CONNECTICUT
Woodlands
SUMMER 2020

Hiking Through a Crisis

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

On the Cover: Lauren Desrocher discovers a delicate lady's slipper on Trails Day, 2019.

Building on a conservation legacy at Highlawn Forest, page 9.

CONTRIBUTOR'S *Spotlight*

Lauren Desrocher, a mother of four, began hiking local conservation areas as a way to get outside with her kids. Soon she discovered a forgotten trail in her own neighborhood. Reopening the trail to the public became her obsession, and led to the creation of the volunteer Ellington Ad Hoc Trails Committee, of which she is the current chair. They build and maintain trails on town-owned open space, but their ultimate goal is to create a series of free, outdoor educational experiences that will help connect community members to nature. Lauren, who shot this issue's cover, says she's "blessed with a group of very devoted and talented volunteers who continue to work safely and independently during these difficult times."

We caught up with Lauren to learn more about her passion for trails.

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Poet laureate Margaret Gibson finds inspiration in nature, page 14.

Preparing students to tackle the climate crisis, page 17.

In This Issue

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Tell us about your photo of the lady's slipper.

This photo was taken on our Trails Day hike in 2019. We had recently cleared and opened the Kimball Forest Trail. Much of Ellington lies within a valley, but the Kimball Trail is nestled between two steep, rocky areas—a hidden fairyland of babbling brooks, mini waterfalls, and mossy boulders. Our committee is now working to expand the trail, which will allow hikers to easily connect with the Shenipsit Trail just up the road.

How does photography change your hiking experience?

I always keep my phone out while hiking with our committee so we can share the experience and spread word of what we do through social media. On the rare occasion that I am hiking alone, I snap photos to share with my kids as soon as I get home. Photography keeps me scanning for highlights like this lady's slipper. The forest floor offers us a miniature world inside of the larger landscape. I find a lot of inspiration there for my own artistic hobbies and projects that I share with my kids.

How has the Ellington Trails Committee adapted to the current pandemic?

This season, our volunteers are working hard (while social distancing, of course!) to create a vibrant Sensory Garden on one of our town-owned properties where we look forward to hosting educational hikes, lectures, and events. We are so grateful to our community for their continued support, and we can't wait to be able to gather together again and celebrate in nature.

Laurels in bloom at Case Mountain, Manchester

Editor's Note

It's hard to imagine living in a more uncertain time. The COVID-19 pandemic has brought life to a halt. People are dying at an alarming rate. Businesses are closed. Schools are shuttered. Concerts and sporting events cancelled. We're physically isolated from our closest loved ones at just the time we need them most.

But everywhere there are reasons for hope. Even while social distancing, people are using new technologies to come together in ways that would have seemed implausible only a few months ago. Across the country, there are nightly celebrations for frontline workers. Companies are innovating new systems to keep their employees working. And critically, people are heeding the advice of scientists and public health officials to stay safe and slow the spread of the virus.

Yet, as we mobilize to fight this pandemic, another crisis looms, one that demands a much bigger and more sustained response. Climate change has the potential to not only alter social norms and disrupt economies, but to unravel the very fabric of life itself. Scientists say we have maybe a decade to act to prevent catastrophic warming. Here in Connecticut, we have a long history of being proactive when it comes to confronting such challenges.

Less than 25 years after the Connecticut Forestry Association, now CFPA, was founded, the world was battling another pandemic, the Spanish influenza of 1918. That flu ravaged the globe, killing an estimated 50 million people, more than died in all of World War I. CFPA survived that crisis, and later the Great Depression and another world war. We will survive this current pandemic, too, thanks to your support.

These days, as more and more people seek the refuge and solace of nature, we say thank you to everyone who has worked over the past 125 years to ensure that we—and future generations—have access to the trails, forests, and parks that sustain us.

I'll see you (safely) outside,

Timothy Brown
Editor

Woodlands

Timothy Brown
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Thanks to photo contributions from: Clare Cain, George Camp, Lauren Desrocher, Shannon Gilman, Steve Kornfeld, Mitchel Kvedar, Marie Malloy, NASA JPL-Caltech, Ryan Walker.

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CFPA Updates

CFPA's Tree School connects kids to nature

Our everyday lives have changed, but our need for nature connection remains as strong as ever. Families and children need enriching outdoor experiences during these times of heightened Zoom learning and social isolation. In response to this need, Tree School was created. This program provides families and teachers the tools to get children safely outdoors into backyards, local parks, or Blue-Blazed Hiking Trails. This program touched over 750 participants including children and their caregivers.

Participants received seven weekly emails filled with fun activities that helped them get into the forest and learn all about trees. Many of the Tree School activities come from Project Learning Tree, which is an environmental education program that uses forests as the backdrop for learning, co-coordinated by CFPA and CT DEEP.

One Connecticut mom, Shirin Pagels, was excited to have Tree School as a resource for her daughter, who grew up hiking our trails. "Thanks so much for coordinating this program for CT's kids," said Pagels. "My kids and friends are loving this! Looking forward to participating with my kids each week."

We are happy that we can help keep the nature connection alive in a time when we all need it the most! Registration for Tree School is ongoing. Visit the events page at ctwoodlands.org for more information.

