

CONNECTICUT

Woodlands

SPRING 2023

**Go with
the Flow**

A MAGAZINE OF THE CONNECTICUT FOREST & PARK ASSOCIATION



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CONTRIBUTOR'S *Spotlight*

Eric Lukingbeal loves trees, so much that the former CFPA board member and president, along with his friend Barry Avery, helped create a public arboretum, the Holcomb Tree Trail, in Granby. Over the past five years a small group of passionate volunteers have planted nearly 100 trees at the arboretum.

We caught up with Eric to learn more about the Holcomb Tree Trail.

Did you have any reservations about taking on such an ambitious project?

We did not really have any reservations when we started. We knew that the town was committed to open space and agriculture. We also learned that the last Holcomb, Tudor Holcomb, who passed away in the 1970s, left his 312-acre farm to UConn, who deeded it to the town in 1991. Tudor's

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On the cover: Roaring Brook at Cotton Hollow Preserve after an early spring rain. Photo by Jack McConnell.

deed to UConn listed “arboretum purposes” as one of the uses he thought would be appropriate for the farm. So we were able to cite Tudor, easily the most revered town citizen, as authority for the proposition that an arboretum made sense for Granby.

How do you balance ecological, aesthetic, and fiscal concerns when selecting trees?

The process has evolved over time. We now have a list of over 30 species, a mix of natives and exotics, we agree are worth planting. While our list is our guide, it's not inflexible. We have recently decided to add magnolias and crabapples because we have some ideal sites, and their spring blooms are special. It's a process, not an event, to decide on, find, and plant a tree.

What inspires you to keep growing the arboretum?

We all know we won't see the trees in maturity; it doesn't seem to make much difference. We like doing something that could have some permanence because the trees will last decades, even centuries. We enjoy each other's company, as we meet fairly often and are constantly planting trees, shrubs, or daffodils and clearing invasives or fallen trees in the woods. And we all think that what we are doing is helping Granby to knit together as a community

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Editor's Note

This year marks the 50th anniversary of the Endangered Species Act, a groundbreaking piece of legislation that changed the course of conservation in this country and has become a model for other nations. At the time of its signing by President Nixon—who, it could be argued, did more for conservation and the environment than any other U.S. president—hundreds of species were at risk of extinction, including our national symbol, the bald eagle. Today, thanks to the ESA, many once-endangered species, such as the iconic osprey (read Laurie D. Morrissey's article, page 8) are not only surviving but thriving.

Despite its undisputed role in safeguarding America's greatest treasures, the ESA is not without its detractors—including some leading conservationists—and in many ways is a product of its time. It's a reactive, rather than proactive, approach to biological conservation; it's expensive; and once a species is listed, there are a host of regulations that come into force that impact livelihoods and businesses. As Naomi Edelson, Senior Director of Wildlife Partnerships at the National Wildlife Federation says, "No one wants to see a species become endangered."

Scientists agree that we are now in the midst of the Earth's sixth mass extinction. Nationwide, a third of all fish and wildlife species are at risk of extinction; here in Connecticut, over 600 species are at risk. The Recovering America's Wildlife Act, or RAWA, is a landmark bill that would provide critical funding to states, territories, and tribes to not only conserve endangered species but to protect species—both animals and plants—before they are at risk. The bill enjoys strong bipartisan support, with both Democrat and Republican cosponsors in Congress. Despite our differences, it seems that conservation is one issue Americans can still agree on.

But passage of the bill is far from guaranteed, and we need your help to ensure that RAWA becomes law. Please contact your representatives and Senators Blumenthal and Murphy today and tell them to support RAWA. And to those of you who've already made your voices heard, thank you!

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

In the last issue of Connecticut Woodlands, I suggested that “83 is Not Enough” in reference to the current ceiling of just 83 full-time employees authorized to care for Connecticut’s 110 state parks, campgrounds, boat launches, and other public facilities across 229,000 acres.

At the time, you may have wondered, “Well how many state park workers would be enough?” Before answering that question, let me lay out once again why this situation is so urgent.

People have been flocking to Connecticut’s state parks in record numbers. The most recent figures suggest that 17.4 million people visited state parks in 2021—the highest attendance ever recorded by the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP). Similar numbers are expected for 2022. In 2020, state parks hit the previous attendance record of 12.9 million visitors. Previously, park attendance was less than 10 million per year.

At the same time that park attendance has grown explosively, the staffing level for state parks has been flat for the past five years, in part thanks to the stabilizing effect of the Passport to the Parks funding which began in 2018. Before the Passport took effect, state parks had lost 41 full-time field positions over the past 20 years and more than 120 positions over the past 40.

“There are many heavy tasks for maintainers that require two or more people, and reliance on one maintainer makes DEEP vulnerable to having no maintenance done across thousands of acres if that single maintainer is sick, injured, or otherwise unable to work.”

That is why we have asked the Connecticut General Assembly and Governor Lamont to **fund 15 new park maintainer positions in DEEP’s Budget** for fiscal year 2024-2025.

Record-high attendance is great, but it comes at a significant cost for the park supervisors and maintainers who operate and maintain these special places. Park maintainers keep restrooms sanitized; mow lawns and landscape; control traffic and parking; and repair fencing, gates, windows, and other park structures damaged by vandals or storms. They welcome campers to campgrounds, handle various maintenance and clean-up tasks, and deal with most on-site enforcement issues. But these essential workers are increasingly put in unsafe situations by being stretched too thin. **At the very least, every park management unit should have more than just one park maintainer.** The average size of a park management unit

