



CONNECTICUT

# Woodlands

FALL 2018

Making  
an old drink  
new again

A MAGAZINE OF THE CONNECTICUT FOREST & PARK ASSOCIATION





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](http://ctwoodlands.org)



**On the Cover:** Cider apple trees at Homberg Orchards, page 14



Monk parakeets at home in Connecticut, page 8

## CONTRIBUTOR'S *Spotlight*



**Ted Merritt** is a seasoned environmental educator with degrees from Unity College and Southern Connecticut State University. He has shared his interest in the natural world throughout New England, the Adirondack mountains, the urban sprawl of New York City, and Colorado and Florida as a certified Interpretive Guide. Some of Ted's favorite research topics are invasive species, local ecology, and environmental restoration.

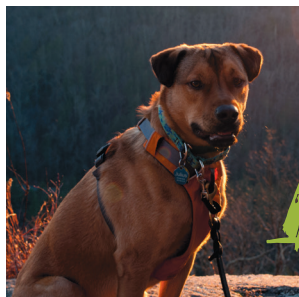
### **Woodlands: Why did you want to write a piece about monk parakeets?**

**Ted:** I've always been fascinated by birds. I've known about monk parakeets for a while, and I find it interesting that they have established themselves and few people know that they are here. It's odd and a little exciting to realize there is a tropical species hanging out in Connecticut.





Commissioner Klee reflects on his tenure at DEEP, page 16



Tips for hiking with dogs, page 20

Fall 2018 Volume 83/No. 4

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## What were you most surprised to learn while researching this story?

I was pleasantly surprised to learn that monk parakeets don't appear to have a detrimental effect on our native ecosystems. The common thread with a lot of exotic species introductions that you hear about is the new arrival becomes invasive and a threat to biodiversity. So, it's nice to hear about a species that seems to mostly be keeping out of trouble.

## Describe the work you're currently doing at the Bronx Zoo.

I am currently employed by the Wildlife Conservation Society as a Senior Quests Leader at the Bronx Zoo. At multiple interpretive stations we discuss environmental stewardship through hands-on activities including wildlife conservation challenges, trivia quizzes, and exploration of the local environment. We also introduce the concept of citizen science through online resources. It's a great way for kids and other zoo guests to take the message of conservation home.

## How does science writing relate to your work as an environmental educator?

Science writing and environmental education go hand in hand. Writing allows me to explore my interests in more detail than an interpretive setting often allows. At the same time, I'm able to reach a wider audience. I also get to expand my own knowledge base through researching topics outside of my usual curriculum.

## A lot of environmental news can sound rather bleak. As an environmental educator, what inspires you?

There's a great quote by Jane Goodall: "You cannot get through a single day without having an impact on the world around you. What you do makes a difference, and you have to decide what kind of difference you want to make."

It can be very easy to become overwhelmed when faced with news of environmental degradation. But I think it's important to remember that inaction is itself action. I would rather commit my energy to having a positive impact and be hopeful in making a difference for the future. I truly believe that when enough people feel this way that things actually do change for the better.

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# Editor’s Note

Here in Connecticut, the transition from summer to autumn is one of nature’s greatest wonders. As heat and humidity slowly give way to crisp, clear days, the lush greenness of our forests transforms into brilliant shades of reds, oranges, and yellows. Birds and butterflies begin their long migrations south. Mammals prepare dens and stockpile food for the long winter to come.

This issue of Woodlands features stories about transitions. In an interview, outgoing DEEP Commissioner Robert Klee reflects on his tenure and the challenges facing his successor. Jean Jones reports on the resurgence of cider, which is once again becoming New England’s heritage drink. And we celebrate 10 years of Eric Hammerling’s leadership as the Executive Director of the Connecticut Forest & Park Association.

Some transitions, however, are unsettling and difficult to understand. Sarah Dennison, who witnessed firsthand the May 15 tornado that ripped through Sleeping Giant State Park, situates the ongoing recovery within the larger story of a land inhabited by the Quinnipiac for thousands of years before colonization. Ted Merritt describes how the monk parakeet, originally from South America, has successfully assimilated into our local ecology. As our nation wrestles with questions of immigration, these stories reveal complex notions of what it means to be “native” and dispel any notion of a static environment. Even apples—that most American of all fruit—are not indigenous to this land.

Transitions in the natural world are mirrored by those in society. This November, Connecticut voters will have the rare opportunity to engage in what state Senator Kevin Witkos calls “direct democracy” by voting “Yes” for a proposed constitutional amendment that would ensure transparency in the legislature’s ability to sell, swap, or trade your public land. Changing the Constitution of the State of Connecticut is something that should be done only after all other options have been exhausted. As Commissioner Klee points out, once we lose open space, it’s gone forever. That is one transition we simply cannot risk.

I’ll see you outside and at the voting booth,

  
Timothy Brown  
Editor

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# CFPA *Updates*

**T**his year, Eric Hammerling celebrates his 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary as the Executive Director of the Connecticut Forest & Park Association. We caught up with Eric to learn more about what inspires him and to reflect on his decade of leadership at CFPA.

## **Woodlands: What inspired you to go into conservation?**

Eric Hammerling: I graduated from the University of Michigan with a B.A. in History and moved to Washington, DC. Initially, I was interested in two professional paths—conducting historical research, and doing policy work on Capitol Hill. I accepted a job with Congressman Silvio O. Conte as a Legislative Aide for Elderly, Environmental, Health Care, and Women’s issues, and although I found all the work to be interesting, the environmental work connected with me on a deeper level. I thank Mass Audubon for providing two places that bred a deep-seeded interest in the outdoors in me—Canoe Meadows bird sanctuary along the upper Housatonic River (located just down the street from our home in Pittsfield) where I learned how to fish; and Pleasant Valley bird sanctuary in Lenox where I went to summer camp for several years and learned about pond ecology, birds, and wildlife.

## **As you reflect on your tenure as Executive Director, what are some of the most significant ways that CFPA has changed over the past ten years?**

Thanks to some transformational gifts and the Board of Directors’ support for our Strategic Plan, CFPA’s capacity has grown over the past decade to address the four programmatic pillars of our mission—Advocacy, Conservation, Recreation, and Education. I think the ongoing evolution of our program effectiveness has been a direct result of recruiting outstanding professional staff, and finding ways to support them. Our increased capacity over time has also enabled us to do more with the incredible volunteers who both inspire us and amplify so much important work dedicated to protecting forests, parks, and trails.

## **What do you love most about your job? What do you find most challenging?**

I consider myself to be incredibly fortunate to be CFPA’s Executive Director, and there are so many things that I both love and find challenging. What I love most are the people



that I work with and the volunteers and supporters that I meet around the state. People who care enough about forests, parks, and trails to actively support them are a special group who I am honored to be around. The biggest challenge is probably the growing disconnection from nature that I see due to the proliferation of mobile technology and addictive electronic devices. When will people find time to disconnect from being passive consumers of information, and re-connect to nature?

