



Westford Conservation Trust

Fall 2022 Newsletter

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You're Invited to the Westford Conservation Trust Annual Meeting - Wednesday, November 16th, 2022, 7:00pm at Parish Center for the Arts, Westford

Members and friends are invited to join us for our our Annual Trust Meeting. We hope you can join us! Refreshments will be served. A brief Trust business meeting will precede our guest speaker who will start his talk at 7:30pm.



Guest Speaker – Ron McAdow – Naturalist, Author and Photographer

With his first book, *Nature*, Ralph Waldo Emerson created the founding text of American transcendentalism. Ron has recently annotated a new edition of *Nature*, and illustrated it with his photographs. In his presentation Ron will read highlights from Emerson's essays accompanied by photographs of the natural world that Ron has taken.

Ron moved from his native state of Illinois to Massachusetts in 1971. Ron authored *The Concord, Sudbury, and Assabet Rivers: A Guide to Canoeing, Wildlife, and History*, and *The Charles River: Exploring Nature and History on Foot and by Canoe*, as well as numerous other books, both fiction and nonfiction. He has worked as a teacher, instructional designer, and served as Executive Director of Sudbury Valley Trustees for 10 years. *Emerson's Nature* is his most recent project in writing and publishing. Ron will be happy to field general questions about nature and wildlife after his talk.

Invasives Committee Summer Wrap-up



Invasive Plant Control Effort (MAM) - For the 11th year in a row, a few dedicated volunteers have been trying to minimize the very invasive Mile-a-Minute vine found here in Westford at four known sites. Also, we collaborate with the Littleton Conservation Trust to control MAM at one site in Littleton. Volunteers hand-pulled 24 pounds of vines and disposed of them this past summer. As always, 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. The dry summer this year contributed to the small amount of plants harvested compared to wetter years.

Ongoing Invasive Water Chestnut Control - Using kayaks, two volunteers continued our invasive Water Chestnut control project at Stony Brook this past year with a total of 73 pounds collected.

A Walk in the Woods! - by David Ebitson

In today's fast paced world there is one place where you can relax, improve your well-being, lower your stress level and clear your mind. You will actually feel better with the clean air and increased oxygen

which trees abundantly provide. A short walk in the woods will improve your health and fitness. In Japanese its called "Shinrin-Yoku" or "Forest Bathing". The Town of Westford is fortunate to have approximately seventy-five miles of scenic woodland trails. Westford trails have one hundred and four structures, with footbridges, boardwalks, signage, and informational kiosks to maintain.



This year's early rain and exceptionally warm summer weather spurred an overgrowth of brush and weeds on our trails which needed to be cleared. The task of maintaining our trails and structures was undertaken by a dedicated group of Trail Stewards, Westford Scouts, and many other volunteers. The photo shows the Stone Arch Trail.

Over the years, Scouts have replaced footbridges on the Peace Trail, Acker Trail, Abbot Trail and the Kloppenburg Trail. They also replaced the kiosk on the Stone Arch Trail. I cannot leave out Cub Scout Pack 96 for clearing the Flaherty Trail near

Mystery Springs and Tadmuck, and also repairing many of our trail signs.



We recently mentored three Westford Academy students for their Capstone projects. The students and mentors rehabilitated the Lyberty Trail and the Hilldreth Meadows to Burns Hill Trails over a five-week period. The Lyberty Trail had been closed for several years due to construction on Powers Road. The students removed sixteen trees, cleaned the overgrown brush and even repaired a footbridge. They also blazed the trails to assure those enjoying the woodland walk stayed on the trail. The trails on both sides of Vine Brook now provide a scenic walk in the woods. The photo shows Michael Greene, Jacob Power, and Jordan Cohen repairing a footbridge.



Our Westford Corporate volunteers from Ribbon Communications (shown in the photo) have volunteered for two consecutive years providing community service to the Trust. They have cleared and cleaned the following trails; Village View in Forge Village, Veterans Memorial, the Tom Paul Trail, and the Tadmuck Trail.



Volunteers recently cleaned and cleared the Stepinski Trail with the entrance behind the Graniteville Baseball fields which follows Stony Brook through the woodlands in Graniteville. This trail was impassable in many areas obscuring the scenic views of Stony Brook. Once cleared, the trails were blazed and marked providing guidance to novice hikers that they are following the trail. The photo shows Natalie and Paul Sandore and Andy Mallio at the Stepinski Trail.

The MacQuarrie Trail is a shortcut to Westford Academy from Macquarrie Road. The trail was completely blocked by overgrowth this year. "The Boys Battalion", a new volunteer family group, did an excellent job

clearing this trail. Due to their efforts the shortcut to Westford Academy is now open again.