➔ page 20

Number of Park Employees

State Park	Acres	Park Workers as of 11.30.22
Pachaug	29,997	1 Sup, 2 Maint
Macedonia Brook	22,530	1 Sup, 2 Maint
Salmon River	21,238	1 Sup, 1 Maint
Mashamoquet	21,225	1 Sup, 1 Maint
Peoples	20,387	1 Sup, 2 Maint
Shenipsit	19,551	1 Sup, 1 Maint
Cockaponset	18,750	1 Sup, 2 Maint
Gillette Castle	11,310	1 Sup, 2 Maint
Topsmead	10,952	1 Sup, 2 Maint
Putnam Memorial	10,446	1 Sup, 2 Maint
Sleeping Giant	8,273	1 Sup, 1 Maint
Burr Pond	8,200	1 Sup, 1 Maint
Lake Waramaug	5,237	1 Sup, 2 Maint
Rocky Neck	5,200	1 Sup, 2 Maint
Penwood	3,377	1 Sup, 2 Maint
Hopeville Pond	3,363	1 Sup, 2 Maint
Squantz Pond	2,301	1 Sup, 1 Maint
Fort Trumbull	2,242	1 Sup, 2 Maint
Osbornedale	2,194	1 Sup, 2 Maint
Sherwood Island	1,200	1 Sup, 2 Maint
Hammonasset	1,096	2 Sup, 4 Maint
Harkness	335	1 Sup, 1 Maint

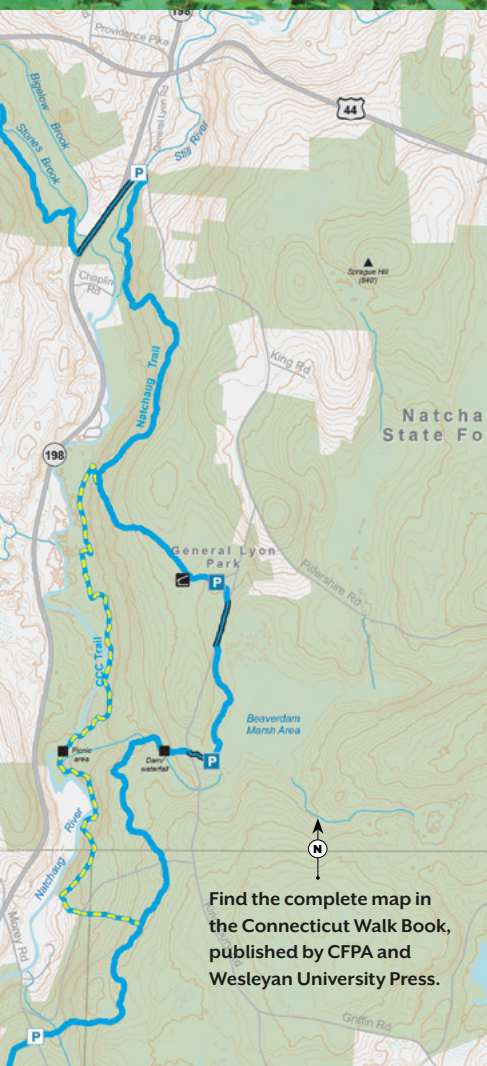
Sup=Park Supervisor, Maint=Park Maintainer



ON THE
Trail

The Natchaug Trail

By David Raczkowski



Find the complete map in the Connecticut Walk Book, published by CFPA and Wesleyan University Press.

I've been working and playing on the Blue-Blazed Hiking Trails for the past four decades. After so many years of being active outside, I'm slowing down and realize my days spent on the trail are numbered. I'm so appreciative that I can still get out on the trails for three or four hours a day, six days a week. Sometimes I focus on trail work and other times I just need to move down a trail. Some days I leave the hand saw and clippers at home because my body just needs to move more.

What has kept me on the trail is my passion for trail running. In 1984, I started the NipMuck Trail Marathon and served as its race director for 27 years. Back then it was held in June when there was plenty of mud, hence the capital "M". This year's race, organized by the Shenipsit Striders, will be on October 1st. A well-maintained trail is essential because a few elite trail runners can average an eight or nine-minute mile. Runners make split second decisions

while their main focus is on the trail five feet in front of them. It also makes the trail easy for hikers to follow. Along with the Willimantic Athletic Club, the Shenipsit Striders have provided funds for 15 footbridges, which have held out quite well over the decades. There are also some great steps on some steep sections at Boston Hollow. But I am not able to do races anymore because I can't make the cut off times, which are put in place so the volunteers don't have to wait around for slower racers like myself to finish.

Most of my time is spent on the roughly 60 miles of trails in the Natchaug and Goodwin state forests near my home. My main focus is on the Natchaug and Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) trails, but I also work on the horse and bike trails. I even got permission from the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection to work on the snowmobile trails. These are all-access trails, so you don't need a bike, horse, or a snowmobile to enjoy them.



Left to right: The Natchaug Trail, a maple blossom, and swamp azalea, photographed by the author along the trail.

I've been wandering in the Natchaug State Forest since moving here some 30 years ago and know it like the back of my hand. To me, it's paradise. The forest has a subtle beauty. Regardless of the season, I always stop once or twice when I'm out to take photographs. I have little motivation to go on a vacation or to visit another part of the country; I rarely even leave Windham County. The Natchaug forest is great for trail running. Its trails offer some challenging technical footing but lack extreme elevation changes. This is also a place where your inner hermit can be nurtured if you're craving solitude.

I stay in the Goodwin Forest during deer hunting season because hunting is not allowed. There are plenty of places to explore at Goodwin as well, but come January when deer hunting season ends, I'm grateful to get back into the Natchaug State Forest.

Part of my maintenance over the past few years has been to make seats and benches along the trail. As I get older, it gets harder to pass one of these benches and not sit down to rest. One of my goals is to take a nap on one of these seats. I haven't fallen asleep yet, but have come close plenty of times.

One of the trails I maintain is the CCC Trail, which I often hike more than once a week. There is a nice stretch along the Natchaug River and a picnic area on the opposite shore, just off

Route 198. The CCC Trail has both north and south connections to the Natchaug Trail. The river is just a couple of feet away from the trail, except when it floods. Then, the river and the trail become one. The CCC Trail originally only headed south from the picnic area, but in 2015, with CFPA's approval, I built connections to the Natchaug Trail at both ends.