## **Finish this sentence: When not working, you can find me...**

I probably spend an unhealthy amount of time working, but when I’m taking a break, I am either playing with my dogs or checking up on my Michigan Wolverines sports teams. My wife and I live with two dogs—Malachi and Talia—who are inseparable sibling terriers. They have been with us for over two years, and are super fun both to cuddle with and rile-up. My love for my family and dogs is rivaled only by my love of the Michigan Wolverines. I spent a year as one of the student managers for the football team under legendary coach, Bo Schembechler. Since that time, I have been a diehard U of M football fan, and I typically make a pilgrimage to the Big House in Ann Arbor for the first home game of every year with my parents and whichever friends I can lure to go with me.



# This November Vote ‘Yes’ to Protect Your Public Land

**A proposed constitutional amendment would ensure transparency in the legislature’s ability to sell, swap, or trade your public land. For Connecticut voters who care about parks, forests, farmland, and open space, it’s a rare opportunity to engage in direct democracy.**

On November 6, Connecticut voters will decide whether the state constitution should be amended to better protect your open space, public lands, and farmland. It’s a rare opportunity for voters to engage in what Sen. Kevin Witkos (R-Canton) calls “direct democracy.”

“We’re saying to the people, ‘We’re putting this back in your hands now,’” he said during a recent interview. “You can’t ask for more democracy than for each voter to be able to say ‘Yes’ or ‘No.’”

The amendment in question would require a public hearing for any proposed sale of state-owned land. Proposed land sales, giveaways, or swaps would also require approval by a two-thirds majority of both the Senate and House of Representatives if those lands are held by CT DEEP or the Department of Agriculture. For Witkos, Deputy Senate Republican President Pro Tempore who proposed and was a vocal supporter of the measure, the ballot question is about making government more transparent and accountable to the voters.

“We need a constitutional amendment because the legislature is the governing body and just by a simple majority they can do what they want,” he said. “But the constitutional amendment ratchets that up and requires a two-thirds majority to sell or transfer protected properties

controlled by the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection or the Department of Agriculture. It raises the bar on what the legislature has to do.”

Under the current system, the sale of state-owned land is rarely debated by the legislature, let alone brought before constituents who are essentially voiceless in the process. Rather, the sale, swap, or giveaway of public land is typically added to the land conveyance bill at the end of the legislative session when legislators are exhausted and there is no time for debate. Moreover, the conveyance bill prohibits any other piece of legislation from interfering with the sale, transfer, or swap of state-owned land. If it passes in November, the proposed constitutional amendment would both ensure public input and hold the legislature to a higher standard when it comes to your public land.

“Something like that should be in the light of day and you should have a public hearing,” said Rep. Joseph Gresko (D-Stratford) a champion of the proposed amendment in the House. “And if it’s really that good of a deal, then you shouldn’t have trouble getting two-thirds of both chambers to approve it.”

Constitutional amendments to protect public land are common in the Northeast. In fact, voters in Maine, Massachusetts, and New York have approved similar measures. Here in Connecticut, Sen. Witkos and Rep. Gresko worked across the aisle with colleagues in both chambers to cultivate strong bipartisan support for SJ 35, the bill that put the question on the November ballot. This past spring, under the leadership of Sen. Witkos and Rep. Gresko, SJ 35 passed unanimously in the Senate and by a margin of 118 to 32 in the House of Representatives.





“This is an issue that transcends politics,” said Witkos, a five-term senator who previously served for six years in the House. “I don’t know anyone who doesn’t like going to the beach or walking in the woods. The policies change all the time, but when you lose open space, farmland, forests, or recreational areas, you’re never, ever going to get it back.”

Advocates insist that the proposed amendment will help the state to meet its goal of preserving or otherwise protecting 21 percent of Connecticut’s land as open space by the year 2023. Gresko, who serves as Vice Chair of the Environment Committee, said, “The individuals who bequeathed land to the state in the past—and more importantly, those who are considering bequeathing land to the state in the future—are saying to themselves, ‘Wait a minute. I’m not going to give land to the state for them to use as a bargaining chip when I wanted it to be preserved.’”

*Continued on page 18*

**BALLOT QUESTION**

“Shall the Constitution of the State be amended to require (1) a public hearing and the enactment of legislation limited in subject matter to the transfer, sale or disposition of state-owned or state-controlled real property or interests in real property in order for the General Assembly to require a state agency to sell, transfer or dispose of any real property or interest in real property that is under the custody or control of the agency, and (2) if such property is under the custody or control of the Department of Agriculture or the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection, that such enactment of legislation be passed by a two-thirds vote of the total membership of each house of the General Assembly?”

“The proposed constitutional amendment holds the legislature to a higher standard when it comes to your public land.”





# Birds of Paradox



In recent decades, the monk parakeet, a South American native, has established itself in neighborhoods throughout southern Connecticut. But despite their occasional inconvenience, scientists say the birds have not negatively impacted the local ecology. Is it possible for us to afford monk parakeets some room within our already crowded landscapes?

By Ted Merritt

Low gray clouds hung heavy over a quiet, residential street, trapping the lazy heat of a late Connecticut summer afternoon. Bird feeders and bluebird boxes painted in cheerful colors adorned the front gardens. High up in the trees, some unusual neighbors were engaged in home maintenance. Chattering amongst themselves, a pair of monk parakeets, a small member of the parrot family, harvested twigs from the limbs of a dead hickory tree. One swooped down from the canopy, gliding along the street before coming to rest amongst a wild tangle of sticks. There the bird spent several minutes meticulously twisting the new twig into place. Once finished, it raced back to the tree.

There is no shortage of stories about how the monk parakeet (*Myiopsitta monachus*), a South American native, came to be found throughout Connecticut and southern New York. Jenny Dickson, a supervisor with the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection, Wildlife Division, recounted a tale about a flock of parakeets who made a great escape from Kennedy International Airport. It's a good story and there are plenty of versions. In some, the birds are released accidentally. In others, wildlife smugglers fearing customs officials decide to free the "evidence." Still others say the birds escaped



Monk parakeets' unique nests, often constructed on utility poles, have helped them to survive Connecticut's harsh winters.



“There is no shortage of stories about how the monk parakeet, a South American native, came to be found throughout Connecticut.”

from an overturned truck, or a ship carrying exotic animals caught fire and someone released the parakeets to save them. But Frank Grasso, a psychologist who studies animal behavior at Brooklyn College, believes the actual story of the parakeets' introduction is somewhat less dramatic. He hasn't seen any evidence of the airport story or any other mass release. Rather, Grasso thinks that there were individual escapes or releases over a period of time. Due to their small size and ability to mimic human speech, monk parakeets are popular pets, he says. Unfortunately, captive parrots require more attention than many people think. Unprepared and overwhelmed, countless pet owners turned their birds loose. Monk parakeets are a gregarious species; over time these released birds sought each other out, forming the wild populations we see today.

