URBAN MUSHERS TAKE TO THE TRAIL

A MAGAZINE OF THE CONNECTICUT FOREST & PARK ASSOCIATION

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: Julia Klaucke and her team of huskies race a snowy trail.

After leaves fall, waterbodies have their own leaf season, page 6

Rhonda Ward is the Poet Laureate of New London. We caught up with Ms. Ward to learn more about her work and how poetry can help connect people more deeply to nature.

How has nature influenced your poetry, such as "Naked in Winter?"

Naked in Winter attempts to look at some of the things that happen in nature and how they also happen in our lives. We are in a time right now that the winds of change are numerous and they're strong. Sometimes poetry is ahead of its time, and some poems are timeless. Today, we can look at racial injustice and compare ourselves to a tree, or we can look at what human beings are doing to the environment and we can relate ourselves to what the environment is going through. I think that poem crosses a lot of boundaries.

Latino Outdoors creates space for the Latinx community, page 14

Connecticut authors and illustrators connect kids and nature, page 18

What kind of an impact do you believe poetry can have on people?

Poetry represents a shared experience. One of the things that I have addressed in poetry is the lack of drinking water around the world and how we are wasteful with that resource. I feel like we may reach the point of no return. This is what we have. We don't get another Earth, and if we don't take care of it, it will not sustain us.

How can readers better understand a particular message of a poem?

Poets try to use their own experience as a jumping-off point to understand that experiences are shared, and to find a way to communicate an experience. I don't think that poetry requires an interpretation. I think the poet will bring his or her intent to the poem, but readers bring their own experiences to that poem, and so how they interpret it is going to be more so related to their own experiences.

You seem to be talking about a deeper connection with nature.

Not everything can be a protest; sometimes we just have to admire what's in front of us. Admiration leads to appreciation and hopefully that can lead us to respect our environment and our surroundings a little bit more, enough to care what happens and how it affects us. We have it skewed, our lack of respect for nature. I think exposure to poems about nature helps people to understand that it is a synchronous relationship. We benefit one another, but we have to take care of one another, and that is the charge of nature to humankind. I do feel like if we are not able to reconcile our minds to that, we are going to be in a world of trouble.

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to the Aquarion Water Company for honoring Connecticut Woodlands Magazine with the 2020 Aquarion Environmental Champions Award for Communications.

Editor's Note

It's hard to mourn the close of 2020.

This year, we saw the most active Atlantic hurricane season on record with 30 named storms. Wildfires consumed millions of acres throughout the West. And, of course, we're still battling a devastating pandemic that upended the economy and, as of this writing, has cost over 250,000 American lives.

If we have learned anything this year, it is that public policy must be rooted in the best available science, and not just the so-called "hard" sciences. Social science is critical for advancing science-based policies. For example, whether we're talking about climate change or COVID, social determinants such as race, poverty, education, and access to quality healthcare impact public health. We must confront such inequality, and the systemic racism that permeates our society, in order to create a more egalitarian, resilient future for all.

Despite all the rancor on the nightly news, 2020 also taught us that humans are hopeful, adaptive creatures. Hearts and rainbows appeared on windows and front lawns as frontline workers battled the coronavirus. Offices moved online. People from all backgrounds took to the streets to demand racial justice. And as John Krasinski reminded us, no matter how bleak the world may seem, there is always "Some Good News."

Like you, our family sought solace in the enduring promise of nature. Our Blue Blazed Trails and state parks saw record attendance as the pandemic drove people outside. The vision of CFPA's founders to protect Connecticut's natural heritage for future generations has never felt more essential than in this, our 125th year.

No one knows exactly when the pandemic will end, but we do know it won't be the last crisis we face. May science, and our shared humanity, be two torches that light our paths forward.

Wishing you and yours a healthy and happy 2021.

Timothy

Timothy Brown
Editor

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From the Statehouse

By Eric Hammerling

Seeking Common Ground in a Polarized World

I am writing this in the wake of a bruising national election. It has been frustrating to watch the increasing polarization of our politics over the last few decades. The perception has grown that if one side "wins" the other side inevitably "loses." What happened to compromise and building common ground that a majority of legislators—and the public who looks to them for leadership—can support?

One of the few areas where both parties recently worked across political lines was on passage of the Great American Outdoors Act, which permanently authorizes funding for the Land and Water Conservation Fund and begins to chip away at public land maintenance issues. It was the most notable conservation accomplishment of the last several years, notable both for its important subject matter and its overwhelming bipartisan support. Bipartisanship *is* possible, and we must ensure that conservation continues to be an issue that unites us.

In Connecticut, issues like the Passport to the Parks, which funds state park maintenance and removes parking fees for residents (see our story on page 9); the Community Investment Act, which supports open space, farmland, historic preservation, and affordable housing; and funding for recreational trails have champions on both sides of the aisle. Parks, forests, farmland, and trails benefit us all.

Although conservation issues have strong bipartisan support, it will continue to take effort to both communicate and listen to each other to ensure that remains the case in the future. But having bipartisan support does not necessarily ensure that these priorities will be supported in the state budget. We must remain vigilant.

A good example of the need to continue seeking common ground is my recent experience as Chair of the Forests Sub-Group, which finalized its report to the Governor's Council on Climate Change (GC3) on November 6th.

In the Forests Report to the GC3, there was strong agreement on many issues—the societal and ecosystem benefits provided by forests; the importance of financial incentives to encourage private landowners to keep forests as forests; the need for state and local policies such as "No Net Loss of Forests," complemented by funding dedicated to reduce the fragmentation and loss of core forest blocks; the need to ensure that tree cover is adequate to provide shade and other public health benefits, particularly in our most vulnerable communities; and much more. Visit the public policy pages on the CFPA website or the GC3 information on the DEEP website to read the Forests Report.

However, there was considerable debate in the development of the final report over the best ways to manage forests for carbon storage and sequestration benefits. Should forests be actively or passively managed? Should there be reserves or preserves on public or private forest lands? What should the role of long-lived wood products be in carbon storage? Strongly held views on these topics led to an intense public input period with over 130 comments being submitted.

Fortunately, throughout this process, the members of the Forests Sub-Group remained dedicated to finding common ground in the Report where forests, the natural climate solutions they offer, and Connecticut residents would all benefit. Critical to finding this common ground was listening to each other, considering many findings based upon the best available science, and understanding that the best solution was one that we could all live with.

I am not suggesting that the Forests Report is a perfect document that resolved all differences; there are debates on some of these issues that will continue. However, it is my hope that we can unite around the vast array of issues where there is broad agreement. Furthermore, it is my hope that Connecticut Woodlands and CFPA will continue to offer a safe forum where various ideas, perhaps ideas that you may not fully agree with, can be presented fairly with the understanding that we don't know everything, we're not always right, and that things can change.

Please keep an open mind, help us all to find common ground, and thank you for your support.

> **"Bipartisanship *is* possible, and we must ensure that conservation continues to be an issue that unites us."**

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

New England is famous for its dramatic fall foliage. But once leaves fall, lakes, ponds, and rivers have a leaf season of their own.

THE AFTERLIFE OF

By Declan McCabe
Photographs by Geoffrey Giller and Lauren McCabe

My sister and her husband recently visited with hopes of experiencing a New England fall. In preparation for the best leaf viewing, we exchanged weather forecasts and studied leaf maps. Nightly news showed peak leaf color perform its annual slow-motion march from the mountains down into the valleys, from northern New England southward. We hoped to time their visit to take in a picture perfect fall day reflected in ponds and lakes.

But once leaves fall, lakes, ponds, and rivers have their own leaf season. Many of the leaves that blow across the landscape accumulate in water bodies. Dry leaves hit watery surfaces, stick and eventually sink. The accumulated leafy piles provide most of the food base for everything in freshwater ecosystems, including bacteria and fungi, insects and other invertebrates, and fish. Ultimately, the nutrition from leaves works its way up through the food web to birds, otters, mink, bears, and people.

