



CONNECTICUT

Woodlands

FALL 2022

Protecting Sacred Land

A MAGAZINE OF THE CONNECTICUT FOREST & PARK ASSOCIATION



Land Acknowledgment Statement

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



CONTRIBUTOR'S *Spotlight*

Clinton Morse spends a lot of time running around in the woods, literally. The retired Living Plants Collection

Manager at the University of Connecticut, Morse regularly runs with the Shenipsit Striders, a local trail running group, and is National Communications Manager for Orienteering USA, the national umbrella organization for sport orienteering. This October 8-9, Bigelow Hollow State Park will host the U.S. Masters Orienteering Championships. We caught up with Morse to learn more about his passion for orienteering, and his love of plants.

How did you first get involved with orienteering?

I used to think orienteering was taking bearings with a compass and doing pace counting. Pretty boring stuff. But in the mid 90's, my wife, Ellen, was teaching adult education courses. One of the perks of her job was taking another adult ed course for free. She

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On the cover: The Mattatuck Trail near Flat Rocks Road in Cornwall Bridge, Conn. Photo by Jake Koteen.

thought we should both try orienteering, and we signed up for a class taught by Allmuth 'Curly' Perzel, a master orienteer. This, however, was sport orienteering, not at all what I was expecting. We were both hooked instantly and have continued to orienteer ever since, along with our three kids. Though the rest of the family takes a more laid-back recreational approach, I'm partial to the competitive aspect.

What is a common misconception people have about orienteering?

One thing holding a lot of folks back is the fear of getting lost. While there are inevitably times you find yourself uncertain of exactly where you are, you have this wonderful tool in the form of a map and you eventually figure out where you went astray and get yourself back on track. In orienteering, you're never really "lost," you just lose contact with the map for a bit.

You spent your career cultivating rare plants from around the world. Do you have a favorite?

Being responsible for over 3,000 species of some of the rarest plants in the world, it's really hard to choose a favorite. But I would say Corpse Flower, *Amorphophallus titanum*, is probably the top contender. I was one of a handful of people to acquire its seed back in the early '90s, and successfully reared over 100 seedlings. After about 10 years of careful cultivation, we were able to share the first ever New England blooming of this magnificent plant to over 10,000 people who came to the greenhouses to view it.

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Editor’s Note

This issue marks five years since I came aboard as editor of Connecticut Woodlands. Along with Laura Kolk, our designer, we have strived to bring you thoughtful stories about the natural world and our place in it. We have worked hard to diversify not only the kinds of stories we publish, but also the voices who tell them, particularly those voices which historically have not been a part of the environmental discourse in this country.

Serving as editor has given me the opportunity to discover all the beauty and incredible outdoors opportunities that our small state has to offer. But what I appreciate most is getting to meet such inspirational people who have dedicated their lives to preserving, protecting, and defending our natural heritage. CFPA has a long and proud history of environmental stewardship and conservation in Connecticut, and I’m grateful to be a part of this community.

One of the people I am most grateful to have met through my work at Woodlands is David Leff, who served as our Poetry Editor from my first issue until his tragic and untimely death earlier this year. While we mourn David’s passing, I’m thrilled to introduce our new Poetry Editor, Margaret Gibson. Margaret, professor emerita at UConn, recently completed her tenure as Connecticut State Poet Laureate, and is the author of more than a dozen books of poetry and editor of *Waking Up to the Earth: Connecticut Poets in a Time of Global Climate Crisis*. For this issue, Margaret selected one of David’s poems, “Cicadas at 60,” which will appear in a new collection of his work, *Blue Marble Gazetteer*, to be published this fall by Homebound Publications.

I’m also thrilled to welcome our new staff photographer, Jake Koteen, whose incredible work has graced the magazine and appears on this issue’s cover.

If I haven’t had the pleasure of meeting you yet, I hope you’ll reach out. I love hearing from readers, and we’re always looking for new story ideas, and the writers and photographers to tell them.

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

A Tough Summer for Trees

In July, my new neighbors cut down a beautiful pin oak that once provided shade to both of our homes. This tree was approximately 80 feet tall with a diameter of more than six feet, and was the largest front yard tree on our street. My new neighbors didn't know that this would be such a hot summer (and that we would miss its shade canopy), nor did they realize that their neighbor (me) cares so much about the many social, economic, and ecosystem benefits provided to our community by trees.

When I asked why they decided to cut it down, they said their primary concern was that the tree would fall during a storm, damage their house, and threaten the safety of their young family. Their concern is, of course, legitimate, and they may have been correct. This pin oak in middle age had remained vigorous for many decades through several tropical storms and hurricanes, but no one knows whether it would have survived the next one. Sadly, we'll never know.

Coincidentally, while my personal shade tree in West Hartford was being removed, the CT Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) was accepting public input on a new "Hazard Tree Mitigation Policy" to protect visitors to state parks and campgrounds. Public Act 22-143, passed by the Connecticut General Assembly earlier this year, requires DEEP to consider: "(A) [t]he maintenance of public safety, (B) ecological and natural resource protection, (C) practices for transparency and public engagement in the process of [hazard tree management], (D) effective stewardship of department resources, (E) public access to outdoor recreation, (F) fire suppression or protection efforts, (G) state park maintenance and repairs, (H) decorative pruning, (I) trail maintenance, (J) post-storm mitigation or clean-up, and (K) removal of invasive species." DEEP's new policy was published in August.

Adding to this tough summer for trees, Eversource recently proposed "resiliency projects" to be implemented in 12 towns: Chester, Clinton, Guilford, Mansfield, Middletown, Naugatuck, Newtown, Redding, Sharon, West Hartford, Windham, and Woodstock. Conducting resiliency projects in the areas of these towns most prone to electric outages will, according to Eversource, involve the pruning and removal of both unhealthy and *healthy* trees outside the defined area where the utilities have typically conducted

vegetation management. In its most recent vegetation management plan, Eversource estimates that across its service territory, over 20,000 trees per year will need to be removed to protect their electric distribution infrastructure.

Are we willing to dedicate resources at the local and state level that will help replant our future urban and roadside forests when healthy trees are lost?

Healthy trees are critical both to make communities more livable, and to help mitigate climate change. As you know, trees provide shade, reduce air pollution, prevent erosion, store and sequester carbon, and provide many other ecosystem and societal benefits. However, more affluent communities tend to have more tree cover, while less affluent communities receive fewer of the benefits that trees provide.

We need healthy trees for today and for the future, and we can't continue to sit by and watch as trees are removed without being replaced. It's about time for a strong "no net loss of trees" policy for Connecticut. We hope the Lamont Administration and General Assembly will take action on this in 2023!

