

CONNECTICUT

Woodlands

SUMMER 2021



Finding Solace in Nature

A MAGAZINE OF THE CONNECTICUT FOREST & PARK ASSOCIATION

In this Issue

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CFPA acknowledges we are on the traditional lands of the Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Nation, the Mohegans, the Eastern Pequot, Schaghticoke, Golden Hill Paugussett, Nipmuc, and Niantic peoples. We pay our respect to the Indigenous people who are no longer here due to colonization, forced relocation, disease, and warfare. We thank them for stewarding this land throughout generations. We recognize the continued presence of Indigenous people on this territory who have survived attempted genocide, and who still hold ties to the land spiritually and culturally. We shall be good stewards of the land we all call Quinnentucket, Connecticut.



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On the cover: Trails Day 2021 was a huge success with over 180 events statewide, including a night hike at Goodwin Conservation Center in Hampton.



CONTRIBUTOR'S Spotlight

When **Michelle Caprio's** mother was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease, she became her mother's primary caregiver. But being a caregiver took its toll on the West Haven native and single mother of two. Michelle found solace in the healing power of nature, exploring Connecticut's trails, parks, and beaches. To date she has hiked nearly 70 trails across the state. A committed advocate, Michelle currently serves as Ambassador and Walk Chair for the Greater New Haven Walk to End Alzheimer's.

As a Connecticut native, what have you been surprised to discover on your hikes throughout the state?

I have been surprised at not only the quantity of the trails throughout Connecticut, but the quality of them as well. CFPA's Blue-Blazed Trails are well-marked and maintained,

and each one has its own unique beauty. I also enjoy learning about our state's history and wildlife throughout my journeys.

What's something you wished you'd known about Alzheimer's disease prior to serving as your mother's caregiver?

My mother would often get frustrated. Looking back, I wish I had established a better daily routine for her. Maintaining a daily schedule could have helped decrease her restlessness and frustration.

In addition to the Alzheimer's Association and CFPA, you help to raise awareness and funds for many other nonprofits. What motivates you to serve others through volunteerism?

When my daughters entered elementary school, I learned about a foster student who came to school with no supplies. I quickly organized the "Backpacks for Kids" program,

which filled our principal's office with backpacks loaded with school supplies. Since then, I have looked for opportunities to provide support and to serve others in need. We all face tough times and it's important to know that someone cares.

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Editor's Note

Ever since I was a young boy, I've loved studying history. During summer vacations, our family would visit historical sites and museums where I became fascinated by the past and the people, tools, and traditions that have shaped our modern world. History helps us to make sense of the present and reveals the diversity of the human experience. But whose stories get told? And who gets to tell them?

For the past five centuries, the stories of America's Indigenous people have been told primarily from the perspective of European colonizers. Historically, Indigenous people were often portrayed as "savages" in need of civilization and salvation, while the concept of "wilderness" perpetuated the myth that prior to the arrival of European settlers, this land was largely unpopulated and unexplored. In reality, some 60 million Indigenous people lived in what would eventually become the United States. These people had complex cultures, robust economies, a deep connection to the land and waters, and a kinship that included the animals and plants with whom they shared this place.

This issue of Woodlands includes a new statement that acknowledges that we are on the traditional lands of the Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Nation, the Mohegans, the Eastern Pequot, Schaghticoke, Golden Hill Paugussett, Nipmuc, and Niantic peoples. It honors the continued presence of Indigenous people in Connecticut despite forced removal and attempted genocide and renews CFPA's commitment as the state's leading conservation organization to being good stewards of this land.

This summer, I hope you'll take advantage of our incredible Blue-Blazed Hiking Trail System and explore our beautiful state parks, forests, and other natural areas. And as you move through the woods, over the ridges, into the hollows, and across the floodplains and beaches, I hope you'll pause to reflect on the history of this land, including the Indigenous people who lived here, built trails, and cared for this land for millennia prior to colonization, and whose descendants still hold deep ties to this place we all call Connecticut.

I'll see you outside,



Timothy Brown
Editor

The Connecticut Forest & Park Association, Inc.

The Connecticut Forest & Park Association (CFPA) is a 501c3 nonprofit organization that protects forests, parks, walking trails, and open spaces for future generations by connecting people to the land. Since 1895, CFPA has enhanced and defended Connecticut's rich natural heritage through advocacy, conservation, recreation, and education, including maintaining the 825-mile Blue-Blazed Hiking Trails system. CFPA depends on the generous support of members to fulfill its mission. For more information and to donate, go to ctwoodlands.org

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From the Statehouse

By Eric Hammerling

Looming Retirements a Major Challenge for State Parks and Forests

A staggering 45% of the environmental protection employees, over 170 workers, at the Connecticut Department of Energy & Environmental Protection (DEEP) are eligible and likely to retire over the next year. Many of these difficult-to-replace individuals are experienced land managers who have been essential to the ongoing operations of state parks, forests, and wildlife management areas for many years.

The pace of retirements will significantly increase this coming year because pension, health, and related benefits will be reduced for retirees who leave state service after July 1, 2022. This upcoming reduction in retirement benefits was negotiated in 2017 as part of the contract signed between former Governor Malloy and the state employees' union.

Since 2017, the state workforce overall has been decreasing, and this has put additional strains on the fulltime and seasonal workers who remain to manage state parks, forests, and other conservation lands for the public's use and benefit. The increased pace of retirements that will occur before next July could push several state parks and forests to the brink of mismanagement.

The looming "retirement cliff" has been foreseen since 2017, but little contingency planning or structural change has been implemented to prepare for the immense turnover in staff that has already begun. Unfortunately, existing bureaucratic hiring practices will undoubtedly magnify the pain of refilling positions. For example, DEEP has to justify position re-fills to the Office of Policy and Management (the Governor's budget office) as if the positions were newly created. Also, in most instances, OPM and DEEP are not nimble enough to advertise or hire new employees before positions become vacant, so the transfer of critical institutional knowledge from departing to incoming employees is rarely smooth.

The "CREATES Report," commissioned by the Lamont Administration, recommends improvements to ensure service quality, delivery, and equity; mitigate retirement risks; and reduce costs while continuing the basic operations of state government. However, most recommendations to centralize, digitize, and automate governmental functions

and systems offer little relief to public land managers who must be available on the front lines to both maintain properties in good condition and meet the needs of visitors.