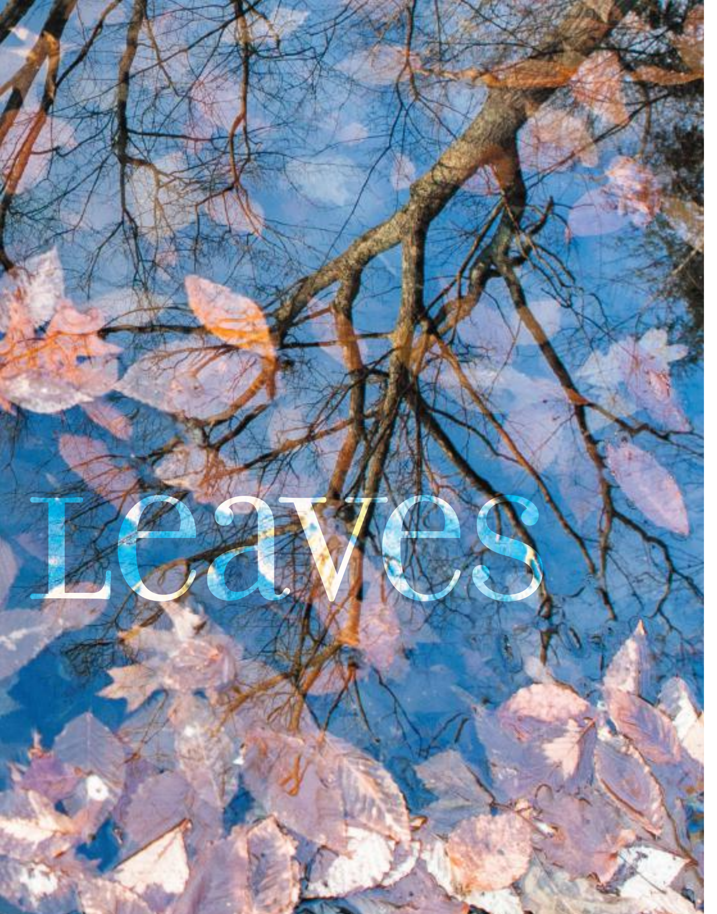
Few readers would ever consider casting a hooked leaf to catch fish, and with good reason: few fish eat leaves. Several links in a complex food web are necessary before nutrients and calories from leaves ever feed a fish, which may in turn end up as a meal for a bald eagle or osprey, or on the menu at a fine Connecticut restaurant.

Before exploring the afterlife of leaves under water, or even their importance as tourist eye candy, it's worth considering them from a tree's viewpoint. First and foremost, leaves produce food for trees. These little green power plants suck carbon atoms from the air and use the sun's energy to string them together into complex carbohydrates—sugars, starches, and even the tree's wood fibers. When we consume maple sugar, or a caterpillar eats a leaf, digestion liberates the sun's energy, breaking down plant products to provide nutrition.

But providing leafy nutrition is not in a tree's best interest. Hungry insects, such as gypsy moths, can kill trees, and the trees are not going down without a fight. In addition to more obvious defenses like thorns and hairs that make leaves harder to get or consume, trees wage chemical warfare against herbivores bent on eating them.

Plants produce a dizzying array of indigestible and even toxic chemicals to dissuade would-be leaf eaters. We take advantage of this pharmacological bounty as inspiration for everything from aspirin, to caffeine, to cancer-fighting compounds.

Although the chlorophyll that makes leaves green breaks down to reveal spectacular fall colors, many of the unpalatable, indigestible, and poisonous compounds are far more stable and remain in falling leaves. When leaves first fall into lakes and streams, not only are they inedible to fish, they are of little nutritional value and sometimes still toxic.



A stonefly on leaves in Brown's River in Vermont.

INVERTEBRATES— insects, crayfish, aquatic sowbugs, and many others— treat all of that leafy goodness as a smorgasbord tossed to perfection with fungal and bacterial dressing.

A physical, chemical, and biological process known as *conditioning* converts inedible, leathery leaves into delectable snacks that underpin freshwater food pyramids. Leaves in streams and ponds leach their chemical compounds into water in much the same way that tea leaves release caffeine, flavors, and the tannins that color our drinks. But the process of leaching toxins and tannins from leaves in water bodies takes place over weeks, and in some cases months.

Releasing toxins is just the first step; there's still the issue of indigestibility. Most of a leaf's structure is cellulose, like the paper upon which this story is printed. Animals lack digestive enzymes to break down cellulose. Even termites, perhaps the most infamous wood eaters, depend on microorganisms to glean nutritional value from your floor joists.

Two groups of freshwater microorganisms, fungi and bacteria, colonize sunken leaves and begin the digestive process before any animal takes a nibble. And still, even after the leaves are appropriately conditioned, most self-respecting fish will turn their noses up at the leafy salad bar.

But invertebrates—insects, crayfish, aquatic sowbugs, and many others—treat all of that leafy goodness as a smorgasbord tossed to perfection with fungal and bacterial dressing. Invertebrates called *shredders* make their living by munching through the piled leaves, consuming fungi and bacteria along with the leaves. Only by eating these invertebrates can fish finally access the enormous nutritional value that our fall leaves provide to freshwater communities.

Just as each leaf has visible characteristics unique to its species, leaf chemistry, physical structure, and the timing of leaf fall also differ from one species to the next. As a doctoral student at UConn, Yingying Xie used time-lapse digital cameras to show the end of leaf season in maples occurs more than 12 days before oaks. Her research matches up with my experience in my own yard. It seems the oaks are watching and spitefully waiting until I've finished raking maple leaves before dropping their ample supply of leaf litter, sometimes on top of early snow.

Leaf structure and chemistry add additional variables to the mix. Linden leaves are soft and reach edible condition rapidly. Oak leaves are leathery and loaded with tannins that take far longer to leach out. The result of all this variability is that a diverse forest provides a reliable food

supply that lasts through winter and spring, tapering off in summer. In addition to supporting healthy terrestrial communities that better resist pest invasions, diverse forests also sustain freshwater communities.

New Englanders know that variations in rainfall, temperature, and storms shift the peak of fall leaf season from year to year. This begs the question: What might a warming climate do to leaf season? And further, how might it impact underwater communities? The obvious answer might be that warmer weather simply delays the season, and indeed anyone who has observed fall trees while driving south from Vermont to Connecticut would likely agree. But there's more to climate change than just warming. We certainly have warmer summers, but we also have increased rainfall in the autumn, and specifically more intense fall storms throughout the Northeast. In another study, Dr. Xie modeled the impacts of climate change on 12 deciduous tree species in a range of locations. She predicted earlier leaf fall for some species due to summer heat stress and heavy rainfall, while later leaf fall for others due to a warmer climate. All of this will vary by location.

The University of Vermont's Brian Beckage documented uphill shifts in the distributions of trees, with fir trees contracting their mountain top ranges while the seeds of broad-leafed species, such as maples, growing farther uphill than they did in the 1960s. According to Alan Betts of Atmospheric Research, between the 1990 and the 2015 versions of USDA's plant hardiness zone maps, Connecticut shifted from zones 5 and 6 to the warmer zones 6 up north and 7 along the southern coast. And while trees can shift local distributions uphill, it remains to be seen if trees can redistribute at the regional scale fast enough to adapt to global warming.

Dr. Beckage and Dr. Xie have done some herculean modeling to predict where a very complex set of parameters will drive our tree communities. And while their predictions are not necessarily tidy, perhaps they make the case for protecting diverse tree communities to spread the risk of drastic change across multiple species so that some future version of healthy forests can persist. Perhaps there's also a case to be made for "assisted migration"—planting trees some miles north of their current distributional limits.

Of one thing I am confident: so long as leaves fall into streams and ponds, the invertebrates in these water bodies will feast on the discarded food source. Will New England streams start to look like those of Pennsylvania or Virginia? That remains to be seen and depends on the actions we take to mitigate climate change.

Crayfish are omnivores, but leaves are important components of their diets.

Aquatic invertebrates have evolved over eons to take advantage of an abundant winter food supply. For many freshwater insects, most growth occurs in winter, even as their habitat is capped with ice. Liquid water flows throughout winter and provides aquatic insects a reliably constant temperature not guaranteed to their dry-land brethren.