The northern section that connects to the Natchaug Trail is especially dear to me. It passes the picnic site where my parents would take our family on summer Sundays six decades ago. From the trail I can see a boulder by the river I would sit on when I was 10. When I turned 16 and got my driver's license, I would explore the other side of the river where the trail now goes. I remember a white pine grove where the trees were four inches in diameter. Those trees are now eighteen inches in diameter.

There are times when I totally get off trail and just wander in old growth forest between areas that have been logged due to gypsy moth infestation. After loggers finish their work, it looks like the land has been destroyed, but within a year or two, the undergrowth comes back. It can take a couple of decades before I can walk through these woods off trail. But I know that the timber harvest helps to keep the forest healthy, and thankfully there is still plenty of old growth forest left for me to explore.

I hope I have a few more years of being able to wander through this forest. I say "wander" because I usually make up my route as I move along. As fatigue begins to set in, I'll consider heading for home. But after resting for a moment—and realizing it's just too nice to go home so soon—I'll get a second wind and stay out a little longer. I move slower and slower, but still manage to get to where I want to be. For me, this place is my home, and this home gets sweeter all the time. I know that someday, when I go to that big trail race in the sky where there is no cut off times, I'll be thinking about and celebrating my long history with this wonderful forest.

Dave Raczkowski is a retired occupational therapist who, for the past 10 years, has used forearm crutches he modified to compensate for knee arthritis. Watch his YouTube videos, "Running on Trails with Forearm Crutches."





The Amazing Osprey

**Once on the verge of extinction,
ospreys are once again a common sight in Connecticut.**

By Laurie D. Morrissey Photo by William Canosa

Soaring high above the mouth of the Housatonic River, the osprey bides his time until he spots the ripple of a fin. Suddenly he bends his massive wings and spirals downward, plunges feet-first into the water, and disappears from view with a splash. He quickly surfaces with a wriggling fish, rises into the air with a hearty wing-shake to shed excess water, and flies off.

He makes it look easy—but there is a lot more to this fish-catching feat than meets the eye. This bird is so fine-tuned for its job that it has its own taxonomic genus and species: *Pandion haliaetus*. In addition to superior vision (an osprey can see fish underwater from as high as 130 feet), these birds have specialized talons that allow them to grasp a fish with two toes in front and two behind. The fourth toe can rotate to serve in either position, which enables the osprey to turn a fish so that it faces head-first, reducing air resistance during flight. The undersides of the toes are barbed for good grip. During dives, the bird's nostrils close, and a third eyelid (the nictating membrane) closes to protect the eye.



Ospreys are no longer a rare sight in Connecticut, thanks to a concerted conservation effort that brought the bird back from the brink of extinction. The impressive raptor is commonly seen these days around coastal marshes, estuaries, reservoirs, and large lakes and rivers—wherever fish are abundant at shallow enough depths to catch. Its fish-heavy diet has led to its common nickname, fish hawk.

Ospreys return to New England in late March and early April after spending the winter as far south as Brazil and quickly begin nesting and raising the next generation. Most return to their previous year's nest atop a tree, utility pole, or artificial platform. Added onto

each year, an osprey's stick nest is easily visible—and big enough that you could sit in it yourself if you could reach it.

With their nearly six-foot wingspans, white bellies, and white heads, ospreys are easy to identify. Among Connecticut raptors, only the bald eagle is larger. (The eagle's white tail feathers also set it apart). The adult male osprey is brown above with slight streaking in a necklace shape on the breast. In flight, the bird's wing position gives it a flattened M shape, with "wrists" held up and forward and outer wings held down and back. Another distinguishing feature is the broad black eye stripe that makes it look like it's wearing a mask.

One of the state's most avid osprey observers is Milan Bull, senior director of science and conservation with the Connecticut Audubon Society. His interest was piqued when he was a young boy on a Housatonic River flounder fishing expedition. His father excitedly pointed to an overhead osprey and told his son that it was a fortunate sighting.

"That bird will be extinct by the time you grow up," he said. He was very nearly right.

"There were about a half dozen nesting pairs in Connecticut at that time. Now there are more than 900," Bull says. That is nearly as many as there were in the 1940s, before the widespread use of chlorine-containing pesticides. Although there were warnings about the damaging effects of DDT in the 40s and 50s, it was the 1962 publication of Rachel Carson's "Silent Spring" that sounded the alarm to the public. The United States banned the use of DDT a decade later.

"Insecticides like DDT got into the water and were ingested by small fish, which were ingested by bigger fish, which were taken by birds of prey like ospreys and eagles," Bull explains. "Bioaccumulation in their eggshells caused trouble producing enough calcium. The shells began to thin in such a dramatic fashion that they cracked, and some didn't have any shell at all."

Without young birds replacing adults, ospreys declined severely. In

Connecticut, restoration efforts began at the mouth of the Connecticut River, where fresh water enters salt water and supports a large population of filter-feeding herring called menhaden.

The species' dramatic rebound is attributed to a combination of factors: the banning of DDT, habitat protection, monitoring and data collection efforts, and the construction of platforms in areas where natural nest sites are scarce. It is an impressive conservation success story, says Bull.

In addition to wildlife professionals, citizen scientists play a valuable role. In 2014, Connecticut Audubon launched a citizen science partnership called Osprey Nation to monitor the condition of nesting sites and gather data that give biologists a better understanding of the health of the osprey population. While the species' comeback is excellent news, conservationists are on the alert for trends.

"If the osprey population begins to decline severely, we want to know when it's happening and why," says Milan Bull. "There was a slight decline in production last year, but we don't know yet whether it's statistically significant."

Old Saybrook summer resident Anne McNulty has been a volunteer steward with Osprey Nation for six seasons, monitoring platforms in Old Saybrook and Old Lyme. Every spring, she looks forward to seeing adult ospreys arrive and begin the process of mating, building their nests, and incubating their eggs.