The CREATES Report highlights additional personnel challenges that this Administration must address at the same time:

- **DEEP must be allowed to increase the hourly pay for seasonal workers** who are a critical part of the DEEP workforce on state lands during the field season. At current hourly rates that max out at \$14 per hour for the most experienced seasonal employees, DEEP is unable to both recruit effectively for young talent at the front end, and is struggling to retain its experienced seasonal workers at the back end; and
- **DEEP must do more to retain younger employees** with fewer than five years of experience. The loss of younger employees suggests that DEEP has inadequate pathways for career growth, pay scales that can't compete with the private sector, and may face significant brain drain issues when replacing employees who retire in the future.

The CREATES Report states emphatically, "If DEEP cannot adjust hourly pay in order to attract qualified staff, it may have to close parks or services at a time when attendance is increasing. The inability to adjust pay for experienced seasonal workers is an example of how inflexibility in the State's workforce management can impact the services it provides to residents."

We call upon the Lamont Administration to heed the Report it commissioned, and at the very least, allow DEEP to raise the hourly rates for seasonal workers immediately since adequate funding is available thanks to the "Passport to the Parks" to support this increase.

These issues should be a top priority for this Administration and DEEP as people continue to flock outdoors to visit parks, forests, and wildlife management areas in record numbers. If hiring replacements and seasonal worker issues aren't effectively addressed this year, 2022 has the potential to be an enormous mess.

Eric Hammerling has served as the Executive Director at the Connecticut Forest & Park Association since 2008.



ON THE Trail

The Nipmuck Trail: Mansfield Hollow State Park

By Debbie Tedford



Find the complete map in the Connecticut Walk Book, published by CFFPA.

The 40-mile long Nipmuck Trail is shaped like an upside-down fork and runs from Mansfield, Conn., north to the Massachusetts border. The three-mile section I maintain—with the assistance of my husband, Barry Gorfain—begins at one of the fork prongs known as the “East Branch” and is located within Mansfield Hollow State Park. The diverse terrain is well-suited for families with adventurous children; turtles and frogs hide under rocks and around ponds just waiting to be discovered. Low hills provide gorgeous views of Mansfield Hollow Lake. Along the trail, you pass stone walls and geologic features such as eskers, kame terraces, and kettle holes that date back to the Ice Age. The trail is beautiful during any season and is frequently used by both local residents and college students for hiking and snowshoeing.

My section starts at the southern trailhead on North Windham Road. After crossing a field, the trail passes majestic pines, active farming fields, and the first of many stone walls. Gradually the pines give way to a mixed hardwood forest. You then cross over an esker, a ridge made of river deposits. To the left is a pond where I have seen Great Blue Herons and turtles. Soon you come to the first view of Mansfield Hollow Lake, or Naubesatuck Lake, which means “Land at the Pond” in the Nipmuck language. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers created the lake between 1949 and 1952 for flood control. Swimming is not permitted in the lake, but boating is, and a variety of fish, including yellow perch, large-mouth bass, bluegill, and crappie draw anglers year-round. I always pause here to take in the view. Bald eagles and other

wildlife can often be found along the shore. In the fall, the reflections of pine, maple, and oak trees dance on the water. During winter, it is a joy to watch ice fishermen and listen to the ice moaning as it expands and contracts.

As the trail continues, there are occasional views of Mansfield Hollow Lake until you reach Bassett Bridge Road. Here the Nipmuck merges with the Yellow Trail, which circumnavigates the northern end of the lake and is maintained by the Friends of Mansfield Hollow (FMH). Here you turn left. There is a short road walk. Soon after the culverts, the trail turns right into a parking lot for boaters. Just prior to the boat launch, the trail goes left, back into the woods. After a slight hill, you encounter a kettle hole, one of many located within the state park. This kettle hole is 50 to 60 feet deep and often filled with water. Following the kettle hole, the trail turns left and goes up a small hill. Here the trail changes to sand and gravel.

Next, the trail enters the Mansfield Hollow picnic area. There are several picnic tables and a wooden pavilion dedicated to Betty Robinson, founder and president emerita of the Friends of Mansfield Hollow. Betty was a very active hiker, hike leader, and ardent supporter of Mansfield Hollow. Along with Sam Dodd, she was instrumental in developing this section of the Nipmuck Trail, which is affectionately called the “Old Mansfield Hollow Trail.”

Following the paved road, the Nipmuck Trail turns right. Immediately after the picnic area and yellow gate, it again merges with the Yellow Trail (CFPA calls this the “South Junction”). Then the Nipmuck Trail turns right, heading back into the woods; the Yellow Trail continues straight. You turn left and go up a small rise before descending a sandy hill. At the bottom of the hill, the Nipmuck Trail once again intersects with the Yellow Trail. This is called the “North Junction.” Here, John Hankins, another CFPA volunteer takes over maintenance of the Nipmuck Trail.

This trail section weaves through Mansfield Hollow Wildlife Management Area, a recreation area managed by the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) under a lease agreement with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. In addition to hiking, this trail section is used for hunting and field dog trials. During hunting season, I always wear a high-visibility orange vest. A portion of this trail near North Windham Road is closed to the public on field trial days, which normally occur on Saturdays and Sundays. I always check the DEEP website to confirm field trials prior to scheduling any trail maintenance.

As a longtime hiker and hike leader, I have always appreciated knowing that when I am on a Blue-Blazed Hiking Trail, the trail will be in good condition. This is not necessarily the



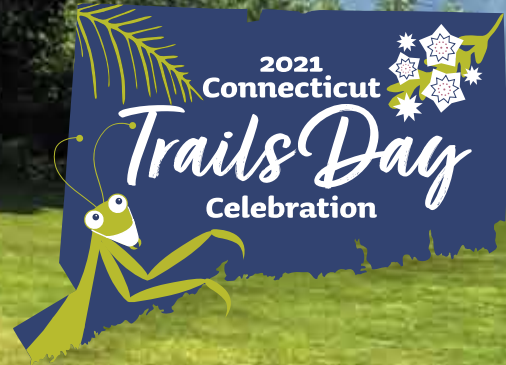
case on other trails. In 2012, I adopted this trail section from Roland Sabourin as a way to give back to CFFPA. In passing the torch (or loppers), Roland took me out a number of times to teach me trail maintenance, and pointed out different highlights, such as the vistas, stone walls, and kettle holes.

