

CONNECTICUT

Woodlands

SUMMER 2022

Connecting Outside

A MAGAZINE OF THE CONNECTICUT FOREST & PARK ASSOCIATION



Land Acknowledgment Statement

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CONTRIBUTOR'S *Spotlight*

While conventional landscape design leans more towards human tastes, designer **Kathy Connolly's** approach prioritizes native plants, earth-friendly designs, and low-impact land care techniques that benefit both people and wildlife. In addition to her design work, Kathy is also a writer and frequent speaker who gives presentations throughout the state on topics such as lawn reduction, flowering meadows, foundation gardens, and other topics. Her work has garnered numerous awards, including the 2021 President's Award from the Federated Garden Clubs of Connecticut.

We caught up with Kathy to learn more about her unique approach to landscape design.

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On the cover: Jennifer Plourde leads a Trails Day hike at the Mary Edwards Granby Land Trust. Photo by Jake Koteen.

What inspired you to pursue a career in landscape design?




I was inspired by a grandmother to love plants as a child. But it took almost 50 years before I finally went back to school, learned some skills, and started to work in landscape design. In this time of ecological reckoning, I think that designers have the unique opportunity to influence what is planted and how it is cared for site-by-site.

How does your approach to ecological landscape design differ from most commercial methods?

Ecological landscaping balances our desire for attractive spaces with care for our fellow creatures and the environment we share. I aim to use four resources in every project: artistic design, horticultural science, landscape craft, and an interpretation of how people relate to the location. When those resources are working together, we can produce enduring and satisfying landscape installations.

Where can readers go to see your work?

The easiest place to visit is 1411 Boston Post Road in Westbrook. This is the Westbrook Post Office but abutting the same parking lot is the Tom O'Dell Memorial Meadow garden, which I designed. It was a project of the Westbrook Garden Club, and they have won awards for their vision and their work.

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Editor's Note

Shortly after I became editor of Connecticut Woodlands, I received a call from David K. Leff, poet laureate of Canton, to discuss publishing poetry in the magazine. I expected our call to last 15 minutes. An hour and a half later, following a wide-ranging conversation about the connections between art and nature, I invited David to serve as our Poetry Editor. His thoughtful selections, each written by a different Connecticut poet, have graced the pages of Woodlands for the past five years.

David passed away suddenly on May 27 at the age of 67. His unexpected death has stunned and devastated the entire CFPA community.

David served on the CFPA Board of Directors from 2007 to 2014 and was chair of CFPA's Public Policy Committee from 2009 to 2022. As Artist-in-Residence for the New England Trail from 2016-2017, he created the "Half a Million Footsteps Story Map," writing Haibun poetry at 90 sites along the trail.

A lawyer by training, David served as Deputy Commissioner at DEEP where he oversaw Parks, Forests, Trails, Wildlife, and Law Enforcement. He was also former attorney and legal staff for the Connecticut General Assembly. His leadership and experience at the statehouse were critical in the successful 2018 campaign to amend the state constitution to protect Connecticut's public lands.

David was a true renaissance person. He wrote a dozen books, edited two others, and composed countless poems and articles about the natural world and our place in it. He volunteered with the Collinsville Historical Society and Canton Fire Department, and was active on the boards of Great Mountain Forest, Audubon CT, and the Connecticut Historical Society. He also produced maple syrup, and of course, wrote about it.

David's contagious smile and sharp wit will be sorely missed, but his passionate and compassionate spirit will live on through his words and in the Connecticut woods.

For this issue of Connecticut Woodlands, David selected a poem by Hartford's poet laureate, Frederick-Douglas Knowles II. We will feature one of David's poems in our fall issue.

I'll see you outside,



Timothy Brown
Editor

The Connecticut Forest & Park Association, Inc.

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

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From the Statehouse

By Eric Hammerling

2022 State Budget and Policy Recap

The 2022 session of the Connecticut General Assembly began on February 9th and ended on May 4th at midnight. This 12-week “short-session” featured wrangling over a rare state budget surplus derived from a strong economic recovery and significant infusions of federal stimulus dollars.

There were several positive revisions to the fiscal year 2023 state budget for Connecticut’s forests, parks, and trails:

State Parks

- \$51.5 million for state park Infrastructure to make parks more accessible, repair public facilities, and rehab historic structures. This will help reduce the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection’s (DEEP) existing building repair and maintenance backlog of over \$150 million.
- Passport to the Parks funding for state park operations (\$20 million per year) stayed intact with no diversions or exceptions to paying the reasonable \$5 per year per vehicle Passport to the Parks fee.
- An extra \$2.5 million was included to compensate the Passport to the Parks Fund for the excess cost of fringe benefits for seasonal workers (who rarely receive these types of benefits).

Recreational Trails, Open Space & Forests

- \$6 million in bonding (an increase of \$3 million) was authorized for Recreational Trails & Greenways matching grants.
- \$15 million in bonding (an increase of \$5 million) was authorized for the Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition Program matching grants.

- Community Investment Act funding for open space (\$5 million) was kept intact.
- \$14 million was included to support “climate-smart agriculture & forestry practices” funded through the Department of Agriculture.

There were also two legislative efforts that were hotly negotiated until the very end: DEEP’s approach to trees considered to be hazardous to people in state parks and campgrounds; and a proposal to sell a piece of Housatonic Meadows State Park in Sharon to a private entity with no restrictions on the use or resale of the property.

Ultimately, both issues were resolved reasonably. DEEP is required to develop a policy for hazard tree mitigation by August 1st and report to the legislature by December 1st. And thankfully, the proposed sale of state park lands failed in the House.

There were some issues this year that received a public hearing but did not attain final passage, such as providing an incentive for private landowners to protect trail corridors. Other issues, such as adopting state policies that would make our forests more resilient, are queued-up for the General Assembly to consider in 2023.

Whether we are making new gains for forests, parks, and trails, or protecting hard-fought victories, CFPA will continue to be a vocal leader in Hartford thanks to your support and engagement.