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



Completed in 2014, the eastern extension of the Saugatuck Trail runs just north of Trout Brook Valley in the midst of hundreds of acres of woodland and streams that drain into the 880-acre Saugatuck Reservoir. Along the six miles of new trail skirting the reservoir lie dramatic rock outcroppings, stands of hemlocks and beech trees, verdant fern meadows, sharp ravines laced with primordial moss-covered stone slabs, and a latticework of historic stone fences and colonial-era old woods roads.

From almost 30 years of hiking and hash-running through these woods, we knew them to be some of the prettiest woodlands in the state. So when CFPA announced plans to construct a new trail in this area, one which would connect the existing western portion of the Saugatuck Trail with the Blue-Blazed Aspetuck Trail to the east, we enlisted some of our fellow hashers and hiker friends and, with our vintage crosscut saws, mattocks, adzes, hammers, and drills, off we all went for what would amount to a solid year of trail and bridge building.

What we all shared in the course of that year was not just a feeling of accomplishment for our labor, nor simply our daily reward of cool beer that by group fiat awaited us after each workday, but also the real sense of comradery that comes from working together to build something of value for posterity. We felt that this trail section we helped build would permit others to experience a place of uncommon beauty and quickly feel immersed in the history of a woods untouched since the 19th century, with glimpses of the vanished communities that once lived there.

Our ongoing management of this section of trail for CFPA is likewise rewarding. We needn't explain the importance of providing unobstructed access to a virtual wilderness lying

within the most populous county in the state (and especially during the pandemic). We also hoped to encourage more people living in a modern, fast-paced society that's become increasingly divorced from nature to come discover and connect with an essential element of our shared existence, and often right in their own backyard. High-minded reasons aside though, managing a trail can be hard work at times. But as you observe and maintain your trail over the years and through the changing seasons, you'll develop a sense of pride of ownership over your adopted little piece of Connecticut and in its small but very real contribution to the well-being of its citizens.

Another rewarding aspect of this sort of trail work is how it provides ties to the rich histories of these lands. For example, on our trail, long before European settlers arrived, this area provided winter hunting grounds for the Unquowa, Sasqua, and Pequonnocks, with summer months spent nearer the shoreline. Through at least the early 1600s there was a substantial Unquowa village located on the Aspetuck River, just a stone's throw from the eastern terminus of our trail. And the old dirt road our trail crosses several times (in colonial



times called the 5th Cross Highway, and later Den Road) is likely to have been built on an existing trail used by these bands to move between the Aspetuck and Saugatuck Rivers.

Then early in the 1600s the area became part of one of the earliest European colonies, the Fairfield Colony. The countless stone fences you cross on the trail, running roughly north/south, mark the boundaries of what were called the Long Lots. These were long, narrow lots (50 to 1000 feet wide, roughly 12 miles south to north), with the head of each family of the colony given title to one such lot.

To illustrate, as shown on the map inset, about a mile from the eastern trailhead on Route 58 you cross a bridge over Burr Creek. At this point you are moving onto the Long Lot which, in the late 1600s, was granted to Nathaniel Burr. You then cross a very faint remnant of an old woods road, likely part of the colonial-era Burr Highway, surveyed around 1700. Next you cross onto the Long Lot of Nathaniel Burr's brother Daniel Burr. (And yes, you probably guessed correctly—this is the same Burr family that will, in a few generations, give rise to Aaron Burr who will be involved in one of the odder episodes in American history: the infamous Hamilton/Burr duel).

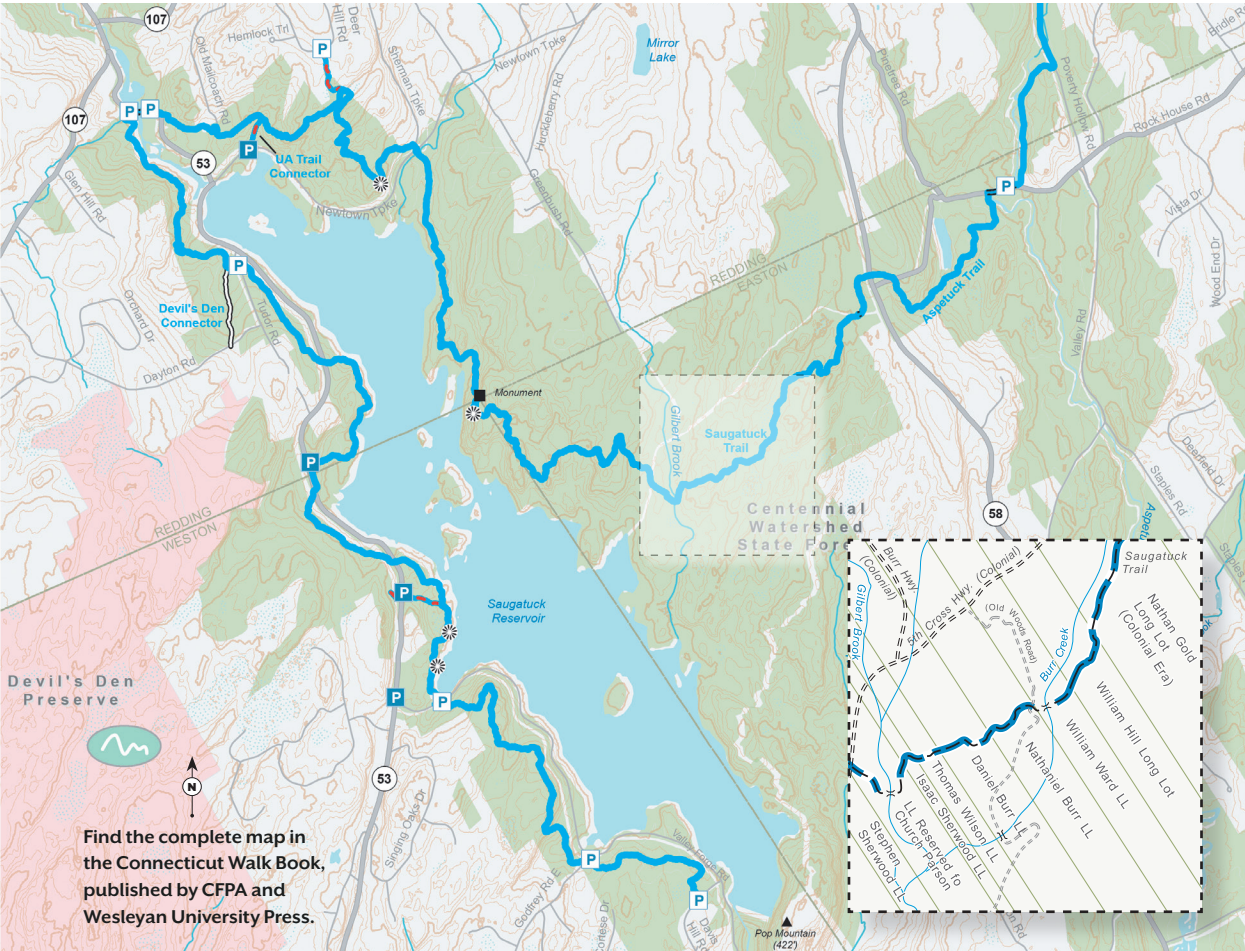
There is far more to the history of these lands than we can include here, but we hope what we have included gives you a sense of what you may find. Just as our building and maintaining this section of trail has given us a deep sense of

connection to “our” trail and “our” woods, you too might discover similar connections to your trail and your woods.