Unique among all parrots, monk parakeets—also known as Quaker parrots—are communal nesters who construct their own nests out of sticks. They join individual nests together into large masses, which typically range from 1 to 20 nest chambers, forming the avian equivalent of apartment buildings where each breeding pair has their own living space. But relatively little is known about the social relationships within these North American colonies. Mated pairs appear to be the primary unit, a characteristic similar to other parrots, and flocks have been observed fragmenting and re-merging frequently. But the relationships amongst individual birds in these nests remains a mystery.

Opinions are divided over the ecological status of the monk parakeet. Some label the birds as invasive pests. Others consider them a naturalized, introduced species that occupies an ecological niche similar to the Carolina parakeet (*Conuropsis carolinensis*), an extinct species that once inhabited the eastern United States. Both species

are sociable, forming large flocks and feeding on nuts, seeds, buds, and fruits. But whereas the Carolina parakeet depended on old growth forests and cypress swamps, monk parakeets have successfully adapted to our urban and suburban landscapes.

**M**onk parakeets are small colorful birds that sport a green back, pale grey face and chest, and blue wingtips. They were first spotted in New York during the 1960s. Today breeding colonies have been documented as far north as Quebec and as far west as Washington State, with local populations found throughout southern Connecticut and New York City. During the 2017 Audubon Christmas Bird Count, 70 parakeets were observed in Connecticut, a slight decrease from the previous year. One scientific study reported that foraging groups could consist of more than 30 birds, though the majority of flocks are composed of 10 or fewer individuals. Foraging groups were at their largest during the autumn and early winter months and smallest at the beginning of the breeding season. In Connecticut and southern New York, breeding takes place in March and April, and juveniles fledge from July to August.

Scientists consider several characteristics when determining whether or not a species is invasive. For example, does the species significantly alter the function of the native ecosystem? Or, does the species threaten populations of native species? But “invasive” doesn't necessarily mean “introduced.” According to Stephen Pruett-Jones, a behavioral ecologist at the University of Chicago, another characteristic is a species whose population grows exponentially out of control, such as white-tailed deer or the brown-headed cowbird. While native wildlife that exhibit invasive characteristics may seem contradictory, human activity



can create the conditions for a species to become invasive, such as altering population size or migration routes. These changes may in turn prove detrimental to sensitive ecosystems. Timothy Wright, a biologist who runs the Avian Communication and Evolution Lab at New Mexico State University, cautions that there is also the potential for an introduced species like the monk parakeet to serve as a reservoir for avian diseases.

But Pruett-Jones maintains that no study has ever shown evidence that monk parakeets threaten native species and the ecological balance of the neighborhoods they've colonized appear to not be negatively impacted. Moreover, scientists suggest that parakeet populations appear to have gained a foothold not through explosive breeding of naturalized flocks, but rather the sheer number of captive birds that have been released in the U.S. Wright believes the parakeets tend to prefer urbanized areas in part because there is less competition with other species. Grasso has observed them occupying the same space as other urban birds without displaying aggression, a behavior also seen in their native South America where they often nest in the same space as other species.

This is not to say that the parakeets have avoided conflict with humans. They are extremely social at times can be quite noisy. And they occasionally construct their nests on stadium lights, power transformers, and utility poles. Grasso suggests that the birds may do so in order to maintain a line of sight with their home base while out foraging. Jenny Dickson says wildlife agencies have been forced to intervene when nests located on electric equipment grow too large, interfere with reception, or become a fire hazard. And while there is the potential for larger populations to impact agricultural areas, as they do in their native Argentina where the monk parakeet is considered a pest, they have not been a serious problem for American farmers. Scientific studies suggest that damage to crops appears to be limited to local concerns rather than widespread destruction.

Still, the government has attempted biocontrol of the birds for nearly as long as they have been here. A nationwide eradication program was initiated by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in the early 1970s. "Though the monk parakeet population in America is at present too small to cause severe agricultural damage, wildlife officials are taking measures to exterminate or control the birds before they become a serious threat," Science News reported in 1973. By

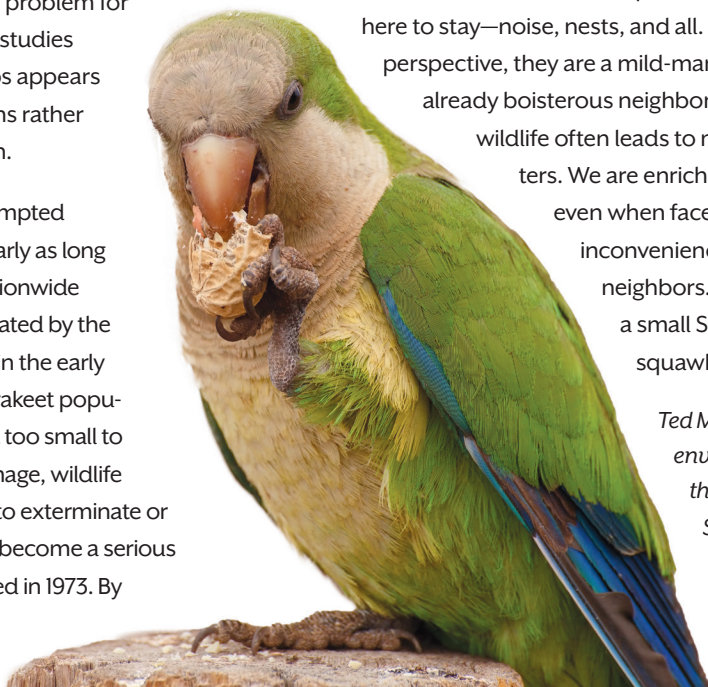
the time the program ended, the monk parakeet population in the Lower 48 had been reduced by roughly one-half. Local control efforts continue to this day. In Connecticut, 189 monk parakeets were euthanized by U.S. Department of Agriculture wildlife officials between October 2005 and September 2006 alone. More recently, management has shifted from eradication to non-lethal population control, including chemical castration.

Not everyone, however, views these birds as a nuisance to be removed. Monk parakeets have grabbed the attention of birders and wildlife enthusiasts alike throughout southern Connecticut and New York. One, Stephen C. Baldwin, founded the Brooklyn Parrot Society in 2005. On his website, he posts photos of monk parakeets and updates on parakeet research. He also occasionally leads tours or "parrot safaris" of local flocks. There is an "interesting animal culture" in New York City, he says. Headlines highlight wildlife sightings—such as the Pizza Rat or the occasional coyote in Central Park—and these animals attain local celebrity status. Baldwin believes that if New Yorkers were exposed to wildlife on a more regular basis, attitudes may be different, for many New Yorkers, however, wild animals are viewed as a novelty. Occasionally his parrot safari draws owners of captive monk parakeets, but most people seem to just be looking for a chance to see this charismatic species.

Baldwin recalls one outing when an employee of Consolidated Edison was in attendance. The woman mentioned how the electric company tries to employ best practices when it comes to controlling parakeet populations, such as only removing nests when no eggs are present and making efforts not to cause undue stress to the birds.