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



ON THE
Trail

Reflections of a Volunteer Trail Maintainer

By Bob McGarry

More than a few years ago, there was a piece in *Voices*, Southbury's weekly newspaper, that told of a hike along the Pomperaug Trail (wherever that was) sponsored by the Connecticut Forest & Park Association (whoever they were). It sounded easy enough, so I arrived for the hike on time and had a quick look at my fellow hikers. There was an older gentleman in the group who I hoped would not slow us down too much. His name was Alan Crepeau. He led the hike, with the rest of us struggling to keep up. At the end, he asked for volunteers who be willing to help with the trails in Kettletown State Park. Thinking this would be a once or twice-a-year commitment, I offered my name and went home. The next day the phone rang. It was Alan Crepeau. He needed some help with side-hilling, along with a variety of other things I had never heard of before.

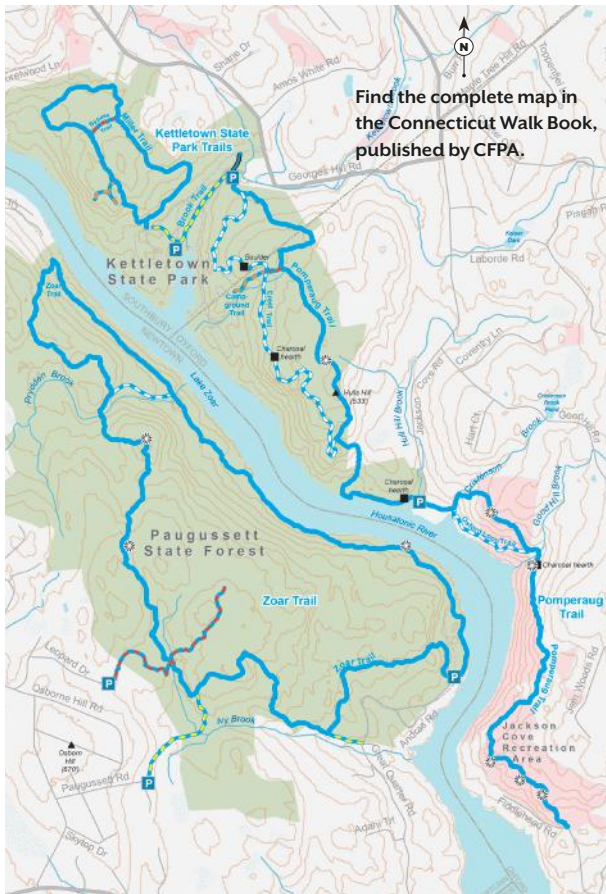
As it turned out, Alan managed trails for both Kettletown and the surrounding area, which meant that we got to explore a lot of trails. When he retired, he was good enough to pass along not only his knowledge of all things trail, but also the position of volunteer trail manager for Kettletown State Park. And so, my "once or twice-a-year adventure" turned into a once or twice-a-week adventure. It has been

quite a ride, and one that I am ever thankful for. If I can maintain those trails half as well as Alan, I will consider it a job well done.

There are about seven miles of hiking trails in Kettletown State Park, including three main trails and several shorter ones that help knit the whole network together.

You can walk along old farm roads on the Miller Trail in the northern part of the park. While there, enjoy a seasonal view overlooking Lake Zoar with the Paugussett State Forest directly across the water. Don't forget to give some thought to the charcoal hearth site. Take a walk across the world famous two log bridge. And throughout the park, you'll see evidence from a 2018 tornado. All the trails were closed for a year while CFPA volunteers did the heroic work restoring them.

If you prefer something a bit more hilly, try the Pomperaug Trail. It starts by the main gate, leaves the park after two miles, and proceeds south for two more miles through the Town of Oxford beach, and past some surprisingly challenging areas before ending at Fiddlehead Road. While still in the park, enjoy Lake Zoar, which is spectacular in the fall.



On hot summer days, the Brook Trail, only about a half-mile walk, passes along Kettletown Brook and is guaranteed to be the coolest place in the park.

I have many wonderful memories from my years working on the trail. For example, the mom who had wet paint on her fingertip from pointing out to her son that the trail blaze was the same as yesterday. Her prediction that they would soon meet people working on the trail came true, much to her son's amazement.

I've also had the opportunity to introduce my own grandkids to the wonders of nature and the satisfaction that can come with working to maintain those trails so others may enjoy them.

I also enjoy reflecting on the park's history. Who built all those miles of stone walls? What was life like for the people who tended those hearth sites scattered throughout the park? Did the first white settlers really trade a brass kettle for the use of the surrounding land, as the myth goes, giving the area the name Kettletown?

One of the great benefits of being a trail manager is to have the work noticed and appreciated by other hikers. For the most part, trail maintenance is an anonymous effort. But when we have a chance to meet hikers on the trails, they are without exception very thankful. All the sore hands, aching backs, and tired feet fade away with their smiles. This is especially true if the hiker happens to be a young person. Their smiles are worth their weight in gold.

Come explore Kettletown's trails and discover the adventures that await. Keep an eye out for me. I'll probably be around somewhere.

Bob McGarry is a retired quality and reliability engineer who lives in Southbury. He is a proud grandfather of six grandchildren, who each have contributed in some way to making this story possible. Bob finds retirement a wonderful opportunity to contribute to his church, community, and trails.



Above: A hiker crosses the two-log bridge on the Miller Trail.

Right: Bob and his grandsons Matthew, 15 (left) and Luke, 13 (center) blaze the Crest Trail.

If you're interested in a shorter walk, the Crest Trail makes an enjoyable return route back to the main gate. It passes a couple of overlooks of the lake and the Lower Paugussett State Forest, which make great spots to rest and resupply with a snack.

If you've got young kids in tow, a connector trail joins the Pomperaug and Crest trails, making a shorter, mile-and-a-quarter circuit hike. If you are camping, there is a connector trail that leads to the campgrounds, saving you a trip to the main gate.

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





The Rise of Nature Prescriptions

These days, doctors, including here in Connecticut, are increasingly prescribing their patients spend more time in nature to improve health and well-being.

By Renee Jiang

Della Corcoran, a pediatrician at Connecticut Children's Hospital, has always loved being outdoors. Like many others, spending time in nature gives her a sense of comfort and peace. As Dr. Corcoran hiked along the winding Appalachian Trail last year, she paused to listen to the delicate calls of nearby songbirds and the bubbling waters of surrounding streams. Inspired by the hike, Dr. Corcoran wondered what science says about the healing power of nature. Later, back at her computer, she discovered hundreds of studies that all suggest that spending time in nature has a positive impact on human health and well-being.