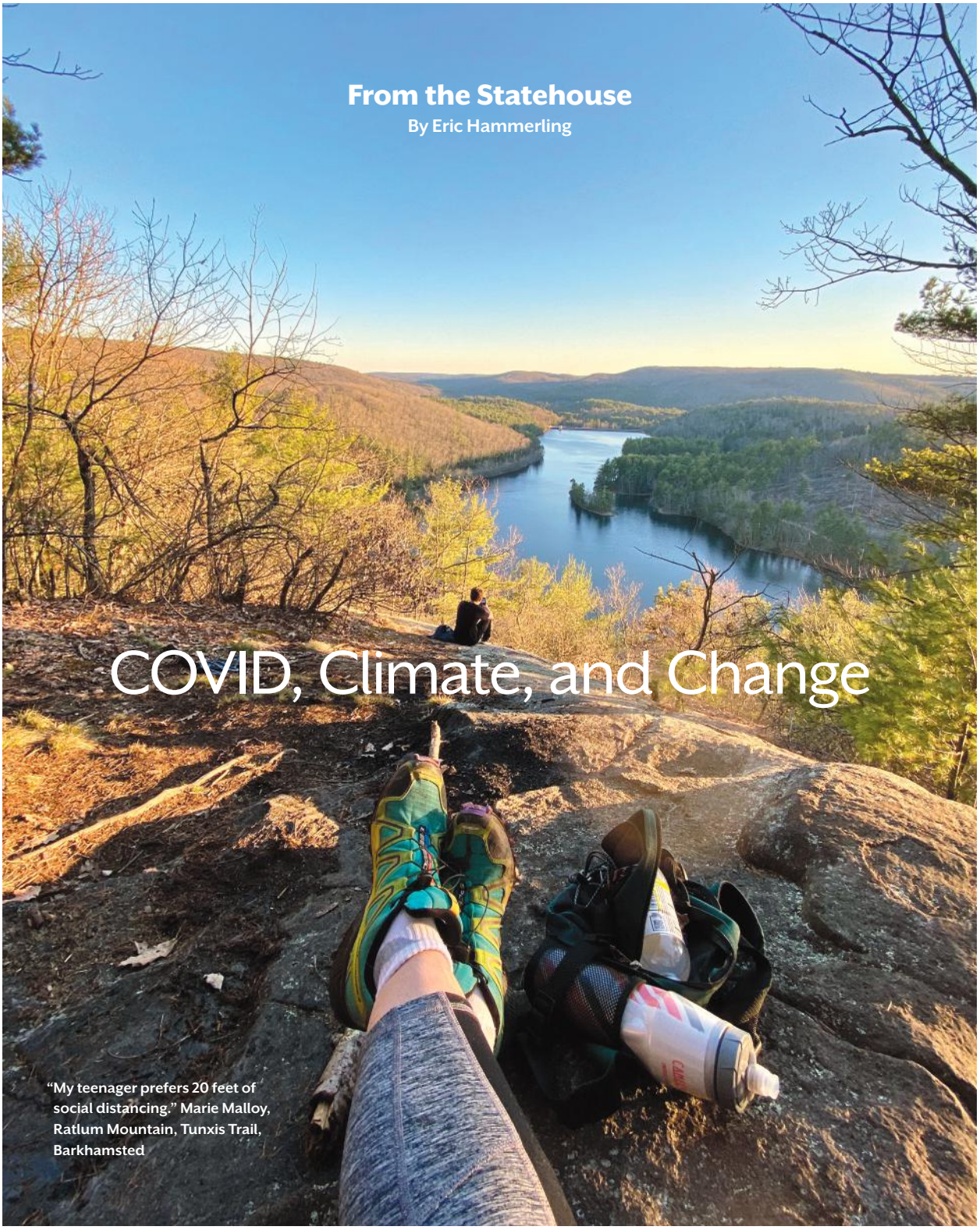
Census Measures Use on Blue-Blazed Trails

The Connecticut Trail Census program is pleased to announce a new partnership with CFPA to measure trail use patterns on the Blue-Blazed Hiking Trails. "Connecticut's Blue-Blazed Trails are the heart and soul of our statewide trail network," observed Charles Tracy, coordinator for the Trail Census. "This new partnership with CFPA will help us to document the actual use and demographics on specific trails and calculate the broad community benefits of Connecticut's diverse hiking trails." The team will first focus on a section of the Mattabesett Trail. The Connecticut Trail Census is a volunteer-based data collection and education program that operates on trails across the state. The program collects information about trail use through trail use counts recorded by infrared counters and user intercept surveys administered by trained volunteers. The goal is to develop an accurate picture of who uses trails in Connecticut, and to advance and inform new trail policy, design, and construction throughout the state. Data is compiled annually and is available online and through public education programs.

Initiated in 2017 as a partnership between UConn Extension, the Naugatuck Valley Council of Governments, the Connecticut Greenways Council, and local trails advocacy organizations, the Trail Census has expanded to over 20 data collection sites on trails across the state. The program receives funding from the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection Recreational Trails Program. For more information or to get involved visit cttrailcensus.uconn.edu

By Eric Hammerling

COVID, Climate, and Change



"My teenager prefers 20 feet of social distancing." Marie Malloy, Ratlum Mountain, Tunxis Trail, Barkhamsted

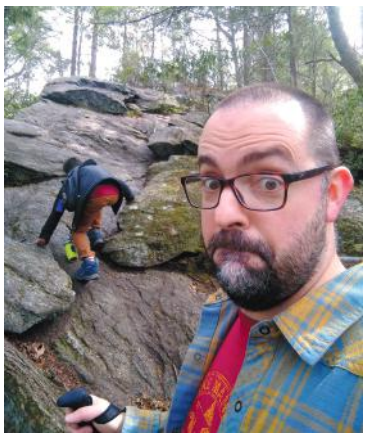
This spring, as social distancing guidelines took effect, closing restaurants, theaters, malls, and other businesses, thousands of citizens across Connecticut got outside in search of adventure, recreation, or just a mental break from endless Zoom meetings. We wanted to see what our readers had been up to, so we asked them to share with us photos of their hikes on Blue-Blazed Trails. The images included here reflect some of the amazing images we received. Thanks to everyone who shared their photos.

BEING AN OPTIMIST, I believe everyone can make a difference, and the best way to respond to a challenge is through action. So, it should be no surprise that I am looking for the silver linings and opportunities for action to combat the dual life-altering threats confronting us right now—COVID-19 and climate change.

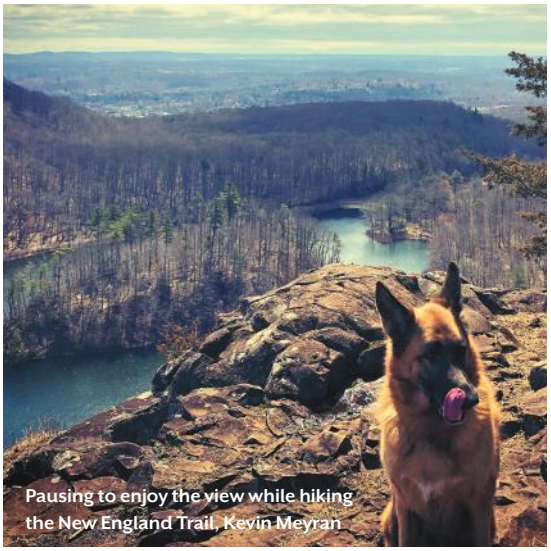
It has been fascinating to witness the nationwide focus on COVID-19, and the unparalleled mobilization of federal and state resources that has evolved so quickly over the past few months. However, the dramatic changes in personal behavior that we have all adopted to keep ourselves and others safe have been the most inspirational. When is the last time that you enjoyed a hug from someone who is not part of your immediate household, or shook the hand of someone you respect, or attended a group sporting or cultural event, or had a meeting in person, or went shopping without an intense awareness of social distancing? It has been difficult, but we are doing it anyway. Wow!

Clearly, we can change as individuals and as a society when we feel like our lives are on the line. Coincidentally, the changes in our behavior spurred by this global pandemic are also having some positive environmental consequences. Less travel and commerce has led to significant improvements in air quality, and this is expected to help people with respiratory ailments be healthier and better able to both combat and recover from COVID-19.

Another positive change is that people are getting outdoors en masse to enjoy trails, parks, forests, and open spaces and experience the numerous mental and physical benefits that come along with this activity. The CT Trail Census at UConn documented an overall increase of 77 percent in trail use across all of the trails they monitor, and on about half of these trails, the increase in use was greater than 100 percent. It is encouraging to see many new people being active outdoors and connected to nature, and I hope this behavior change for many will be lifelong. ➨



"My oldest son, Braden (10) and I have been exploring Blue-Blazed Trails during the week, and he's getting pretty good at scrambling up the rocks." Ryan Walker, Photos: left, Whitestone Cliffs; center and right, Mattatuck Trail heading towards Leatherman's Cave



Pausing to enjoy the view while hiking the New England Trail, Kevin Meyran

The response to COVID-19 has shown us what we can do to tackle a life-threatening challenge. So, how can we bring the urgency, resources, focus, and changes in behavior to that other, presumably bigger challenge of climate change?