This past spring, I visited a vernal pool and watched caddisflies crawling beneath the ice as they foraged on different patches of leaves. For insects in particular, the timing of winter feeding and growth is important. For most species, adults emerge to mate in summer when the weather warms their muscles enough for flight. Few insects of any type can muster the warmth to fly in winter, and so winter larval feeding and adult summer flights is a boon for aquatic species.

To get a glimpse into the winter communities in your nearest small stream, grab a handful of submerged leaves and drop them into a basin of water. You'll be amazed by the stoneflies, cranefly larvae, and other organisms that crawl out as you gradually remove the leaves. You can briefly establish a streamside macroinvertebrate zoo in a plastic ice cube tray to view your catch. Take care to detain your guests just briefly and return them where you found them so they can continue feasting during the prolonged aquatic leaf season.

As for my family's leaf-season adventure, the timing worked well. Before the visit was over, we were lucky to catch spectacular golden red vistas of maple, birch, and beech reflected in the New England lakes and ponds that these leaves would later feed.

Declan McCabe is a professor of biology at Saint Michael's College. *His work with student researchers on insect communities is funded by Vermont EPSCoR's Grant NSF EPS Award #1556770 from the National Science Foundation.*

Checking Your Passport

Three years after becoming law, Passport to the Parks is providing record numbers of visitors access to Connecticut's state parks.

By Hanna Holcomb

Clinton resident Brian Roccapriore spends a lot of time in Connecticut state parks.

"I'm a bit of an outlier in that I'm in a state park at least once a week," he said. As an avid runner who serves on the Board of Directors of CT Trailmixers, a local trail running club, he is taking advantage of the free state park access provided by Passport to the Parks, a law passed by the Connecticut General Assembly in 2017.

"It's a great opportunity now to bring my family into Chatfield Hollow, bring the kids down to the beach, or go to Devil's Hopyard and not have to worry about the extra costs associated with visiting a state park," he said.

Passport to the Parks was established to create a steady source of funding for Connecticut's 139 state parks by adding a $10 fee to 2-year DMV registrations. In return, anyone in a Connecticut-registered vehicle can park for free at state parks. Without the Passport legislation, the state park budget faced drastic cuts following the 2008 recession.

The registration fee was implemented in February of 2018 and yields about $16 million annually for state park operations. Each year, another roughly $4 million goes into the Passport to the Parks fund from other collected fees,

Since Passport to the Parks was established, the number of visitors to state parks has increased by roughly 10% each year.

"It's really important to have a reliable source of funding because that allows us to plan for the future."

Mason Trumble

including entrance fees from out-of-state visitors, campground and pavilion rentals, and admission fees at a few facilities, including the Exhibit Center at Dinosaur State Park and Gillette Castle. Previously, money collected from state park fees would go to the state's general fund and could be spent for non-park purposes.

Prior to Passport, Connecticut was one of only a handful of states that funded state parks solely through their general fund, which relies on tax revenue. Following the 2008 recession, general fund resources were reduced. State park funding increased from 2005 - 2010, but steadily declined afterwards. In fiscal year 2017, the general fund budget for the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP), which manages the state park system, was reduced by $10 million. To operate within that budget, $2 million of the state park's $18 million total operating budget was cut.

According to the Office of Fiscal Analysis, staffing costs are the biggest expense of state park operations, accounting for some 70% of the total operating budget. To reduce operating costs, about 45% of the seasonal staffing budget was cut and 12 full-time park maintainers were laid off, leaving only 35 park maintainers for 110 parks. By 2016, there were 200 fewer DEEP employees than there had been a decade earlier. To further cut costs, four lesser-used campgrounds were closed, and some visitor center and museum hours were reduced. State park beaches had lifeguards on duty five days per week instead of seven.

In fiscal year 2018, then-Governor Dannel Malloy proposed a $6.5 million cut to the state park budget. The cuts may have led to passive management of some state parks, meaning there'd be no active maintenance. But thanks to the roughly $20 million generated annually by Passport to the Parks, DEEP has had consistent funding to hire staff and support state park operations.

"It's really important to have a reliable source of funding because that allows us to plan for the future," said Mason Trumble, who joined DEEP in September as the Deputy Commissioner of Environmental Conservation. "We have an incredible amount of use in the summer. The fund allows us to hire a seasonal staff of about 500 folks and that helps us to have the people power to meet the massive increase in need," he said.

The 500 seasonal employees, including lifeguards, interpretive guides, and maintenance crews, are essential to maintaining parks and providing a safe visitor experience. Passport to the Parks also secures funding for some full-time positions. Of the 82 full-time state park employees, 35 of the salaries are now covered by the Passport to the Parks fund and the remaining 47 are funded by Connecticut's general fund.

Since the Passport fund was established, DEEP has been able to reopen campgrounds at several state parks, including Devil's Hopyard, Green Falls, Macedonia, and Salt Rock, and keep campgrounds open longer during the shoulder seasons. Nature centers and museums were able to resume normal hours. And the fund supports park maintenance including litter cleanup, building repair, and mowing.

Passport to the Parks also provides approximately $1 million for the Connecticut Council on Environmental Quality, which assesses the quality of Connecticut's environment, advises state agencies on the impacts of proposed construction, and investigates citizen complaints of environmental law violations. It also provides funding for the Connecticut Soil and Water Conservation Districts, local nonprofit organizations that provide technical assistance and environmental education to promote sound natural resource management.

"From my perspective it's really critical for us to receive that funding," said Dan Mullins, Executive Director of the Eastern Connecticut Conservation District, which annually receives $100,000 from the Passport fund. When Mullins started working with the Conservation District in 2014, each district received $100,000 from the state's general fund. But in fiscal years 2015 and 2016, that funding was cut in half. In 2017 and 2018, the Conservation Districts received no money from the state. "Without state funding, we always finished in the red," he said.

The consistent funding provided by Passport helps to fund staffing and covers overhead costs like rent, vehicle expenses, and maintenance, which are not often covered by grants.

"Keeping us open with funding through the state facilitates the reduction of nonpoint source pollution," said Mullins.

"If we care about people having access to state parks and access to the outdoors, having free access is an important piece of the puzzle."
Walker Holmes

"That's not going to have an immediate effect, but over the long term, it's going to help keep beaches and inland lake parks open by preventing bacteria from rain runoff."

Since Passport to the Parks was established three years ago, the number of visitors to state parks has increased by roughly 10% each year, and more than 9 million people visit state parks annually. During the pandemic, visitation to the parks has been even higher.

"The state parks are a place that we can go even in the midst of a pandemic to play, to connect with nature, to spend time outdoors, to be with family," said Walker Holmes, Connecticut State Director of The Trust for Public Land.

Not all state parks have consistent counting methods, but electronic counters at Hammonasset State Park counted nearly 3 million visitors in 2020, half a million more than last year. Calls for service from Environmental Conservation Officers, who enforce fish and game laws, boating safety, and search and rescue, increased from about 3,000 calls to 10,000. Last year, parking lots were closed for capacity 120 times; this year they were closed nearly 500 times, which is due, in part, to COVID-19 social distancing restrictions that reduced parking capacity by 50%. Further, there was an increase in hunting and fishing licenses which had previously been in decline.

Providing free access to Connecticut's state parks has helped to increase accessibility. In a statewide survey of more than 2,000 responses for the 2017 Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP), 23% of participants said the biggest barrier to outdoor recreation was fees. "If we care about people having access to state parks and access to the outdoors, having free access is an important piece of the puzzle," said Holmes.

But taking away the fee isn't the only barrier to spending time outdoors. Over a fifth of SCORP survey respondents said that parks were too far away from their residences to use.

"From neighborhood parks to state parks to national parks, we know that 100 million Americans don't have access to a park within a ten-minute walk of home," said Holmes.

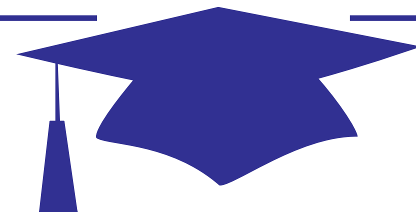
Across race and income, access to public land is not equal. A study by The Trust for Public Land found that parks serving primarily non-white populations are half the size of parks serving majority white populations, and five times more crowded. Parks serving majority low income communities are four times smaller and four times more crowded than parks serving majority high income communities.