"Being in nature lowers your blood pressure and body mass index, improves your quality of life and mental health, decreases anxiety and depression, and much more," said Dr. Corcoran. In addition, research suggests that exercising outdoors provides more health benefits than exercising indoors, and those benefits increase when exercising in a natural environment. "A wooded area is even better than a grassy area," she said.

Researchers have two primary theories about the positive influence of nature on human health, according to Gregory Bratman, Director of the Environment and Well-Being Lab at the University of Washington. The first is known as the Stress Reduction Theory. Spending time in nature activates the parasympathetic nervous system, an autonomic response that lowers your heart rate and blood pressure and promotes digestion. Like yoga or meditation, hiking, swimming, and even simply looking at a picture of nature has been shown to induce the parasympathetic nervous system and reduce stress.

The second is Attention Restoration Theory (ART), developed by psychologists Stephen and Rachel Kaplan at the University of Michigan. The Kaplans proposed four states of attention: concentration, recovery, soft fascination, and restoration. ART states that nature engages our soft fascination, which involves fewer stimulating activities that provide opportunity for introspection. Thus, nature gives our directed attention, or concentration, the time to relax and recover. In addition, researchers

have found that consistent contact with microbes in nature can train and boost immune systems, improving respiratory and microbiome health. Empowered by the science behind the connection between nature and human health, Dr. Corcoran founded OutdoorRx CT in 2021.

The mission of OutdoorRx CT is to increase engagement with outdoor spaces and nature to improve both chronic and acute physical and mental health. In addition to educating patients and families, Dr. Corcoran hopes to help raise awareness amongst healthcare providers, payers, and donors about nature as a core social determinant of health to healthcare. By bringing communities together in the outdoors, Dr. Corcoran also looks to improve infrastructure for greater access to green space and call attention to environmental conservation on a wider scale.

Though the program is still relatively new, Dr. Corcoran has been working with healthcare providers along with the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) to create greater connections between community members and the outdoors.

As a pediatrician, Dr. Corcoran noticed that many of her patients spend most of their free time engaged with technology; the pandemic has only increased the amount of time youth spend staring at a screen. So she began to hand out



**“Being in nature lowers your blood pressure and body mass index, improves your quality of life and mental health, decreases anxiety and depression, and much more.”
Della Corcoran, pediatrician and founder of OutdoorRx CT**

nature “prescriptions,” encouraging her patients to unplug and head outdoors. In one case, she wrote a nature prescription for a teenage patient who was struggling with depression and anxiety due to the ongoing pandemic. “Just go outside for 15 minutes a day. That’s all I want you to do,” she told them. The patient followed her advice, discovering joy in identifying bird calls. Soon Dr. Corcoran began to observe a notable change in their attitude and behavior.

OutdoorRx CT is modeled after two, established national programs: Walk with a Doc and ParkRx America. In 2005, cardiologist David Sabgir founded Walk with a Doc as a grassroots effort to promote behavioral change through physical activity. During every Walk with a Doc event, a volunteer healthcare professional discusses a relevant health topic and encourages conversation between community members. What began as one doctor’s belief in the power of walking has grown into a global movement and now has over 500 chapters worldwide.

ParkRx America was founded in 2013 to make “nature prescriptions” mainstream in the medical community. This national initiative seeks to decrease the burden of chronic disease, increase health and happiness, and foster environmental

stewardship through prescribing nature during the routine delivery of healthcare. The initiative offers resources and education for healthcare providers about creating and maintaining a Park Prescription program, including toolkits, best practices, and case studies. In addition, ParkRx America serves as a platform for healthcare providers, park agencies, and community organizations to connect and collaborate. Since its inception, ParkRx America has expanded to over 80 programs across the country and hopes to continue fostering a community of health practitioners and nature lovers to better improve public health.

The ongoing pandemic has highlighted the importance of spending time in nature to improve one’s mental and physical health. Healthcare and social service providers across the country are increasingly writing “nature prescriptions” for their patients to head outside.

The U.S. isn’t alone in the movement to guide people outdoors for public health. In November 2020, Canada established PaRx, its first national “nature prescription” program through the Vancouver-based BC Parks Foundation. In 2021, the program expanded into Ontario and

Saskatchewan. Today, over 1,000 registered healthcare providers in Canada are writing patients prescriptions to spend time nature.

In 2018, the National Health Service Shetland and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds Scotland partnered to create a Nature Prescriptions program on the Shetland Islands. After gaining interest, the program expanded to urban centers in Edinburgh. During the pilot program, nearly 350 patients of all ages received a nature prescription for a variety of 32 different mental and physical health conditions. The results of the pilot were overwhelming. Nearly three-quarters of participants said they had benefitted from their nature prescription, and 87 percent of patients said it was either likely or very likely they would continue their prescription.

“It’s a simple idea: get our most trusted health professionals to recommend that people seek nature as a way of feeling better,” said Karen MacKelvie, community engagement officer at RSPD Scotland. “As a result, people form deep connections to nature through an association with better health. The value placed on nature means more people are likely to step up to save it in the future.”



Research suggests that exercising outdoors provides more health benefits than exercising indoors, and those benefits increase when exercising in a natural environment.

But raising awareness about nature's health benefits doesn't necessarily translate to increased access to parks and other open space. Nature prescriptions are not an option for those who cannot easily access green spaces. In one study, Matthew Browning, founding director of the Virtual Reality and Nature Lab at Clemson University, and his colleagues analyzed a decade's worth of data on the total healthcare costs of 5 million people across Northern California. Their research, published in the May 2022 issue of the journal *Environment International*, finds that proximity to nature correlates with lower health care costs, regardless of other factors such as income, occupation, and housing. Yet, for marginalized neighborhoods that do not have access to green space, community members may struggle with more health issues, a lack of resources to combat them, and higher healthcare costs.

A 2020 study by the Trust for Public Land (TPL), based on government data from 14,000 U.S. towns and cities, showed that on average, parks in low-income neighborhood parks are four times smaller and overcrowded compared to parks in higher income areas.

Each year, TPL releases their Park Score Index, which compares municipal park systems of the country's 100-most-populated cities according to five categories: access, investment, amenities, acreage, and equity. In addition, the Index houses information on access levels for nearly every town and city in the United States, including how many people in a certain city live within a 10-minute walk of a park. According to the database, 99 percent of Hartford residents have close access to a park. But that figure doesn't show the whole picture.