I do not have the answer, but I can at least give you some insights into CFPA's priority actions related to climate change excerpted from our Strategic Plan for 2020-2022:

Get more people outdoors on trails: CFPA is always working to maintain, improve, and protect more than 825 miles of Blue-Blazed Hiking Trails. The more sustainable outdoor recreation that happens here in Connecticut, the less travel to other states and greenhouse gas emissions that will take place. This is connected to our promotion of state and federal support for recreational trails, better marketing of and access to local outdoor recreation opportunities, and online resources such as a statewide trails map that let people know where trails are in each community.

Keep trail corridors connected: To get more people outdoors and ensure trails are always available, CFPA is working with landowners to protect trail corridors in perpetuity. CFPA is also advocating for protecting trail corridors with a property tax break for landowners committed to hosting state-designated greenways such as the Blue-Blazed Hiking Trails.

Keep forests as forests: CFPA is building a new "Master Woodland Owner" certification program and coordinates Coverts to provide resources and training for landowners on how to manage their forests for multiple personal and societal benefits. CFPA is developing recommendations through its role on the Governor's Council on Climate Change to support increased climate change mitigation, adaptation, and resilience in Connecticut's forests.

None of these efforts happen or continue without your involvement and support, so thank you, and keep safe outdoors!

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

Shannon Gilman, Black Rock State Park

CREATING A CONSERVATION LEGACY

AFTER A QUARTER-CENTURY OF PROTECTION, HIGHLAWN FOREST GETS A BRAND-NEW BOARDWALK AND OUTDOOR CLASSROOM FOR THE ENJOYMENT OF PRESENT AND FUTURE GENERATIONS.

This year marks the 25th anniversary of the protection of Highlawn Forest, located behind the administrative headquarters of the Connecticut Forest & Park Association. John Camp, who served on CFPA's board from 1971-1989, generously donated development rights to CFPA on over 250 acres of mixed hardwood forest in Middletown. The forest features a relatively flat, three-mile, closed-loop trail that is open to the public for non-motorized activities, including hiking, snowshoeing, Nordic skiing, birding, letterboxing, and forest bathing. CFPA regularly hosts hikes, trainings, educational programs, and other events there.

Highlawn also serves as living laboratory for students from Wesleyan, Yale, and other area schools. The forest is home to a spectacular natural vernal pool, a type of seasonal wetland, where each spring fairy shrimp, wood frogs, spring peepers, and spotted salamanders come to life. CFPA also allows partner organizations such as the Appalachian Mountain Club and Women of the Woods to host programs at Highlawn. And in 2012, graduate students from the Yale School of Forestry & Environmental Studies completed a comprehensive management plan for the forest.

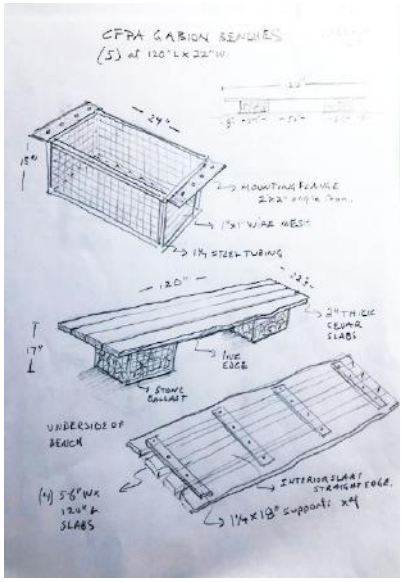
"The goal for this property is to truly make it a demonstration forest with opportunities for youth and adult education on forestry techniques, invasive species removal, trail building, and maintenance," said Lindsay Suhr, CFPA's Land Conservation Director.

Recently, CFPA has been busy with two major infrastructure improvements in Highlawn Forest. The first is a re-build of the popular vernal pool boardwalk and overlook platform. Used regularly by school groups and hiking clubs, the wooden walkway provides access to the sights and sounds of the large and active vernal pool. Built two decades ago by CFPA's trail volunteers, the structure was in need of a re-design and re-build. Many partner groups and volunteers have pitched in to demolish and remove the old boardwalk and build the new one.

The second improvement is the construction of a new outdoor classroom. Tucked behind a small ridge, the classroom is surrounded by large trees and will be a congregation place and learning circle for young and old naturalists alike. Benches were designed and built from local cedar planks by City Bench, a company that creates furniture using reclaimed wood.

"We are excited to have a gathering place in Highlawn that is beautiful, inspirational, and in concert with the surroundings," said Clare Cain, CFPA's Trails Stewardship Director. ➨

First Highlawn Farmhouse, ca 1906



Photos at left and above: After two decades, the popular vernal pool boardwalk was in need of repair. Clare Cain, Trails Stewardship Director, and Brennan Turner, Field Coordinator, practice social distancing while constructing the boardwalk. Center and bottom: Benches at the outdoor classroom were designed by City Bench using local cedar planks.

Highlawn has been in the Camp family for the past three generations. Originally a dairy farm, John and his wife Ruth inherited the property in 1960. They raised Christmas trees and managed the forest as a refuge for wildlife. John, who passed away in 1995, was twice named Connecticut's Outstanding Tree Farmer for his commitment to forestry and forest conservation.

Last fall, we interviewed John's son, George, about his family's history on the property. George and his wife, Camille, split their time between HIghlawn and a second home in North Carolina. George was excited about the new boardwalk and outdoor classroom, and deeply appreciative of the work CFPA has done to keep the forest protected and open to the public. Sadly, George, a sociologist by training who would have turned 82 this year, passed away unexpectedly on March 30 just as we were working on this story. Our condolences go out to Camille and the rest of the Camp family.

The following interview has been edited for length and clarity.

Connecticut Woodlands: How long has the property been in your family?

George Camp: My father's parents began acquiring the land around 1898, the year they were married, for the purposes of building a home and riding horses. They both loved to ride horses. Even before they built the house, they would ride up here. It was a working dairy farm known as Highlawn Farm, and they had stables and many horses that they both rode and showed. My grandfather judged horse shows all over the Northeast, including at Madison Square Garden. They built the house in the first decade of the last century, and moved in around 1906. The original house looked just like Mount Vernon. One winter at night when they weren't home, it caught fire. It was so icy that the fire wagons and trucks could not get there in time to save the house.

"THERE'S JUST SOMETHING THAT'S VERY TRANQUIL AND IN TUNE WITH NATURE WHEN THE LAND IS OPEN LIKE THIS." George Camp

The only thing they saved was the front door knob, which is actually on the second house that they rebuilt. It's the same house that is still here today.

CW: Did they do any forestry on the property?

GC: No. At that time, there were logging trails around the property, but they primarily used them as riding trails for their horses. It's tough to envision now, but most of the property was not forested. The forest was pretty much cleaned out around this part of the country. It was sunny pasture, and it's only since then that it's grown up with the trees that you see.