The peace and beauty of this section of the Nipmuck Trail never ceases to amaze me. I know this trail is well-used; every time I am out, I meet up with at least one other hiker, dog walker, birder, or friend of nature. They are often surprised to learn that this trail is not maintained by the state, but by CFFPA volunteers. Like me, they are grateful to CFFPA for maintaining the Blue-Blazed Hiking Trails.

Debbie Tedford resides in Niantic and has been a longtime supporter of CFFPA. Since 2012, she has maintained this section of the Nipmuck Trail. She has been an active AMC hike leader for more than twenty years and enjoys exploring nature by hiking, cycling, and kayaking.



Explore the Blue-Blazed Hiking Trails Interactive Map on the CFFPA website.



“The spirit of Trails Day was everywhere in Connecticut; a true celebration of our state’s beautiful parks and trails.”

Chuck Toal, Connecticut Trails Day Coordinator

Since 1993, CFPA has coordinated Connecticut’s Trails Day, the largest celebration of trails in the country. This year, there were over 180 events across the state, from hiking and trail maintenance to horseback riding, cycling, paddling, nature walks, and several self-guided programs. Thanks to all of our leaders for helping to make Trails Day such a success!



Prior to the arrival of European colonists, an extensive network of Indigenous trails crisscrossed the Connecticut landscape. Today, few original footpaths remain. But many roads and highways follow the same trails that Indigenous people travelled for thousands of years.

By Jay Levy

Quinnentucket Footpaths

This piece is dedicated to Trudie Lamb-Richmond, “Kekiokwashawe,” Schaghticoke Tribal Matriarch, and Golden Hill Paugussett Chief Quiet Hawk, Aurielus H. Piper Jr.

As I enter the forest, I quietly say, “Thank you.” Whom am I acknowledging? I don’t know, it’s just been a long-standing tradition whenever I recognize a presence much larger than me. When I enter someone’s home, I am grateful for being invited inside; likewise, here, in the woods, I am respectful of being in this living space. Connecticut has so little open space left that I am very appreciative for what we do have. I often think about my family’s ancestors in these forests. This land I walk on is literally their blood, flesh, and bones. The presence of our ancestors is both spiritual and material. Either way, the past is with me in the present, on the trail.

Trails have marked the Connecticut landscape since the last glaciers retreated some 16,000 years ago. Contrary to the myth that early colonists encountered a barren wilderness, Indigenous people were here for thousands of years prior to European contact, traveling by foot or dugout canoe. The Pequot and Paugussett have always crisscrossed these Connecticut hills. The Quinnipiac and Niantic have always navigated these waters. Early Indian footpaths followed game trails, the contours of the hills, or rivers and streams, which provided access to water and opportunities to fish. These trails united communities and established trade routes between tribes. They linked subtribes and Native confederacies. Songs, traditions, and stories were passed from one generation to the next along these trails. In the river valleys, trails connected seasonal villages with nearby streams for the springtime shad run. In the uplands, trails were used for hunting and winter camps.

The Lantern Hill Trail marked with an arrow and eagle feathers joins up with the blue blazed Narragansett Trail.

One of the most important trails in the formation of the state was the Old Connecticut Path, which ran from the Connecticut River in present-day Hartford to the Massachusetts Bay in Boston. Documents dating back to 1636 refer to the “Old Connecticut Path,” but the trail was known by many other names, including “The Great Trail of New England” and the “Old Nipmuc Path,” in recognition of the Nipmuc Indians who traveled this route since time immemorial. The trail passed dozens of villages with hundreds of Nipmuc families, including the villages of Maanexit (now Thompson, Conn.) and Quantisset, which later became known as “Indian praying towns”—places where Indians were sent to convert to Christianity and forced to adopt English customs. In 1630, Acquittimaug, a Wabbaquassett Nipmuc Indian, traveled this path from what is now Woodstock, Conn., to Boston, bringing with him sacks of corn to give to the starving colonists. For nearly a century, the trail was also the primary route for the westward expansion of early settlers coming from Massachusetts to the village of Saukiog (now Hartford) on the banks of the Connecticut River. Today, the trail is recognized with a sign by the Woodstock Historical Society as an “Old Indian Trail.”

Two other Indian trails intersected the Old Connecticut Path in Woodstock. One trail led north to villages in Worcester, and south to villages in Norwich and New London; the other trail traveled east to Providence. Today these are paved roads, but a portion of the Old Connecticut Path remains a dirt road on Pulpit Rock Road in Woodstock. Here the trail passes an Indian fort on a hill and a large boulder that was used as an Indian gathering site. A segment of the original trail also still exists along a section of CFFPA’s Blue-Blazed Nipmuc Trail in the Natchaug State Forest. Walking this section today is as close as you may get to experiencing what Indigenous trails were like thousands of years ago.