Perhaps it's possible to minimize risks to the electric grid and at the same time afford monk parakeets some room within our crowded landscapes. It appears the birds are here to stay—noise, nests, and all. From an ecological perspective, they are a mild-mannered arrival in an already boisterous neighborhood. Living alongside wildlife often leads to memorable encounters. We are enriched by the experience even when faced with the occasional inconvenience caused by our wild neighbors. For many, this includes a small South American parrot squawking high up in the trees.

*Ted Merritt is a writer and environmental educator at the Wildlife Conservation Society.*







“I realized any of these surrounding giants could fall. I had no idea all of them would.”

Sarah Dennison

## Gaining Perspective from Sleeping Giant

On the afternoon of May 15, a tornado swept through Sleeping Giant, cutting a wide swath through one of Connecticut’s most beloved parks. For our writer—who was there when the storm hit—the on-going recovery is another chapter in the unfolding story of Sleeping Giant, a place that has been sacred to the Quinnipiac people for millennia.

Text and pictures by Sarah Dennison

**T**he weather report warned of thunderstorms. But relaxing at the top of Sleeping Giant, I thought if I made it to my car before the lightning started, I would be fine. When clear blue skies ceded to a rush of slate gray, I began meandering down the trail. Quickly, the air grew unusually heavy, an oppressive early dusk fell, and thunder purred dangerously overhead. I picked up my walk to a run.

As if the belly of the ocean was sliced open, an onslaught of water gushed down as I reached my car. I got in, turned on the light, and began to check for ticks. It would have been easier to do the tick-check in the rain, but my intuition shouted clearly, “Do not get out of the car.”



“The park is still there; the giant is still sleeping.  
The park will look different, but there are also new perspectives.”

Chris Collibee



The EF1 tornado leveled trees along the popular Tower Trail. Visitors can now see the chin of the giant from the picnic area.

A tall pine fell. It was the type of tree for which the exclamation “Timber!” was created. I realized any of these surrounding giants could also fall. I had no idea all of them would.

Shaking, I turned on the engine and catapulted out of the lot. Limbs peeled off trees like dandelion seeds. Heavy winds thrashed my car to the side as I fought with the steering wheel. It looked like I was driving beneath a river.

I could barely cross the road, but I had to get away from where I was. Ten feet in front of me, a tree was yanked from the earth—rootless—and flung back to the ground. Horizontal winds blew from the west, so I parked on the east side of Quinnipiac University. Only a few hundred yards separated me from where a tornado was now ripping into the earth.

Like an elemental sneeze, the storm passed as quickly as it had started. The wind stopped and the rain eased. Severed powerlines and downed trees blocked the road. Unable to leave, I walked back into the park.

It looked like a bomb had gone off. A single, mauled pine stood surrounded by splinters of shorn trunks and fallen giants. I climbed across a haphazard jungle-gym of pines thicker than barrels. There was a 20-foot-wide clearing where the tornado had kissed the earth, spewing out trunks and limbs onto the abandoned cars and picnic tables. An uprooted tree lay right where my car had been parked. I sat on the rough wet bark, grappling with the sheer force of nature.

Two months later I returned to Sleeping Giant. The ground was covered with the pale woodchips of giants. Two contractors had already spent a month clearing the downed pines, trading their services for the salvage timber, which was sent to mills in Connecticut and Canada. Nearly 500 trees came down during the storm. As of this writing, nearly 140 had been removed from the park. Hanging limbs and dislodged trunks still blocked the trails.

In a typical year, Sleeping Giant State Park sees some 225,000 visitors. Jill Scheibenpflug, the park supervisor, had been looking forward to implementing the new Passport to the Parks, which would allow more equal access to the park, and is disappointed that the park has been closed all summer.

“The problem with letting people in is that we need to get the picnic area seeded so we don’t have a big erosion problem,” Scheibenpflug explains. The area can’t be seeded until the fall. Even then, once Tower Trail is safe for hikers, she is concerned that people may be tempted to venture onto trails that are still hazardous. “Next spring is when I think it really will be ready,” she says.

Chris Collibee, Communications Director for the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP), encourages the public to use this opportunity to explore other parks. “We have 110 state parks. A lot of people go to the same parks consistently, but there are other parks out there that are beautiful,” he says. Beckley Iron Furnace in Canaan and River Highlands State Park in Cromwell are two of his favorites. He also suggests West Rock State Park as a nearby alternative to Sleeping Giant.



Sleeping Giant shares its three full-time and four seasonal staff with seven other parks, so Scheibenpflug relies on the Sleeping Giant Park Association (SGPA) volunteers for their help. The SGPA have responded to the storm in force, and their membership grew from 10 to 32. The SGPA volunteers took chainsaw safety courses with CFPA and have made most of the trail-clearing progress at the park. Yet there are clusters of trail damage so daunting they can only be tackled by DEEP.

The recovery at Sleeping Giant reflects a commitment to environmental stewardship. “Some of the trees fell in and around the Mill River, and we worked with the contractor to put some of the root balls back to create new fishing habitat,” Collibee says. “We see a tree down, and we think ‘Oh, that’s a problem,’ but an animal may see a tree down or rotting as a potential home or hiding space. The trees that aren’t on the trail might create new habitat for various animals,” he says.

The picnic area will be revitalized with native species which support local wildlife and pollinators, but the pines won’t be replanted. Before the storm, Scheibenpflug estimates five or six large pines fell in the park each year. During the storm, the well-used Tower Trail lost 170 trees in just a mile and a half. The trail is being widened to remove the timber, and Scheibenpflug says it won’t have the same aesthetic, “but there are other ways to climb that mountain.”

The storm that hit Sleeping Giant is a reminder we shouldn’t take our public lands for granted. “We’re going to see significant storms. It wasn’t that long ago that we were dealing with hurricanes Sandy and Irene, which changed the landscapes of parks throughout Connecticut,” Collibee says. “We can’t forget that climate change is real. It is happening, and it’s going to continue impacting the state.”

As Sleeping Giant recovers and becomes safe for visitors again, he encourages people to hold tight. “The park is still there; the giant is still sleeping. The park will look different, but there are also new perspectives. Previously you couldn’t see the chin of the giant from the picnic area, and now you can.”

**S**leeping Giant is sacred to the Quinnipiac people who inhabited the area for more than 8,000 years before colonization. Its name comes from their legend of the giant Hobbomock. According to Gordon Fox-Running Brainerd, Elder Medicine Man of the Quinnipiac Totoket Band, Hobbomock’s brother Mausop, was an eater of people. The Quinnipiac prayed to the Creator to drive Mausop away. The thunder gods created a downpour that lasted for days, and the Quinnipiac paddled north to escape the storm. Hobbomock and Mausop climbed onto a large oak as the water rose higher and higher, but Mausop got swept away. Hobbomock came across his body on the shores of



Gordon Fox-Running Brainerd curates the Dawnland Museum at the Dudley Farm in Guilford.

present-day West Haven. Hobbomock carried Mausop to the area now known as West Rock and covered him with stones. After he buried his brother, Hobbomock lay down and went to sleep, waiting for the return of the Quinnipiac people.

