

**Westford Conservation Trust
Newsletter**

Spring 2024



It's The Westford Conservation Trust's 40th Anniversary!



Come walk with us as the Trust participates in this year's Apple Blossom Parade and we celebrate our 40th Anniversary! The parade will kick off on **Saturday May 18th at 10:00 AM** (sharp, rain or shine) and begins at the intersection of Main Street & Graniteville Road and ends at the Abbot School on Depot Road.

Trust members plan to gather prior to the start of the parade around 8:30 AM. We would love our fellow trust members and friends to walk with us to celebrate this huge milestone in our long history! Feel free to be creative with signs or art or costumes! For questions or more info, contact Diane at 978-692-3298 or email us at info@westfordconservationtrust.org We plan to have an information/membership table as well at the carnival grounds. Come say hello!

See Something - Say Something! - by Rich Strazdas

As wonderful as the Trust's volunteers are, they are not everywhere all the time. Westford has 80 miles of public trails. The Trust owns 17 properties with 105 acres. The Trust administers 18 Conservation Restrictions (CRs) with 312 acres. The Trust jointly administers 15 CRs with 435 acres. The Trust has 22 trail easements with miles of trails. Crowdsourcing (noun: obtaining information or input into a task or project by enlisting the services of a large number of people) is the way to go.



What can you do? If you see something that looks amiss, and you can provide an immediate fix, just do it. While hiking a trail, carry a produce bag for trash. Forgot to bring a bag? Sometimes there is enough trash that a bag is provided for you! And micro trash doesn't belong on the trail. The end of a candy wrapper, a twist tie, or a decomposing plastic container are all eyesores. Not everyone can pack out the amount of trail trash like the subject in the photo!



Is there a branch or small limb fallen onto the trail? Move it to the side. You will be helping others, and yourself as well on the return trip. This may be the limit of what you can clear by hand:

What if it is too big to handle on your own? Say something! The Trust has two ways for you to report trail issues:

<https://westfordconservationtrust.org/contact-us/> can be used for Trails and Trail Maintenance issues. Or, you can simply email info@westfordconservationtrust.org.

When possible, provide a photo and be specific about the location.

Here are the ABC's of recently reported issues:

Example 1: Canoes (owner unknown) found on northern Peace Trail. These may be on Trust property or town property or private property. Once we know about it, we can make that determination. Private property items should never be stored on Trust or Conservation owned land.



A) A picture is worth a thousand words.
B) GPS coordinates (from a phone app) are helpful to anyone investigating a problem: -71.42647, 42.57938



C) Are you skilled with photo editing? Grab a screenshot of the online Trust map and edit it to show where you were (the sample map shows a **red arrow** where the problem was found).



Example 2: Tree down on Nashoba Brook trails, on the old rail bed past the trail to the sketchy bridge

A) Again, a picture is worth a thousand words
B) GPS coordinates (from phone app) are helpful: -71.42037, 42.53110
C) Edit a trail map to show the location (red cross marks location).

Other issues worth reporting:

- Damage to a bridge or boardwalk. Maybe a plank or two needs replacing.
- A kiosk in disrepair or a sign has fallen down.
- Trail blazes have faded or a tree with a critical blaze has fallen down.

The Trust has trail stewards and volunteers skilled with chainsaws who can address the following issues.

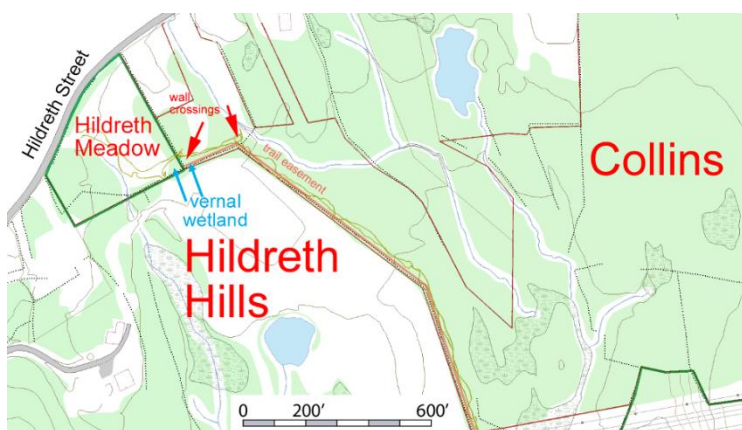
- Trail issues that are beyond the scope of what the Trust can fix without serious effort.
 - Wet areas in springtime or after heavy rain. This requires boardwalk construction.
 - Severe trail erosion. This requires trail mitigation or re-routing.
-