CW: Tell me a little about that transition, allowing the forest to come back.

GC: As the world was changing, farming became less attractive. And as my grandparents grew older, they rode less. And then around 1950 or so, the stable burned to the ground and all the saddlery, bridles, and buggies were lost. Gradually, rather than being "Highlawn Farm," it just became "Highlawn." When they passed on, my father—who was their only child—and my mother, my two brothers, and I moved into the house. My father and mother had the interest in preserving the land. They felt like Middletown was growing rapidly, and would grow even more. They wanted to set aside some land to protect it as open space. My father and mother donated the land, about four acres, to the Connecticut Forest & Park Association for their headquarters. They worked with the Board to put together an easement that would go into effect upon his death. Since that time, CFPA has had responsibility of managing the land under the terms of the easement as open space. They developed the trails, which have become more and more attractive to people in the area. There's a lot of foot traffic on those trails.

CW: Are any of the trails the same horse trails your grandparents used?

GC: Yes, the trails pretty much follow the trails on which my grandparents rode their horses and which at some point were used for logging. My father had an interest in tree farming here and raised Christmas trees for a number of years.

CW: How old were you when your family moved to the house?

GC: I was probably 14 or 15.

CW: At the time, did you like to spend time in the woods?

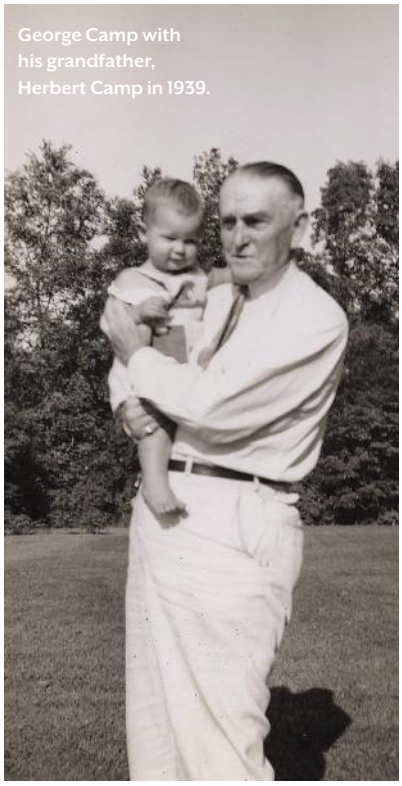
GC: I enjoyed exploring the woods as a young kid. There used to be a cider mill on the property, and for a youngster, it was always exciting to explore that. Even when I was much younger, when I would come to visit my grandparents, it was a special time. My grandmother and grandfather were very unique people, and my grandfather was very well respected in the town. Everybody knew him, so he'd take me everywhere and introduce me. It was very nice to have a grandfather like that.

CW: What is your connection to the land now?

GC: Both Camille and I have been very supportive of the initiatives that CFPA has developed. I remain in close contact with Eric and other staff, and pretty much allow them to develop their own plan. I'll comment from time to time, but I generally leave it up to them because I trust them. We feel that what they've recommended has been well thought-out, and definitely enhanced the property. We've been supportive and interested in what they're doing, and very, very pleased with their success.

CW: Why is it so important to you and your family that the land not be developed? Obviously, you could have made a lot of money if the land were developed.

GC: Well, that's true. But there are other things in life and other values that you hold. There's just something that's very tranquil and in tune with nature when the land is open like this. And we as a family enjoy it. But



George Camp with his grandfather, Herbert Camp in 1939.

hundreds, if not thousands, of other people are also able to enjoy it. When I was a little child, driving from our front entrance on Washington Street into town, it used to be a little two-lane road with farmland on each

➨ *page 21*

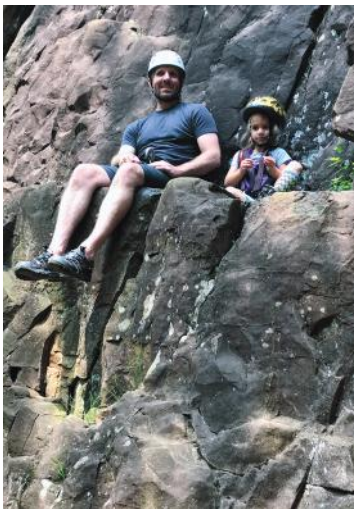
DIY Trails Day 2020

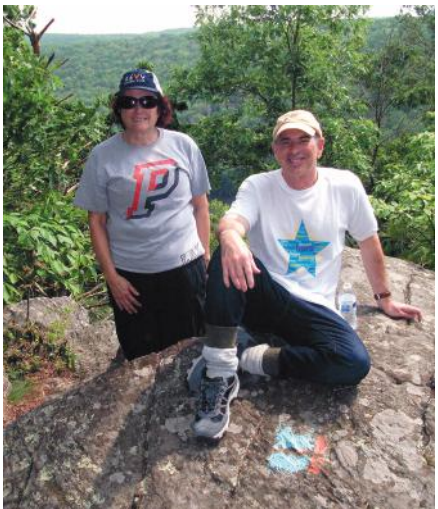
CFPA is proud to sponsor Connecticut Trails Day, the largest Trails Day celebration in the country. But in light of the current COVID-19 pandemic, this year's event will look a little different. We still want you to get outside—in fact, doing so is important for both your mental and physical health. But rather than hosting group events, we encourage you to create your own Trails Day adventure following appropriate social distancing guidelines. And with 230 Trails Day locations and over 825 miles of Blue-Blazed Hiking Trails, there is plenty to choose from!

Visit ctwoodlands.org/TD2020DIR for suggestions on where to go or check out our new Interactive Trails Map.

Tips to Stay Safe on the Trail

- **Go outdoors as a solitary activity or in a very small group. If a trail is already crowded, find another place to go.**
- **Stay at least 6 feet from others. Allow for plenty of space when passing someone on the trail.**
- **Wear a facemask to protect yourself and others, and if you are not feeling well, stay at home.**
- **Avoid touching your face.**
- **Wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds before and after you go outdoors.**
- **"Go before you go" and limit the length of your trip since restroom facilities are closed.**
- **Practice general hiker safety, such as planning your hike, keeping dogs leashed, and practicing Leave No Trace principles. This is especially important now since you put others in jeopardy if you leave infected trash behind.**





ANOTHER WAY OF SEEING

Connecticut Poet Laureate Margaret Gibson's poems connect the physical and spiritual and offer a critical perspective on how we think about the natural world.

By Timothy Brown

Margaret Gibson, an award-winning author of a dozen books of poetry and a memoir, was named Connecticut Poet Laureate last year by the Department of Economic and Community Development's Office of Arts & Culture. Her poems, intimate and penetrating, explore a range of topics, from her late-husband's fight with Alzheimer's to climate change.

As poet laureate, a three-year, honorary position, Gibson is using poetry to foster community and to talk about issues that concern all of us, including the environment. She is passionate about the natural world and an advocate for what she calls "green poetry," poems that address contemporary environmental issues such as climate change. Gibson is hoping to organize Green Poetry Cafes where poets read their work followed by an expansive discussion, possibly facilitated by a forester or scientist. Her approach reflects a wider movement toward increased dialogue and collaboration between the arts and sciences. While such interdisciplinary projects may sound problematic, in practice, Gibson says there are many parallels between the scientific method and writing poetry.