Although many others had a role in constructing the trail, those whom we’ve worked most closely with include Eric Bengston, who did much of the early planning and building, Jeff Glans (Trail Manager for the western portion of the Saugatuck Trail), Steve Bayne, Craig Weber, Eric Stones, and Al Puches (Trail Managers for the adjoining Aspetuck Trail). We would also like to thank the Fairfield Museum and History Center, and especially Collections Manager Diane Lee, for assisting with research, including providing access to colonial-era documents concerning the Long Lots and colonial roads.

Rick Dewitt is a recently retired professor. He helped design and build the Blue-Blazed Aspetuck and Saugatuck Trails, and the 17-mile Ives Trail and Greenway, connecting the towns of Ridgefield, Danbury, Bethel, and Redding. Active in the sport of orienteering, he is the President of the Western Connecticut Orienteering Club and serves as the Vice-Chair of the Ives Trail and Greenway Regional Association.

Kent Stivers is a retired IT professional who lives in Redding. Besides volunteering with CFPA, he’s also on the Ives Trail Board and helps manage that trail and others in Redding’s Gallows Hill Natural Area. For the past eight years, he’s volunteered on stonework projects in public parks throughout the southern Hudson Valley with the Jolly Rovers Trail Crew.





Swirling Swallows

A CONNECTICUT RIVER SPECTACLE

By Laurie D. Morrissey

Photo by Jake Koteen

With their snow-white bellies and iridescent blue-green heads, tree swallows are among our prettiest songbirds. Their aerial acrobatics make them a joy to watch as they swoop over a sunny field or play with a dropped feather during courtship.

But perhaps their most stunning feat is on stage now at the mouth of the Connecticut River. At dusk each evening over a period of several autumn weeks, tree swallows fly in from all directions, appearing as tiny black specks in the sky. Random specks swirl together to form a massive bird-cloud.

Then, on some mysterious cue, they descend like a tornado into the dark reeds where they rest for the night.

This murmuration of swallows—as many as 500,000-600,000 at once—is a phenomenon that begins in late August as the birds prepare to leave the Northeast for their wintering grounds. Even for seasoned ornithologists, this staging event is remarkable.

“It is the only place to observe such a phenomenon with tree swallows that I’m aware of,” says Patrick Comins, executive director of Connecticut Audubon Society. “It is an amazing spectacle. First a few birds appear in the sky, then slowly but steadily it becomes a solid cloud of birds. At a certain point, they begin to hesitantly descend until finally the first few make it all the way down and then it’s like a torrent of birds filling the reeds.”

Even Roger Tory Peterson was impressed. “I have never witnessed a spectacle more dramatic than the twisting tornadoes of tree swallows I saw plunging from the sky after sundown,” said the famous ornithologist, who lived next to the Connecticut River and witnessed avian wonders all over the world. Like Peterson, many in Connecticut (and beyond) have become ardent observers.

Chester resident Laurian McGinley is an enthusiastic swallow watcher, making it a point to travel down the river at least once per season to catch the sight along with her family and interested friends.

“When our friends say, ‘We’re going down to see the birds,’ we know what that means: we’re taking our boats south to Old Lyme,” she says. Years ago, on her first swallow trip, theirs was among a half dozen boats. Now there may be 40 to 60 vessels, from kayaks and canoes to commercial cruise boats. “It’s spectacular,” she says. “Every night it’s different, but it’s always magical to see it. The next day, we all talk about it like we’re reviewing a play.”

The autumn spectacle is just one aspect of these fascinating birds. Because of its relative abundance and tameness, *Tachycineta bicolor* is among the best-studied bird species in North



America. The majority of research focuses on mating and nesting behavior. Biologist Bernd Heinrich related eight seasons of observation in his book, *White Feathers: The Nesting Lives of Tree Swallows*. He offers an intimate look at the daily life of several pairs as they furnish their nests with white feathers “only after their eggs had been laid, not before, as per usual avian protocol.”

Besides the massive staging event at the mouth of the Connecticut River, tree swallow migration stands out for other reasons. Unlike many of their fellow insectivores, they will eat berries, allowing them to arrive early in spring to stake out their territories even before insects are active. When tree swallows depart in the fall, their pace is step by step, not straight through. Their journey along the coast to Florida and Central America takes three to four months. When not flying, they are stopping to rest, molt, refuel, and build up their energy reserves.

Cathy Malin, who conducts swallow cruises on the 64-foot RiverQuest, has more swallow spectacles under her belt than most: for 12 years, she has worked as crew member and naturalist on the boat’s six-times-a-week trips. “A lot of people are unaware of this natural event, and their first time usually finds them in awe,” she says. “For many passengers it’s an annual event not to be missed.” Her hope is that sharing the experience encourages stewardship of the river and its unique ecosystems, allowing this and other natural processes to continue.

Comins agrees. “The more people that are aware of it, the more will be interested

in conserving the critical habitat of the lower Connecticut River,” he says.

“Protecting migratory waystations is of critical importance. Birds need nesting wintering and migratory stopover habitat to thrive and survive. Problems with any one of the legs of that stool can upset the balance and threaten the vitality of a species.” Although phragmites—the reeds sheltering swallows in the river—are an invasive species often targeted for eradication, he says, “In general, removal is a good thing, just not on the main roosting area. I think the phragmites on the roosting islands is pretty critical and should not be messed with so long as the roost remains.” As far as the adoring fans go, Comins says they probably do not pose a threat as long as they stay off the islands.

One reason for his concern is a decline in the population of aerial insectivores, birds whose diet is almost exclusively insects captured in flight. Cornell researcher David Chang van Oordt says that scientists are struggling to figure out the specific causal link in the overall decline. He cites a combination of factors, including climate change.

“Changing precipitation patterns can dry out wetlands and make them smaller,” he says. Another factor is the decline in insect populations. “The biomass of insects is going down and there is not as much food as there used to be. Places like these are super important since the swallows need to make stops in wetlands to recharge along the way.”