"In order to truly have park access for all, we need parks and open spaces of every type, and the state of Connecticut needs to have those all over the state," said Holmes. "It will take cities, towns, the state, land trusts, and many other types of partner organizations to all come together in order to make that possible."

During the pandemic, parks have provided Connecticut residents with a safer way to spend time with family and friends, while providing numerous physical and mental health benefits during this stressful time.

"I really encourage people to still get outside even when it gets a little colder and to take advantage of what we have here in the state," said Brian Roccapriore. "There's something different and beautiful out there no matter what time of year you get out."

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



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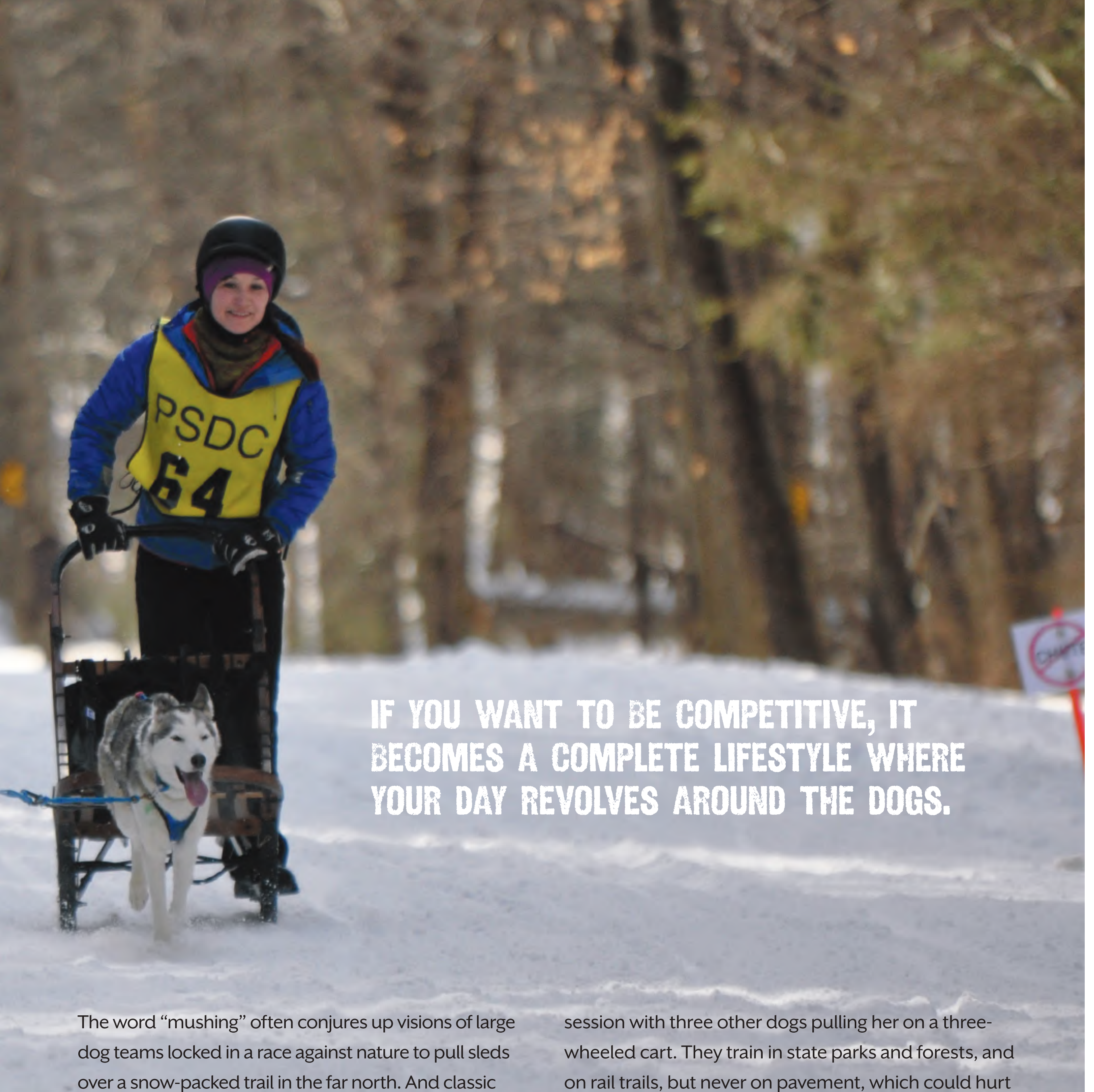
CONNECTICUT'S URBAN MUSHERS

For people who love being out in the woods in winter, dog sledding is the perfect antidote for the pandemic.

By Timothy Brown

On January 21, 1925, the people of Nome, Alaska, found themselves under quarantine as public health officials tried to stave off a devastating diphtheria epidemic. Inaccessible by steamship in winter, the only way to get the life-saving antitoxin to the remote seaport was by dog sled, at the time the primary form of transportation for subarctic communities. On the evening of January 27, "Wild" Bill Shannon and his team of Alaskan malamutes left Nenana, Alaska, with 300,000 units of the antitoxin. Over the next five-and-a-half days, 20 mushers and some 150 sled dogs braved temperatures of -70 degrees, gale-force winds, ice, and darkness to relay the serum along the 674-mile route. In the early hours of February 2, the final musher, Gunnar Kaasen, arrived in Nome, pulled by a team of 13 dogs led by his Siberian husky, Balto, a creature who has since been immortalized in bronze, book, and film. Today, the Iditarod Trail Dog Sled Race follows much of the same route as the 1925 Great Race of Mercy.

As a kid, Balto's story made a big impression on Julia Klaucke. "It fascinated me, thinking about being out on the trail, just you and the dogs," she says. About a decade ago, the Connecticut native decided to turn her dream into reality. She got her first husky and began to learn how to train sport dogs. She started working with shelter dogs, and she trained with people like Karen Ramstead, a Canadian musher who's raced the Iditarod 11 times. Now a certified dog trainer who works with several local shelters, Klaucke is a competitive musher who owns eight dogs, all of whom are her pets and sleep indoors.



IF YOU WANT TO BE COMPETITIVE, IT BECOMES A COMPLETE LIFESTYLE WHERE YOUR DAY REVOLVES AROUND THE DOGS.

The word "mushing" often conjures up visions of large dog teams locked in a race against nature to pull sleds over a snow-packed trail in the far north. And classic races, such as the 1000-mile Iditarod, reinforce this image. But these days mushers are just as likely to be riding a mountain bike, or on skis, a scooter, or even running along with their dogs.

Throughout the summer, Klaucke's dogs take lots of walks and swim. But in the fall, as soon as the temperatures start to dip below 50 degrees, the team starts training. At first, they take short, early morning runs, just a mile or two, often near a lake where the dogs can cool off. As temperatures continue to fall, the team ups their mileage, training four-to-five times a week. Klaucke often does two, early morning training sessions: first, with two dogs and her mountain bike; then a second session with three other dogs pulling her on a three-wheeled cart. They train in state parks and forests, and on rail trails, but never on pavement, which could hurt the dogs' paw pads and joints. "If you want to be competitive, it becomes a complete lifestyle where your day revolves around the dogs," she says.

Klaucke grew up with dogs, but it wasn't until she got huskies that she fully realized how important it is to exercise sport dogs. "If they don't have an outlet for all that energy, it goes into behaviors you don't want. For people who are struggling with their dog, when you find a sport that you can do together, it changes both of your worlds," she says. "Suddenly you have a teammate, you have goals, you're doing something that's really enjoyable, rather than having a dog that you're constantly frustrated with."

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Creating a Space Where We Matter

An interview with Amy Hernandez of Latino Outdoors

It was little more than a year ago when Amy Hernandez first heard of Latino Outdoors, a nonprofit organization whose mission is to "inspire, connect, and engage the Latino community in the outdoors." The Connecticut native and UConn grad, who currently works as materials engineer at Pratt and Whitney, is an avid hiker who also loves camping and skiing. After tagging a photo on Instagram with "Latina outdoors," the organization reached out to ask Amy if they could re-share her post. "I had no idea they existed," she says. Today she is an Outings Leader for the Connecticut Chapter of Latino Outdoors.