“Hobbomock never woke up,” says Fox-Running. The 84-year-old is curator of the Dawnland Museum at the Dudley Farm in Guilford where he educates the public about Connecticut’s First Peoples.

“What you do to the land you pass on to the next generation.”

**Gordon Fox-Running Brainerd**

When European colonists arrived in Connecticut in the 1630s, they clear-cut the land for lumber and agriculture. This put immense strain on the Quinnipiac and their traditional way of life. By the 1700s, colonial violence and disease had nearly wiped out the Quinnipiac people. Most of those who survived dispersed to places as far away as present-day Wisconsin and Quebec.

After nearly two centuries, some Quinnipiac descendants returned to Connecticut because they “wanted to get back in touch with their homeland,” Fox-Running says. When they returned, there was a piecing together of traditions,

*Continues on page 19*





Cider, which for more than two centuries was the most popular beverage in America, is once again becoming New England's heritage drink.

By Jean Crum Jones



During the past decade “hard” apple cider has experienced a renaissance as New England’s heritage drink. Northeast apple farmers are using heirloom cider apple varieties, old recipe formulas, and hand crafted techniques to create a sophisticated beverage which mimics the ciders available in England, France, and Spain. Well-made cider is a complex, crisp drink with fruit overtones akin to a fine sparkling wine. “Customers want to eat and drink local farm foods,” says Dan Beardsley, owner of Beardsley Orchards in Shelton. “They are interested in the historical connection of cider as the ‘every per-



Dan Beardsley

son’s drink’ of early New England and want to keep the tradition alive.”

Apples, which are often considered that most American of all fruits, are not actually native to this country. As early as the 1620s, English settlers—who had been growing apples since the Roman invasion of Britain—

brought apple seeds and cuttings to New England. The new apple trees grew well in our mineral-rich soils and benefitted from cold winter temperatures, which are necessary for the next fruiting cycle. Trails were irregularly lined with apple trees, sprung from discarded apple cores. Within a generation of the first colonists’ arrival, apple production had taken hold and cider had become the primary drink of all New Englanders. Everyone drank cider, from infants to the elderly.

By the late 1700s, most New England farmers had dozens of seedling apple trees in their orchards. After harvest, apples were put up as dried slices, applesauce, apple butter, and boiled apple syrup. Late fall apples were fed to pigs for fattening. But most apples were crushed and turned into cider or vinegar. An estimated 10 percent of New England farms had their own cider press and most towns had cider mills. In the fall, farmers with wagonloads of apples waited in line to unload their crops and returned with barrels of cider. A farmer might store some forty barrels of cider each fall that would ferment by winter. The apples they grew were sharp, tannic, and bitter, qualities that still make the best ciders.

For more than two centuries, cider was the most popular drink in America. But it slowly vanished from our culture as the country became more urban. German-made beers and new soft drinks could be made more economically in cities, and improved public water systems and pasteurized





Some cider apples are practically inedible and are nicknamed “spitters.” Many new cideries are experimenting with unusual flavor blends, such as adding fruits, hops, ginger, or other spices to their ciders.

milk—supported by the temperance movement—provided beverage alternatives for a growing urban population. The Prohibition period effectively ended cider production in the U.S. No longer able to make cider legally, apple growers replanted their cider trees with thin-skinned varieties, such as Cortland and McIntosh. The new slogan “An apple a day keeps the doctor away” promoted fresh apple eating, and “sweet” cider was marketed as a hallmark of autumn. Hard cider was relegated to fond memories of a bygone era.

In the 1980s, apple growers Steve Wood and Louisa Spencer of Lebanon, New Hampshire, began grafting old varieties, such as Esopus Spitzenberg, Wickson, and Golden Russet, which they sold to high-end markets and restaurants. After visiting England where they tasted traditional ciders, the couple decided to try producing a high quality hard cider in the U.S. They planted bitter sharp and bitter sweet apple trees and launched Farnum Hill Traditional Ciders. Widely applauded for their high-quality ciders, Steve and Louisa have worked with other apple producers to support the growth of the cider industry throughout New England.

Here in Connecticut, a new generation of cider makers is revitalizing an old tradition. At Holmberg’s Orchards in Gale’s Ferry, Russell Holmberg, a 4th generation producer, has been making hard cider for nearly a decade. Russell uses a strain of



Russell Holmberg

Golden Russet developed by his father, Richard, to create a sparkling, traditional English cider that is light, fresh, and fruity. Tyson Averill, a 10th generation farmer at Averill Farm in Washington Depot, has planted Northern Spy, Baldwin, Winesap, and Gold Rush cider apple varieties. His first release is a semi-dry cider; he plans to make a sparkling cider next.

Traditional ciders tend to be on the dry side with a subtle apple aroma. The challenge for cider makers is to skillfully blend the nuanced flavors of a variety of heritage apples while balancing acids and tannins to create a product that has great texture, astringency, and complexity. Some cider apples are practically inedible and are nicknamed “spitters.” Many new cideries, including Holmberg’s Orchards and Beardsley’s Cider Mill, are experimenting with unusual flavor blends, such as adding fruits, hops, ginger, or other spices to their ciders. In addition, Dan Beardsley offers a unique twist to using traditional cider apples. He sells his special blend of fresh cider, which uses Winesap, Northern Spy, Golden Russet, Fuji and Yellow Delicious apples, to home brewers of hard cider. Other producers use barrel fermentation and barrel aging to achieve distinct flavor profiles.

Ryan Bishop of Bishop’s Orchard in Guilford has spent six years working with Steve Wood at Farnum Hill Ciders and is currently creating the next generation of ciders at his family’s farm. He has planted six heirloom varieties from Steve’s collection—Wickson, Yarlington Mill, Chisel Jersey, Russet, Somerset RedStreak, and Ashmeads Kernal. He hopes there will be bearing fruit available in 2019 for these new cider blends. Keith Bishop, Ryan’s father, also produces a semi-sweet farmhouse style cider from a mix of the orchard’s culinary varieties.

All of these growers are positive about the future of traditional cider in Connecticut and are currently planting more old-fashioned varieties of apples. “Across the board, customers are smarter about their food than twenty years ago,” Dan Beardsley says. “They keep abreast of what’s going on with farmers’ production practices, they want to try more types of local fruits and food products, and they want healthier and more flavorful foods overall. The future for cider looks good.”

*Jean Crum Jones lives in Shelton with her farming family.*



# Translating Science Into Good Public Policy: An Interview with DEEP Commissioner Robert Klee

By Timothy Brown



**R**obert Klee has a lot on the plate. As Commissioner of the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP), he oversees a staff of more than 800 full-time employees—plus 500 to 600 seasonal workers—who work on issues ranging from renewable energy policy, to environmental protection, to management of our state parks and forests. But despite his demanding job, Klee still finds time to get outside with his family. On the day we met, he'd just returned from a weekend camping trip with his family as part of No Child Left Inside, a program established by his predecessor Gina McCarthy that connects kids with the outdoors. It's one of the programs Klee says he'll miss most when his term concludes at the end of this year.

