



Westford Conservation Trust

Spring 2023 Newsletter

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Letter From Our New Trust President - Rich Strazdas



Welcome from Rich Strazdas, your new Westford Conservation Trust president. You may have seen my name as Saturday hike leader, or trail book editor. Now I have stepped up to fill the shoes of outgoing president, Dave Ebitson. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Dave for his strong leadership, dedication & work ethic. We truly admire the enthusiasm & passion he brought to the Trust during his tenure as president. Luckily, Dave has agreed to continue as a board member and as chair of our Land & Trails committee.

What is my background story? I come from the software industry. (Okay, yawn! But it helps with data analysis and map making.) I have been a hiker for over fifty years, exploring the White Mountains and wherever my travels take me. New Hampshire 4000-footers? Done. Twice. Redlining is my current passion. This means hiking every bit of the 1420 miles of trails in the Whites. I'm 69.94% done (yes, there's a spreadsheet for that) which sounds like a lot, but it also means over 400 miles to go.

Section	Miles			
	Total	To Do	Complete	%
Mt. Washington and the Southern Ridges	128.3	40.4	87.9	68.5%
The Northern Peaks and the Great Gulf	132.7	59.2	73.5	55.4%
The Franconia, Twin, and Willey Ranges	159.4	1.6	157.8	99.0%
The Carrigain and Moat Regions	86.9	4.2	82.7	95.2%
Cannon and Kinsman	62.9	0.0	62.9	100.0%



I found the Trust in 2009 when family kept me in Westford most weekends and I wanted to update the best available trail maps in town. "Hello, my name is Rich, and I'm a mapoholic." The Snake Meadow Trail map in process is shown in the picture. I found a passionate community that welcomed me and was glad to accommodate my volunteer spirit. I learned about trail maintenance, blazing, invasives, stream monitoring, public relations, website maintenance, town liaisons, property monitoring, Boy/Girl Scout mentoring, running meetings, taking minutes, ... Hey, have I been training for the presidency?

Dave's legacy includes keeping trails clear of blowdowns, completing the blazing of trails, advocating for property donation, and sustaining the objectives of his predecessors. Where will I make my mark? Perhaps in membership and volunteer recruitment. Perhaps in interpretive trails. Dr. Seuss said, "You have brains in your head. You have feet in your shoes. You can steer yourself any direction you choose." I like the walking/hiking analogy.

Where will you steer yourself? Do you have a few hours per week or month to share your passion of hiking or conservation with like-minded individuals? The worst that could happen is you spiral into the vortex known as volunteerism and maybe end up president of your local land trust. I think that's possible.

Free Tree Seedlings



We still have a few tree seedlings left over from our Earth Day Celebration give-away that took place at our Westford Conservation Trust table on the Westford Common. The seedlings are mostly Red Oak with a couple of White Spruce. Seedlings come with printed planting and care instructions. To get your seedling trees, leave a message for Diane at 978-692-3298 or email [here](#).

Spring Pools by Marian Harman



Spring has sprung in a way typical of New England: on and off rain, alternating warm and cold days, occasional spits of snow. This is the time of year that amphibians most love. On rainy nights at the end of March or early April that are 40 degrees or above, frogs and salamanders emerge from their winter hibernation, and respond to the mating urge. They are called by memory to travel to the places of their birth.

Wood frogs (shown in the photo) and mole salamanders return to their natal vernal pools. Vernal pools are relatively shallow, isolated pools. These pools usually dry up in the summer. The advantage of vernal pools to wood frogs and salamanders is that vernal pools harbor no fish which could eat their eggs.

In winter, wood frogs hibernate under wet leaves in the forest, and survive in a frozen state through a complicated chemical process—frogsicles! When the first warm rains hit them, they seemingly miraculously “melt” and return to their normal state. When reaching their vernal pool, males start to call. Their croaks are low and sound like quacking ducks. They are calling both to establish territory in the pool, and to call a mate. Once mating is accomplished, females deposit a large egg mass, usually partially attached to brush or branches in the pool. Many wood frog egg masses may be put in the same area until a large, extended mass can be seen floating on the pond’s surface.