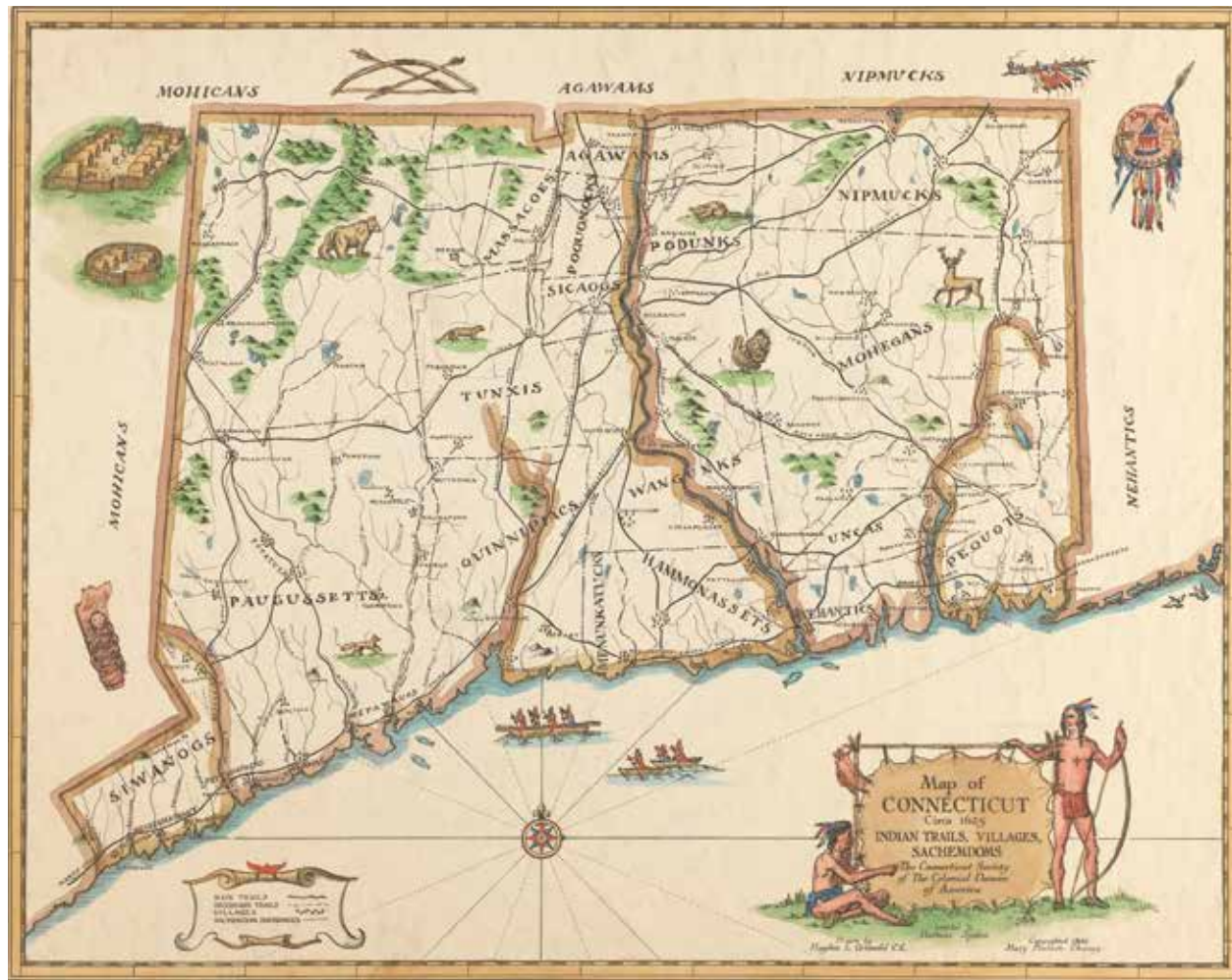
Connecticut’s Indigenous footpaths changed significantly after the arrival of European settlers in 1614. At first, early colonists were dependent on Indian guides to navigate through thick forests, which they referred to as “dense jungles.” To the untrained eye, these single-track paths could be hard to see, and colonists often

➤ What’s in a name?
Historically, many of Connecticut’s original trails were referred to as simply an “old Indian path,” which meant that these trails all had the same name. But tribal people had their own names for these trails. Some were named for the place they led to, or the direction they followed. Today, many Blue-Blazed Trails pay homage to the Indigenous people on whose lands they traverse. The Quinnipiac Trail honors the Quinnipiac, or “People of the Long Water Land” in the Quiripy language, who have inhabited south central Connecticut for millennia. The Menunkatuck is named for the band of Quinnipiaks whose ancestral village was located near what is now the southern terminus of the New England Trail. The Metacomet honors the Wampanoag sachem, Metacom, or King Phillip, who fought for his people and their traditional territories.



River Trails

River trails provided easy transportation for trade, communication, and fishing. These river trails were navigated by dugout canoes, including across Long Island Sound. Canoe journeys between tribes still occur today. In 2015, the Mashantucket Pequot created a 36-foot canoe from a burned-out tulip poplar tree and paddled it in the Mystic River. Photo by David S. Robinson



became lost in the woods. Gradually, footpaths grew into bridle paths that could accommodate horses. As the colonial population expanded, so did the need to transport more goods and supplies. Bridle paths widened into cart paths as horses and oxen pulled wooden carts through the rolling hills. Soon these paths were too narrow to accommodate multiple carts and were widened further still. By the mid-18th century, broad stagecoach roads had replaced most of the small cart and footpaths.

Today, many of Connecticut's original footpaths are paved roads and highways; forests have reclaimed most of the remaining old Indian trails. This does not make walking these trails any less enjoyable, or meaningful. I especially enjoy walking the Pequot Trail in the southeastern corner of the state. Although most of this original trail is now asphalt, I appreciate knowing that the path I am on has been traveled for centuries. One year, I decided to walk this path as a pilgrimage after a Pequot Tribal Elder and I were harassed while paying our respects at the Pequot massacre site, an event that forever changed the relationship between Indigenous people and colonists in Connecticut.

The Pequot War was a fight for Indigenous survival and colonial control of territory. On the morning of May 26, 1637, the English and their allies attacked a fort in Mystic, killing some 500 Pequots in less than an hour. After the massacre, the remaining Pequot Indians were enslaved, and the shoreline opened for colonial settlement. The once-quiet path quickly developed into

This 1930 map depicts Indian territories in Connecticut circa 1625. It is a snapshot in time as European contact quickly transformed the landscape. Indigenous people thought of land very differently from the Europeans. There were no fixed boundaries. Territories changed over time and neighboring tribes shared common hunting and gathering grounds. Also, some of the imagery is more representative of Plains Indians than Eastern Woodland Tribes, a reflection of inaccurate stereotypes that existed when this map was created.

Boston Public Library, Norman B. Leventhal Map Center, <https://ark.digitalcommonwealth.org/ark:/50959/0r96fm716>.



Cacique Levy, Pequot and Narragansett, sings a memorial song to his ancestors on the trail at the Pequot village and massacre site.

ment by English colonists and broken agreements had led to war, but the Narragansett Indians remained neutral until December 1675 when the English broke their peace treaty and attacked a Narragansett village at the Great Swamp near present-day South Kingston, R.I. The English massacred hundreds of men, women, and children, and enslaved many others. Canonchet was eventually captured and executed along this section of the Pequot Trail in 1676. Today, the Pequot trail most people are familiar with is the

a road that today includes portions of Route 1 and Route 1A. I have driven on this path countless times to get to Dunkin' Donuts.

I began my pilgrimage along the Old Indian Path on the 380th commemoration of the massacre. From the Pequot village site in Mystic, I followed the original path of the survivors to another massacre site in the swamps of Fairfield. The trail hugs the shoreline, traveling through the Pequot Woods Park in Mystic and Groton and connecting to the Pequot village of Nameaug (now New London). Some paths are easier to walk than others. For me, this walk became one of healing and awareness. But my wife won't walk this trail. It is too upsetting for her to know that this is the place where her ancestors fled for their lives.