"I continue to thrill at seeing the first little featherless hatchlings' heads pop up above the edge of the nest," she says. "Then it gets exciting! Watching the nestlings go from down-covered to feathered, then start flapping their wings and finally taking flight—and seeing 'Dad' bring a fish to the platform. When I see ospreys fishing from the beach I always pause to watch as they hover and then make the plunge. I hold my breath to find out if they're successful, and then watch to see if any gulls pursue them to steal their catch."

Of course, not even the most talented fisherman is successful 100 percent of the time. Ornithologists have



Photo by Anne McNulty.

I continue to thrill at seeing the first little featherless hatchlings' heads pop up above the edge of the nest.

Anne McNulty, Osprey Nation Volunteer

documented a success rate of about 25 to 70 percent—not bad, considering the odds. Osprey don't waste any time, either: they spend an average of 12 minutes hunting before making a catch, and few anglers can beat that.

Over the past 10 years, about 700 trained Osprey Nation volunteers have contributed to the data collection effort documenting Connecticut's osprey population. While not every nest is monitored, a high percentage are, according to Milan Bull. McNulty enjoys making a solid contribution to that effort. She also appreciates how much she learns in the process.

"Every year as I watch this drama, I find I have new questions about ospreys

and their behavior," she says. "Being a monitor also gives me a chance to help educate people who come by and ask what I'm doing." One year, she knocked on a property owner's door and asked permission to observe her nesting platforms from their yard. "For the next six years, I've had the opportunity to teach her about the marvelous happenings right before her eyes."

Besides gathering data, volunteers fly into action when a nesting platform is destroyed by storms, as happened in February of 2021 in the tidal channel off Milford Point. It was the platform that held Connecticut Audubon's Osprey Cam, which livestreams osprey activity to the delight of tens of thousands of viewers. Volunteers supplied both labor and materials.

The Osprey Cam is up and running, and so is this year's army of volunteers. Your chance of seeing an osprey perform its fishing feat is very, very good.

For further information, including volunteer opportunities, about Connecticut's ospreys, visit osprey@ctaudubon.org

Laurie D. Morrissey is a New Hampshire-based writer of articles, essays, and poetry. Her work has appeared in Connecticut Woodlands since 2016, when she wrote about her father, state park ranger Bill Dougal. Her writing has appeared in Northern Woodlands, Art New England, New Hampshire Home, Appalachia, and numerous poetry journals.

Safeguarding America's Greatest Treasures

The US is poised to make the biggest investment in conservation in a half century. Will Congress get the job done this session?

By Timothy Brown

As the sun set on 2022, it became clear that a landmark piece of conservation legislation intended to safeguard America's endangered species would not be included in the massive omnibus spending package slowly working its way through Congress. It was ironic timing. Just days before, delegates to the United Nations Biodiversity Conference in Montreal had signed the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, an ambitious agreement that includes a goal to protect 30 percent of the world's land, inland waters, coastal areas, and oceans by 2030. The United States had sent a delegation to the negotiations, but as one of only two countries who is not a party to the UN's Convention on Biological Diversity—the other being the Vatican—the U.S. did not sign the historic agreement, this despite numerous commitments to biological conservation that the Biden administration had made for the past two years.



While other environmental concerns (namely the climate crisis) continue to dominate the public discourse, the nation's biodiversity has received relatively little attention—or funding—in recent years. The Recovering America's Wildlife Act, or RAWA, would reverse that trend. This historic legislation would provide states, territories, and tribes with an annual injection of \$1.4 billion aimed at protecting both critically endangered species as well as safeguarding species before they become “at risk.” Widely considered the most significant conservation bill since passage of the Endangered Species Act a half century ago, the House passed the measure last June with strong bipartisan support, and RAWA already has 32 cosponsors—including both Democrats and Republicans—in the Senate. In this era of divided politics, conservation remains a shared value for most Americans. Advocates insist the bill stalled in the last Congress not for a lack of support, but because officials couldn't agree on how to pay for it. Still, many remain hopeful that 2023 will be the year that RAWA finally becomes law.

“RAWA remains National Wildlife Federation's top legislative priority because of the magnitude of the package. It covers all kinds of wildlife species in all 50 states, territories, and the tribal nations,” said Naomi Edelson, Senior Director for Wildlife Partnerships at NWF. “It's good for wildlife; it's good for taxpayers; and it's good for business. There's lot of desire and recognition that it didn't get done last time, and it should get done now.”

Edelson says the bill enjoys broad bipartisan support in part because it's focused on preventing wildlife from becoming endangered. “No one wants to see a species become endangered,” she said. “Some people

It creates a big toolbox to deal with a whole bunch of conservation measures. In an era of climate change, we'll going to need all the options on the table.



Naomi Edelson, National Wildlife Federation

don't want all the regulations that come with it; that's an economic disruption for business. Some people just don't want to lose wildlife. But regardless, there's agreement that it's not good for either people or wildlife when a species becomes endangered."

More than one-third of America's fish and wildlife species are now at risk of extinction. In the United States alone, more than 1,600 species are already listed under the Endangered Species Act, another 150 are presumed extinct, and state fish and wildlife agencies have identified more than 12,000 species of greatest conservation need. This is all part of Earth's unfolding sixth mass extinction, in which, according to a recent United Nations assessment, more than 1 million animal and plant species could vanish in the coming decades. The causes of this crisis vary in different parts of the world, but in the U.S., the key drivers of species declines are habitat loss, invasive species, disease, and the impacts of a shifting climate.

Here in Connecticut, the state's Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) lists more than 600 species of plants and animals as endangered, threatened, or of "special concern." And while there have been numerous local conservation successes, such as the recovery of the bald eagle and the osprey, the traditional reactive approach to saving endangered species simply isn't sufficient to meet the current challenge.