Mole salamanders also breed in vernal pools. These animals spend most of their lives in damp holes deep underground (hence the name “mole” salamander). The most common of these mole salamanders is the Spotted Salamander, a 5-7” long, sturdy, shiny black salamander with bright yellow spots. As with wood frogs, spotted salamanders emerge from hibernation on the first rainy night in late March or early April when temperatures reach at least 40 degrees. They too, migrate to the vernal pool of their birth. If conditions are perfect, spotted salamanders and wood frogs may all migrate to their vernal pools on one particular night. This phenomenon is known as “Big Night”. Spotted salamanders deposit their eggs in small, compact bundles. The eggs are enclosed in a transparent, white, or greenish sack that is attached underwater to a branch.

It’s fun to shine a flashlight into a vernal pool to try to see these animals at night, and then to look for egg masses a few days later during the day. Eggs hatch a few weeks later, and the tadpoles and larval

salamanders can be seen swimming in the pool during the day. These babies will feed and grow up to their adult form within two months and then leave the pool as adults, continuing the circle of life.

The Bumblebee Project - From SVT's Wren Newsletter

The [Sudbury Valley Trustees](#) hold land of their own as well as conservation restrictions on land in other Massachusetts towns. For instance, they hold a conservation restriction on the Trust's Prospect Hill and Frances Hill properties. They have many [hiking trails](#) on their properties. Their Spring 2023 newsletter contains an article titled: *Spotlight On...Going Native* that is excerpted here.

A garden can be filled with native plants that attract buzzing bees, but this does not guarantee that it provides habitat for at-risk species. The bees you see are often common bumblebees or even honey bees, the latter of which were imported from Europe and are considered livestock. While honey bees play a role in large crop production, they do not support our native plants and they compete with native pollinators for floral resources.

The [Metrowest Conservation Alliance](#) and SVT have launched a project to conserve native pollination systems by encouraging everyone to add some of the specific plants required by at-risk native pollinators to their yard. The Bumble Bee Project is based on the research of Dr. Robert Gegear, a professor of biology at UMass Dartmouth.

If your yard is sunny to partly sunny and has medium-to-dry soil, you can add plants that support at-risk bees. To learn more about the Bumble Bee Project and recommended plants, click [here](#). Foxglove beardtongue (*Penstemon digitalis* pictured below left) and Wild bergamot (*Monarda fistulosa* pictured below right) are two of the many flowering plants that support at-risk bees such as the golden northern bumble bee.



Calling All Volunteers by Rich Strazdas



The Westford Conservation Trust is a private, non-profit all volunteer group. The Trust is not affiliated with the Westford Conservation Commission but we do work closely with them. Generous donations from our members and friends fund the Trust. For any non-profit organization, volunteer recruitment is a perennial challenge. Sometimes individuals or corporations come out of the woodwork to offer their time and skills. More often, it's the usual suspects who show up to do the nuts and bolts work of trail maintenance, invasive clearing, property monitoring, etc.

Recruitment involves attracting volunteers whose values align with the Trust's values. Yet those are precisely the people who join as members, attend webinars and hikes, visit us on the Westford Common on Earth Day, etc.

The most precious commodity any of us can offer is our time. You've heard the expression: Well, there's an hour of my life I'll never get back. How many times have you wasted an hour, or half a day? "Me time" is important, but so is engaging with your family, your friends, your community. Are you already overcommitted with a couple organizations (like me)? Then you get a pass. If not, consider how you can make a difference in another person's life, in your environment, in your community. Someone famously said, "Ask not what your Conservation Trust can do for you. Ask what you can do for your Conservation Trust." Or something like that!

Of course, the Trust would be thrilled to have a standing army of volunteers to accomplish and expand our goals. I would be equally happy to see increased volunteerism in all aspects of our community: libraries, Scouts, youth services, senior services, climate action, and so much more. Westford is already blessed with many organizations that do incredible work. Find one whose values align with yours, knock on their door, and see what develops.