The trail led eastward to Narragansett Indian territory at the Pawcatuck River, and then north to Providence. Today the trail is fragmented, but one segment on Route 234 in Stonington still retains its original name—the Pequot Trail. This is where the great Narragansett leader, Canonchet, was executed during the

King Phillip's War. Further land encroach-

“In the river valleys, trails connected seasonal villages with nearby streams for the springtime shad run. In the uplands, trails were used for hunting and winter camps.”



Lantern Hill seen from Lantern Hill Pond.

ReVITALizing COMMUNITY

By Renee Jiang

Christina Smith is the Executive Director of Groundwork Bridgeport, a nonprofit that is transforming the city by turning blighted areas into gardens, parks, playgrounds, and other open spaces that instill pride in the community. Born and raised in Bridgeport, Smith has always felt an affinity for her hometown. After earning degrees from Princeton, New York University, and University College London, she decided to return to home to help improve her community, particularly for the youth. A former Bridgeport city councilwoman, Smith has led Groundwork Bridgeport since 2016.

We sat down with Ms. Smith to learn more about how Groundwork Bridgeport is revitalizing the city through community empowerment and sustainable urban development. This interview has been edited for length and clarity.



Groundwork onsite staff members, left to right: Janaya Patterson (AmeriCorps VISTA Service Member), Jonny Gagnon (Princeton Internships in Civic Service (PICS) Intern), Tanner Burgdorf (Groundwork Bridgeport Program Lead), Christina Smith (Groundwork Bridgeport CEO), Henry Vehslage (ConnectiCorps - AmeriCorps Service Member). Photo courtesy of Groundwork Bridgeport.

Connecticut Woodlands: How is environmental justice incorporated into Groundwork's mission?

Christina Smith: Our work is simply about doing good for our fellow humans that are living in Bridgeport. It's about focusing on holistic revitalization and understanding and improving upon the needs of a community while also listening to what the residents say. We don't necessarily operate through an environmental justice lens as much as one that asks: "How can we care for our whole ecosystem?" Things like environmental justice—and any kind of justice—can flow from that.

Why is fostering a stronger sense of community in Bridgeport so critical to your work?

As humans, we love to connect. It's those small connections that make us feel comfortable around one another; then we're more likely to come together to work towards change. If we're operating individually, we're not going to move as fast collectively. For example, I recently started a walking club. Over a thousand people registered for the club purely as a social activity. If you want to go for a walk, you're not going to go up to a stranger

and ask them to go. But being part of this walking club automatically forms that connection. If we don't build community first, we are less likely to connect with one another and work together towards common goals.

What do you see as the role of youth in the environmental movement, and how is Groundwork Bridgeport working with youth?

A lot of the work we do with youth is not only educating them about their environment, but also giving them that spirit of togetherness that we're here to take care of our community. It's not about outsiders coming in, or a corporate group for a one-day event to do something. This is our home, these are our neighbors, and we want to work together with those around us to take care of our environment, our home, and our families.

What inspired you to get involved with Groundwork Bridgeport?

A lot of people have that one home that they feel an affinity for. I wanted to come back home. I know the reputation of Bridgeport. The perception is quite negative and I wanted to be part of changing that. It wasn't like I wanted

to just go plant trees; I wanted to be a part of making change in my community for the youth. I am more about the human element of sustainable development, but I also learned about green infrastructure and all of these other things that play into what you need to do to revitalize a community. I believe in multi-solving. There's always a way to think of how to solve the multiple issues here at once versus just tackling one thing at a time. Everything is interrelated and we don't operate in silos. In the end, it wasn't that I wanted to go for an environmental organization, but more about wanting to work to improve my community.

Can you talk about the main aspects of sustainable urban renewal and how this type of development, such as restoring urban waterways, can help lower-income communities and communities of color?

I love some aspects of sustainable movements or urban development, but not when it goes to the extent of adopting fancy new technology and doing something without thinking about the environment. For example, I live in a house that's old and

has wooden windows. Many people would replace them with modern windows, but you could get heavy drapes to make it just as efficient as the new windows that they're putting out on the market now that are made of plastic and other unsustainable materials. I think traditional architecture and building methods are more environmentally friendly. We didn't have all this technology to make everything easier so you really had to focus on the placement of the windows or where you sited the house. Another example is composting: it's a free thing to do, but I was reading the other day about a \$400 electric composter. Who can afford this? How much plastic has gone into it? Composting for me is simply a natural way to operate with nature just as it is.

What are some of Groundwork Bridgeport's current projects that really excite you?

I'm looking into using behavioral psychology to help people see that we are all in this together. If you see other people doing something, social norms can motivate you to do it as well. Sometimes people are so overwhelmed by climate change that they

do nothing. The key is to identify all of the actions people can take and help to remove the barriers while we wait for bigger policy changes; to gamify sustainability, essentially.

For example, when I first learned about rain gardens a couple years ago, I really wanted one. But I didn't know how to put in a rain garden and didn't have time to research it. Here we are years later and I still don't have one. The idea is to work towards helping people become greener by making it easier. It's about providing the education that people need to actually get that done. If you want to plant a rain garden, these are the steps that you need to take to do that, this is the cost, these are some of the contractors that can do it for you, these are some of the recommended plants based on the area that you're in. I wanted to make a check-list version of all the little things you can do as an individual and then put a little fun in there where you can get points and redeem them within your local community.

How does reinvesting in urban core areas like Bridgeport provide economic benefits to community residents and local businesses?

I don't think researchers have spent enough time looking towards solutions. They're looking at the problem as opposed to seeing how we can all gain something together. I've seen the data that says the cost of not offering Bridgeport students enough after-school programs ends up costing more in other ways. I would argue it actually ends up being cheaper to do good.

Renee Jiang is a high school junior at Choate Rosemary Hall where she is Associate Editor of the Choate News. Her critical piece on the fossil fuel industry recently won the CT Regionals Scholastic Writing Gold Key Award.

Transforming Transportation

As more people walk or bike to work, cities are looking for ways to make active transportation safer and more accessible.

By Hanna Holcomb

Doug Hausladen, the Director of Transportation, Traffic, and Parking in New Haven, may be one of few workers who truly enjoys his morning commute, perhaps because he often gets to work by bike. “A 15-minute bike ride is a great amount of activity in the morning to get your thoughts collected and to get your heart pounding a little bit,” he said. “You always end up arriving at work with a smile on your face.”