We caught up with Amy to learn more about how Latino Outdoors is working to improve access and equity in the outdoors, why their focus on *cultura y familia* (culture and family) is critical to their mission, and what other environmental organizations can do to become more welcoming and inclusive of the Latinx community.

Connecticut Woodlands: There are dozens of environmental organizations throughout the country. Why is it important to have an outdoors organization that specifically serves the Latinx community?

Amy Hernandez: The outdoors and nature are an important part of Latino culture, but we don't have much representation in mainstream environmental organizations, in their advertisements, leadership, or workforce. Latino Outdoors works to connect the community, or *la communidad*, with the outdoors by improving access and equity to public lands.

It also is important to have a group where people feel like they belong. A big concept within the organization is *Yo cuento*, which is a blog as well as a video on our website. *Yo cuento* is a Spanish phrase that means I count, I matter; but it also means, I tell. It's a

way to tell a story. Yo cuento is important to us because it creates a space where *we* matter. It's looking at our identity as connected to nature. That's a big emphasis for the organization because representation does matter. When we see ourselves in an outdoors sport, in an advertisement, or in the workforce, suddenly we feel like we belong and we matter in that space.

We talk about public lands, as if all Americans have equal opportunity to access and enjoy those lands, but this is clearly not the case.

AH: Recently, the Housatonic River Association reported that there have been a lot more Latinos recreating on the river in northwestern Connecticut. And their presence has created more tension in those neighborhoods, which tend to be predominantly white. Obviously, we're in the midst of a global pandemic and we're trying to socially distance, but some people are also sending the message: "This is *our* land and we don't want *them* (Latinos) to come here and crowd things."

Is this an example of a microaggression? How do you define that term?

AH: First, I think it's important to claim one's own privilege. I have the privilege of being able-bodied; the privilege of being cis-gendered; of being straight. I experience microaggressions very specifically as to my race, my look, and my body as a woman. One of the common things is the look of surprise I get when I tell people that I like to hike, to camp, to ski. It's this very confused look that says, "I wouldn't expect that from *you*." There's no reason why you shouldn't expect that from me, but it isn't seen that often. There's always this assumption that I didn't come prepared, that I don't know what I'm doing out there. I think the seeds of that thought are that I don't belong out there. That's the thing with microaggressions—it may not be that someone is intentionally trying to be malicious; it may be with the positive intent, trying to be funny, or trying to be helpful. But there are all these assumptions, and they target specific groups. I'll get questions like: "Are you sure about that? How did you get here? Do you have the right qualifications?"—things that wouldn't be asked of a peer who is white and male. There is an assumption that you're not prepared, or qualified, or that you just don't belong there.

How does recreating on a Latino Outdoors program feel different for you from going outside with a group of white folks?

AH: It's deeper than just having a Spanish translation. In the outings I've done with LO, we've added a lot of different cultural aspects to the program. We can sit around a circle and talk about experiences from our childhoods. We tend to cater the programs to the culture more than I would with my friends who are mostly white. It makes you feel more at home.

In other words, you feel a sense of belonging.

AH: Yeah. My mom is an immigrant; my dad is Puerto Rican. I was born in Connecticut, but I relate to a lot of Latinx customs. Recreating outdoors is a part of our culture, too. It's a huge part of our culture.

"*Yo cuento* is important to us because it creates a space where we matter."

What are some of the things environmental organizations could do to become more inclusive and equitable?

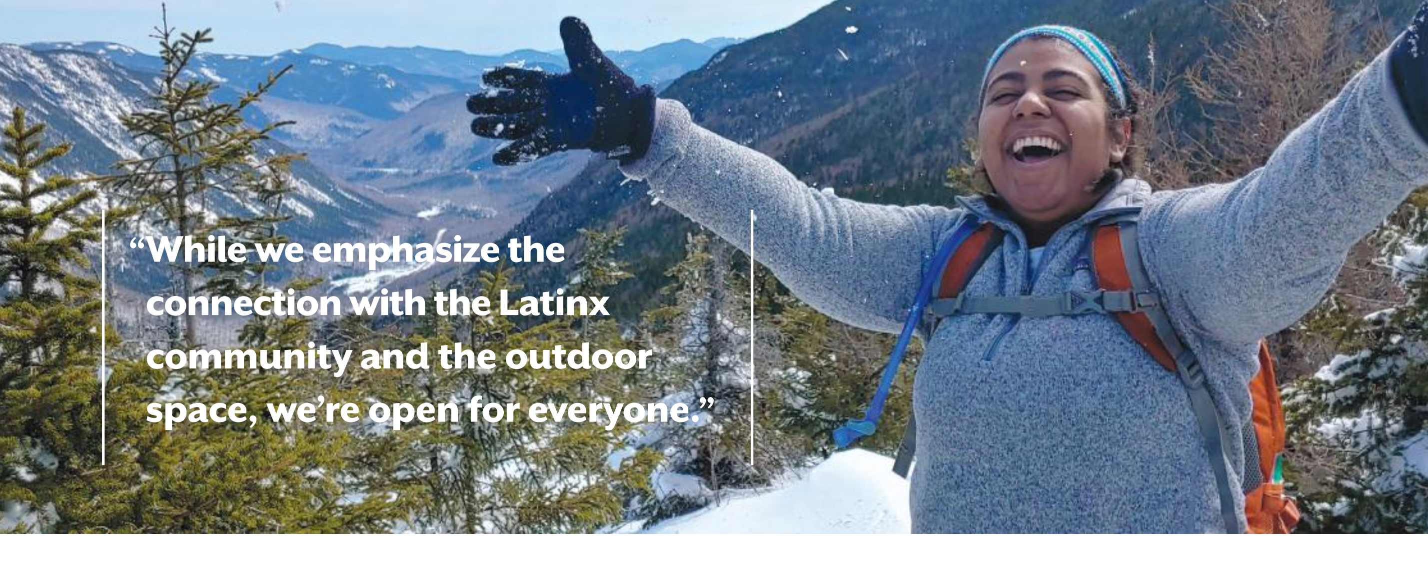
AH: They really need to hire someone who is Latinx, or Black, or Asian, who can bring their perspective, their culture with them. Put the money there. Many organizations say they have a hard time finding someone with that background. But I know so many Latinos who would love those jobs. Hiring a Latino would make a huge difference because you're introducing our culture into that space. You're already looking out for that population in that way. Representation is so important, not only in terms of your workforce, but also in the ways that you advertise, in how you communicate. It's surprising that not everything has a Spanish translation, or a Mandarin translation.

It sounds as if you're talking about an access issue, access to information, to resources.

AH: Absolutely. For example, if you have an events calendar, having it in Spanish would be a huge resource for the community. Something like that that engages people. At LO, all of our events are in both Spanish and English.

I'm sure that attending an event with an Outings Leader who's Latina, who speaks Spanish, helps people to feel more comfortable, and to see themselves as future leaders as well.

AH: Yeah. I'm even thinking about when I got into engineering. I didn't think about doing engineering until I was a junior in high school. I was on a robotics team and still I didn't even think about engineering. I met one of our mentor's girlfriend and she is the one who got me into engineering. It was meeting another brown woman who does engineering, and I was like, "Oh wow, I can do this too!"



It sounds as if you're saying that organizations could be doing a lot more to cultivate talent and empower the next generation.

AH: Foster the talent that there is. There's a lot of really talented people who are getting their degrees—specifically looking at UConn, there are a lot of Latinx, Black and brown and Asian students working in ecology, biology, and conservation. Lean into that and foster them as future leaders. They certainly want it. And the ways we get jobs is not just going to school or getting the good grades; a lot of times it's just who you know. A lot of people get their internship because they had a personal connection to the organization. But if you have a population who has historically not been a part of that field, then they're not going to have that kind of network. It's on those industries and those organizations to reach out and to inspire the next generation. Host events for young kids so they have the interest in those fields. If you do the work now to change the pipeline, you're going to see a change in the next 20 years.

There are environmental organizations for many constituency groups—Outdoor Afro, Venture Out, et cetera. Why is it important to have an organization specifically devoted to the interests of the Latinx community?