What can a small group of passionate citizens do to "think globally, act locally" for conservation? Quite a bit! Your Westford Conservation Trust has its fingers in a lot of pies:

- Act as land trustees of 105 acres in town.
- Directly administer 312 acres of Conservation Restrictions and jointly administer another 435 acres with the town.
- Publish, and regularly revise a town Trail Guide.
- Host guided trail walks free-of-charge to all.
- Practice invasive species control, notably for mile-a-minute, water chestnut, and porcelain berry on town owned land.
- Remove downed trees from all trails in town (almost 500 trees removed since 2018).
- Clear and blaze trails in town, including all publicly accessible trails.
- Coordinate trail cleanups with local businesses and small groups of residents.
- Sponsor Boy and Girl Scout projects, including trail clearing and boardwalk and bridge construction.
- Mentor high school students in their Capstone projects.
- Fund college scholarships to Westford Academy students planning to pursue conservation-related fields of study.
- Provide a 4th grade birding program in an elementary school.
- Conduct ad-hoc water quality testing on town waterways and bodies of water.

There is no signing bonus, but the training is priceless! Click [here](#) to contact us about becoming a volunteer.

Garlic Mustard - One of Westford's Invasive Plants*

What is it?

Garlic mustard is a biennial (it takes two years to complete its reproductive cycle) herb that was first brought here by European settlers for culinary and medicinal purposes, but now it's a rampant, aggressive, invasive weed that threatens Westford's fields, woods, conservation land, and neighborhoods.

What does it look like?

It depends on its stage of growth. First-year plants form a rosette (photo on left, below) of round - or heart-shaped leaves close to the ground that smell like garlic when crushed. Second-year plants send up 5-36" tall stems topped by small, white flowers (photo on right, below) that appear in late April. In time, leaves start losing color, the garlic smell fades and the flowers disintegrate, giving way to long, thin seed pods filled with tiny black seeds. After the seeds are dispersed, the plant dies, but the seeds will live on.

Where does it grow?

It prefers the dappled shade of forest edges, and moist, shady areas near water. But it has cunningly adapted to full sun, and now grows along roadsides, train tracks, in places where the soil has been disturbed, and anywhere it wants.

How does it spread?

One plant can produce up to 6,000 seeds that can remain viable in the soil for up to 7 years! Seeds can be spread by birds, deer, squirrels and horses, on the bottom of people's shoes, vehicle tires, and the blades of mowing equipment. Streams, heavy rains and wind carry seeds to new sites. That's why it's crucial to pull the plants before they go to seed.

Why is it so bad?

A few plants on your property that go to seed will explode exponentially into a serious infestation over time. If left to grow unchecked, they can completely cover an area in 4-5 years - and each of those plants will be producing thousands of seeds!. Garlic mustard eliminates native plants which wildlife depend on, and it can stunt the growth of native trees. No animals will eat it, so it has no predators - except for educated, vigilant citizens who pull it out. Even worse, garlic mustard roots produce a chemical that prevents other plants from growing in that soil!

How can you control it?

Pull it as soon as you spot it! It's most effective to remove as many plants as possible in April or May - before they go to seed and spread. They pull out of the ground easily with a gentle tug; make sure to grab the whole root or they will re-sprout. For larger areas, cut or mow plants close to ground level before flowers and seeds are produced. You'll have to do this repeatedly, because they will try to re-flower again and again. Garlic mustard is tenacious.

How do I dispose of it?

Rosettes can be pulled and left to dry on the ground in the sun to kill the roots, but don't make a big pile or

the roots can stay moist and grow again.

*This article is from a fact sheet produced by the Town of Lincoln, MA



May and June 2023 Guided Walks

Spring Bird Walk on Saturday May 13, 2023, 7:30 - 9:00 am



Join Westford Conservation Trust birder Lenny Palmer for an early morning ramble at Westford's birding "hot spot", Emmet Conservation Land. We will search Nashoba/Kennedy Pond and wetland areas on Town and Mass Audubon conservation lands for returning migrants and nesting resident birds. Bring binoculars and wear sturdy shoes as land can be rocky and hilly in places. No dogs please. **Park** and meet Lenny in the Town parking lot at the end of Trailside Way off Powers Road. Walk is free of charge and no sign-up is required. For more information, contact Lenny at 978-392-9876

A Walk to Mystery Spring on Saturday, June 3, 9 - 10:30 am



This walk will be led by Trust Director Gerry DiBello, and will be held rain or shine. The trail offers views of glacial eskers and wetlands that are abundant with wildlife in spring. Mystery Spring has been known since at least 1855. Park and meet Gerry at the cul-de-sac end of Dana Drive. Walk is free of charge and no sign-up is required. For more information, contact Gerry at 978-692-9137.

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

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



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