Much about the tree swallow’s pre-migration “avian ballet” remains mysterious. Awed observers marvel at how such large numbers of birds flying in a mass do not bump into each other and wonder how they signal their sudden drop downward into the reeds. As with so many things in nature, there is always much more to understand.

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.

Finding Your Way Through the Woods



If you think orienteering is just for the military or Scouts, check out Orienteering USA Master's Nationals Championship this fall at Bigelow Hollow State Park.

By Clinton Morse



Photo courtesy Dean Bolt

On a warm April day, a race called the Billygoat took place on a small mountain in central Massachusetts. Now this Billygoat was no ordinary race; it was an orienteering race, which meant that runners were allowed to choose which way they wanted to go as long as they passed through a series of pre-determined checkpoints marked on a map. On this particular day, after about 90 minutes of racing, two racers were running abreast along an old forest road at the front of the race with no one in sight behind them.

Dave was an accomplished runner with many wins to his credit, both on roads and trails. Dave knew how to

read a map but today's race strategy was to stick close to Mike with whom he was maintaining a strong pace. Mike knew how fast Dave could run and with only 10 or so minutes left in the race realized that if it came down to a finish sprint Dave would easily win the contest. Mike, however, was an expert navigator; at the time, perhaps the best in North America. Holding his map casually at arm's length while running along with Dave, he took occasional covert glances down at it and carefully committed a route for the rest of his race to memory.

All of a sudden, with no warning, Mike veered off the path into the forest at top speed, leaping over fallen trees and splashing through small streams from the spring runoff. Mike chose this point to leave the trail as small ridges and thick vegetation provided limited visibility in which Mike hoped to shake himself free of his pursuer. A few minutes later Mike emerged from the forest with no sign of Dave and the finish line in sight. Dave arrived at the finish nearly 10 minutes later to settle for second place. In orienteering a well-executed route often beats raw running speed.

Orienteering is an exciting navigation sport that combines running through parks and forests with the problem-solving challenge of navigating a course aided by a detailed topographic map. The goal is to traverse your way through a series of checkpoints and back to the finish. Course designs present multiple route choices for each leg of your journey but the decision of which route to take is entirely your own. Going straight from point A to point B will always be the 'shortest' option, but rarely the simplest to execute or the fastest. Which will you choose? Good routes are not always readily apparent by a quick glance at the map either. Deducing and executing the routes that will work best for you while on the move is a fundamental aspect of the sport and is often the deciding factor in who finishes first. As both a competitive and a recreational sport, orienteering is enjoyed by people of all ages and abilities.

One of the largest annual events in the country is the Orienteering USA Master's Nationals Championship which will be coming to Connecticut on October 8 and 9 on a brand-new map of Bigelow Hollow State Park in Union. Many of the country's best masters orienteers from age 35 on up into their 70s and 80s will be coming to test themselves against the terrain at Bigelow Hollow, although there will also be non-championship courses available for orienteers of all ages.

The courses for this event have been designed by Bridget Hall & Keegan Harkavy, two local members of the U.S. National Orienteering Team's Junior Squad. "The Masters Nationals courses will have some interesting route choice legs as well as (require) some careful reading of passageways through the green and rocky areas," Bridget said.

Orienteering is an excellent activity for older adults who may no longer have the endurance or speed that they had in their youth. You can select a length and difficulty level that appeals to you and then take your own time completing the course while enjoying all the benefits that a good stroll in the woods offers.

Orienteering keeps the brain active as well as the body and Connecticut parks and forests offer beautiful surroundings for healthy exercise.

Orienteering is also great for families and children providing intellectual stimulation while promoting health and fitness. Short courses with relatively easy navigation are always available at events which provide kids the option to complete a course on their own in safe surroundings. Children realize many important benefits from doing their own course: independence, decision-making, observation, and awareness of their surroundings are just some of the developed skills. Anna Campbell, a new member of the National Team Junior Squad, said "Orienteering helped me get better at problem solving." Orienteering also builds self-esteem. Heading into the wild, finding success, and learning from the errors you make is all part of the game; even elite orienteers can make costly mistakes.

As your navigation abilities improve, one option is to try and decrease the amount of time it takes to complete

a course. Advanced level orienteering requires endurance and technical skills, with the best orienteers having fitness levels on par with elite runners and multi-sport athletes. Orienteering events are electronically timed. If you're already a runner, running against the clock is a familiar experience, but orienteering provides the added challenge of a staggered, individual start and deciding where your own course goes as you are running. If you're a non-runner, electronic timing from control to control provides a great way to measure your navigational effectiveness across routes and compare notes after the race with others who may have gone a different way. Results printouts with individual splits are provided as soon as you finish your course.

Regardless of whether you aspire to compete for a championship medal, or simply want to add a new twist for family outings in the woods, we hope to see you at the Master's Nationals at Bigelow Hollow this October, or at one of our other local events.



Above: An unidentified youth nears the finish at OUSA Junior Nationals in April.

Upper Right: Bridget Hall (on the left), a current member of the US National Team and a course setter for this fall's Masters Nationals, goes head-to-head against her mother, Kristen, a former US Team member, at the Overlook NRE in May.

Photos courtesy of Orienteering USA unless otherwise specified.



Clinton Morse has been orienteering & trail running around Connecticut for over 25 years. Since retiring from UConn in 2020 he has served as Orienteering USA's National Communications Manager providing him an ideal opportunity to orienteer frequently from coast to coast.



Left: Trail Orienteering allows people with physical disabilities to participate in the sport using a series of checkpoints along an ADA accessible pathway. Photo courtesy of World Trail Orienteering.



Creating a Better Trail System

Trail work is not for the faint of heart, especially in the midst of a hot, Connecticut summer. But CFPA's dedicated Trail Crew spent the season building bridges and improving eroded sections of the Blue-Blazed Hiking Trail System, often in partnership with our volunteer Trail Managers.

By Timothy Brown

On a hot, June morning, CFPA's summer Trail Crew arrived at John Hankin's home in Mansfield, ready to begin work on a bridge-building project on the Blue-Blazed Nipmuck Trail in northeastern Connecticut. Lumber was already waiting in John's driveway for the crew, who appeared eager to get started.

"But then something happened that I wasn't ready for," John said. "The crew sat down in my driveway and started the day with calisthenics. And then they went around the circle and each person provided a safety tip for the group." Someone mentioned staying hydrated; another reminded folks to check for ticks. "That really put safety front and center in their minds. I thought that was an effective tool, and an important one."