We sat down with Commissioner Klee, who holds both a Ph.D. in industrial ecology from the Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies and a law degree from Yale Law School, for a wide-ranging discussion about his tenure at DEEP, the challenges his successor will face, and the importance of this November's election for Connecticut's environment.

This interview has been edited for clarity and length.

“In Connecticut, science actually matters.”

**Woodlands:** You have a strong and diverse background in science and law. Why did you want to get into environmental policy, and by extension, politics?

**Commissioner Klee:** I haven't viewed my time here at DEEP as very partisan or political. It's one of the nice things about Connecticut—we have a bipartisan approach to environmental issues. That was demonstrated this past year with the passage of big pieces of environmental legislation, including SJ35 and the governor's bills on climate change and clean energy. In Connecticut, science actually matters. People understand the changes that are happening to our climate. They see it—whether they're hiking in a forest, on a lake, on the Sound, or in their own backyard. That reality doesn't know political lines or boundaries. I think that having the science and the law background were a great combo for this agency where we work to translate science into good public policy.

**How do you balance Connecticut's energy and environmental needs in a state that's struggling with budget issues and many competing interests?**

We work best when we're approaching issues that cut across different parts of the agency. So many of our energy choices have significant environmental impacts. It's been interesting to integrate with our more traditional roles of the old DEP (Department of Environmental Protection). We've seen over time that people have been really interested—really engaged—in how the agency approaches energy issues. For example, at the Meigs Point Nature Center, we intentionally built-in solar, geothermal, highly



During Klee's tenure, DEEP has improved infrastructure at our state parks, including the new Meigs Point Nature Center at Hammonasset Beach.



DEEP's What's In, What's Out social media campaign provides shows how to recycle or dispose of waste items.

efficient energy, and electric vehicle charging stations at a place that gets 2 million visitors a year. You can start having those teachable moments and bring in all those different parts of our agency at a place like that.

**What are you most proud of having accomplished during your tenure as Commissioner?**

On the policy front, I think we've had some really amazing accomplishments. The Governor's Council on Climate Change—environmental nonprofits, academics, business interests, and government agencies all working together—set an interim target for reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 45 percent by 2030 that got passed. On the materials management side, we've been investing in anaerobic digestion, but also modernizing our waste infrastructure and putting our What's In, What's Out campaign on social media. On Long Island Sound, the Blue Plan has been really focused on that amazing resource—cleaning up the water that flows to it, but also ensuring that it's a vibrant, working waterbody. On the education side, No Child Left Inside has been one of my favorite parts of the job—that direct connection with kids and families and the outdoors. And the governor has been amazing in investing in infrastructure for our parks, even in tough budget times. The new Meigs

Point Nature Center; the West Beach bathhouse; Silver Sands' new bathrooms and snack shack overlooking Long Island Sound—those are the things that will be there for 30 years. I'll get to keep visiting them and know that I got to play a little part in making sure that they happened.

**What are some of the challenges facing the next Commissioner?**

There are big things. We've set targets on the climate side—ambitious ones. We need a clean grid. We need to electrify transportation. We need to deal with building heating and cooling. Those are not easy areas. We've also established a Renewable Portfolio Standard—one of the most ambitious in the country. We've got the target on the books. Now we have to actually make it, which is going to be a big challenge, but one that I think is doable. We can be the model for other states to follow. I love this agency because of its people. But in tough budget times, we've been shrinking too much. That will continue to be a challenge for the next Commissioner going forward. How do we ensure that the legislature doesn't keep adding things to our plate at a time when we need to be focused on the things we do best, the things that are most impactful for the environment or energy space? That's going to be hard because the list

The purpose of the Long Island Sound Blue Plan is to protect traditional uses, minimize conflicts, and maximize compatibility, now and in the future. This includes preserving Long Island Sound's ecosystems and resources, and facilitating a transparent, science-based decision-making process. Learn more at [ct.gov/deep](http://ct.gov/deep) and search for Blue Plan.





**“The constitutional amendment says these lands are part of our natural heritage and they’re supposed to be there for future generations.”**

**Commissioner Robert Klee**

of the things we could do keeps growing as our numbers keep shrinking.

**How important is this fall’s upcoming election for Connecticut’s environment and clean energy future?**

I think it is very important. There are serious consequences in these sorts of elections. We’re pushing back against some very tough headwinds. You need a state leadership that’s there to ensure that we’re protecting the rights of our citizens to enjoy a clean and healthy environment. That doesn’t have to be a partisan issue. Digging deep into where the candidates—all the candidates—stand on these issues is important, regardless of whether they are Republican or Democrat or Independent.

**What are your thoughts on the proposed constitutional amendment?**

We fully support it. It has been frustrating for the legislature to do that late night, last night of session swapping of lands with so little public input. We tried in my tenure as Commissioner to shed a light, to show up and testify, to be a voice in that process. And yet the process was flawed because it had the ability of “Notwithstanding...” anything

in the statute, you can go ahead and do whatever you want. The constitutional amendment tackles that head-on and says these lands are part of our natural heritage and they’re supposed to be there for future generations. They serve public health and well-being, and ecological health; they connect wildlife corridors; they help respond to climate change and make Connecticut more resilient. And when you lose those spaces, they’re gone forever. The challenge of passing a constitutional amendment is that we don’t do them very often. I focus on the spirit of it, which is about protecting our natural spaces and making sure that we’re being good stewards of our lands.

**What are your plans when your current term ends?**

I’m still in the process of searching. What I do know is that this has been an amazing job and it will be hard to top. I’d like to find as many elements of this position in my next job. First and foremost, great people to work with, and the ability to interact with such a diversity of subject matter and people and constituents. I have a love of learning and I learn something new every day. I want to keep that going, whatever I do next.

*Timothy Brown is the Editor of Connecticut Woodlands.*

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**This November Vote ‘Yes’ to Protect Your Public Land,**  
*Continued*

Moreover, both Witkos and Gresko flatly reject any notion that the proposed amendment will harm economic development in Connecticut. “There is absolutely no negative impact of this measure on business,” said Witkos. “In fact, I would say it’s just the opposite.”

“I agree we want economic development in the state of Connecticut,” Gresko said, “but if the deal were that good, if it were that important, then it should’ve been put together with a little more time to spare, rather than cramming it through at the 11th hour when there’s a thousand things to do and not everyone’s paying attention.”

The proposed constitutional amendment to protect these natural resources is now in the hands of Connecticut’s voters who will go to the polls on November 6. Gresko encourages those who support the proposed amendment to reach out to people in both parties, just as he and Witkos did at the statehouse where the initiative received overwhelming support from people in both parties.

“I always say to the groups that are advocating for environmental issues, ‘Don’t talk to me—you’ve got me already,’” he said. “Go and target people who are on the fence. Go to people who are sensible and thoughtful. There are a handful of people who can sway your issue one way or the other and that’s where you should be focusing.”