AH: First, when you look at Latino population, it's very diverse. We have all races in the Latinx population. There's Asian Latinx, white Latinx, Black Latinx, and mixed, such as myself. I am Afro-Indigenous; I am black, I am white, I am indigenous. I think it's important to have our separate groups because we find community in the things that we hold together culturally. But at the same time, we collaborate with other groups, such as Outdoor Afro. I think it's important to have our groups to celebrate our identity, but, at least speaking for LO, we're open for anyone. So even if you're Black but not Latinx, or white but not Latinx, you could join and participate with us.

As a white person, I could attend an LO event?

AH: Absolutely! We're open to anyone who's in solidarity with the values of creating access and equity, and for respect for public lands, and for respect of the history of public lands in this country. So while we emphasize the connection with the Latinx community and the outdoor space, we're open for everyone.

Latino, Latinx, Hispanic—is one label more appropriate, or more inclusive?

AH: Our organization has kept the name Latino Outdoors. When we refer to all genders, we use the term "Latinx." It's more inclusive, especially for the trans community. Latinx is not a race, but it is a grouping of people. When the protests started following George Floyd's murder, a lot of groups, including LO, put out statements like, Latinx in Solidarity (with Black Lives Matter). But that excluded the fact that there are Black Latinx people. So that was our own organization's oversight because it's a geographic grouping of people by language. In terms of identity, Latinx encompasses all of the races. But when identifying an individual, like myself, I often shorten it to say I'm Afro-Latina. It's up to the individual.

Obviously Covid has had a tragically disproportionate impact on communities of color. Is Latino Outdoors still hosting events during the pandemic?

AH: We have cancelled all our in-person events. However, we are still holding virtual events. We're still engaging the community, trying to make sure that while we're apart, we're still going out recreating. LO has provided resources about how to recreate responsibly. It's not just wearing a mask and maintaining social distancing; it's also planning where you're going ahead of time, making sure you're not going out at a peak time, making sure that if you encounter a lot of people you have a space to go elsewhere. All of these things are really important. We don't want people to just stay home just because we're not physically going out together. We still want people to go out.

Naked in Winter

Like mighty oaks, we stand strong

And tall against the winds of change

Absorb the gentle rains

Of our fortunate days

Withstand the bitter cold

Of sometimes harsh realities

Naked in the winter of our sorrows

Clothed in spring

With the renewing of our spirits

Rhonda Ward lives and works in New London, CT where she serves as the city's inaugural poet laureate. Her poems have been published in Siren (UMass Dartmouth), Long Island Quarterly, and Cape Cod Poetry Review among other journals. Most recently, her poem, "Legacy", was selected for the Academy of American Poets' Poem-a-Day project.