Edelson likens the Endangered Species Act to an emergency room. "It's not quite that simplistic," she said, "but almost in the sense that it costs more when you're toward the end and there are less options, and the interventions are more significant. When something becomes endangered, it's federal dollars—taxpayers' money—that's helping to recover it. We support that, of course, but the point is it could've cost a lot less earlier."

Historically, wildlife conservation in the U.S. was almost exclusively tied to the protection of so-called "game" species, animals like deer and ducks that were valued by hunters and anglers. For decades, policies were crafted to protect game species, often to the neglect—or event detriment—of other species. With passage of the 1973 Endangered Species Act, however, efforts shifted to the protection of all species at risk of extinction, regardless of their real or perceived value to humans. Still, 80 percent of funding for state-led wildlife conservation comes from the sale of hunting and fishing licenses and permits. But as the number of hunters and fishers nationally continues to decline—one 2020 study by the advocacy group Wildlife for All found that only 4.2 percent of the population are hunters—states are forced to make difficult decisions about how to spend precious resources. In practice, this often means prioritizing the conservation of animals that folks hunt and fish over their non-game cousins. RAWA would provide critical funding for those species that for decades have been overlooked.



"We're in a place where the game species have had some significant funding; it's an 'if you pay you should benefit mentality,' giving back to the hunters and anglers because that's who's putting money in," Edelson said. "The majority of all the state's species, 80 to 90 percent, haven't gotten funding."

She cites endangered songbirds, such as various warblers, thrushes, and meadowlarks; salamanders and turtles as examples of nongame species who have received relatively little attention or dollars. Some species at risk, such as butterflies and other pollinators, provide critical support for our food web. Losing them could have long-lasting trophic effects for entire ecosystems.

RAWA would provide funding that could be used, for example, to conserve and restore habitat, fight invasive species, and reintroduce extirpated native species. State fish and wildlife agencies would collectively receive \$1.3 billion a year, while tribes would receive \$97.5 million for tribal wildlife conservation. (Nationwide, 574 tribes manage more than 140 million acres of land, much of it vital wildlife habitat for threatened species. But unlike states, tribes don't receive any federal funding for conservation from excise taxes). Advocates say that RAWA will help to boost local economies and the \$646 billion outdoors recreation industry by creating an estimated 33,000 jobs a year. Edelson says the bill has enjoyed broad bipartisan support in part because the vast majority of its funds will go to state and local agencies. "There are often good relationships between Congressional members and their state fish and wildlife agency," she said. "They're a trusted source for many members of Congress."

Much of RAWA's funding would be funneled through a state's Wildlife Action Plan. These plans, drafted by each state in 2005 as a requirement to receive State and Tribal Wildlife Grants, serve as blueprints for how a state agency will proactively protect vulnerable species and their habitat before they become more costly to recover. States are required to review and revise their plans every 10 years using the best available science, as well as input from relevant partners and the general public. But state fish and wildlife agencies lack adequate funding to do their job; currently the

There's agreement that it's not good for either people or wildlife when a species becomes endangered.

When it comes to conserving endangered species, your voice matters. Please contact your elected officials today and ask them to support the Recovering America's Wildlife Act.

To find your Congressional Representative, visit house.gov. This site allows users to identify their representative and provides contact information for each member.

To contact U.S. Senators Blumenthal and Murphy, go to blumenthal.senate.gov/contact and murphy.senate.gov/contact.



sub-habitats throughout the state. The plan cites habitat loss, degradation, and fragmentation; changes in land use; and competition from non-native or invasive species as some of the most serious threats wildlife face. Those species that appear on the state's wildlife action plan tend to be the most neglected, and thus will be the ones who will benefit most from RAWA's dedicated funding. And states will be the ones who largely get to decide how to best spend those conservation dollars.

In 2017, the Alliance for America's Fish and Wildlife was established with the goal of securing funding for fish and wildlife conservation. An outgrowth of the Blue Ribbon Panel on Sustaining America's Diverse Fish and Wildlife Resources, its members represent a diverse coalition of like-minded supporters, including the outdoor recreation industry, retail and manufacturing sector, energy and automotive industries, private landowners, educational institutions, conservation organizations, and state, tribal, and federal fish and wildlife agencies. The Alliance has played a critical role in advancing RAWA with the goal of partnering with all Americans to conserve "our precious fish and wildlife and natural heritage for future generations."

federal government only allocates \$70 million a year for 56 states, territories, and the District of Columbia to implement their Wildlife Action Plans. RAWA would distribute dollars to states based on their size, population, and number of federally listed species. Estimates suggest Connecticut would likely receive \$12 million a year to conserve imperiled species such as the wood turtle, New England cottontail, piping plover, and blue-spotted salamander. While previous conservation bills have addressed specific challenges, such as park maintenance or invasive species, RAWA would fund a vast array of conservation initiatives from wildlife surveys and habitat restoration to nature centers, environmental education programs, and outdoors recreation projects.

"It creates a big toolbox to deal with a whole bunch of conservation measures," Edelson said. "It really covers all species and all quarters of the country. In an era of climate change, we'll going to need all the options on the table."

Connecticut's Wildlife Action Plan, revised in 2015, identifies 567 Regional Species of Greatest Conservation Need, including 26 mammals, 95 birds, 31 reptiles and amphibians, 73 fish, 242 invertebrates, and 100 plant species (the state's 2005 plan identified 475 species, but did not include native plants). These species are found in 10 key habitats and 54

"That's our job as advocates," said Edelson, "and this is why I think our coalition is really important. There's a lot of desire and recognition that it didn't get done last time, and it should get done now."

With a new Congress, the legislation will once again have to pass the House Natural Resources Committee before it can go to the House floor. But unlike last year, this time some of the questions around how to pay for the measure are being addressed from the start in an effort to garner more support for the bill. And even with a divided Congress, Edelson believes that RAWA is one of the few, clearly bipartisan bills—especially in the conservation arena—that can pass this session.