Supporters of the measure should expect to spend some time educating prospective voters about the issue, he says. People may not be used to seeing a proposed constitutional amendment, and the language of the ballot measure can sound technical. Witkos says that voters should focus on the spirit of the proposed amendment, which is about protecting Connecticut’s open space, parks, and forests current and future generations.

“If they have any questions, they can contact my office and we’d be more than happy to walk them through what this means,” said Witkos, “because I believe that in my 16-year career at the capitol, this is one of the most important issues that I’ve worked on, and the only issue that is being put before every voter in the state of Connecticut.”

## Gaining Perspective from Sleeping Giant, Continued

but it was never the same. “Most came back as family groups, not as a whole tribe,” he says. While many Quinnipiac were more accepted by the settlers, they were still “hiding in plain sight” says Fox-Running. “They practiced their religious beliefs in private.”

Fox-Running’s grandmother returned from Quebec, but cultural suppression carried on for generations in his family as well. Growing up in Stony Creek, he and his siblings were told never to speak of the ir Quinnipiac blood “for fear of public ridicule and harassment.” His siblings still do not speak of their heritage, and have expressed no interest in his museum exhibit.

Fox-Running is dedicated to educating the public on Quinnipiac customs and history. Through decades of research and numerous archeological digs, Fox-Running has reconnected with his roots and preserved an extensive record of the area’s first inhabitants. The collection of Quinnipiac artifacts at the Dawnland Museum includes a ceremonial spearhead pendant made of quartz crystal; a 5-foot-tall corn grinder embedded with ancient corn remains; and a snakeskin bow with metal arrowhead arrows dating from the 1600s. Fox-Running has thoroughly researched the cultural significance of each tool and artifact. His reverence is contagious.

“I wish people would become more aware of what native people did for this country,” he says. For example, many of the foods we eat today were first cultivated by Native Americans. He is concerned about unchecked population growth, our consumption of finite resources, toxic waste, and plastic in the ocean. “I couldn’t imagine living the way my ancestors did,” he says.

“We believe that the Creator put us on this earth as stewards of the land—to respect the land, taking what we need for survival. Not anything more than that. Not for profit. Always leaving something behind for future generations,” he says. “You’re not immortal. What you do to the land you pass on to the next generation.”

The destruction at Sleeping Giant has brought people together, but Fox-Running urges the public to see the larger picture and to be a steward of the land beyond the park. “I’m just a small voice,” he says. “We need more people. Like me—and you—to speak up. Talk in public. Call. Have meetings. What can we do locally to help our environment?”

*Sarah Dennison grew up on the coast of Maine. She writes with the hope of preserving the wild for its own sake. She has worked on two environmental activism campaigns, and has a Bachelors in English Literature from Wheaton College. She is currently working on a novel.*



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# Hitting the Trail With Your Tailed One

By Susan Cornell



Julius at the Peoples State Forest overlook by Dan Barrett.

**A** pooch, a parrot, or a pig? Whether your sidekick is furry or feathery, there are a few tips that will enhance your trail time together. With a little forethought and planning, you and your best buddy can safely enjoy your shared pastime—hiking!

Researchers point to the many health benefits of hiking with dogs, such as increasing walking speeds, lowering the risk of diabetes, and reducing stress. Dog owners—including children from dog-owning families—are more likely to stick to and reach their fitness goals. And walking a dog has many social benefits as well, such as increasing social interaction and reducing loneliness and isolation.

My companion is Bailey, a 15-pound puggle. We joke that she's the worst of both breeds—she eats like a pug and barks like a beagle. Still I wouldn't trade her or our time on the trail together for anything. As a CFPA Trail Manager, I find that she is one more incentive to get out there often. While Bailey and I hike year-round, autumn is one of our favorite seasons. It's not too warm or too cold, the smell of fallen leaves is heavenly, and the views and colors are incredible. And October 1-7 is National Walk Your Dog Week, the perfect time for you and your pooch to hit the trail.

## Finding tail-friendly trails

Before you go, it's important to know that the trail is dog-friendly, wildlife you may encounter, distance, and terrain, says Tim Burdelski, Outdoor Programs Instructor at REI in West Harford, who hikes with his “girls”—Regina, a German Shepherd, and his rescue, Wulver.

Leashes are almost always mandatory. Also, look for routes that are easy on the paws, avoid surfaces that get too hot, watch out for steep drops, and avoid trails that are heavily used by horses or mountain bikes.

## Preparing for the Trip

Ask your vet if your canine companion is physically ready for the trail. Are there vaccinations or medications she might need? Just as you build up your stamina for tougher hikes, it's important to build up your dog's stamina, too. In fact, a puppy's bones may not be fully developed until she's about a year old. But no matter your dog's age, start with shorter hikes and increase to longer ones. This not only helps them develop stamina, but also toughens their paw pads.

Brush up on trail etiquette and obedience. Good manners include stepping off the trail to yield to passersby. Think about how Fido might react to other dogs, hikers, and wildlife. If she runs after a squirrel—or someone's picnic—will she return on command?



Gearing Up

Among the essentials are a leash, identification, rabies tag, vet’s contact information, water and water bowl, first aid kit, and snacks that have been taste-tested beforehand, advises Burdelski. A dog pack can be useful, but it’s important that it’s fitted correctly and is loaded evenly.

“For fitting a dog for a pack, you’ll want to measure the dog’s girth, or the circumference of their chest, behind their front legs,” says Mat Jobin, owner of Reach Your Summit. “For weight in a pack, I always follow the rule of 10 percent of the animal’s body weight. If a dog is 50 pounds, it should carry no more than 5 pounds of pack weight,” he says.

Food and Water Planning

According to Jobin, dogs should consume about an ounce of water per pound of body weight. On a really hot day, you may want to double that amount to keep them hydrated. You’ll also want to increase their diet by 50 to 70 percent for long distance hikes. He says, “I wouldn’t suggest a big meal before being active. It can cause bloating and stomach issues in dogs, and may result in a trip to the vet.”

Nakitta Manseau, manager at Denali Outdoor in Old Saybrook and an avid hiker, gives her two dogs a little snack both before and after a hike. She hides a quarter of what they normally eat and makes sure they drink plenty of liquids. “I bring enough food for one meal per dog whenever I go out for worst-case scenario situations,” she says.

Leave No Trace

On day hikes, always BYOB – Bring Your Own (poop) Bags and dispose of them properly. If you’re concerned about leakage, double-bag on the trail. You can always reuse any clean outer bags on the next adventure. On backpacking trips, Leave No Trace applies to both people and pets. Pet waste should be buried in a 6 to 8-inch hole at least 200 feet from any camps, trails, or water sources.

Safety

Although poison ivy rarely causes reactions for dogs, the oils can spread from them to humans. Always check your dog for ticks after a hike.

It’s great to have a doggie first aid kit, but don’t forget to bone up on how to use it. Remember to include any necessary medications and clean wool socks that, with a little tape, can serve as bootie bandages. The Red Cross is a great resource for dog owners. They provide checklists, as well first aid kits and training materials. They even offer an online course in cat and dog first aid.