John, who lives at the southern terminus of the Nipmuck Trail, has maintained a ten-mile section of the trail for the past 20 years. He grew up about a half-mile from the trail in a family that was devoted to conservation and the outdoors. John spent his free time exploring the woods and hiking up to Wolf Rock. When he was 17, he ran the entire trail with some of his cross-country buddies. "The trail really captured my imagination," he said. His love and intimate knowledge of the trail and the surrounding landscape made him a logical choice to become Trail Manager of this section when Sam Dodd, a legendary trail steward, retired from the position.

Managers do everything from routine maintenance like clearing trails to spearheading larger infrastructure projects. Seventeen years ago, John led a committed crew of like-minded volunteers who built a bridge over Sawmill Brook, about a mile-and-a-half north of Putnam Lane. It was a critical project. A couple of times each year, the brook was impassable when the water ran high, effectively cutting off hikers from the trail. The new bridge affectionately became known as "Dad's Bridge," an homage to John's dad who had passed away only months before.

Nearly two decades later, Dad's Bridge was still standing, but the wood had started to rot, and it was only a matter of time before it collapsed. Building a new bridge quickly became a priority for CFPA's Trail Crew.

The summer crew performs trail maintenance, repair, and construction projects on Connecticut's 825-mile Blue-Blazed Hiking Trail System. They work on a variety of projects to improve the trails, the hiker experience, and to reduce impacts to natural resources along trail corridors. Crew members learn from, and work closely with, professionals and experienced volunteers to learn sustainable trail building techniques. The work is exhausting. Members regularly hike up to five miles a day to the job site while carrying all their tools and gear. They endure biting insects, rain, and this season, weeks of oppressive heat.

“These projects are being completed by a really committed group of young adults who came into this with very little experience and have built a lot of skills, both teamwork skills as well as hard carpentry skills,” said Alex Bradley, CFPA Trails Program Field Coordinator. “They’ve dedicated their summer to improving small sections of trails in big ways.”

“These people were enthusiastic and ready to work,” John said. “They all understood the importance of what they were doing and really embraced it. The level of enthusiasm was through the roof, and they really worked together well.”

Alex, who holds a bachelor’s degree in environmental recreation, first worked on trails in Colorado with the Rocky Mountain Youth Corps. “That was a very formative experience for me,” he said. “I thought, if I could somehow make a career out of trail work while also providing a similar experience like I’d just had to the next generation, that would be amazing.” Last year, Alex joined CFPA’s staff. His work includes designing the projects and making sure the crew has all the materials and resources they need to get the job done. He also works with various constituents, including the volunteer Trail Managers.

“A big part of my position is meeting with the Trail Managers, discussing the issues they may be having with the trails, coming up with a plan, and making sure they’re involved as much as they want to be,” he said.

Alex and John surveyed the project sites for the Nipmuck Trail, which not only included the Sawmill Brook bridge, but three smaller bog bridges as well, and made a list of all the necessary materials. This particular trail section runs through the Town of Mansfield’s Sawmill Brook Preserve, so John

asked Jennifer Kaufman, senior planner for the Town, if they would help cover the cost of the supplies. After getting the green light, John purchased the materials and had them delivered to his home. But the bridge was close to a mile from the nearest road crossing. So John asked his neighbor, Pat Prignano, if he would be willing to provide the crew access through his property, effectively cutting a mile-long trek down to about 200 yards. Pat readily agreed and went a step further, offering to transport the materials to the site with his bucket loader tractor. John then contacted Joshua’s Trust, a local land trust with whom he also volunteers, and got permission to borrow their truck to haul away the old bridge. Pat cut up the old bridge, hauled away the rotted lumber with his tractor, and dumped it into Joshua’s Trust truck. And the Town waived the waste disposal fee.

“The project was a collaboration between CFPA who supplied the labor and the expertise; the Town of Mansfield who supplied the materials; the neighbor who supplied the access and the tractor (and drove the tractor); and Joshua’s Trust who supplied a truck,” John said.

This season, CFPA decided to implement a spike crew model. In contrast to the day crew model whereby workers arrived at the office each

2022 Summer Trails Crew Stats	
9	Trail Crew Members
11	Number of Blue-Blazed Hiking Trails Improved by the Trail Crew
7	New Bridges and Boardwalks Built
9	Campsites
40	Nights Camped Out
200	Number of Pop-Tarts consumed by the Trail Crew



Previous page: The CFPA Summer Trails Crew poses on the timber crib steps they built at their Goodwin Conservation and Education Center. Left: Molly Bernstein sets rocks in a causeway to reduce erosion on the Charles L. Pack Trail at People’s State Forest. Right: The Trails Crew constructs an elevated bog bridge at Timberland Park in Berlin.

The Trails Crew constructed gabions, metal cages filled with rocks, to support a new foot bridge over Furnace Brook on the Mohawk Trail in Cornwall. They used 12-foot-tall metal tripods to transport rocks along the highline.



morning to collect the necessary materials, headed out to the job site, and then returned at the end of each day, the spike crew traveled around the state working on projects that typically lasted five days (two projects were eight-day spikes) and camped near the job site. This system is more efficient and enables the crew to tackle more remote projects. It also helps to cultivate teamwork and collaboration amongst the crewmembers.

“We reserved campsites for every project and made sure we had tents available for anyone who wanted to use one,” Alex said. “One the first day of the spike, usually a Monday, they show up, pack up all the tools and camping gear they’ll need, and drive out to the project site. After a short workday, they set up camp and are there for the week or eight days depending on the project. The crew really becomes like a family, with all the disfunction that a family sometimes has, but you work through it because you’re living together.”

With a young family of his own at home, Alex spent less time in the field this year. But luckily, he had Molly Bernstein, CFPA Trail Crew Supervisor, to help manage the projects and crew. A Westbrook native who returned to Connecticut after earning her degree from The Evergreen State College in Olympia, Wash., Molly serves as chair of the Westbrook Conservation Commission and has a strong background in forest ecology. But before this summer, she had never used a chainsaw.

“I’ve always been pretty timid around chainsaws; I never thought I would have to work with one,” she said. Now, in addition to chain sawing, she’s become more confident working with different types of carpentry tools and gained invaluable experience as a supervisor.

“They’ve dedicated their summer to improving small sections of trails in big ways.”


Alex Bradley, CFPA Trails Program Field Coordinator

“I spend probably 40 percent of my time with the crew—working on trails, cutting new tread, bridge-building, invasive species removal, clearing the trail corridors, and camping. The rest of the time I’m with Alex doing site visits and administrative work, like writing weekly progress reports,” said Molly. But the job provided her with more than just developing new skills; it connected her with areas of Connecticut she’d never visited before.

“It really is such a green, beautiful state,” she said. “Even though it’s small, there are a lot of opportunities for recreation and a lot of preserved land.”

Ultimately, Molly hopes that hikers will notice and appreciate all the hard work the Trail Crew does to improve the Blue-Blazed Hiking Trail System.