"Poetry is another way of observation and another way of seeing. It is a discipline of language that is committed to seeing what is there, but also seeing with the eyes of the heart and yoking those things together," she said.

Gibson grew up exploring the interconnected greenways behind her family's home in Richmond, Va., memories that she still mines for her poetry. Summers were spent at a family farmhouse surrounded by pasture and woods. Being in the countryside gave her a certain kind of freedom she didn't have in the city. "I associate imagination and coming into my own as an individual with the time I spent out in the country when I was a child," she said.

Even from a young age, she recognized the importance and power of being able to use language to articulate clearly one's thoughts, feelings, and observations of the world. But it wasn't until she took a creative writing class during her freshman year of college that she discovered her love of poetry.

"It is a discipline of language that is committed to seeing what is there, but also seeing with the eyes of the heart."

"It's a craft, and it's also a passion," she said. "Poetry has made every aspect of my life more vibrant and more understandable. You can't write a good poem unless you learn to pay attention—exquisite detailed attention—and then find the words that will recreate that experience for another."

In 1975, she relocated from Washington, D.C., to the woods of southeastern Connecticut where she has lived for the past 45 years. For Gibson, a professor emerita of the University of Connecticut, nature has always been a source of inspiration, a place of refuge and education. Like many other poets, she admits she once largely used the natural world as a metaphor for understanding herself. But her 1997 collection, *Earth Elegy*, marked a turning point where she began to write about the natural world for its own sake. "My attention changed from looking at individual trees, birds, landscapes, to systems, wholes, how things are interrelated and interconnected," she said. "Now I try to write poems that are mindful of how the Earth is interconnected."

For some, poetry may seem aloof, distant, disconnected from everyday life. Rather than always seek some great hidden meaning, Gibson encourages readers to approach poetry directly, simply listening to one human who is being moved to speak.

"If someone says, 'I have something intimate I want to share with you,' you usually listen, you really pay attention," she said. "A poem asks for the same willing attention. Are the words fast moving or slow? Is it a love poem, or an anger poem? Just try to put yourself there with the speaker and listen."

Gibson also suggests reading poetry and paying attention to the sensory world the poem evokes, seeing and hearing it, imagining oneself within it. "Poetry has sometimes been spoiled by those who say that trees

and flowers and stones are always symbols. A tree can be just a tree," she said. "It's not always a symbol for something else."

In addition to the state poet laureate, more than 30 Connecticut communities sponsor their own town poet laureate. "Being poet laureate has put me in a position to write even more, to meet more poets, and that's just wonderful," she said.

Although the current COVID-19 crisis has forced the cancellation of many of her scheduled readings and other appearances, Gibson is hopeful that the pandemic will awaken people to the importance of working together on critical issues that may also be global in scope, such as climate change.

"During the pandemic, with many of us kept at home and when restaurants and theaters are closed, for recreation people are heading out to places of natural and scenic beauty" she said. "I'm hopeful that there may be a new experience of the natural world as a place of solace and reverence and an awakened sense of our need to protect this planet's wild, beautiful, and necessary places."

Margaret Gibson, the current Connecticut Poet Laureate, is the author of 12 books of poems, most recently Not Hearing the Wood Thrush. She is Professor Emerita from UCONN. For more about her work, go to margaretgibsonpoetry.com

STAR KOAN

By Margaret Gibson

What galaxy can you find that is left out of your body?

I have learned to sink into the river in my wrist, find a sky path
and follow it over the trees
to where the winged horse rests its hind hooves on Aquarius.

Is this where I was born?

When Orion glints through the galactic space between the branches
of the wolf tree maple alongside the lane, I know briefly
the depth of what I am—

also briefly, the magnitude of brightness

of each yellow leaf, as in a whoosh the leaves fall upward,
as sparks would, into the wind.

Wind is breath.

I find Rigel in my left foot, Canus Major on the leash I hold.
The mote in my eye is Arcturus, the dirt beneath my toenails
galactic dust.

Given earth tilt and the aberration of light,

I need tether, and yet what joy there is touching the edge
of the edgeless.

Meanwhile, I know in my bones

how to live, how to die . . .

Ionized Carbon Atoms in Orion photograph courtesy of NASA/JPL-Caltech

A Love of Laurels

A naturalist reflects on Connecticut's state flower.

By Laurie D. Morrissey

As kids, my brother and I had a backyard that went on for miles—or at least so it seemed. Our father was a state park ranger, and we considered the park's 100 acres, plus adjacent woodlands, our domain. In all that territory, we had certain magical spots. One was a thicket of old mountain laurels that we hiked through on our way to an outcrop we called the Ledge. Their shreddy, red-brown trunks forked and twisted like trees in a fairy tale. In early summer, their branches held delicate pink and white flowers that were sticky to the touch.

Kalmia latifolia, Connecticut's state flower, is a member of the Ericaceae, or heath family, along with rhododendron, blueberry, and huckleberry. These days living in New Hampshire, I don't see quite as much of this beautiful shrub. When I find it, I'm always drawn back in my mind to the woodlands of northwestern Connecticut. Shade-tolerant and able to thrive in dry or moist acid soils, it grows in every part of the state.

In the laurel stand I remember, the flowers were fairly sparse because it grew in the shade of the Ledge. But laurels like sun. Spectacular stands grow along roadsides and power lines. In late May and June, they're covered with snowball-sized terminal flower clusters. At first, the clusters are two-toned, with the sealed buds darker than open flowers. Fully open, each cluster contains a crowd of five-sided cups ranging from white to pink, with contrasting dots and streaks of darker pink and purple.

Mountain laurel flowers attract bees and other pollinators. If you walk up close to a stand in full bloom, you will be able to hear their soft hum. Bees are enablers in a fancy pollen dispersal system that is uniquely efficient. The pollen-carrying parts of the flower, or anthers, are held up by tiny, stalk-like filaments. When a bumble bee enters the flower, these filaments act like catapults, flinging pollen onto the back of the bee, which then takes the pollen to another flower. Researchers using high-speed video have determined that the pollen reaches a top speed of eight miles per hour—making mountain laurel possibly the fastest plant on earth.

Mountain laurel is tough to transplant, so if you want mountain laurel in your yard, it is best to buy nursery stock. About 80 named cultivars exist, according to Dr. Richard A. Jaynes, a Connecticut horticulturist and mountain laurel expert. He has developed at least 25 varieties during his career at the Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station and at his Broken Arrow Nursery in Hamden. The flowers of cultivars offer a variety of colors, including bicolor.

Although reputed to be poisonous, mountain laurel is often browsed by deer. According to Jaynes, they use it as a condiment. "Somehow they know not to eat enough at one time to be poisoned by it," he said. "They eat it when they're short of other food, and they like the cultivars best."