"I think that the most important thing is that people know that their voice matters, that it will take us speaking up for fish and wildlife and native plants," Edelson said, "We started this decades ago and we have our best shot at getting it done in 20 years, so it really is time for people to weigh in and ask their members of Congress to cosponsor the bill and get it passed this session."

Timothy Brown is the editor of Connecticut Woodlands.

Earth Shine

Lana Orphanides

Beneath this perfect spring moon
in this elegant universe
when the sun lingers at the equator
it is time to bow down.
It is time to shine the earth

to turn off the lights
to turn off the lights around the world
to listen to the Earth's arc
to sit in the quiet purple evening
as the heron ghost slides into night

and single stars rise.
It is time to mark the curve of each wave
to mark the moon on the edge of that wave
to mark the shining leaf
just beginning, itself, to polish
this silver earth.



Lana Orphanides is the author of Searching for Angels, and Sea and the Sound of Wind, Poems of Greece. She participated in Poetry of the Wild and has been the Opening Voice at the Mystic Arts Cafe. Lana was nominated for the Pushcart Prize and her work appears in several anthologies. She is a member of the Connecticut River Poets and Poets for the Planet.

A New Arboretum Takes Root

Not quite five years old, visitors will enjoy the Holcomb Tree Trail for generations to come.

By Eric Lukingbeal

There's a saying among arborists: the best time to plant a tree is 100 years ago, the next best time is today. Here's my story of how five years ago, a small group of amateurs took this advice and started an arboretum in Granby.



Tree Trail volunteers, left to right: Walt Zultowski, the author, Jack Lareau, Barry Avery.



Trees are grown using the Missouri Gravel Bed system, in which bare roots are planted in sand, gravel, and nutrient-rich water before being transplanted into the soil.

Our trees won't mature for fifty years; our grandkids will enjoy them, but we will not. Arboretums must plan for the very long term.

I suppose I was always ready to do something with trees. I collected leaves in a scrapbook as a boy and learned to identify many trees at a YMCA camp. My father planted trees at our house and showed me how to dig the holes. And we had some big black cherry trees that I climbed. But the specific idea of starting an arboretum had not occurred to me.

Then, sometime in 2016, my friend Barry Avery and I were talking about trees. Both of us had been planting trees for years at our houses, slowly getting rid of our lawns. We had served together on our local wetlands commission, and Barry had talked me into becoming a UConn Master Gardener. We agreed trees ought to be encouraged, for climate-related reasons as well as for sheer enjoyment. Barry now claims that I said to him, "Why don't we start an arboretum?"

There was no real discussion. We were tree lovers and thought an arboretum would be used by the public and would make Granby a better community. We were both retired for a few years, and we were confident we could make it work, even without any formal training in arboriculture. Here in New England, trees want to grow. Our idea was to plant trees on fields at the 310-acre Holcomb Farm, which the Town has owned since 1991. These particular fields—about forty acres—had not been farmed or grazed since the 1970s and were being slowly reclaimed by invasives.

It took us two years to persuade the Town allow us to plant some trees. A nonprofit, Friends of Holcomb Farm, agreed that our plan fit well with their mission to "preserve, promote, and utilize the historic working farm," and we became a project of their stewardship committee. We decided to call our arboretum the Holcomb Tree Trail.

The first 16 trees were planted in October 2018. All were grown by Rare Earth Nursery in Cazenovia, N.Y., utilizing the Missouri Gravel Bed system in which bare root trees are planted in 18 inches of sand and gravel and irrigated with nutrient-rich water. The roots respond vigorously, and when removed from the gravel, a seven-foot, inch-and-a-half caliper tree can be easily picked up by a ten-year-old. These are much easier to plant than balled and burlap trees with heavy root balls. These 16 trees were Princeton elms, shingle oaks, swamp white oaks, basswoods, Kentucky coffeetree "Espresso" cultivars, and a black tupelo "Afterburner" cultivar. More trees have been planted every year, many from Rare Earth and some also sourced from O'Brien Nurserymen and Bosco's Garden Center. There are now 90 new trees of more than 25 species. All are

labeled and many are natives to the eastern U.S. We've also labeled 70 mature trees along woodland trails.

The stewardship committee helped recruit volunteers to plant and care for the trees, which includes mulching and placing wire cages around the trunks to protect against buck rub and small mammal damage.



Volunteers also mow an extensive network of walking paths to the trees.

Holcomb Tree Trail design principles include: planting trees with spring bloom and fall color; planting trees in places that do not obstruct the long views of surrounding hills; planting around the edges of former fields to allow for future agricultural use; planting unusual trees that people haven't seen; and planting trees that attract birds to improve habitat.

The two toughest challenges facing the Holcomb Tree Trail are watering and invasive plants. The nearest source of water is more than a quarter mile away. Water is transported via car in five-gallon buckets, then carried to the trees. In dry years, like 2020 and 2022, trees were watered more than 20 times, while in 2021, it rained over 50 inches between July and December, so no additional watering was needed. There is an abundance of invasives, including oriental bittersweet, multiflora rose, autumn olive, and Japanese barberry. Volunteer work crews remove these by hand or with mechanical tools. No herbicides are used.

Our management has evolved over time. We are all volunteers. There are eight of us in addition to Barry and me—Jack and Peggy Lareau, Shirley Murtha, Cat Kadrle, Sue Canavan, Walter Ford, Walt Zultowski, and Heidi Lindberg. We meet monthly on Saturday morning to talk about what trees to plant, and where to plant them. We don't always agree, and while there is a fairly wide variety of opinions, no punches are thrown. We also talk about what invasive removal projects deserve priority. We are forced to talk about succession issues, as some of us are in our seventies and we have quite a collection of knee and hip replacements. And of course, we talk about money, budget, and grants. So far, the total cost of the Tree Trail is about \$25,000. We've had some generous gifts from individuals. I've run into walkers on the trails who've asked me where to send a contribution, and I'm not alone to have had this experience. We talk about our need to establish an endowment. Our trees won't mature for fifty years; our grandkids will enjoy them, but we will not. Arboretums must plan for the very long term.