"Thirty-seven percent of Hartford residents do not have access to a car, and those people need to be able to walk to the park, which isn't guaranteed," Dr. Corcoran said.

In addition, people may avoid municipal parks due to concerns about public safety. "There is a perception of more crime in the city parks," she said. "There can be crime, but the more people come to the parks, the lower the crime goes. Some of the inequity comes from a lack of education. I think the OutdoorRx CT program helps to promote the educational piece of heading outdoors," Dr. Corcoran said.

OutdoorRx CT is currently partnering with other like-minded organizations to create nature programs aimed at increasing health benefits, particularly for Connecticut's youth. They recently hosted a Trails Day event with CFPA, opening a new trail that connects Auerfarm State Park Scenic Reserve, the 4-H Education Center at Auerfarm, and the Metropolitan District Commission's Red Loop trail. In the future, Dr. Corcoran hopes to partner with DEEP, healthcare providers, insurance companies, volunteer organizations, foundations such as Hartford Urban Alliance and Office of Community Child Health, and outdoors retailers REI and L.L. Bean.

Dr. Corcoran says it's important to create greater connections between urban community members—who may perceive nature as unclean and unsafe—and the outdoors. "People who are strictly in an urban environment without any exposure to a natural environment may not understand the importance of that kind of conservation," she said. "So, getting people out into nature helps them appreciate our planet."

Renee Jiang, intern at Connecticut Woodlands, recently graduated from Choate Rosemary Hall and will be attending Columbia University this fall.



Native thistles are largely misunderstood and maligned, but play a vital role in sustaining birds, bees, and butterflies.

By Laurie D. Morrissey

Prickly weed, pretty flower, or pollinator's friend? Thistles are all of these things. Throughout Connecticut, thistles add splashes of purple and lavender-pink to fields, thickets, and roadsides. Stretching from two to 10 feet high, they are spectacular when viewed against a lush meadow or a brilliant blue sky. Their blooms appear in June and last well into the fall.

The U.S. has more than 200 species of thistles, which are members of the sunflower family. Many of these species are non-native and unfortunately, some have become invasive. Several native species, however, are present in Connecticut. Among the most common natives are the field thistle (*Cirsium discolor*), pasture thistle (*C. pumilum*), and swamp thistle (*C. muticum*). The state also has a yellow thistle (*C. horridulum*), a rare species found mostly near the coast.

While they are the bane of many farmers, thistles are valuable to birds, bees, and butterflies. When goldfinches fly their bouncy way across the sky, calling "Po-ta-to chip! Po-ta-to chip!" they are not praising their favorite food.

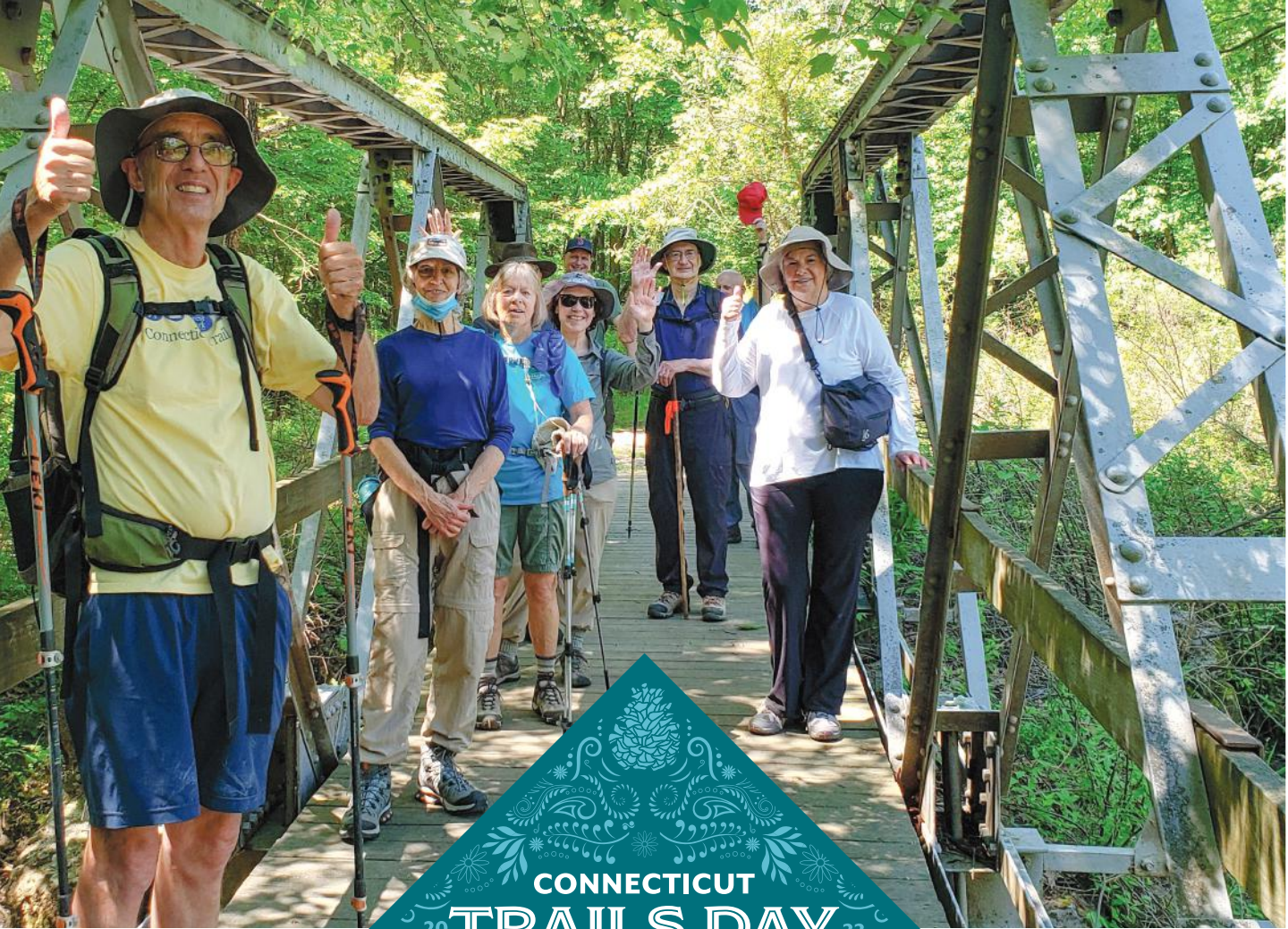
That would be thistle seeds. Goldfinches eat mostly seeds, with thistle seeds a clear favorite. The large heads of thistles, each containing as many as 100 seeds, are like grocery stores for these beloved birds. They also rely heavily on thistle plants for lining their nests with the silky fluff attached to wind-borne seeds. Ornithologists believe that the goldfinch's breeding period—late June and early July; later than most songbirds—is related to the timing of thistle seed abundance. Thistle seeds also are believed to contribute to the goldfinch's bright plumage, due to their high level of carotenoids.