Local Dog-Friendly Parks

Some of Connecticut’s best state parks for dogs include Ragged Mountain in Berlin, Devils Hopyard in East Haddam, and West Rock Ridge in Hamden. Two of the best bark parks are Shelton Dog Park, which has a four-mile trail, and the 14-acre, off-leash Southbury Dog Park, which offers a fenced-in small-dog area, a huge open field, two wooded trails, a beautiful and accessible river, and plenty of poop bags.

Our state tourism website de-tails not only great places to hike with a dog, but also where they can swim, take an off-leash adventure, and “pawse” for a bite, treat, drink, or nap. Go to CTVisit.com and search “dog hike” for ideas on where to go.

Finally, most, but not all, Blue Blazed Hiking Trails are pet-friendly. To pick a great hike, go to ctwoodlands.org/blue-blazed-hiking-trails, or refer to the Connecticut Walk Book.

This may seem like a lot to consider, but don’t let it scare you away from hiking with a pet. The benefits for both you and your pet far outweigh any inconveniences. With a little practice, planning will become routine and soon you’ll both be drooling for more quality time together on the trail.

Susan Cornell owns Moppet Magic Publishing & Public Relations in Killingsworth, and is a CFPA Trail Manager.



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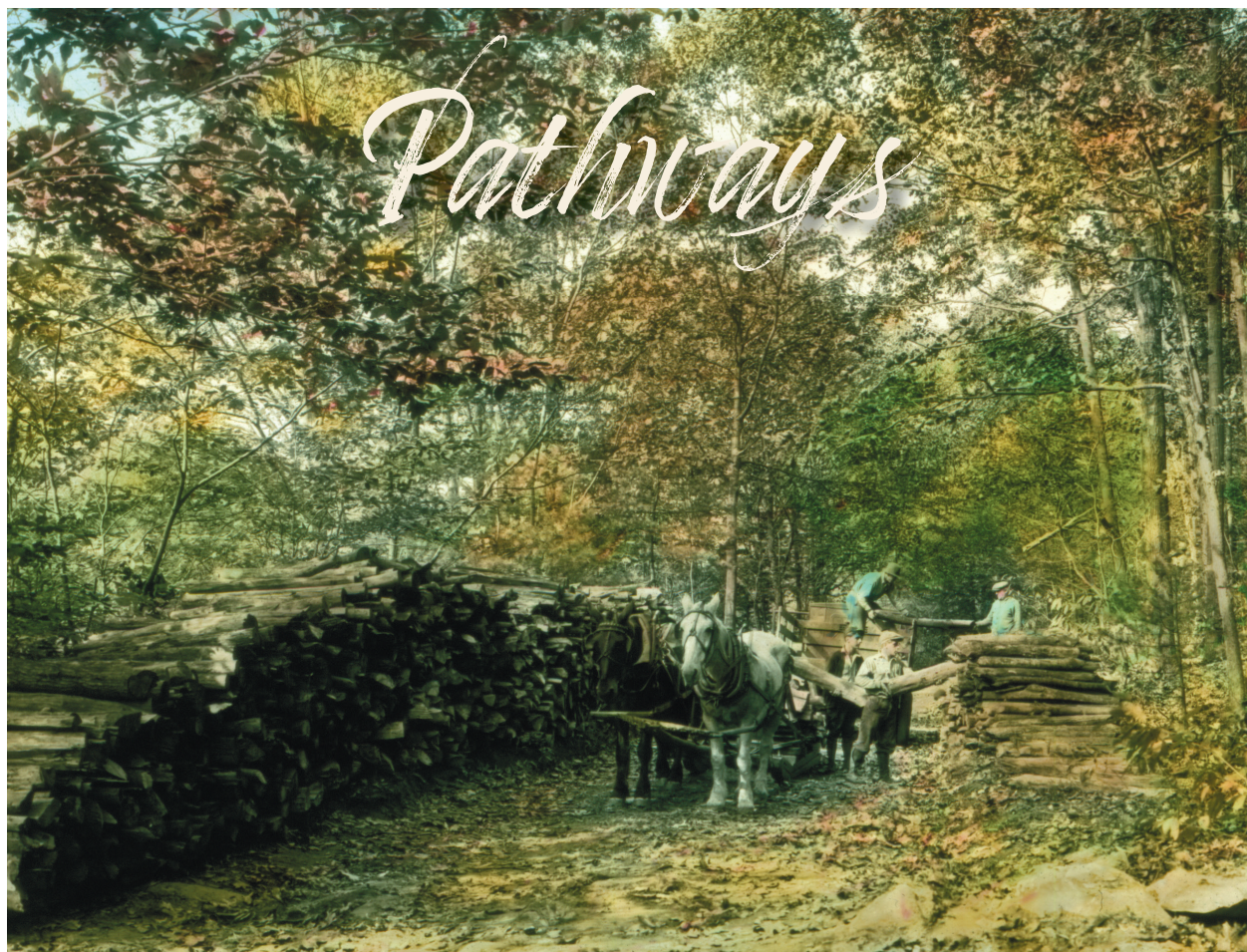
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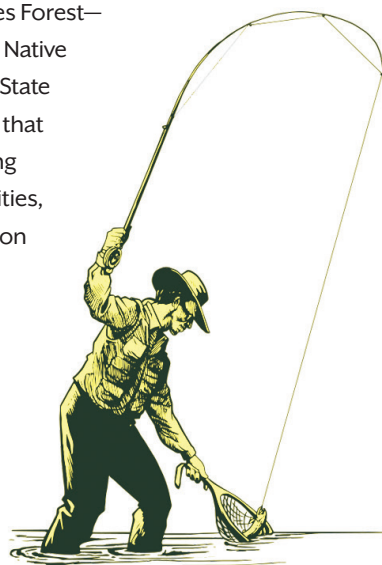


# Pathways

**T**hroughout the early 1920s, CFPA helped facilitate the expansion of Connecticut’s state parks and forests, including the Peoples Forest in Barkhamsted, established in 1924.

Envisioned by Association President Alain White as “a gift to the state from its people,” CFPA coordinated donations from the Connecticut Federation of Women’s Clubs, the Daughters of the American Revolution, and numerous CFPA members, who purchased land for approximately \$8.00 an acre. For the next 30 years, the Peoples Forest—which features a 200-year-old stand of white pine and a 1500-year-old Native American soapstone quarry—served as the nursery for the Connecticut State Forests. In 1935, the Civilian Conservation Corps built a Nature Museum that visitors can still enjoy today. The forest also boasts over 11 miles of hiking trails, excellent cross-country skiing, and numerous water-based activities, such as trout fishing and canoeing on the West Branch of the Farmington River, a designated a Wild and Scenic River.

In the above photograph dating from 1932, workers can be seen using horses to log a stand in the Peoples Forest. These days, horse-logging, which causes minimal soil erosion and allows for more selective thinning, is once again becoming popular with many small and medium-sized woodlot owners as a more environmentally sensitive or “restorative” type of forestry.





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