Hausladen is among the approximately 20% of New Haven residents who commute to work using some form of active transportation, or any human-powered means of travel, like walking, cycling, skating, or rolling. Improving active transportation has been a priority for Hausladen in a city where one-third of households don't own a vehicle and 60% of households have fewer vehicles than the number of workers. “New Haven is holistically thinking about how you get to work, not just how to make your car commute better,” he said. “Some of those things mean prioritizing pedestrians or bikes, or sometimes it's making buses better.”

Active transportation has been on the rise nationwide since 2001. According to the 2017 National Household Travel Survey, almost 12% of trips involve walking or biking. Active transportation helps to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and health-care costs,

provides mobility and independence for those without licenses or vehicles, and supports local economies. But encouraging active transportation requires sufficient infrastructure to help commuters efficiently and safely reach their destinations.

The 2019 Connecticut Active Transportation Plan addresses the needs of cyclists and pedestrians, guided by the vision that, “any person, regardless of age, ability, or income will be able to walk, bicycle, or use other types of active transportation modes safely and conveniently throughout Connecticut.” The plan builds on programs and policies established by the 2009 Connecticut Bicycle and Pedestrian Transportation Plan, which led to the adoption of the Complete Streets Policy in 2014. While roadways are often designed for automobiles, complete streets take all users into account, including pedestrians and cyclists.

The state is currently making roadways more friendly for non-automobile travelers through a variety of techniques. A “road diet” reduces the number of travel lanes to make space for a bike lane or broadened shoulders. The Vendor-In-Place Paving Program provides wider shoulders for pedestrians by reducing travel lane width where appropriate during repaving and restriping. The plan also supports

improved pedestrian signaling at crosswalks and intersections.

Before 2009, municipalities and regions were largely responsible for the planning, design, and construction of multi-use trails that pass through their communities. This led to gaps along trails due to a lack of funding. CTDOT began providing more support to close gaps on multi-use trails of state-wide significance, such as the East Coast Greenway, a 3,000-mile route from Maine to Florida. “The idea was to connect the major cities of the East Coast in a manner that reflected a kind of urban Appalachian Trail,” said Bruce Donald, Tri-State Coordinator for the East Coast Greenway. Two hundred miles of the route travel east-west through Connecticut, connecting urban, rural, coastal, and inland parts of the state. A little more than half of the state's section is on protected paths, including rail trails like the Hop River Trail and the Farmington Canal Trail. “Once these facilities are built in a town or city, they become a really big part of that community,” said Donald.

Building multi-use trails is expensive. According to Donald, a 10-foot-wide asphalt path with safety fences and benches costs about \$1 million-per-mile. In areas where more engineered structures are needed, like bridges or tunnels, it can cost significantly more. In New Haven, for example, a 1.6-mile

section of trail from Yale to Long Wharf is estimated to cost around \$11 million. However, these paths can have a high return on investment. A study in North Carolina showed that for every \$1 invested in greenway construction, \$1.72 was returned to the community. “You're bringing people into a community who aren't whizzing past in a car,” said Donald. “They might get their bike fixed or stop at a store to buy something.”

Improving commuter safety is a focus of Connecticut's Active Transportation Plan. “We looked at safety first and foremost,” said Marcy Miller, Senior Project Manager and New England Community Engagement Manager at FHI Studio, which worked with CTDOT on the plan. The plan highlights ten safety corridors and proposes infrastructure solutions, such as road diets, updated signaling, and dedicated left turn lanes to help mitigate collisions.

In 2020, Connecticut had 66 pedestrian and cyclist fatalities and more than 1300 crashes between vehicles and pedestrians or cyclists. Nationwide, there was a 40% increase in pedestrian fatalities between 2008 and 2019, due, in part, to larger vehicle size and distracted driving. Collisions are disproportionately high in urban areas. Sidewalks and bike lanes can help reduce collisions, but these structures are often concentrated in white and wealthy neighborhoods. “That

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infrastructure tends to go where people have a bigger advocacy voice and money,” said Karen Jenkins, founder and managing principal of the consulting firm, Development4Good, LLC.

An analysis by Smart Growth America found that lower income metro areas have more pedestrian collisions and fatalities. Further, while people of color comprise about one-third of the U.S. population, they account for nearly half of all pedestrian deaths. The study suggested that a lack of pedestrian-friendly infrastructure in poorer neighborhoods and lower levels of vehicle ownership lead to more walking or cycling trips per resident. “All of us are equally vulnerable if you’re on a bike; it doesn’t matter how much money you have in your pocket,” said Jenkins, a League of American Bicyclists certified instructor and founding board member of the New Haven Coalition for Active Transportation.

The coalition offers classes for adults who never learned to bike or who are out of practice, as well as more advanced courses on bike handling, road positioning, bike maintenance, and understanding your rights as a cyclist. Courses are taught by League Cycling Instructors. Eventually, the

coalition hopes to have bicycle education in every school throughout the city. “Every child should have bike education so that they’re healthier,” said Jenkins. “They’ll grow into better advocates for their urban environment and be more sensitive about the use of the roads and how to ride safely.”

Other nonprofits are working to make bike commuting a safe and accessible alternative. Bike Walk Connecticut also created a bicycle education curriculum specifically for Connecticut’s fourth graders. “We work with League Cycling Instructors to train gym teachers to teach their classes,” said Mary Cockram, a Bike Walk CT co-chair. “We’re doing that in four communities this year and then we’ll do it in some more communities next year.”

Bike Cheshire helps to reduce the cost barrier by providing a free bike share program. One of Bike Cheshire’s fifteen bikes can be picked up from a designated shop along the Farmington Canal Heritage Trail. Cyclists fill out a waiver, make a small, refundable deposit, and head out. “It’s something we wanted to give to the community,” said Jim Jinks, founder and executive director of Bike Cheshire. “We felt like making it ‘borrow a bike’ rather than ‘rent a bike’ was the way to go.”

The 2019 Connecticut Active Transportation Plan seeks to improve mobility for those using active transportation by integrating bicycles on buses and trains, and improving pedestrian safety near transit stations. The plan also calls for assessments of and upgrades to state-maintained infrastructure

that comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Volunteers with The Last Green Valley National Heritage Corridor (TLGV) have been using a High-Efficiency Trail Assessment Process to collect detailed information to help trail users with mobility challenges decide if a particular trail or stretch of trail will be accessible and enjoyable. The equipment captures elevation, grade, cross slope, and distance. That information is then displayed at trailheads and on the internet in a uniform manner. Lyann Graff, office coordinator at TLGV, said that many of the sections of the Airline State Park Trail, for example, have grades and surfaces that are accessible, but access is still blocked. “There’s a gate that goes the whole width of the trail and there are boulders on either side of it,” said Graff. “The gate is locked and you can’t get around the boulders. The trail is good for people, but the access to the trails is not.”