Anatomy of a Boardwalk by Rich Strazdas

There are dozens of trail amenities in Westford: simple log stream crossings, boardwalks short and long, bridges with and without foundations. We all appreciate when a precarious rock hop across a stream or a muddy traverse is transformed into a safe and dry passage to the rest of the trail. But how does one of these structures go from idea to reality? The boardwalk at the start of the Burns Hill Connector Trail on the Trust's Hildreth Meadow property provides a case study.



It starts with identifying a need. The Trust purchased the Hildreth Meadow parcel across from 53 Hildreth Street in 2015. Over time, we built a small parking area and restored the meadow from a tangle of invasive multiflora rose and glossy buckthorn. On the other side of the power lines, the Burns Hill Loop Trail was constructed in 2014 as an Eagle Scout project. A connector trail was envisioned in 2019 when a trail easement was granted on the Salt Box Farm land, and the trail was blazed in 2022 with the help of a Westford Academy Capstone senior. Unfortunately, the trail began at a vernal wetland, requiring a very wet start in February through May. About 90 feet of boardwalk fixed that problem.



Are you ready to grab the saw and hammer and get to work? Not so fast! This is where the process slows down as it goes through state and town wetlands bureaucracy. Because we don't want developers willy-nilly paving over wetlands, our small projects with minimal impact get caught up in the same wetlands regulations designed to protect

them. A Notice of Intent (excerpt below) needs to be filed with the state, but all of the vetting is done through the town's Conservation Commission, which understand the local conditions. There is so much paperwork that a 10-point application checklist requires every step to be documented with receipts. Highlights include:

- Complete the Notice of Intent (17 pages).
 - Request a list of abutters within 100' of the property affected (the boardwalk is on one corner of a rambling 38-acre parcel, so this listing captured abutters up to 1800' from the work site).
 - Notify all the abutters of the Notice of Intent, and save receipts.
 - Certify the shortcut of notifying only the Hildreth Hills association management by Certificate of Mailing, and the 200 owners by regular mail (still not cheap).
-

- Send *Notice of Intent* by Certified Mail to the MA Department of Environmental Protection.
- Publish a legal notice in the *Lowell Sun*.
- Go before the Conservation Commission to defend the design and the paperwork.



Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection
Bureau of Resource Protection - Wetlands
WPA Form 3 – Notice of Intent
Massachusetts Wetlands Protection Act M.G.L. c. 131, §40

Provided by MassDEP
MassDEP File Number
Document Transaction Number
Westford City/Town

Finally, we are almost ready to build and install the boardwalk! The Conservation Commission issues an Order of Conditions. This incorporates the Notice of Intent, has a MA DEP file number, and spells out the procedures to follow and how to request the Certificate of Compliance. Both the Order and the Certificate must be filed with the North Middlesex Registry of Deeds, just like