If you want to observe or photograph monarchs, swallow-tails, skippers, or a number of other native butterfly species, sitting near a flowering thistle plant affords an excellent eye-level, close-up view. The nectar and pollen of thistle plants attract hummingbirds, bees, butterflies, and other pollinators. Butterfly and moth larvae feed on the pollen, nectar, leaves, and seeds. According to the Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation, monarch butterflies visit native thistle flowers more than most other wildflowers during their fall migration from southern Canada to Mexico. It is more important than ever to protect the butterfly's food sources, as Eastern Monarch populations have plummeted in recent years due to habitat loss, pesticides, climate change, and other factors.

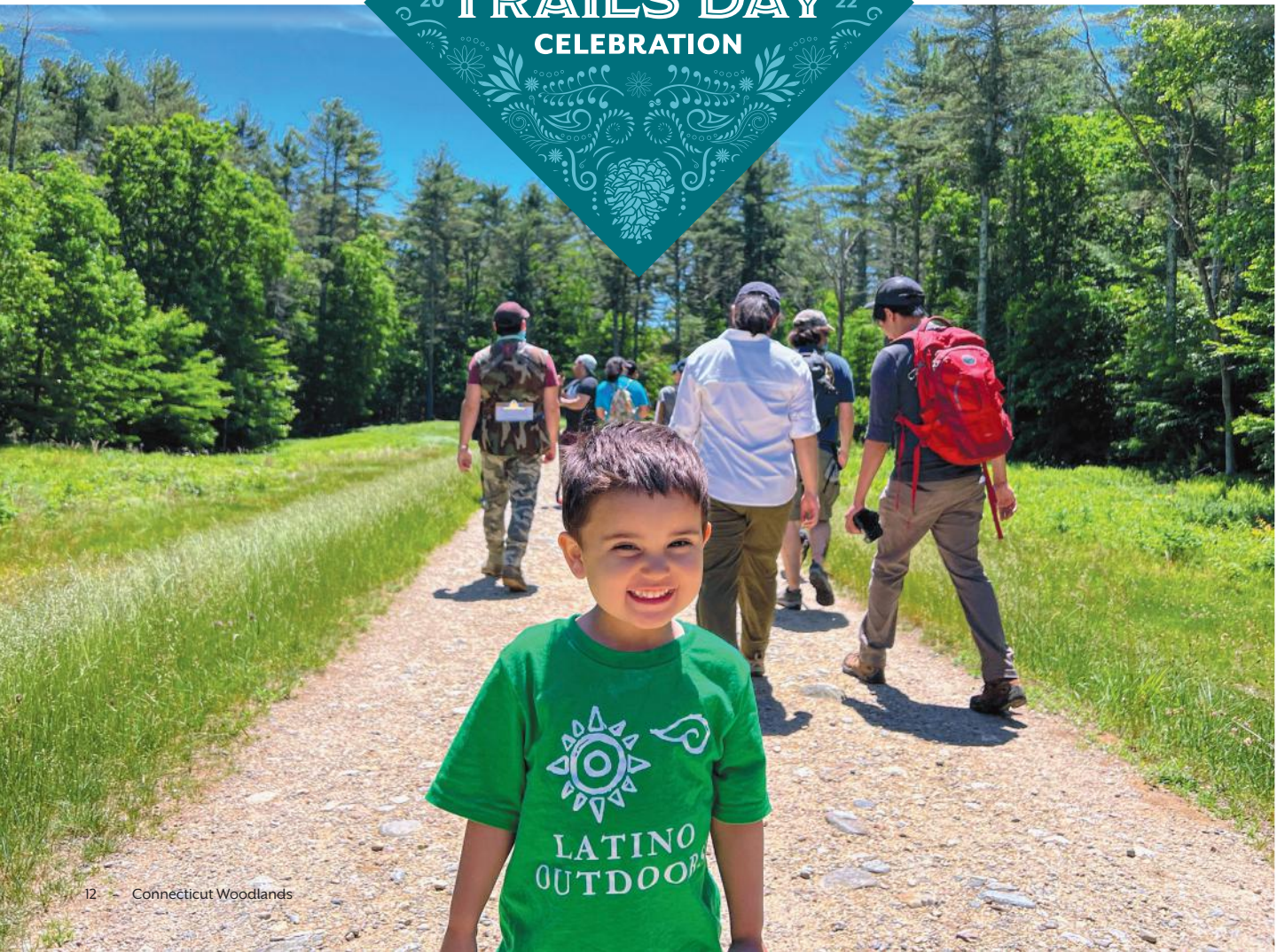
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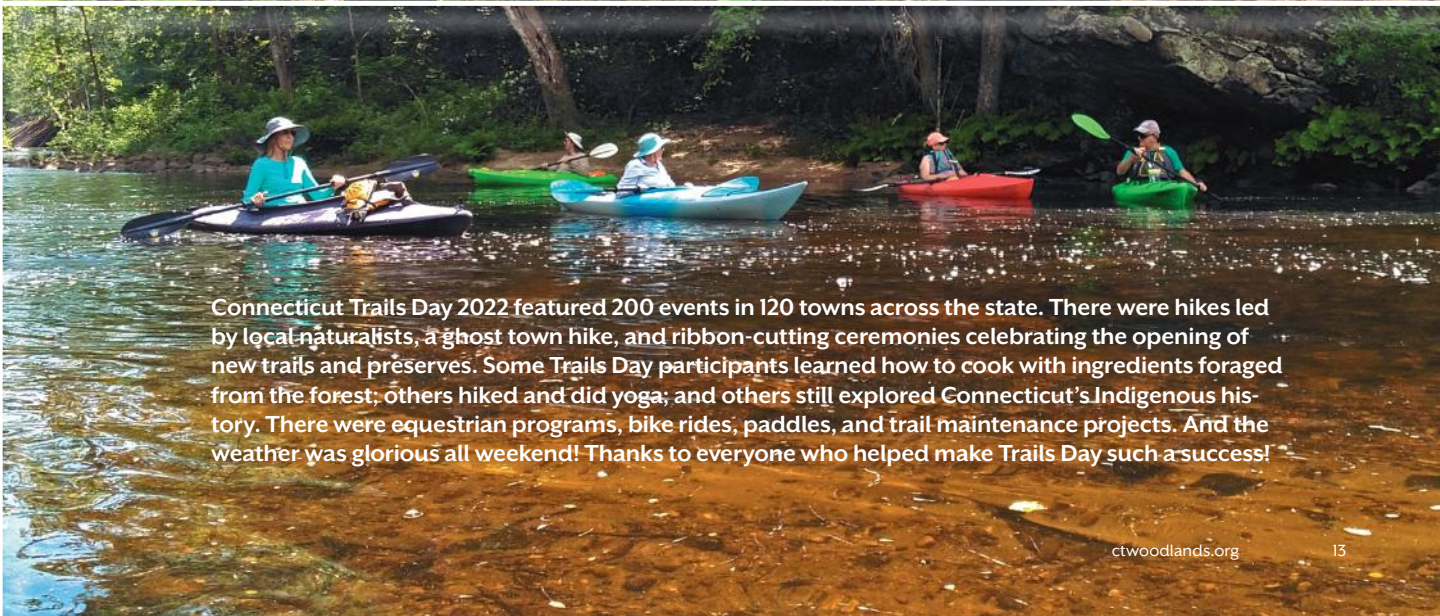