Since the implementation of the 2009 plan, the state has been steadily improving infrastructure for active transportation, yet Connecticut is ranked by the League of American Bicyclists as only the 21st most bicycle-friendly state in the nation. The pandemic has shown how essential safe pathways are for recreation and commuting. While vehicle travel fell by about 15% nationwide last year, trails monitored by the Connecticut Trail Census saw a nearly 40% increase in use over 2019. Though automobiles have dominated roadways for nearly a century, focusing more on cyclists and pedestrians will help to fight climate change, reduce road congestion, build healthier communities, and provide more equitable access to transportation for all of Connecticut’s residents.

Hanna Holcomb, a native of Woodstock, Conn., has written for Woodlands since 2017.

On the Henry Buck Trail

By David K. Leff

On a steepening trail, I climb a series of mossy stone steps, some worn by generations of feet, an earthbound stairway anticipating heaven like ascent of an ancient overgrown temple.

I almost hear the CCC boys grunt and strain, working the rocks into place with picks, shovels and prybars, puzzle-masters fitting glacial whimsy as neatly as precast knob and groove.

Cussing and laughter from decades ago echoes on breezes that carry slight whiffs of sweat from humid spring days of glistening muscles—hard, joyful exertion now freeze-framed.

Bleached to myth, they left more than just a path naturalized among ledges and trees. I pause on curving treads, catch my breath, and climb in their footsteps.

David K. Leff is poetry editor of Connecticut Woodlands, author of a dozen books, and poet laureate of Canton, Connecticut. He served as poet-in-residence for the New England Trail in 2016-17. View his work at davidkleff.com

Finding Healing on the Trail

By Michelle M. Caprio

I remember escaping to Wharton Brook State Park in Wallingford to teach my daughters how to fish. We hiked around the lake searching for the best spot to lay out our gear. Lying on a blanket, looking up at the sky, and smelling the fresh air, I felt the stress of being my mother's caregiver dissipate. I'd heard about the healing power of nature, but it was not until I experienced it firsthand that I fully understood the benefits of being outdoors.

My mother, JoAnn, suffered many medical ailments, including diabetes and congestive heart failure, but being diagnosed with Alzheimer's was the most difficult. She lacked concentration and became confused, frustrated, and forgetful. At times she did not even know who I was. As caregivers, my brother, John, and I had a hard time understanding why this was happening. Mom still had her beautiful smile, laughed, and told jokes, but her decline took a toll on us. We tried to keep life simple by focusing on making her comfortable and taking care of ourselves. For me, that included getting outside to hike and explore Connecticut's state parks, trails, and beaches. I would get lost in my walks; they helped me to separate my roles as a caregiver and a mom. To date, I have completed 67 trails across the state.

Being a caregiver was unbelievably challenging, yet also rewarding. I became more resilient, more compassionate, stronger, and more determined to understand the causes of Alzheimer's and to avoid them in my own life. According to Kristen Cusato, director of communications for the Alzheimer's Association, Connecticut Chapter, there is growing scientific evidence that certain lifestyle interventions at an early age—getting proper sleep, reducing stress, protecting your head from injury, and keeping your blood pressure in check—can help reduce your risk of cognitive decline later in life. In Connecticut, there are some 80,000 people living with Alzheimer's, and twice as many caregivers. Most caregivers—often women—are unpaid family members. Nationwide, two-thirds of Alzheimer's patients are women.

Mom passed away in January 2012. Just three months later, my brother was diagnosed with cancer. Once again,

I became a caregiver. John passed away eight years later, just four days shy of his 50th birthday. The only way I could deal with another loss was to continue my quest for trails that would help me to heal. Spending time around trees has been shown to reduce stress and lower blood pressure. Socializing on the trails also helped me to feel better. Once while hiking the Tidal Marsh Trail in North Haven, I met a woman who was hiking with her nephew. I was searching for the tin lion at the end of the trail. Despite having hiked the trail many times, they did not know about the tin lion, so we decided to continue together. As we chatted, we discovered that we know many of the same people. She had recently lost her sister. We exchanged numbers to set up another hike. She was a stranger, yet she understood the pain of losing someone and the healing power of nature.

Many people ask if I have a favorite trail. It's a hard question; each one holds a special memory. A beautiful rainbow glistened at People's State Forest. Camp Columbia has a tower with an outer spiral staircase that made me feel like I was on top of the world. Bluff Point had sensational views and rocks where I could just sit and listen to the waves. Talcott Mountain—although a bit more strenuous—was memorable from start to finish. I post all my hikes on Facebook to show the beauty that surrounds us, and to encourage others to get outside, explore, and to care for their mental and physical wellbeing.

With over 825 miles of Blue-Blazed Trails, there is something for everyone, whether you have the entire day or only a few hours to spare. So grab a hiking stick and hit the trail. Your body and brain will thank you.

For more information about the Alzheimer's Association, or to join the Walk to End Alzheimer's, visit act.alz.org.

Michelle Caprio is the mother of two amazing daughters, Michaela and Chloe. A committed advocate for various causes, she has competed in the Tough Mudder, Warrior Dash, and 5K road races to help raise funds and awareness. For the past several years, she has participated in the Walk to End Alzheimer's, and in 2021, she was named Ambassador and Walk Chair for Greater New Haven.

“There is growing scientific evidence that certain lifestyle interventions at an early age can help reduce your risk of cognitive decline later in life.”

Quinnentucket Footpaths, continued from page 13

one maintained by the CFFPA as part of the Blue-Blazed Hiking Trail System. The southern terminus of this trail is at the Mashantucket Pequot Indian Reservation near their tribal burial grounds. The trail continues at the Foxwoods Great Cedar Casino Lobby as the Lantern Hill Trail, maintained by the Mashantucket Pequot Indian Tribe, which leads up a steep climb to Lantern Hill, a culturally significant site, before connecting to the Blue-Blazed Narragansett Trail on the other side of the reservation. The Tribe purchased a portion of the hill to stop the mining of silica at this sacred site.