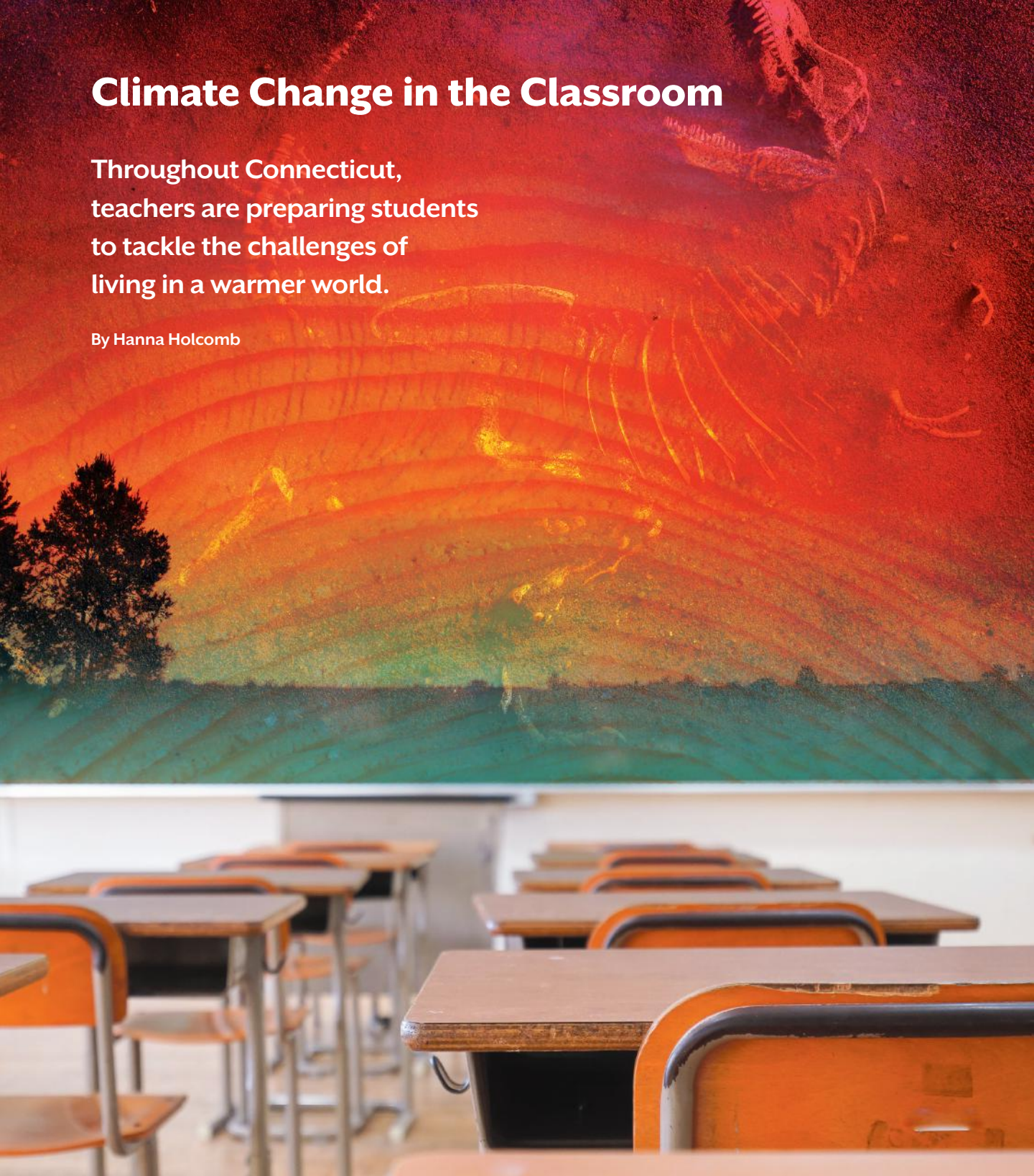
In May, you don't have to search very hard to see this prized flower in the wild, but certain locations stand out, including Chatfield Hollow State Park and the Mountain Laurel Sanctuary in Nipmuck State Forest. At the end of the day, memories will linger in your mind like mine of the tangled laurels beneath the Ledge.

Laurie D. Morrissey is a New Hampshire-based writer of articles, essays, and poetry. Her previous article for Connecticut Woodlands, *about her father, Connecticut state park ranger William Dougal, was published in the Fall 2016 issue.*

Climate Change in the Classroom

Throughout Connecticut, teachers are preparing students to tackle the challenges of living in a warmer world.

By Hanna Holcomb



When Sena Wazer, a sophomore at the University of Connecticut, learned about the recent Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report, she was worried. The report warned that fossil fuel consumption would need to be cut nearly in half by 2030 in order prevent the average global temperature from rising more than 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-Industrial levels. The Earth has already warmed about 1 degree and the effects of climate change are being felt worldwide. Additional warming will be disastrous—millions of people could be displaced from their homes due to rising sea levels, the frequency of extreme weather will increase, and the geographic ranges of several species will shrink.

Student climate strike. Photo by Mitchel Kvedar.

> "I think for me and other youth there's a lot of fear for what our future holds if we keep acting the way we are."
>
> **Sena Wazer, University of Connecticut sophomore**

"That scared me," said Wazer. "I think for me and other youth there's a lot of fear for what our future holds if we keep acting the way we are."

Despite the urgent need to overhaul our energy system and prevent the worst effects of global warming, most Americans don't understand how the climate system works, or the causes, impacts, and solutions to global warming. In a 2010 survey by the Yale Program on Climate Change Communication (YPCCC), more than 2,000 adults were tested on their climate change knowledge. Only about 8 percent of adults answered enough questions correctly to earn an A or a B, and over half got an F. Fortunately, about three-quarters of Americans think that climate change should be taught in schools.

In November 2015, Connecticut adopted the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS). The standards shift science education away from rote memorization of facts to emphasize the use of scientific reasoning, questioning, and making evidence-based conclusions. Climate change is an NGSS core idea for both middle and high school students, covering the effects of human activities on global warming and how reducing warming depends on understanding climate science, engineering capabilities, and social dynamics.

"It just makes sense," said Arline Maynard, a sixth grade science teacher at Woodstock Middle School. "People don't learn science by being told science. Their understanding needs to be built on prior research, background knowledge, experiences in the classroom, skillful interpretation of data, and using the lenses of the cross-cutting concepts to make sense of it all."

Students in Maynard's classroom analyze climate graphs from various time periods, data from tree rings and fossil records, and the change in human emissions since the Industrial Revolution. They also discuss solutions to global warming such as carbon sequestration and renewable energy sources. But the level of climate change instruction varies widely by school and teacher. Not all teachers feel prepared to teach the topic, depending on their training and administrative support received. And since climate change is a politically charged topic, teachers may fear backlash from community members, especially in conservative districts, for teaching it.

In 2019, Christine Palm, a member of the Connecticut House of Representatives who represents District 36, proposed a bill to mandate climate change education.

"Right now, our state statute says you must teach science in accordance with NGSS, which *may* include climate change," she said. "And I want to change that to, which *shall* include climate change. One puts it into state law and the other says, please do this because it's the right thing to do."