As the writer of this piece, I confess to an ulterior motive. I'd like to inspire others to start an arboretum in their towns. I'll offer a few specific pieces of advice. Visit some arboretums and talk to their people. We visited more than a few (Connecticut College and Bartlett Arboretum among them) and got some good advice. Get a copy of "The Tree Book" by Michael Dirr and Keith Warren. Talk to folks at your local nursery. Be prepared for some disappointment; trees sometimes die for no apparent reason. Be prepared to make some mistakes. It's not easy. But as the midwestern philosopher Woody Hayes said, "If it's easy, it ain't worth doing."

No one should think that what we have done so far is due to our efforts alone.

We are fortunate because almost all of the Holcomb Farm land is now protected against any future development by a conservation easement granted by the Town to the Granby Land Trust last fall. First Selectman Mark Fiorentino led this effort, which had been discussed for decades. Granby Land Trust president Rick Orluk along with Friends of Holcomb Farm president Bob Bystrowski and its executive director Jenny Emery helped to garner public support for the project.

Many other organizations, as well as individual donors of money, equipment, and time continue to support the Tree Trail. The Tree Trail is open to the public and guided tours are available.

Eric Lukingbeal is a retired trial lawyer, and a former CFPA board member and president. He serves on the boards of the Granby Land Trust and Friends of Holcomb Farm. His favorite trees are the northern catalpa and black tupelo.



SOAKING UP THE RAIN

By Michael Dietz

As the climate warms and the Northeast experiences more frequent and heavier rain events, you've likely heard the term "rain gardens." But what is a rain garden and why would you want one at your home? Well, before we get to that, we need to talk about stormwater runoff. Stormwater runoff is generated when there is too much rain for it all to sink into the ground. In undeveloped areas, like forests and fields, most rainfall is absorbed by the ground and then moves slowly through the soil. This natural purification process, however, has been interrupted by the impervious surfaces—such as roads, parking lots, and houses—that we put on the landscape. Impervious surfaces do not allow water to sink into the ground, and in many places the runoff from these surfaces gets piped directly to nearby waterways. This has negative impacts

on aquatic life, including loss of habitat and over-enrichment of waters with nutrients, which can lead to toxic algae blooms and low oxygen. Rain gardens are one form of green stormwater infrastructure that can help your landscape function more like it did before the impervious surfaces were added.

Okay, so now you know why we need rain gardens. But how do they work, and can you install one at your home? A rain garden is quite simple in concept: it is a depression in the landscape that collects stormwater runoff. The plants used in rain gardens are native to this area and grow around the edges of wetlands. This means they can tolerate standing water sometimes and dry conditions at other times. This raises an important point: rain gardens are not wetlands and should not hold water for more than a day after a rain event. Their primary function is to allow the water to sink into the ground



RAIN GARDENS are one form of green stormwater infrastructure that can help your landscape function more like it did before the impervious surfaces were added.



you can likely dig it by hand if your soils are not overly compacted. For comparison, a rain garden to treat runoff from one downspout at my cape-style home would be about 40 square feet, which means you'd need to remove nearly a cubic yard of soil. If you (or a family member who has been volun"told" to help) can manage this kind of work, you're all set. Then you install the plants, which is similar to digging in plants in any other landscaped area. Next you need to decide how you are getting water to the garden. You could run a pipe from your downspout or make a stream bed out of stone to get water from the downspout to the garden. If you have a basement, I recommend keeping a rain garden at least 10 feet away from your foundation to prevent water from moving back towards your basement. Then you need to install a thin layer of mulch to help keep weeds down and moisture in for the plants. The decision of whether to Do It Yourself or hire a professional to install the rain garden will depend on whether you can handle this type of physical work. Once installed, the maintenance of a rain garden is similar to caring for perennial plants in a landscaped area.

In addition to reducing stormwater runoff, rain gardens can also provide wildlife habitat. Plants can be chosen

that will attract pollinators. Butterfly milkweed (*Asclepias tuberosa*) and Joe-Pye weed (*Eutrochium spp.*) are great rain garden plants that will attract lots of pollinators to your garden in addition to providing beautiful blooms and splashes of color. Winterberry (*Ilex verticillata*) shrubs provide important food sources for birds in the winter months. Inkberry (*Ilex glabra*) shrubs also provide berries for birds and their leaves stay green throughout the winter, providing nice visual appeal.

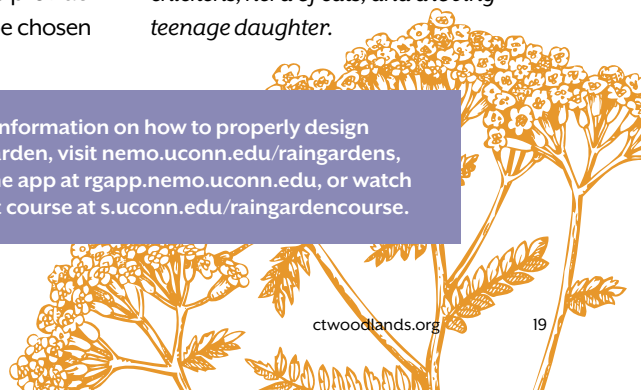
Given all of these positive benefits, I leave you with this question: why wouldn't you want a rain garden at your house?

Michael Dietz is an Extension Educator at the University of Connecticut, where he is also a joint faculty member in the Department of Natural Resources and the Environment. Dr. Dietz has been doing outreach and research on stormwater issues for more than 20 years. In his current role, he is part of the Center for Land Use Education and Research (CLEAR) and directs the Connecticut Institute of Water Resources. A Connecticut native, he lives in the Quiet Corner with his wife, flock of chickens, herd of cats, and a loving teenage daughter.

so it's dry before the next storm. Because of this, there are some important considerations when you are determining whether a rain garden will work at your home, including where to place your garden, how water will get to your garden, the suitability of soils, and the proximity to buildings. UConn's CT NEMO (Nonpoint Education for Municipal Officials) maintains a website and app with detailed information and short video clips to help you evaluate your site. There are also tools to help you size your rain garden and a plant database to help you choose the best plants depending on your sun exposure and desired aesthetic.