“All the lumber that got out there to make these bridges, it took hands-on work. It wasn’t dropped in by a helicopter,” she said. “People hauled in the wood for these projects. We hauled in the tools we needed to create new trail, dig new trail, cut roots. It all took human power. People are making it a better place for you to enjoy.”



The climate emergency
is reinforcing the notion
that we are in this together
and there's no future
without a shared future.

That is the most fundamental
transformation of consciousness
in our time.

A Moral Force for Change:

An Interview with
Mary Evelyn Tucker

People tend to think of the climate crisis as a scientific, economic, or political issue, but Mary Evelyn Tucker, a research scholar at Yale and co-director of the Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology, says religions play a crucial role in addressing the ethical implication of climate change. “We have the science; we have the politics; but we don’t have the moral force for change,” she said in a recent interview. “There’s great potential with the religious communities saying: The Earth is sacred; creation is holy and needs to be preserved and protected and used wisely for future generations.”

degradation, the biodiversity crisis, and what is increasingly being called the climate emergency.

In the mid-1990s, Tucker’s concern for the growing environmental crisis led her to organize, along with her husband, John Grim, a series of ten seminal conferences on World Religions and Ecology at Harvard that brought together theologians, laity, religious leaders, and activists. “We tried to make this conversation intersect with policy, science, economics, and education. We call it ‘engaged scholarship,’” said Tucker. Following the conferences, they founded the Forum on Religion and Ecology, and convened the first conference on climate change and world religions. They have authored or edited nearly 20 books on religion and ecology, as well as several books with or about the great cultural historian, Thomas Berry, with whom they closely worked for three decades. In 2011, Tucker, along with evolutionary philosopher, Brian Thomas Swimme, created a multi-media project called Journey of the Universe, which includes an Emmy award winning film, book, newsletter, and massive online classes. She also served on the International Earth Charter Drafting Committee and was a member of the Earth Charter International Council. In 2019, she and Grim received a Lifetime Achievement Award from the International Society for Religion, Nature, and Culture.

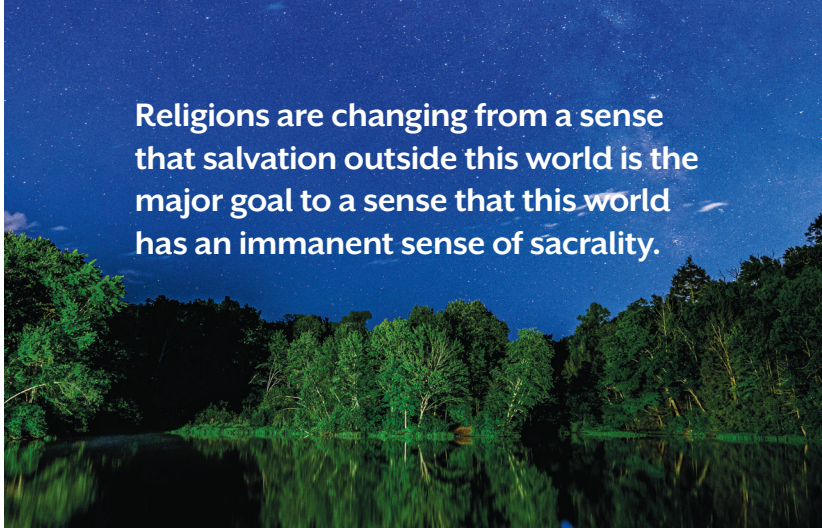
We spoke with Dr. Tucker about the critical role that religions are playing to address the climate crisis. This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

Connecticut Woodlands: How is the climate crisis changing the conversation about the relationship between humans and the Earth?

Mary Evelyn Tucker: Religions are changing from a sense that salvation outside this world is the major goal to a sense that this world has an immanent sense of sacrality. Whether you talk about ecosystems and their complexity, or the grandeur of mountains, streams, and rivers, people are deeply

Religion plays a critical role in shaping our daily lives, including our understanding of and response to environmental and climate issues. Globally, more than eight out of ten people identify with a religious group. There are 2.4 billion Christians, 1.8 billion Muslims, 1.2 billion Hindus, 506 million Buddhists, 15 million Jews, and 6.2 million Confucians worldwide. In addition,

more than 400 million people practice an Indigenous or folk religion. Religious teachings inform one’s worldview, provide a sense of community and identity, and influence everything from politics to education to culture. Still, many environmentalists have been slow to appreciate the potential for the world’s religions to address such issues as environmental



Religions are changing from a sense that salvation outside this world is the major goal to a sense that this world has an immanent sense of sacrality.

moved by the beauty and complexity of nature. That is a religious sensibility, a spiritual sensibility for many people. We've been concentrating on human-God relations outside the world, a transcendent God. But human-Earth relations are critical to our identity, how we belong, and what we evolved from—a 14-billion-year-old universe; a 4.6-million-year Earth history. The sense that we are universe beings and Earth beings, is critical to that shift. Of course, we have a long way to go even in terms of human-human relations, but the climate emergency is reinforcing the notion that we are in this together and there's no future without a shared future. That is the most fundamental transformation of consciousness in our time.

What is the relationship between religion and climate justice?

The main thing is this: folks are already suffering from rising seas, like in Bangladesh; from flooding and drought and heat, like has hit India, Pakistan, and China, as well as in the so-called global north. But there's a possibility in the global north of some resilience built in. People who don't have the resilience of technology, of air conditioning, of relief services are truly the ones who are suffering the most. And that is exemplified by the fact that there are over 90 million climate refugees now all over the world. We have to connect the dots below the political upheaval, the social cost to the environmental destruction underneath all of this. That's why United Nations Secretary General Gutierrez says this is the largest crisis of humanity. That's the level we need to speak about this. It's a climate emergency, not just climate change.

Why is the papal encyclical "Laudato Si': On Care for our Common Home" so significant, not just for Catholics, but for all people?

Pope Francis is an astonishingly creative, compassionate human being. He wrote an extraordinary letter that the environmentalist and writer, Bill McKibben, has called "the most important document of the 21st century." The environmental community, the policy community, and the response from all the world's religions has been very strong. For many years, the environmental movement got the climate part, but the part that we would call "ecojustice"—the effect on humans—was not in their purview. And many people in the religious community got the social justice issues, but didn't make the connections to the environment. Now we have this document that says the Earth and humans are profoundly interdependent. The key line in this encyclical is, "Cry of the Earth and the cry of the poor." The encyclical is hugely important, and it will continue to have importance because there's a movement called the Laudato Si' Movement to take this from a document to action on the ground.

What role do religions play in communicating about climate change?