The bill passed the Connecticut House in 2019, but was never called in the Senate. Palm reintroduced the bill in 2020 and held a public hearing, but it has since been put on hold due to the COVID-19 crisis. Though the

bill has widespread support, it's not unanimous.

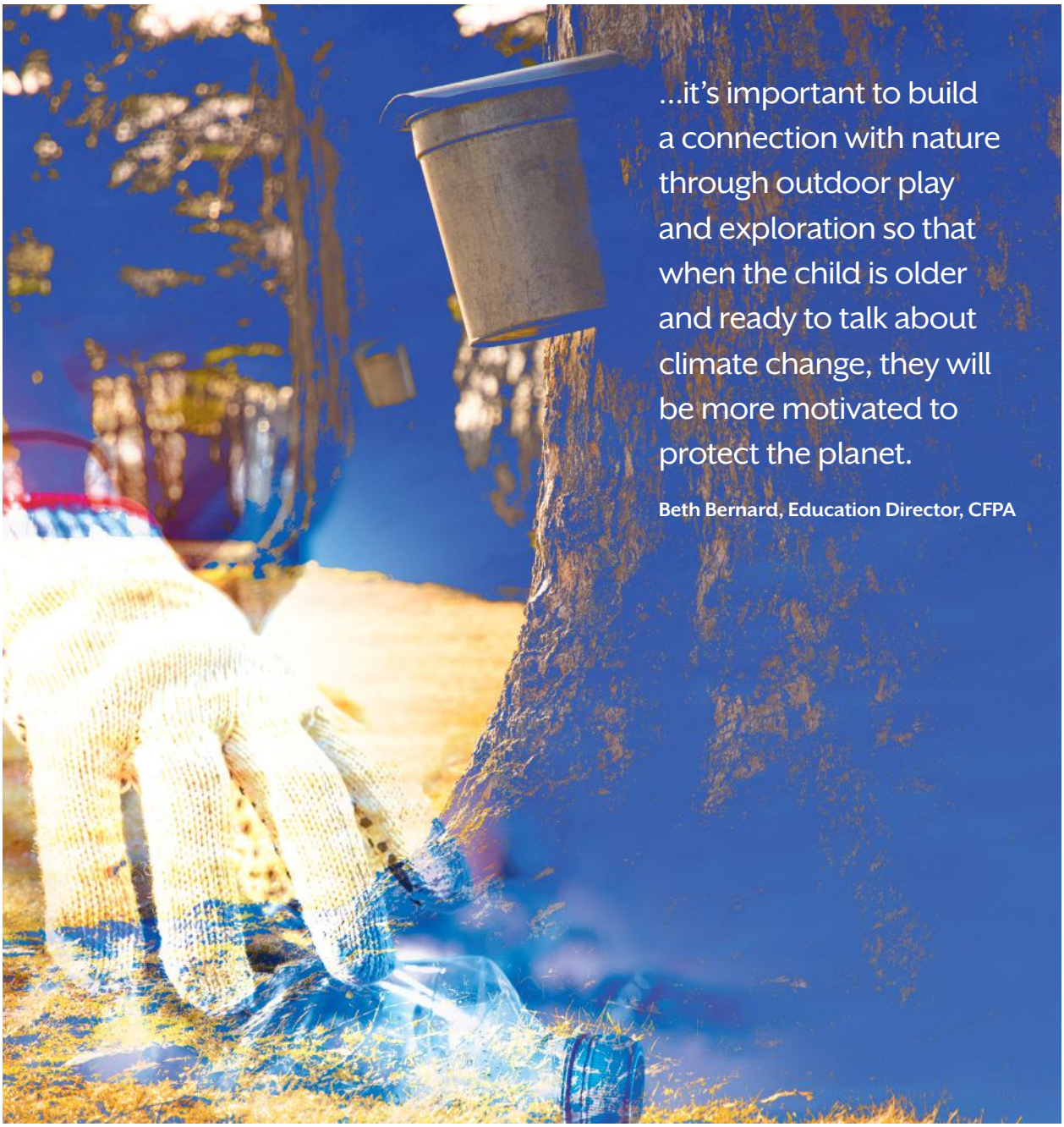
Some argue, for example, that the bill takes power away from teachers. But Palm, a former teacher herself, says that the bill lets teachers decide how much time to devote to the topic and prevents local boards of education from telling teachers they can't teach it.

"I believe teachers want what's best for their kids," said Palm. "This bill empowers them to teach climate change, even if their superintendent says they shouldn't."

There have been other efforts to improve climate education for students throughout the state. Connecticut Green Leaf Schools is a free program open to any K-12 school that helps them improve their environmental education and culture. Schools take a self-assessment in three pillars: environmental and sustainability education, health and wellness for staff and students, and reducing environmental impact. After completing the assessment, Connecticut Green Leaf provides resources and trainings to help schools improve and adopt more sustainable practices.

"It's really important that going green becomes a school culture and it's not just an idea that stays on paper," said Abby Peklo, Connecticut Green Leaf Schools Program Director.

Other environmental education centers, like the Goodwin Conservation Center and the Connecticut Audubon Society, provide educational resources that pair education standards and hands-on outdoor experiences. ➨



"Our programing married the objectives of the school systems, which are all tied to state standards and standardized test performance, with our objectives of motivating people to take conservation action," said Michelle Eckman, a sustainability consultant and the former Director of Education at Connecticut Audubon Society.

> "It's really important that going green becomes a school culture and it's not just an idea that stays on paper."
>
> **Abby Peklo, Connecticut Green Leaf Schools Program Director**

Some youth are motivated to change the political climate around global warming. The Sunrise Movement is a national organization made up of people under age 35 that works to stop climate change while also creating millions of green jobs. The Connecticut chapter, established in 2018, focuses on local issues such as school climate strikes and legislation. Prior to the Covid-19 quarantine regulations, Sunrise Connecticut was active at the state General Assembly, advocating for the bill to mandate climate education, as well as a ban on new fossil fuel infrastructure, and for expanded renewable energy projects.

"The Sunrise Movement gives youth the opportunity to lead with support from older and more experienced community members," said Sena Wazer, co-director of Sunrise Connecticut.

Parents can also support climate education with activities and conversations tailored to their child's age, interests, and anxieties. Research suggests that children younger than fourth grade aren't developmentally ready to talk about climate change. The subject requires too much big system thinking.

"A kid in second grade who learns about climate change and hears there's going to be a lot of flooding, will think the flooding is going to be in their house," said Beth Bernard. "Talking to kids too young about climate change will actually make them afraid of nature."

At that age it's important to build a connection with nature through outdoor play and exploration so that when the child is older and ready to talk about climate change, they will be more motivated to protect the planet.

Discussions about climate change should be hopeful, action oriented, and focus on the facts, not emotions. When talking about the impacts of climate change, it's better to discuss local effects, such as changes to the maple sugaring season or extreme weather, rather than using distant examples like polar bears. Adults can also help children to assess the mixed messaging in the media about climate change, and role-model green lifestyles by encouraging and participating in recycling, litter clean-ups, and volunteer trail work.