If you would like to contribute a few hours per week to help maintain our network of trails or join our Tuesday morning walks, contact us on our website at WestfordConservationTrust.org.

If you would like to enjoy fresh air and experience “Shinrin-Yoku”, go take a “walk in the woods”!

Something to Chew On - by Mark Minnucci

Can a team of goats help manage Westford’s invasive plants?

You may already know that Westford backyards and conservation land have outbreaks of invasive plants such as Mile-a-Minute, Knotweed, and Bittersweet. But what you may not know is that a team of Conservation Trust volunteers go out on summer mornings to Westford’s worst hot spots to pull these plants and prevent their spread. Our volunteers do fantastic work, but is there a better way to manage invasives in town?

When deciding how to deal with an invasive plant outbreak, we look at two possibilities: targeted treatment and broad treatment. Targeted treatment is exactly what we do today. Volunteers go to a site, hopefully find the invasive plants, pull them one-by-one, and repeat indefinitely. With broad treatment, heavy-duty landscaping equipment and/or chemicals are used to clear an entire area of both native and invasive plants. Just like the targeted treatment, broad treatment needs to be repeated until re-planted native species can take hold.

Both of these treatment options can be effective in the short-term, but both have their drawbacks. Targeted treatment by volunteers is very environmentally-friendly and avoids unintentional destruction of native plants and wildlife. But this requires dedicated individuals to volunteer their time, do yardwork in the hot sun, and expose themselves to ticks, poison ivy, and thorns. Broad treatment on the other hand is effective at controlling very large properties, but can have severe impacts to native plants and wildlife that we don’t want to disturb.



The Westford Conservation Trust learned that in some cases, it makes more sense to consider a middle-ground solution...goats!

The process works like this:

1. A natural area is temporarily encircled by an electric fence.
2. A team of goats is brought to the site and put within the fenced area.
3. The goats eat the weeds and invasive species that are up to six feet off the ground.
4. The goats remain overnight and continue for several days until

the site is clear of plants.

If goats clear a site of all plants, why are they better than the other treatment options? First, unlike machine options, goats don’t consume fossil fuels or emit significant greenhouse gasses. Second, unlike both machine and chemical options, goats are more gentle on the ecosystem than large-scale landscaping equipment and chemicals. Third, unlike manual pulling, goats sterilize the majority of seeds

that they digest, which reduces the likelihood of invasive plants re-emerging.

Regardless whether broad treatment, targeted treatment, or goat treatment is applied to a site, the area will need to be re-seeded with native plants to further help prevent the re-emergence of new invasives.

This past summer, the Trust kicked off a trial using goats to manage invasives at a Westford Conservation Commission property off Grey Fox Lane. Want to see the goats in action? The team at *WestfordCAT* filmed a segment on our initiative that you can view by clicking [here](#).

Hildreth Meadows Trail - by Bill Harman



The Trust owns a lovely meadow along [Hildreth Street](#), shown on the accompanying map. The meadow is also the beginning of a long trail, which offers a variety of scenic New England landscapes. For energetic hikers the trail goes all the way to the top of Burn's Hill.

Near Hildreth Street is a small parking area, large enough for about 6 cars. The driveway going in from Hildreth Street is relatively small, so it might be helpful to look for certain nearby addresses. On Hildreth Street

going away from Westford Common, the driveway is on the left and is located immediately after 48 Hildreth Street.

The Trust mows the meadow yearly to keep it as an open meadow. The beginning of this trail is not immediately obvious. You can do it this way: walk through the open meadow going away from Hildreth Street, and walk to the end of Hildreth Meadow where there is an opening into a separate mowed field, having a different owner (Hildreth Hills). The trail begins at the far-left corner of Hildreth Meadow. It's marked with a trailhead post.

The beginning of the trail is wet at times, and is a location where a boardwalk may be installed in the future. After 100 yards it turns right through a large stone wall, which a volunteer with heavy equipment spent a lot of effort to breach. You then come to a very attractive long walk with a stone wall on your right side, beyond which is the large mowed field mentioned above (Hildreth Hills). That field is Conservation Land, and land on your left is also Conservation Land. Along this attractive long trail is a notable very large Sassafras tree.

The woodland section of the trail eventually leads to the open area of the power lines where, due to constant sunlight, it's difficult to keep the trail clearly visible. The trail goes straight until reaching, but not crossing, a stone wall where it turns left and follows the wall. At the trail's low point across a tributary of Vine Brook, it can be very wet at times. The trail continues along the wall until crossing a dirt road. The wall becomes less distinct, but a few blue blazes on boulders help mark the way straight and to the right. You will see a trail post where the trail enters the woods on your right. At that point it is not much farther to the Burn's Hill trail.