Once you've decided to install a rain garden, you need to consider whether you can do the work yourself or if you'll need to hire a contractor. If you're installing a small residential rain garden to contain runoff from part of a 1,000-square-foot building footprint,

For more detailed information on how to properly design and install a rain garden, visit nemo.uconn.edu/raingardens, use our smartphone app at rgapp.nemo.uconn.edu, or watch our free, multi-part course at s.uconn.edu/raingardencourse.



Master Woodland Manager Program Now Accepting Applications

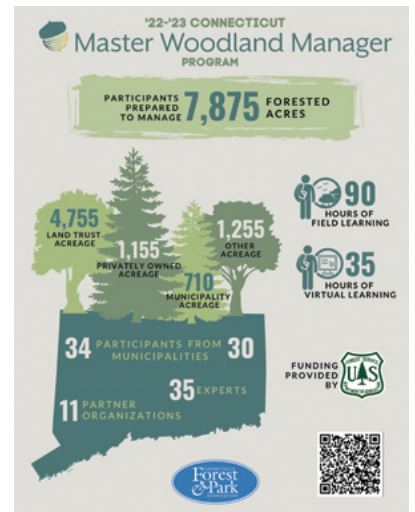
CFPA is excited to offer the third round of the Connecticut Master Woodland Manager (MWM) program. Applications are due in mid-July and the program begins in September. Learn from state's top forestry and wildlife professionals and join a community of woodland supporters! Whether you own a large, forested property; serve as a land trust steward; or have a small, treed acre in your backyard, there's something for everyone. The year-long program features a flexible, interactive learning experience that includes both virtual and field opportunities. To learn more and to apply visit ctwoodlands.org.

Connecticut Woodlands Conservation Corps

CFPA's Trails Program is proud to launch the Connecticut Woodlands Conservation Corps (CWCC) this year. Since 2017, CFPA has hired a team of young adults who spend their summer improving the Blue-Blazed Hiking Trail System. The new CWCC program will more fully encompass and represent the work and skills our crew members are already learning and doing. For



example, the transition from a daily commuter crew to a backcountry one, will help facilitate a deeper and more immersive experience with the crew living and working together fulltime. Also, we're formalizing our skills curriculum. We want to make sure these young people leave with a standard set of skills and knowledge. The CWCC will be less of a summer trails job and more of an experiential program, similar to most conservation corps. Today, there are many state and regional conservation corps programs across the country modeled after the Civilian Conservation Corps. Our new Connecticut Woodlands Conservation Corps hopes to have a similar positive impact on our trails and forests that will be felt for years to come.



From the Statehouse, continued from page 5

is more than 10,000 acres. There are many heavy tasks for maintainers that require two or more people, and reliance on one maintainer makes DEEP vulnerable to having no maintenance done across thousands of acres if that single maintainer is sick, injured, or otherwise unable to work.

Across the state park system,

- there are seven park management units, such as the iconic Sleeping Giant State Park, with just one maintainer.
- there are also several park management units with two maintainers, such as Rocky Neck, Pachaug, Penwood, and Sherwood Island state parks. These parks should have three or more maintainers based on high visitation and large acreage.

- Hammonasset Beach State Park, Connecticut's most visited outdoor attraction with over 3 million annual visitors, has just 4 maintainers (down from 11).

After all of the positions that have been lost to attrition and budget cuts over the past several decades, will another 15 park maintainers really make a difference?

Honestly, it's probably still not enough, but it's a critical first step to help our state parks stabilize and re-trench their operations and maintenance capacity. Without this kind of essential investment, we will be helpless witnesses as Connecticut's state parks, campgrounds, and related resources continue to degrade through high attendance paired with increasing neglect.

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



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Pathways

This year marks the 90th anniversary of the Civilian Conservation Corps, or CCC, one of the hallmarks of Roosevelt's New Deal. The federal program, which ran from 1933 to 1942, provided young, unemployed men with a steady income and job skills. Often referred to as "Roosevelt's Tree Army," CCC boys, as they were called, worked on a variety of conservation projects including planting trees; fighting invasive pests; conducting biological surveys; and building roads, trails, and other infrastructure for parks. They also responded to natural disasters such as wildfires and the devastating hurricane of 1938.

Connecticut was home to 21 CCC camps, including Camp Chapman, located at Stone's Ranch Military Reserve in Niantic. Initially intended for veterans of World War I and the Spanish-American War who enrolled in the CCC, its crews planted a stand of pine trees at the ranch, and constructed campgrounds and roads at Rocky Neck, Devil's Hopyard, and Fort Shantok state parks and the Nehantic State Forest.

The Camp Chapman News, a monthly newsletter from 1934, offers a glimpse into the daily life of the camp. There are stories about cribbage tournaments and baseball games, reviews of theatrical productions, and original poetry about the changing seasons or the author's fondness for the CCC. Many issues include advice for newer recruits, farewells to veterans who are about to leave, and a healthy dose of playful banter. One issue advertises classes at the Adult Educational and Training Center of New London in subjects ranging from trigonometry to French to radio repair, emphasizing the importance of education since, as the article states, "you can only stay in the Civilian Conservation Corps for one year."

Reading the newsletter, you get a sense of the true value of the CCC, not just for its conservation mission or even its economic impact, but for the ways in which the program buoyed the morale of its members, creating a sense of pride, comradery, and a sense of belonging for millions of young men during the Great Depression.

CCC Kitchen Tent, Camp Chapman, Stone Ranch Military Reserve, Niantic, Conn. 1933-1935.





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