A dainty sulphur butterfly (*Nathalis iole*), on a thistle flower at the Belding Wildlife Management Area in Vernon, Conn.



CONNECTICUT
2022 TRAILS DAY CELEBRATION





Connecticut Trails Day 2022 featured 200 events in 120 towns across the state. There were hikes led by local naturalists, a ghost town hike, and ribbon-cutting ceremonies celebrating the opening of new trails and preserves. Some Trails Day participants learned how to cook with ingredients foraged from the forest; others hiked and did yoga; and others still explored Connecticut's Indigenous history. There were equestrian programs, bike rides, paddles, and trail maintenance projects. And the weather was glorious all weekend! Thanks to everyone who helped make Trails Day such a success!



Cultivating a Backyard Forest

By Kathy Connolly

This home landscape is reminiscent of an opening in a forest, with a strong emphasis on native plants. Photo courtesy of Charles and Debra Landrey of Old Saybrook.

Are you a forest dweller? I am, though my address might suggest otherwise. No, I don't live under trees in a tent or look down from a treehouse each morning. My backyard doesn't abut a state forest. In fact, I wake up every day in a conventional neighborhood.

But I am aware that my yard, street, and entire neighborhood were carved out of a forest long ago. Even today, the forest is held back only by machines and labor. Here, in Connecticut, we might say we are all forest dwellers.

While single-family home and condominium landscapes cannot replace the abundant life of an intact forest, the structure and seasons of forest life can influence how we design our residential landscapes. This is especially helpful when neighbors agree to use low-impact land care and high-value native

plants. By doing so, we increase habitat for insects, birds, and all other life.

Shall we let the forest lead the way?

1. Tall trees stand above all other forms of vegetation, both literally and figuratively. "A tall tree is a living creature that's been enduring a place for many, many years," says Chris Donnelly, retired urban forestry coordinator for the state of Connecticut. "Size represents a passage of time that can't be replaced." According to Jane Harris, consulting arborist from Middletown, "A mature landscape

tree's value is vastly greater than that of a newly planted tree in terms of carbon sequestration, canopy reflectivity, stormwater control, and food for wildlife." Tall tree canopies are like cities in the sky, harboring untold numbers of insects, birds, and other creatures. "Here in the Northeast, oaks might be considered the single most valuable tree. As Dr. Douglas Tallamy observes in his 2021 book, "The Nature of Oaks," more than 500 species of moths and butterflies depend on oaks, "nearly 100 more species than their closest competitors, the native cherries. No other tree genus supports so much life."



2. Native understory trees are smaller and well-adapted to shade, and they offer special value for wildlife that dwells in the understory. The National Wildlife Federation’s Native Plant Finder shows that hornbeams, for instance, are larval hosts for 75 species of butterflies and moths in Connecticut.

3. Native shrubs form another forest layer, many of them producing flowers and berries. Birds depend on shrubs such as blueberries, huckleberries, serviceberries, and viburnums.

4. Dead material, such as crumbling leaves, fallen sticks, and dead logs, are found throughout the forest. The Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation encourages “safe zones” for dead

material on residential properties. Fireflies, for instance, require leaf litter during most of their life cycles. Birds forage in logs, leaves, and dead standing trees for insect larvae as well as seeds.

5. Moss, common in the woods, is a reliable occupant under trees, where many a homeowner has struggled to grow lawn grass.

6. Ferns are common woodland groundcovers. Though they don’t flower, they hold soil and shade it, discouraging unwanted plants.

7. Lawn grass is absent in most Connecticut forests. “You have to hunt for native grasses in the woods; they’re sparse,” says Lauren Brown, a Connecticut botanist and co-author

of “Grasses, Sedges, Rushes: An Identification Guide.” “As for native sedges, that’s another story,” she says. Among the most common woodland varieties, she lists Pennsylvania sedge and spreading sedge. “And don’t forget path rush and woodrush,” she adds.

8. Wetlands, ponds, or streams are common in forests. From birdbaths to water gardens, their presence at home can be life-giving for many creatures.

9. Openings happen periodically in forests due to storms or fires. Flowering plants such as asters, black-eyed Susans, and goldenrods usually thrive in those openings until the forest grows back.

Connecting through Connecticut's Woodlands

A new field-based program is educating woodland managers and creating community at the same time.