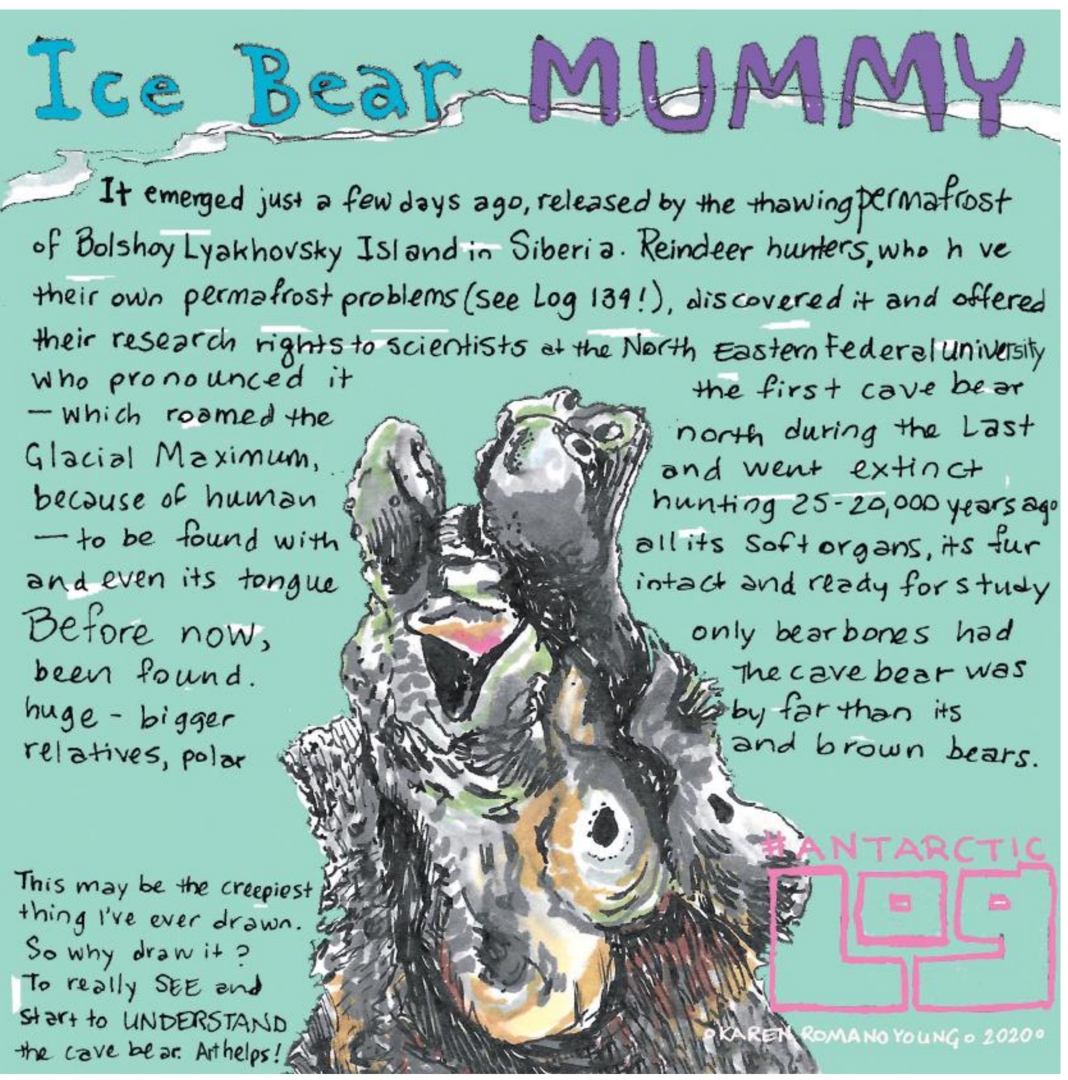
WORDS OF WONDER

CONNECTICUT AUTHORS CONNECT KIDS WITH NATURE

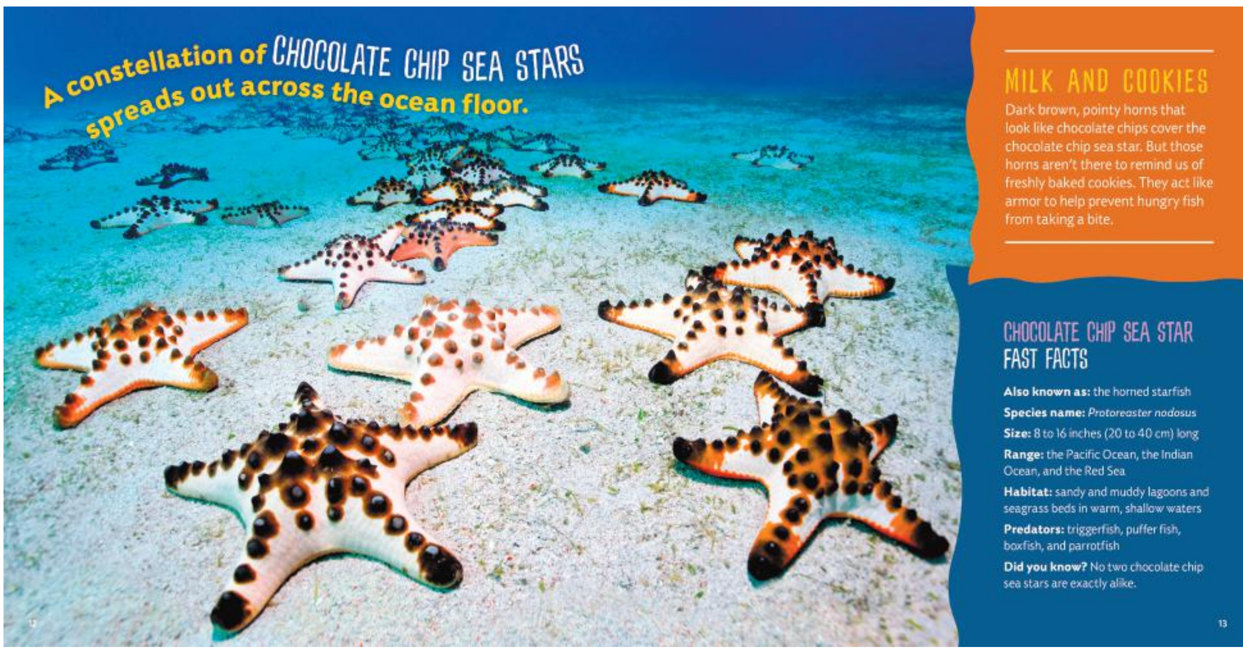
By Katherine Hauswirth

When asked how his local environs spark ideas for books, John Himmelman's answer is simple: "A lack of streetlights!" With more than 80 books to his credit, the Killingworth-based author-illustrator is drawn to nocturnal creatures. Walks through his low-lit backyard and nearby woods provide inspiration, including for "Wait Till it Gets Dark: A Kid's Guide to Exploring the Night," which he illustrated. In the book, young readers encounter Great Horned Owls, bullfrogs, spiders, and other critters. Working as a library page awoke his interest in children's books. "I came across some inspiring work like Arnold Lobel's 'Frog and Toad' books," he said. "They showed me how I could combine both my love of making pictures *and* making up stories."

For generations, Connecticut-based authors and illustrators have been inspiring kids' interest in nature. Hugh Lofting, who created Dr. Dolittle in the 1920s, lived and wrote in Killingworth, not far from Himmelman. Harriet Beecher Stowe, who lived in Hartford, is recognized for her abolitionist writings but rarely her children's nature stories. Branford illustrator Jean Zallinger contributed to a host of nature-themed nonfiction books for young readers. She used the Yale Peabody Museum of Natural History's collections to inform her portrayals of creatures that proved challenging to study in their natural habitats.



"Ice Bear Mummy" by Karen Romano Young www.antarcticlog.com



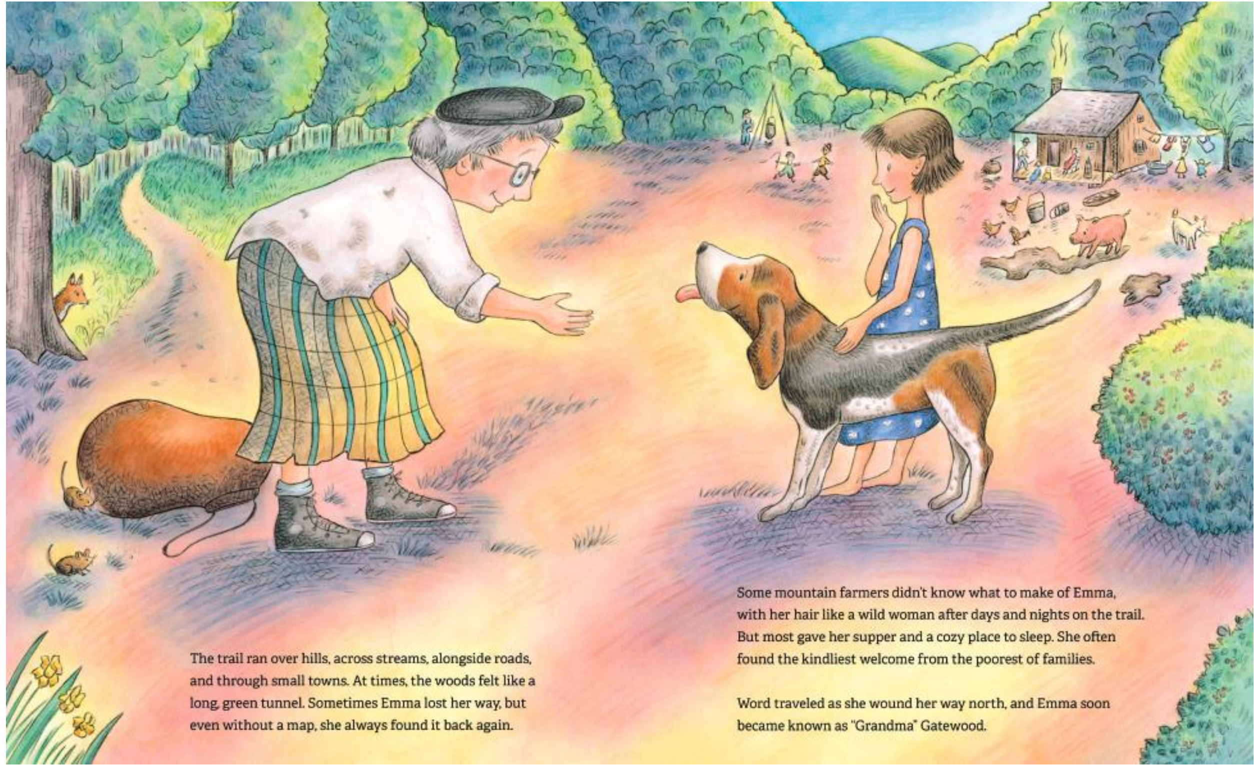
"I See Sea Food" by Jenna Grodzicki. Text copyright © 2020 by Jenna Grodzicki. Reprinted with the permission of Millbrook Press, a division of Lerner Publishing Group, Inc. All rights reserved.

This literary legacy continues with the state's contemporary authors and illustrators. This year's Connecticut Book Award for Young Readers Nonfiction, from the Connecticut Center for the Book, was awarded to Jenna Grodzicki's "I See Sea Food, Sea Creatures That Look Like Food." This treat for the eyes will have children of all ages delighting in comparisons of sea creatures to familiar food items. She also wrote "Wild Style: Amazing Animal Adornments," where young readers learn about our local caddisfly larva's suit of rock/stick/sand "armor," as well as more exotic creatures, like the Indian Ocean's pom-pom crab. Grodzicki's time as a teacher and media specialist showed her how kids are especially drawn to science-themed books with a healthy dose of humor. She hopes that her books will spark kids' imaginations and inspire them to learn more about nature, especially about less-familiar creatures. "Kids know lots about sharks and dolphins and whales," she says, "but there are so many other animals that are not as well known that are really cool and interesting!"

Sarah Albee agrees that some animals get the bulk of readers' attention. "People tend to gravitate toward the cute and fuzzy, furry animals that are endangered," she says. "But there are a lot of animals that don't get respect, like insects and sea slugs and things that aren't really that attractive but are also endangered." She wants her young readers to respect insects, to appreciate them and understand their worth. Most of her children's books focus on some aspect of history, but some get at the natural world in a roundabout way. "Bugged: How Insects Changed History," a playful, fact-packed book for kids in grades 3-6, covers how insects have been woven into human society for millennia, from red clothing dyes made from cochineal insects to the far-reaching threat of mosquito-borne malaria. For the well-known I Can Read series, her book about Jane Goodall gives early readers a window into Goodall's groundbreaking work with chimpanzees and insight into these creatures' lives.

In addition to being a writer and artist, Karen Romano Young is a deep-sea diver, polar explorer, and comics creator. Young was one of the first Mill River Rangers, which "taught decades of kids to understand our river from spring to Sound," she says. Her books grow from her curiosity. "Across the Wide Ocean" sprang from her interest in navigation, whether by whales, sharks, turtles, or nuclear submarines and container ships. "Mission: Sea Turtle Rescue" was driven by a desire to learn about these wide-roaming creatures threatened by human activity. Following research trips to Antarctica, Young created Antarctic Log, an online comic series dedicated to telling eye-catching, kid-friendly stories about climate change and scientific research. Her new book, "The World's Shrinking Continent," another product of her polar expeditions, will be published next year. "I think children are just as ready to be in nature and just as engaged as ever with books about animals and other nature themes," Young says.