A. General Information (continued)

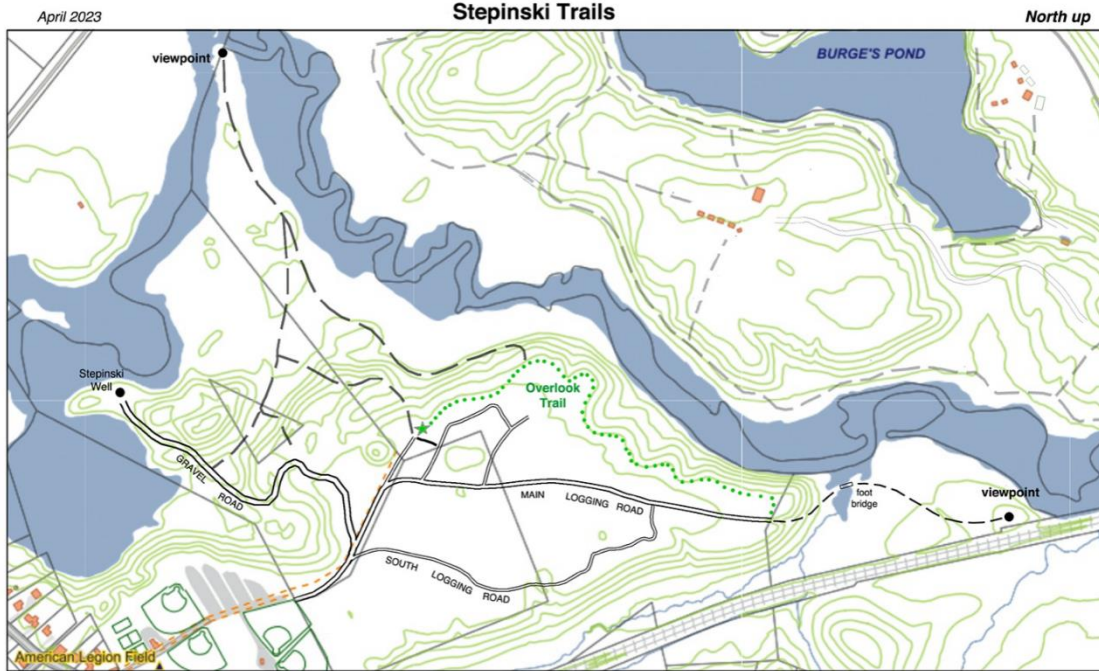
6. General Project Description:

Boardwalks on either side of low stone wall separating the two parcels. Approximately 34' x 4' on parcel 21-103, and approximately 42' x 4' on parcel 21-105.

a house sale.

Now it's time to break out the tools and play in the mud! Last spring, a corporate volunteer group built half the boardwalk segments and staged them at the trailhead. There was no permission yet to install anything. This spring a group of four WA Capstone students built the other segments and already installed the first set. The end is in sight, only five years after it was conceived. And that's how you build a boardwalk!

The New Overlook Trail by Bill Harman



The relatively new Overlook Trail in the Stepinski Conservation Land provides hikers excellent views of Stony Brook seen from a trail 60 feet higher. The accompanying map shows the Overlook Trail and the Stepinski land, which is town-owned Conservation Land across Stony Brook from East Boston Camps.

There is a large parking area for the Graniteville ballfields, beyond which is woodland and trails. The parking area is separated from the woodland by a gate. After you duck under the gate, to get to the beginning of the Overlook Trail, walk along the wide path, not taking the curve to the right (the South Logging Road) and not taking the curve to the left (the gravel road to the Stepinski well). Continue straight until the Main Logging Road curves off to the right. Looking straight-ahead, you will see the sign at the start of the Overlook Trail.

As shown on this trail map, the Overlook Trail has a serpentine shape. This shape is results from much of the Stepinski Land being much higher (about 60 feet higher) than Stony Brook. Interestingly, the altitude of this high-land is approximately constant. The level area drops the 60-foot difference abruptly, and the Overlook Trail is designed to remain at constant altitude following along the outer edge of the upper area. A number of gullies have appeared in this steep drop, and this is the reason for the serpentine shape of the Overlook Trail.

Help Wanted!

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 of 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, or 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. Trust President Rich Strazdas says he 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 Help Wanted List is looking for volunteers to:

- Conduct guided trail walks.
- Practice invasive species control, notably for mile-a-minute, water chestnut, and porcelain berry on town owned land.
- Help remove downed trees from all trails in town (almost 500 trees removed since 2018).
- Provide ongoing trail maintenance, including all publicly accessible trails.
- Construct and install boardwalks and bridges.
- Mentor high school students in their Capstone projects.
- Blazing and re-blazing trails.
- Maintain our Website.
- Help with a Microsoft Publisher document editing project.

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

May Is Garlic Mustard Pulling Time*

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 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 virtually 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 out with a gloved hand (to protect your skin from early spring poison ivy that could be nearby) as soon as you spot it! It's most effective to remove as many plants as possible in early 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 close to the ground and knock the soil off or they will re-sprout. Put the plants in piles and they will compost quickly in the sunlight. 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 Land Trust.



Early Spring Leaves



Garlic Mustard Flowers

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