Religions have major educational institutions—secondary schools, colleges, seminaries—where this can be inflected into the curriculum. For example, the Jesuits, the religious order of the Catholic Church, have nearly 200 colleges and universities—27 here in the U.S. They have 600 high school and secondary schools, and they have 7 million graduates from these educational institutions. The Jesuit Order is hugely influential in terms of social justice, and the Pope is Jesuit. If they can inflect Laudato Si' into the curriculum, there

is a major possibility for change of the educational map.

I'll mention one very concrete thing: Bill McKibben helped to start the divestment movement from fossil fuels and banks that are supporting them, and institutions that have their pension funds, endowment funds wrapped up in them. Since the movement was started about seven or eight years ago, it has grown into an astonishing number: 40 trillion dollars of divestment. And of that, 30 percent has been energized by the religious communities who helped to start socially responsible investment. So that is where the religious communities are making a significant difference.

Everyone who is reading the newspaper or listening to the news understands the growing anxiety that the climate emergency is causing. It's called eco-anxiety or climate-anxiety. Ministers are being trained on how to address this as an important part of pastoral care. Today there are 14 graduate programs in religion and ecology across the country, half of which are master's programs. More and more students are keenly interested in combining the scientific knowledge with moral, spiritual, and ethical sensibilities that are needed.

How are religious communities in our state confronting the climate crisis?

The Interreligious Eco Justice Network has been quite effective for a number of years—lobbying the state legislature and convening conferences. They have worked with the national organization Interfaith Power and Light, which is helping churches, mosques, and synagogues reduce their carbon emissions and to change the nature of their engagement. This has not been easy. All too many people still see climate change as a political issue in this country; not so much around the world, where people have connected the dots between fossil fuels in the atmosphere warming the planet and changing weather patterns. But here in the U.S. we've had all sorts of denials and distortions from the oil companies and misunderstandings of why this is a moral issue. That is why the religious communities are so crucial.

To learn more about the Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology, and to enroll in one of their free, online courses, go to fore.yale.edu



Cicadas at Sixty

By David K. Leff

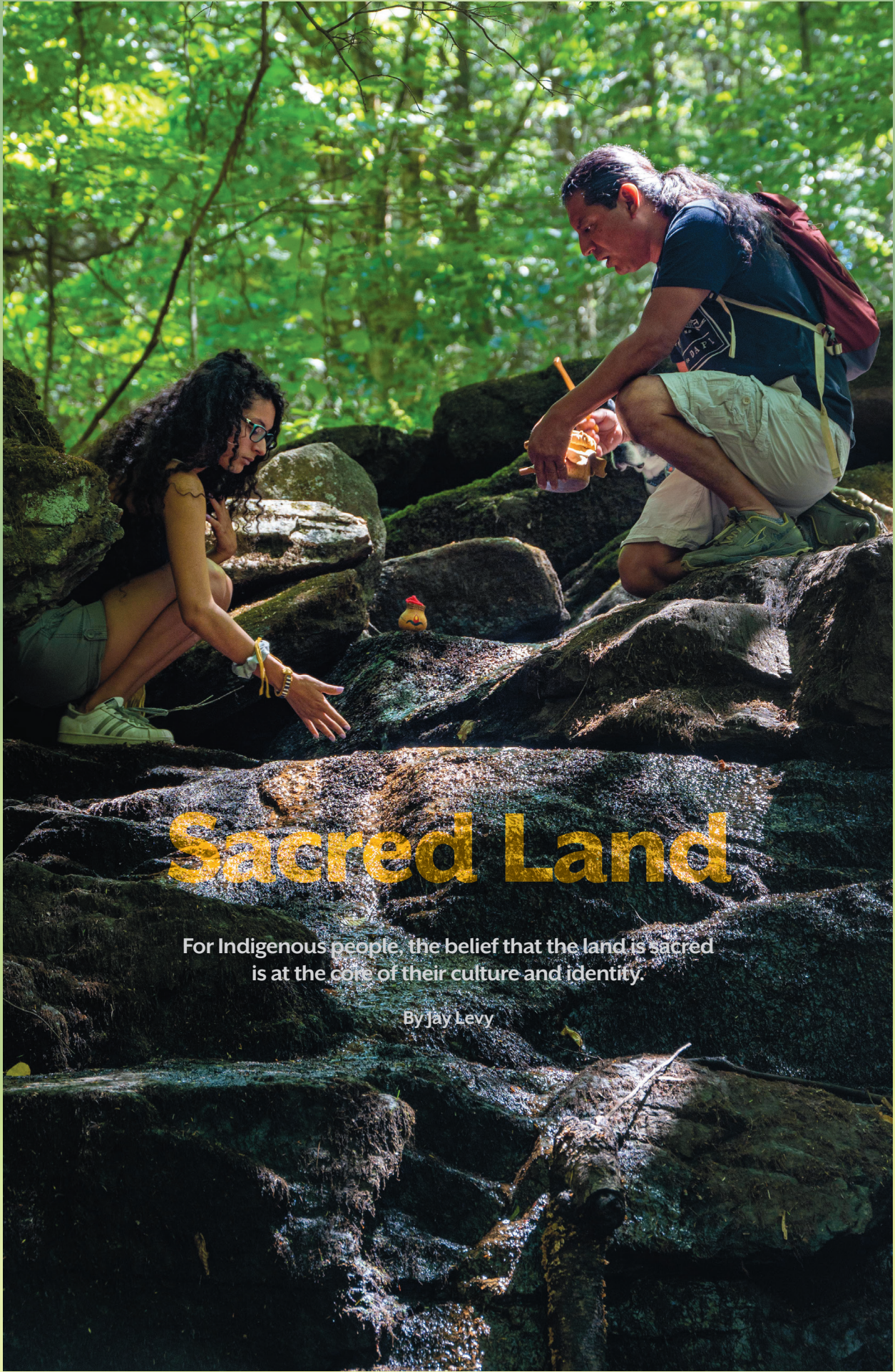
Let me go out to cicada songs,
and ripen to compost for tree roots
where the cyclical insects feed.

Clouds of chorusing for my street parade,
sonic declarations of dust and ash,
an inscrutable vibratory rhythm
like the throaty hum of Tibetan monks.

Trumpeting the very pulse of time,
they emerge from earthy blackness
ready for music, sex and revelry.

Grant me that next seventeen
years, the luck of sevens twice,
for a selfsame celebration
before my own stay in darkness.

This poem will appear in a new collection of David Leff's work, *Blue Marble Gazzateer*, to be published this fall by Homebound Publications, and printed here with permission. The photo features the historic iron bridge that spans the Farmington River in Collinsville, where David lived and was active in civic life, including serving as poet laureate, deputy town historian, and a volunteer fire fighter for 26 years.