Though climate change is a science topic at its core, dealing with the consequences requires an interdisciplinary approach. As a Community Climate Change Fellow, Eckman worked with Common Ground in New Haven to incorporate climate change in subjects besides science.

"The students and faculty recognized that climate change affects everything, every area of life," said Eckman. "We wanted to bring climate change to the table in a way that wasn't the usual buckets that it gets put into." For example, math teachers can teach kids to calculate their carbon footprint. Social studies classes can focus on communities displaced by drought, and English teachers can use literature, including cli-fi, or "climate fiction," that focuses on the environment.

It's also essential to talk about climate change with a sense of urgency. According to the YPCCC, 67 percent of adults agree that global warming will harm future generations, but only 42 percent think that it will harm them personally. The window to reduce carbon emissions is limited, and it can't be spoken about as something in the distant future.

"I still find a lot of people who think that climate change is concerning, but not *that* concerning," said Wazer. "We have ten years to do something, and we need to act right now."

The least we can do is to arm young people with the knowledge and skills they need to fight a crisis that they did not create.

"Students need encouragement that a solution is in reach," said Maynard. "Our future depends on a well-educated generation of scientists and engineers prepared to tackle creative new solutions to world issues."

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

Creating a Conservation Legacy, *continued from page 11*

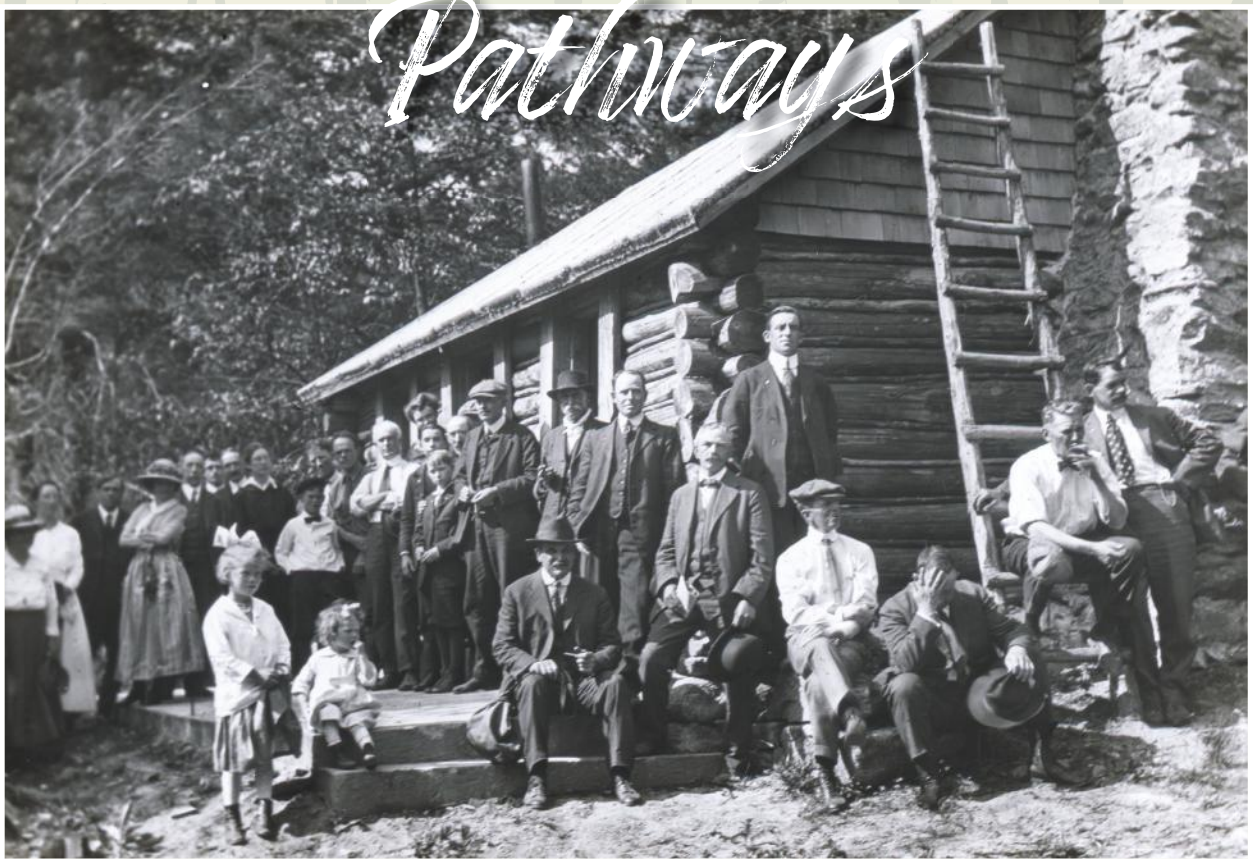
side. There was hardly anything other than a few homes all the way to town. There were no gas stations or anything like that. The landscape has changed dramatically in my lifetime. How much more it's going to change in our children's and grandchildren's lifetimes remains to be seen, but I expect it's going to be great.

CW: Is there anything else you'd like for our readers to know?

GC: I think the success that has resulted from all of this is really due to the work of CFPA and in particular, the Trails Committee. They are really the backbone and the strength of CFPA. And CFPA has been very fortunate to have not only a very fine executive director, but also some very dedicated—and I mean dedicated—volunteers. Those volunteers work their butts off, not only maintaining the trails here, but also throughout the state. And they deserve all the credit. They're always coming up with great suggestions. I don't think I've ever said no to anything they've ever suggested. I've always been very appreciative that they've thought of these things and that they're interested in making those improvements.

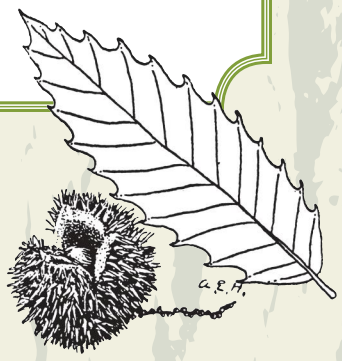
Clare Cain and Lindsay Suhr contributed to this story.

Pathways



In 1901, the Connecticut Forestry Association (CFA) lobbied the General Assembly to establish the country's first state forester. Shortly thereafter, CFA helped the state acquire the first 70 acres to create the Portland State Forest in 1903. Later renamed the Meshomasic State Forest, it was the first state forest in New England, and only the second in the nation. Primarily used as a demonstration forest, the American chestnut (*Castanea dentata*) was the dominant tree species—and the most important commercial species—at the time. But two years later, the chestnut blight would be identified at the Bronx Zoo. By 1950, the pathogen had decimated chestnut populations throughout the U.S.

CFA, renamed the Connecticut Forest & Park Association in 1928, held its first annual meeting at the Meshomasic State Forest in 1907. The above photo, taken at an Association meeting at Meshomasic in 1918, features a cabin built from diseased chestnut. Today, thanks to advances in genetics and extensive breeding programs, the American chestnut is staging one of conservation's greatest comebacks. One day, the so-called "perfect tree" may once again come to dominate Connecticut's forests.



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