MWM participants have the opportunity to learn from industry experts such as Jeffrey Ward, chief scientist, forestry and horticulture, Connecticut Agriculture Experiment Station (top); and Thomas Worthley, associate extension professor and extension forester, UConn Cooperative Extension Service (above).

By Beth Bernard and Elizabeth Merow

On a recent sunny April day, a group of woodland-minded adults gathered at Field Forest in Durham to soak in some knowledge about forest management for diversity and wildlife. As the students traversed the trail, studying invasive oriental bittersweet, watching a wood duck in a vernal pool, and exploring a young forest, the sun disappeared. Instead, they soaked up snow, sleet, and rain.

But the foul weather did not stop these participants in the Connecticut Master Woodland Manager (MWM) Program from learning all that they could about this forest so that they could bring this knowledge back to their own woodlands. The group didn't stop until they were forced into their cars by an incoming thunderstorm, a quick ending to a stormy spring day in New England.

For nearly a year, people from across Connecticut have gathered each month to learn about forest health, invasive species, wildlife ecology, and forest management strategies from a host of forestry and wildlife professionals. The

“The Master Woodland Manager Program is unique as it connects landowners, stakeholders, and professionals across the state in such a collaborative, interdisciplinary way.”

Andrea Urbano

goal of the program is to create a learning community for woodland owners and managers through lectures and field-based exercises.

The Connecticut MWM Program spans seven themed modules, including forest ecology, wildlife ecology, forest and climate change, forest health, forest management, and forest conservation resources. Each module includes both online and in-person learning experiences. Students explore forests throughout the state to learn how they have been managed. For example, they study forest succession at UConn Forest, forest pests and pathogens in the Naugatuck Forest, supporting wildlife such as the New England cottontail at Sessions Woods, and tree cultivation practices at the Yale Forest.

At the end of the course, students take the knowledge and skills that they have gained and use it to manage their own woodlands, in their own way. Woodland management is an individual choice that is based on values. Some participants value wildlife and want to support them with their management actions. Others want to help fight climate change by growing trees that sequester carbon dioxide

from our atmosphere. And others are looking to sell timber and support young forest bird species. These values determine their management strategy. Often multiple goals can be achieved by one management strategy.

Many woodland owners and managers feel overwhelmed by different perspectives and management options. “You don’t have to do it alone. The most successful forest management involves the input and collaboration of professionals and other stakeholders. Networking with these professionals and other program participants through the MWM Program ultimately increases one’s ability, knowledge, and confidence to steward their woodlands,” said Andrea Urbano, service forester with the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) and MWM instructor.

Connecticut is more than 60 percent forested, and nearly 72 percent of those woodlands are privately-owned. Overall, the Northeast is the most forested region of the U.S. in terms of percentage of land in forests. With forests playing such a critical role in the region’s economy, the MWM Program is essential for promoting forest health and resilience across the landscape. “The only way to make the changes that need to



Participants tour the Hull Forest Products sawmill.



Participants visit a recently harvested site in Madison.

be made in this era of climate change and threatened forest health is to educate ourselves and apply those skills and knowledge,” said Urbano. “What better way to do that than through this state-wide landowner education program that draws from the experience and knowledge of professionals and neighbors alike?”

The first cohort is a diverse group of woodland owners, land trust representatives, state employees, environmental leaders, and community members. Dan Carmody, from Wallingford, was interested in the program after retiring as a firefighter in 2020. He was looking for something to foster his insatiable curiosity and love for the natural world, specifically the forests he spent so much time in during his youth. Dan became involved in Fairfield County’s Aspetuck Land Trust and wanted to learn as much as he could about creating healthier forests.

“Once I realized how little I knew about woodlands, it drove me to learn as much as I could. This program has provided me with access to invaluable expertise, knowledge, and perspective that I couldn’t get solely from books,” he said.

Another participant, high school teacher Emily Picard, is applying what she’s learning to her outdoor classroom, a newly acquired 5-acre wooded lot adjacent to the school’s campus. Picard, who lives in Killingworth, said, “My students love being outside in the woods. It is a nice break from their stressful days in classrooms.” But Picard’s students are not just recreating in this forest. “They’ve helped me survey the land, map the property, conduct plant inventories, and manage invasives. Through their interaction with this 5-acre parcel, my students are graduating more environmentally minded than when they started high school. The MWM Program has given me the skills to provide this experience to my students.”

Being a part of this learning community has been invaluable for participants. “It has been invigorating to connect with like-minded people to learn both with them and from them,” Urbano said. “This program is unique as it connects landowners, stakeholders, and professionals across the state in such a collaborative, interdisciplinary way.”

For Carmody, the program has been transformational. “I’m looking at woodlands through a whole new lens now,” he said.

The Connecticut MWM Program, made possible with funding from the U.S. Forest Service’s Landscape Scale Restoration Program, was designed by CFPA with help from a committed group of partners including Audubon Connecticut, the Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station, DEEP’s Forestry and Wildlife Divisions, Connecticut Land Conservation Council, UConn Extension, and the Yale School of the Environment.

The second cohort will begin this September. Whether you own a large, forested property, steward a woodland for a land trust, or have a small, treed acre in your backyard, there’s something for everyone in the Master Woodland Manager Program. For more information and to apply, go to ctwoodlands.org.

Beth Bernard, CFPA’s Education Director, has been teaching people of all ages about Northeast’s forests since 2005. She holds a M.S. in Environmental Education from Antioch University New England.

Elizabeth Merow serves as CFPA’s Adult Education Program Contractor. Since earning her M.S. in Ecology and Evolutionary Biology from UConn, she has created and led public programs for nature museums, botanic gardens, universities, and nonprofits from Georgia to Connecticut.



Conversion

By Frederick-Douglass Knowles II

When Gloria started, the weatherman said *she wouldn't be much*, some silver tears falling in rapid succession. Cumulus clouds arguing over open space. But when the wind began her sermon, the trees bowed in deference.

The congregation of our front yard knelt in prayer. Their branches swaying like a vigil of candlelight in hope that she wouldn't uproot their trunks from hallow ground; cast them into a forest of fallen limbs. Their leaves silenced each season.

We watched as a parishioner of Oaks and Pines pled for deliverance. One Oak caught the Holy Ghost. Flailed its arms like my sister whenever the Spirit swept her bifocals under Mahogany pews during the pinnacle of testimony service.