Throughout Connecticut, Indigenous sacred sites remain on or near current hiking trails. On the western edge of the state, Route 7 runs north-south along the Housatonic River. Part of this two-lane road was once a well-traveled footpath that connected the seasonal villages of the Schaghticoke Indians to the Stockbridge Munsee people in Massachusetts. Many side trails off this main route led to sacred sites. One such site lies over the border in Great Barrington, Mass., where a short but steep hiking trail climbs up Monument Mountain. Recently, this trail, formerly known as Indian Monument Trail, was renamed the Mohican Monument Trail. Under the guidance of the Stockbridge Munsee Band of Mohicans, the mountain was also renamed Peeskawso Peak. The mountain once held ceremonial offering stone piles that have since been vandalized and dismantled. The Munsee Indians hope to preserve what is left and to continue to hold their ceremonies in these sacred spaces.

Other trails pass near Indigenous sacred sites. The Connecticut section of the Appalachian Trail is currently being re-routed to avoid ceremonial sites on the Schaghticoke Indian reservation. In Rhode Island, the Narragansett Trail also passes sacred sites. Not far off the trail are Indigenous stone groupings. The town of Hopkinton and several local tribes joined together to protect these sites and their common heritage.

Historically, we all had a relationship with the woodlands. But as colonists settled in Connecticut, Indigenous people had to adapt their relationship with the land. We always had a relationship with the Creator and the gift of this land. I once heard a Wampanoag woman say, “We come from the land, and as we grow, we learn from the land. We eat from it, and when we pass, we go back to it. The land is a part of us, and we are a part it.”

Jay Levy currently lives on his wife's ancestral territory. He sits on many Native American Advisory Boards and acts as a Cultural Advisor, integrating Indigenous ideology, tribal tradition, and cultural protocol into land preservation.



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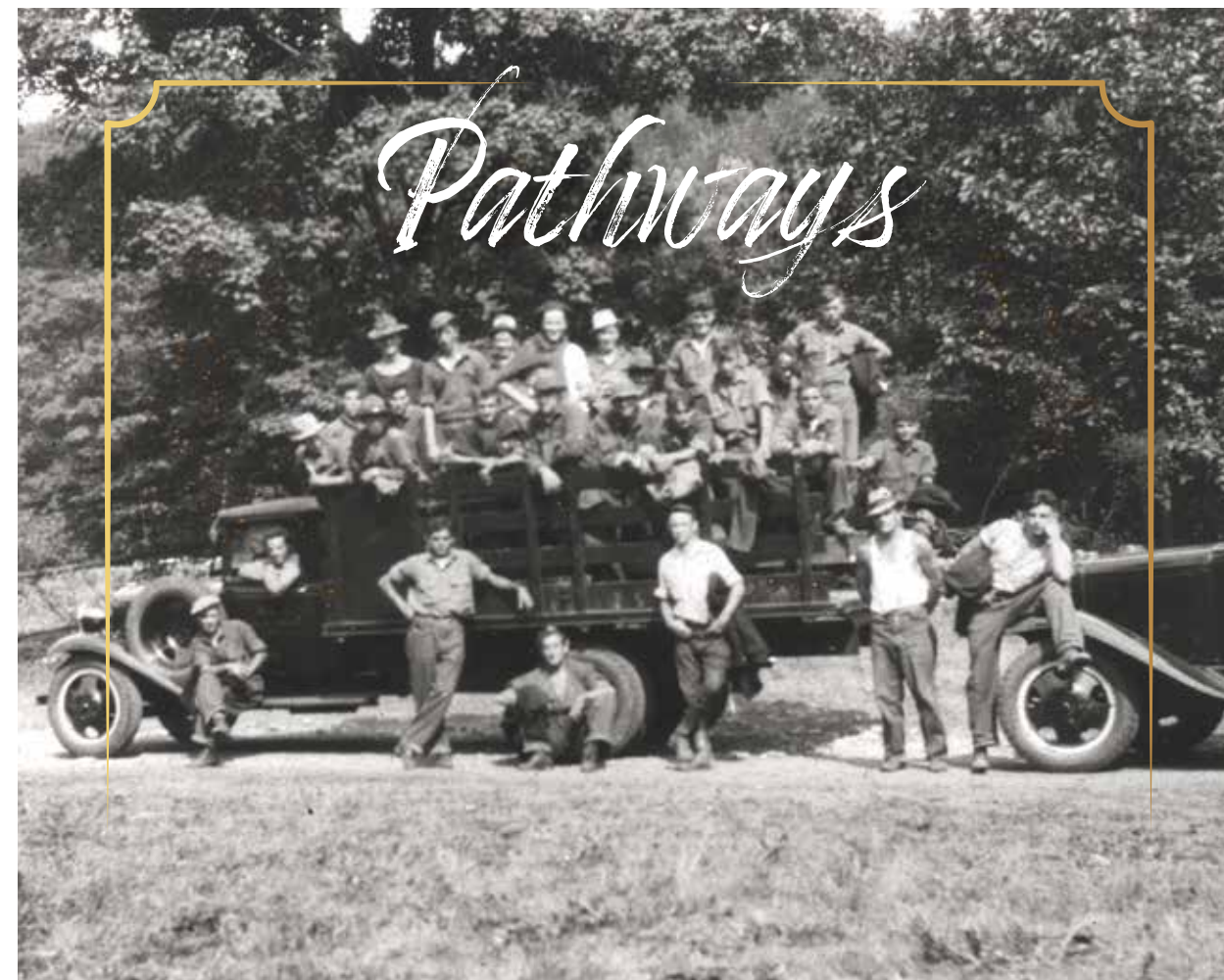


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From 1933-1937, Thomaston's Black Rock State Park was home to Camp Roberts, Company 175 of the Civilian Conservation Corps. Part of Roosevelt's New Deal, the CCC built trails, roads, dams, and bridges; fought wildfires; conducted surveys; installed telephone lines; removed invasive species; and planted some three billion trees nationwide. Between 1933-1941, Connecticut hosted 21 CCC camps that housed thousands of "CCC boys," as they were known. Today you can still see their legacy in many of our state's forests and parks.

Earlier this spring, President Biden proposed the creation of a new kind of CCC— a Civilian Climate Corps—that would pay young people to help fight the climate crisis by reducing the risk of catastrophic wildfire and extreme flooding, planting trees, and protecting topsoil. This new CCC would invest in both rural and urban projects—cleaning brownfields, improving municipal parks, and planting street trees to help offset global warming. It would also be more inclusive than Roosevelt's program, which was segregated and excluded women. This new 21st century CCC would provide young people with a living wage and help to cultivate a strong conservation ethic, while mitigating the worst effects of climate change.

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