Sacred Land

For Indigenous people, the belief that the land is sacred is at the core of their culture and identity.

By Jay Levy



**Ahki wuyitupôhtam.
The land is sacred.**

**This is in the Algonquian language
of the original people of Connecticut.
It is the concept that our survival
is dependent on the Earth.**

The Creator gifted the land to the people. It was then passed on to us from our ancestors and we borrow the land for our children. The mountains and rivers are our relatives, they are our relations. To Indigenous people, they are relatives like our brothers and sisters.

Everything has life—the land, the water, the rocks, trees, and animals. The land gives us life, food, and medicines. We extract oil from the birch tree and use it as an antiseptic for wounds. We weave baskets from plants and wood splints, and we use flowers and nuts to dye them many colors. We must take care of the land so she will take care of us. That is our responsibility and obligation. It is how we relate to the environment and keep balance. The land keeps us well and heals us, so we must care for her. She is worthy of respect.

Indigenous people have a long history and deep connection to this land. Before European contact, everything we did was dependent on the land. We listened to the land and observed and learned from the environment. When the geese—*Kahôk*—returned in the spring, we knew the maple syrup would run from the trees. When the leaves changed color, we knew it was time to hunt.

Colonization, forced assimilation, and cultural genocide has tried to erase the Indian. Our culture, language, and beliefs were beaten from our ancestors. Because of this, many have lost their traditional ways. But something lost can be found. Living in two societies, it is easy to get blinded by modern technology. We have our traditions, but we also have adapted to the new world. Now we hunt in aisle three of the grocery store and today many geese have changed their patterns and do not migrate. The climate has changed, and so have habitats.

*We say and sing thanks to the land and the water.
We touch the soil and water, like a handshake with a close relative.*

Many of us no longer hear or listen to the land. My ears and my son's ears were pierced as a reminder to listen. We strive to connect to the land in many ways. One way is through our language. The Creator gave us the gift of our language. It was once a vibration that came from the Earth. So, when we speak, sing, or pray in our language, we are connecting back to the land. One word can tell a story, a feeling, an event, or determine if something is animate and, if so, its relation to us. Language contains our culture, our being. In an effort to save the language, today many elders are being interviewed and recorded.

Others may own the land, but our people belong to her.

Ceremony bonds us to our traditions and brings us together. Blessings or acts of thankfulness can be seen as ceremony, but to many Indigenous people, it's just how we live. When we pick a plant for medicine and leave an offering or say thanks or talk to her by her original name, it reinforces our place in the universe and our debt to care and protect the land. These connections to the land begin when we are born and continue through the many stages of our lives. We begin our life in the womb of our mother and in the womb of our ancient mother—the land. We are taught throughout life to give and care for the land. And at the end of our life, we return to the land.

As we grow, we learn from the land; she teaches us to give. She teaches us how to be good human beings and how to be thankful. The forest is our library. We bring our children and teach our youth these values in the woods.

As we learn to appreciate her gifts, we say and sing thanks to the land and the water. We touch the soil and water, like a handshake with a close relative. The land and water strengthen and cleanse us. The land is made up of many beings. Each being has a gift to share if we listen.

Just like the land, the animals have many things to teach us. Many Indigenous people of New England believe the land was created and formed on the back of a giant turtle and call this place known today as North America, Turtle Island. The turtle is one of the oldest living creatures and is said to have witnessed creation. Grandfather turtle teaches us about wisdom, honesty, courage, and the value of work. Turtle also gives us the 13 lunar moons in a year as depicted on the 13 scutes of her carapace.

The soil is our ancestors. It is our past. It is sacred. In my work as an archaeologist, I care for the soil we disturb. Soil taken is returned from where it came. As I mold clay to make a pot for my child, I am infusing the past with the present and future. In 1912, a Crow Indian refused to sell any land because the earth was dust of the blood, flesh, and bones of his ancestors. To my wife whose ancestors have been in Connecticut for thousands of years, this is both spiritual and material. The land is a part of us, and we are a part of her.

*W*e must all care for the Earth and stop abusing nature. We need to preserve the land and water for the next seven generations, for the ones not yet born. We need to all be a part of this work. As we all become stewards of the land and water, we are all protectors of what is sacred.

We sing water songs to thank the water, all the forms of water—water from the sky, water in the streams and oceans, and water from the faucet. In the spring of 2016, the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL) protest brought water protectors to the Standing Rock Sioux reservation to defend the Missouri River from contamination. The Indigenous community and hundreds of tribes united from all over Turtle Island to stand in solidarity. A delegation of tribes from Connecticut drove out to join our sister nations. My 10-year-old son wanted to go and stand with the people at Standing Rock. He spoke about the movement at his school. We mailed supplies and waved the NODAPL flag wherever we went. Non-Indigenous people also started thinking about sacredness and defending Mother Earth from pollution and became water protectors.

This understanding that nature is not a thing, but rather a *being* led to granting the River Atrato in Colombia legal rights. The law recognizes that nature is not property, but a member of a community with inherent rights to life that we are responsible to protect. In North America, the Yurok Tribe in Oregon also granted the Klamath River rights of a person under tribal law.

Others may own the land, but our people belong to her. My friend and tribal matriarch from the Schaghticoke Tribal Nation, Trudie Lamb Richmond, would say, “The land does not belong to the people, but rather the people belong to the land.”

Like the cycle of the seasons, throughout our life we change, we grow and learn, and we fade away. We fulfil our cycle by returning to the land. That is our relationship with the land. That is why the land is sacred.

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



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Pathways



Nestled amongst the rolling Litchfield Hills of Sharon, Conn., near the New York border, lies Housatonic Meadows State Park. Established in 1927, the park is relatively small—only 452 acres—but features a variety of outdoor recreation opportunities, including hiking, camping, canoeing, and world-class flyfishing along the banks of the Housatonic River, a 150-mile waterway that begins in western Massachusetts and gradually flows southeast through Litchfield County before emptying into Long Island Sound between Stratford and Milford.

Long cherished by the Mohicans and other Indigenous people who for millennia lived along its banks in hide-covered wigwams, the Housatonic River became a major industrial power source in the 19th century. By 1900, dozens of dams had slowed its flows and blocked migrating fish such as trout and salmon. Then, from 1932 to 1977, the General Electric plant in Pittsfield, Mass., discharged PCB pollution into the river; in 1997 the area was designated a Superfund Site by the Environmental Protection Agency. While remediation continues along its upper stretches, the Housatonic River remains a destination for whitewater kayakers, birders, and anglers in northwestern Connecticut. Local outfitters will guide you to the perfect eddy where you can test your skills against brown trout, rainbow trout, and bass in its cold, clear waters. At Housatonic Meadows State Park, all flyfishing is catch and release.



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