The Oak could no longer withstand the gale of Gloria, conceding with a disheartening *Hallelujah* before crashing into our rooftop. When the might of the Lord laid its hand on our home, I gathered amongst my older siblings

and discerned that my faith in the Almighty didn't stem from Tuesday night bible study. Or Pastor Luther's Sunday communion of free crackers and juice, filling my body with the body of Christ. It was a Monday morning that made me believe.

After the Holy Trinity of Cloud, Wind and Rain had moved out to sea, we peered through our window to bare witness to the fallen Oak—dismembered. The cacophony of *brum-brum*, *buzz* and *crackle* sang like a choir praising the name of God.

This poem first appeared in Comstock Review, and was nominated for this issue by David K. Leff.

Frederick-Douglass Knowles II is professor of English at Three Rivers Community College in his native city of Norwich. The inaugural poet laureate of Hartford, he is the recipient of the Nutmeg Poetry Award and the Connecticut of The Arts Fellow in Artist Excellence for Poetry/Creative Non-Fiction. Knowles is a Pushcart Prize nominee and the author of *BlackRoseCity*.

CFPA Partners with Connecticut Trail Finder, New Interactive Mapping Site

CFPA is proud to partner with the Connecticut Trail Finder, a new, free interactive mapping site designed to help outdoor enthusiasts locate hiking, walking, snowshoeing, mountain biking, cross-country skiing, and paddling trails across the state. The goal of CT Trail Finder is to help people get out, be active, and explore our state's natural treasures while connecting trail users to state-wide trail management organizations. Detailed trail descriptions allow users to view the trails, get essential information, and submit trip comments and photos. Users are able to log their trail experiences, noting trails that they have completed, their favorites, or ones they want to visit. The Blue-Blazed Hiking Trails are being added to the site, with the goal of making the Trail Finder the go-to digital resource for all trails in the state. UConn Extension designed and manages the website thanks to funding from the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection and Connecticut Department of Transportation, and through strong collaboration with CFPA, the Connecticut Trail Census, and other organizations. For more information, visit cttrailfinder.com and "Explore Every Corner!"

CFPA Sponsors Inaugural Scout Forestry Day

On April 30th, the James L. Goodwin Conservation Center, located at the Goodwin State Forest, hosted the inaugural Scout Forestry Day, a unique program designed specifically for area Scouts to learn about Connecticut's woodlands from foresters, naturalists, wildlife biologists, and other practitioners. More than 30 Scouts and their families participated in the daylong event. Girl Scout Cadettes and Scouting BSA Webelos spent the day exploring the forest, building forts, and sketching habitats in field journals, and earned their "Trees" and "Into the Woods" badges, respectively.

The event, sponsored by CFPA and the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP), was developed by Public Allies AmeriCorps service member Bryan Avery. Other partners included UConn Forestry, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Friends of Goodwin Forest, and Country Carpenters.

"Our goal was to inspire the next generation of nature-minded citizens, leaders, and problem solvers," said Avery. "Learning through service is a common theme in Scouting, and local Scouts have greatly improved Connecticut's natural landscape through Eagle Scout projects, volunteer gardening days, trail cleanups, and more."

Lovely, Prickly Thistles, *continued from page 11*

Despite their wildlife value, native thistles are largely misunderstood and maligned. Farmers often dislike them because they discourage cows from grazing and compete with crop plants for water, light, and nutrients. Several non-native species, such as the bull thistle (*C. vulgare*), are invasive and difficult to eradicate due to their deep tap roots. *Cirsium arvense*, which is known as Canada thistle (though it's actually a European import), is on Connecticut's invasive species list. These tenacious species often are targeted for removal. Unfortunately, native thistles suffer in the process.

Botanists advise that people who want to eradicate spiny thistles from their fields or gardens take care to identify the plants accurately. The Xerces Society produces a helpful, downloadable field guide. The book identifies native thistle species and includes information on the natural history of the plant, its conservation value, habitat restoration, and native thistle propagation.

One of the thistle's claims to fame is that it's the national symbol of Scotland. As legend has it, Norse invaders in the 13th century attempted to surprise some sleeping Scots by sneaking up without

shoes under cover of night. Their cries of pain alerted their enemy, and the clan was saved.

For reasons both historical and botanical, thistles have quite a reputation. But when you see a purple thistle flower waving in the breeze, topped with a golden monarch butterfly, I hope you'll take a moment to just enjoy it.

Laurie D. Morrissey is a New Hampshire-based writer of articles, essays, and poetry. Her writing has appeared in Kearsarge Magazine, The Outside Story, and other publications.



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Pathways

IN THE AUTUMN OF 1913, the newly formed Connecticut State Parks Commission hired Albert Turner, a 46-year-old Litchfield native and Yale educated engineer, to survey the state for locations to establish state parks. Throughout the spring and summer of the following year, Turner fully committed himself to the Herculean project, exploring dozens of lakes, peaks, and river valleys throughout the state, and all 254 miles of Connecticut's shoreline. Turner ardently believed the State should prioritize public access to the water, particularly Long Island Sound, and selected three areas along the coast suitable for a state park, including Westport's Sherwood Island in Fairfield County. "The shoreline State Park must have breathing space for the multitudes," he wrote to the Commission, "and the shore must be preserved essentially untarnished."

At the time, beachfront property and adjoining upland, already a scare commodity, cost \$6,500 an acre, and the Commission only had a budget of \$20,000. In December 1914, Westport farmer and former state legislator, William H. Burr, Jr., purchased 5 acres on Sherwood Island. By 1923, the State had acquired 48 acres on the island. But some local landowners fiercely opposed the park's development, and the State was reluctant to proceed without local support. The below 1923 photo of Park Commissioners looking at illegal campers on the other side of New Creek exemplifies the conflict. It would be 23 years before Sherwood Island State Park officially opened to the public in 1937. By then, Hammonasset Beach State Park, the crown jewel of the Connecticut State Park System, was already attracting hundreds of thousands of visitors each year, validation of Turner's commitment to public access of Long Island Sound.

TODAY, in addition to enjoying the sandy beach, visitors to the 235-acre Sherwood Island State Park can explore hiking trails and a nature center, play disc golf, and pay their respects at Connecticut's 9-11 Living Memorial.





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