of Westford and the Sudbury Trustees by the O'Brien family provides access to the many trails throughout the twenty-five acre farm. The woodlands and trails are a true birder's paradise with an annual population of over forty species of our feathered friends.



Pond Brook lazily flows through the farm providing home to a local beaver population and a cool summer drink to the occasional deer and red fox. In the late spring you may find many of the eight species of turtles indigenous to Westford laying their eggs, which usually hatch out in July through August. Watch out for the sunning snapping turtles; they may be guarding their clutch of up to fifty eggs. (The photo shows a horse and carriage crossing Pond Brook).

Pond Brook flows under Vose Road then enters into the O'Brien Farm and crosses an old horse and carriage watering by-pass. On a hot summer day years ago horses would walk into the stream and enjoy a cool drink and then continue across the stream and back up onto Vose Road.

Here the stream continues into the farm, meandering into a rich growth of wetland foliage. The foliage both filters and absorbs sediment from the water while slowing its flow to protect the fragile sandy stream banks as it turns towards Hart Pond.

Our new footbridge crossing the Pond Brook and the wetlands will require approximately an eighty foot span and a four foot wide walkway of molded fiberglass grated decking with a railing crossing the brook and wetlands. The footbridge will utilize threaded solid metal piping which will screw into the stream bed at a specified torque to provide a sturdy structure with minimal impact on the aquatic life and wetlands.



Members of our town committees, contributors, and land owner Charlie McColough, at the 2012 signing of the conservation restriction, realized the need to join the two parcels with a public footbridge. Throughout the years Charlie and the Sudbury Valley Trust have researched the location and construction for this much needed footbridge. (The photo shows the celebration of the O'Brien Farm conservation restriction by contributors and participants in 2012).

We wish also to thank the Historical Commission, Parks and Recreation, Conservation Commission, Westford Land Preservation Foundation, Sudbury Valley Trust and many others for their assistance in making this new pedestrian footbridge possible.

You may see the concept drawing of the new footbridge at the kiosk at the O'Brien Farm Trail Head. We are looking forward to the O'Brien Farm footbridge completion at the end of 2022.

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## Tom Paul Memorial Guided Walk

**Saturday June 4, 2022**

**9:00 – 10:30 am**

**Location:** Upper Tom Paul Trail - Park in the rear of the Westford Town Hall, 55 Main Street, Westford, MA. Meet your guide in the parking lot.



Join Trust Directors for a commemorative walk in honor of Tom Paul. Tom is seen on the left in the photo presenting a Trust Scholarship at the Academy on Senior Scholarships Night in 2016. Tom was a long-time Westford environmental activist who passed away in October 2021. The C. Thomas Paul trail, named in honor of the Trust's President from 1988 to 1995, was marked and maintained for years by Tom and his children. Tom moved to Connecticut in 2002 but continued to maintain close ties as well as presenting our Trust scholarship to graduating WA seniors every year.

The trail has very little level walking. Outbound is all downhill and inbound all uphill. Sturdy shoes are recommended. Sociable dogs on leash are welcome. Call Lenny Palmer at (978) 392.9876 for more information.

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