When I am hiking on this trail, I usually avoid that wet area by using a bridge (marked on the map above)

that the power company uses on its dirt road. Having crossed Vine Brook using that bridge, I continue left on the dirt road until it crosses the wall and the blazed boulders lead to the trail post entering the woods near Burn's Hill.

Best Ways to Preserve Nature While Hiking



More people than ever are taking advantage of the many health benefits that you get from hiking and that's putting a lot of stress on the natural world. These days everyone needs to find safe ways to get outside, especially people who are working from home. Hiking is a safe outdoor activity that nearly everyone can do, and it's free, which makes it a fantastic option for those who want to get outside. But now that even more people are hiking, the natural world is in danger. Make sure that you're doing these things every time you hike to help preserve the natural

world around you:

Don't Bother The Animals

It's very common to see animals as you hike. You might see deer, rabbits, opossums, or other animals depending on where you are hiking. It's important that you never approach any animals that you see when you're hiking. Don't offer them your food, and don't leave food out for them either. The food that was made for you could make them sick if they eat it. Keep your distance from the animals. Take photos if you would like to commemorate the moment, but that's it. For your safety and theirs you shouldn't interact with any animals when you're hiking.

No Shortcuts

Part of the fun of hiking is feeling like you're exploring a new land, but you shouldn't actually make your own shortcuts or paths. Follow the hiking trails that have been created for hikers and don't try to make your own path through the woods and fields around you. If you go off on your own, you can cause a lot of damage by trampling plants or ripping them out at the roots. You can also damage bushes and shrubs and scare animals away from their nests and babies. Stick to the hiking path provided.

Don't Leave Food Behind

It's amazing how many hikers who care about the natural world don't think twice about littering. Leaving food waste behind is littering and it's bad for the environment. Even if you think that your apple cores, orange peels, and other food scraps will decompose it's not fine to throw them on the ground. All of your trash should be taken with you. Food scraps decompose and can attract bacteria that can make those scraps toxic to animals eating them.

Always Leash Your Dog



Dogs are fun hiking companions who enjoy the outdoors as much as you do. But, it's important to always keep your dog leashed and under your control. Dogs that are running off leash can wreak havoc in the natural world. They might chase or kill small animals, or chase or bite other hikers. They can dig up plants and grass, eat leaves and scratch up tree trunks. If you do bring your dog hiking, remember to always keep it on a leash.

Don't Take Things

It's perfectly normal to want to pick up some beautiful leaves that you see when you're hiking in the fall or pick some wildflowers during a summer hike. You might spend some time by a river or lake looking for rocks that look like hearts or some other shape. But you should never take anything from nature home with you. Leave those items in the natural world where they belong.

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Nutty Westford - by Rich Strazdas

Now that I've got your attention, let's talk nuts. Not peanuts or pe-cahns. This isn't Georgia. Not chestnuts. You'll find chestnut trees here but no chestnuts; that's a sad story of an invasive fungus. This article will be limited to two species of nuts that can be harvested in late summer or early fall.

You've heard of hickory nuts (photo below, left), but probably never tasted them. Removing the nutmeat is not easy without shattering them, so they are not sold in stores. Let the squirrels, turkeys and deer have them. Westford is home to the shagbark hickory, *Carya ovata*. In fact, the state champion tree is still growing beside the trail in the Trust's Prospect Hill Wildlife Sanctuary. And the newly developed Burn's Hill Link trail has fine examples of this species, as seen in the photo. In early August, the hickory tree drops its nuts. They are encased in a hard shell inside a thick green fleshy husk. I have not tried eating them. Preparation involves husking, drying, cracking and picking out the nutmeat, which is buttery and sweet enough to not need roasting. That's a lot of effort for a few delicious calories.

A more familiar nut is the black walnut, *Juglans nigra*. This is also native to North America. Solitary specimens occur throughout town. These photographs were taken along Fisher Way near the Abbot School in mid September. The visible husk or sheath, green and thick (picture below, right), encases the hard walnut shells we all know, just like the hickory. Preparation is similar to hickory, but extracting the nutmeat is somewhat easier. And the raw nut's bitterness is improved by roasting, which is how we get those nuts in the store.

Like oaks and acorns, wild nut trees have mast years in which they produce far more nuts than usual. This helps propagate the species, as animals cannot eat the entire crop. The critters then have large litters which unfortunately suffer the following year when food is more scarce.

Note that raw nuts should be consumed in small quantities, as they contain compounds that are difficult to digest. That's the extent of my knowledge of wild nuts in town. Did I misspell that? Oh, nuts!



December 2022 and January 2023 Guided Walks

Please check our [website](#) or [Facebook page](#) for details on our these guided walks.

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The Westford Conservation Trust Newsletter is published bi-yearly in the spring and fall