Some of Jennifer Thermes' books connect kids with the natural world through the lens of notable nature lovers. For example, many active grandparents say they've used "Grandma Gatewood Hikes the Appalachian Trail," her book about the pioneering thru-hiker, to encourage their grandkids to start hiking. Thermes, who is both an author and an illustrator, has also written a children's book about Charles Darwin,



Text and illustrations from Grandma Gatewood Hikes the Appalachian Trail © 2018 Jennifer Thermes. Used with permission from Abrams Books for Young Readers.

whose keen observations as a young naturalist aboard the Beagle formed the basis of his theory of evolution by natural selection. "Since observing the world and keeping a sketchbook is a part of many artists' process, I was fascinated with the connection between science and art," Thermes says. She savors the many creatures around her old farmhouse and its backyard pond. Her appreciation is evident in "There Are No Moose on this Island." Its young protagonist reminds his dad to put aside the guidebook and ferry schedule and appreciate the mammals, birds, insects, and sea life on a Maine island.

Leslie Bulion love for the outdoors started during childhood, when she kept busy digging for worms and mole crabs on Long Island. Several of her kids' books use catchy, humorous poetry to engage readers, all the while teaching about science. "Hey There, Stink Bug!" goes beyond its namesake to teach about a host of insects, and the illustrations complement fun verse: "Bombardier beetle/slow on the wing but thinks fast on its feetle/ Blasting poor predators into retreatle." Mixed between rhymes are fascinating factoids, like this beetle's acid spray defenses and impressive aim. Her "Amphibian Acrobats" book, another mix of verse, science, and engaging art, came out in March. "Spi-Ku, a Clutter of Short Verse on Eight Legs," her seventh science poetry book, will be released next year.

Water finds its way into several of Susan Hood's books, with good reason. Hood is a sailor who grew up enjoying the Long Island Sound. Her lighthearted, rhyming "Leaps and Bounce," which describes tadpoles' development into full-fledged frogs and celebrates growth, is meant for younger readers. More recently, Hood has created "The Last Straw: Kids vs. Plastics," due out early 2021. Hood takes science seriously; the book has been fact-checked by the Ocean Conservancy's chief scientist, and Jane Goodall endorses it. It salutes activists like Milo Cress, who started the "Skip the Straw" movement when she was just 9-years-old. Hood says she draws inspiration from young people like Milo. "I hope hearing their stories will empower other kids to tackle this problem head-on," she says.

Typically, these Connecticut-based authors and illustrators spend extensive time visiting schools, libraries, and bookstores, connecting in person with kids, parents, and teachers. While visits have been limited during the pandemic, many have continued to host virtual readings and other events. This holiday season consider supporting these authors by purchasing their books and inspire the young people in your life to become more engaged with the natural world.

Katherine Hauswirth lives and writes in Deep River. She authored the award-winning "The Book of Noticing: Collections and Connection on the Trail." To read more of her writing, visit her at fpnaturalist.com

Connecticut's Urban Mushers, *continued from page 13*

Klaucke is the founder of Urban Mushing, a networking club for Connecticut mushers to connect with one another, share advice, and provide support. Members tend to be young, active professionals who love the outdoors and find themselves owning a highly energetic dog who needs a lot of exercise. The Siberian Husky Valley Club hosts races at Pachuag State Forest, where novice mushers can watch and learn. In addition to local races, Klaucke and her team also travel throughout northern New England in search of longer competitions, and snow.

Here in southern New England, the warmer winters brought on by climate change are impacting the sport. “We often train—and in some years exclusively train—on our bicycles, rigs, or carts,” says Klaucke, “and I think that’s one reason there’s a lot of sprint teams. Typically, the more dogs you have, the longer races you’re intending to do, which is tough if you have warmer weather. Sometimes our first time out on snow is when we go to a race up in Maine.”

Although some people allege that dog sledding is cruel, Klaucke contends that mushers are loving, devoted care-givers for their dogs.

“Mushers really do take great care of our dogs. We’re very concerned about their diet. We put so much into them.” Moreover, she says, the dogs truly love the sport.

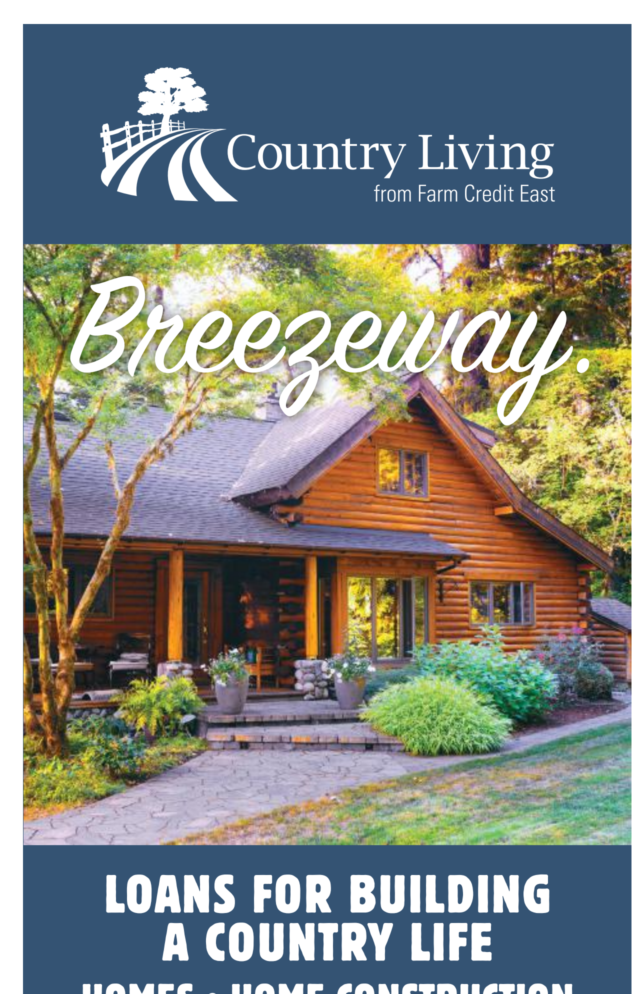
“They go crazy as I start to get out the harnesses. It’s the like the best moment in their life,” she says. “I can’t imagine doing something with my dogs that they didn’t want to do; it would be heartbreaking. And it would be heart-breaking to keep them from a sport that they really love.”

As her team continues to evolve and train, she’s constantly reshaping her visions for the future. The more they’re out on the trail, the longer the team wants to stay out.

“All that you’ve learned together, and the training that you’ve put in; all the time you’ve spent with the dogs—there’s just something that’s so special and unique about it. Eventually I’d like to do longer races, like 60 miles. And for that, we probably will have to relocate somewhere farther north where it’s colder and there are larger parks.”

But competition aside, the relationship between musher and dog team is at the heart of this sport.

“It’s this incredible bond that you create with the dog,” says Klaucke. “You’re out in nature, in the woods. You’re in the moment. Everything else from your day, the stress, it’s gone. None of it matters. It creates this serene, other world experience when you’re out with them.”



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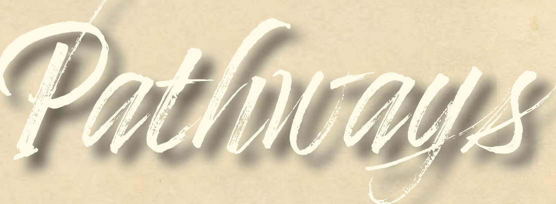


TELEPHONE 2-3368

JAMES L. GOODWIN
ROOM 304, 15 LEWIS STREET
HARTFORD, CONN.

January 14, 1939.

Mr. Edgar L. Heermance,
215 Church Street,
New Haven, Conn.

Dear Mr. Heermance:

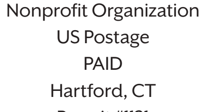
I took the inclosed photograph of the sawmill at Shaker Pines last Thursday. I thought you might be interested to see it and that you could possibly put it into the Woodlands magazine.

Sincerely yours,

James L. Goodwin

JLG/EM

While combing through CFPA's papers at the State Archives, we came across the above photo and letter from James Goodwin, one of America's first professional foresters and a longtime CFPA board member, to Edgar Heermance, a preacher who served as the first CFPA Trails Committee Chair and founded our iconic Blue Blazed Trails.



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