



CONNECTICUT

Woodlands

SUMMER 2024

**Celebrating
Connecticut's
Trails**

A MAGAZINE OF THE CONNECTICUT FOREST & PARK ASSOCIATION



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CONTRIBUTOR'S *Spotlight*

Zbigniew Grabowski has always loved being outside. Growing up, he spent countless days on the banks

of the Fenton River. Today, the scholar and athlete shares his love of nature with his daughter, Oona, as they explore the Farmington River near their home. We caught up with Zbigniew to chat about outdoor sports and fatherhood.

You are a multi-disciplinary athlete. What is your favorite sport?

It's so hard to pick favorites! I love backcountry skiing—the sense of freedom and connection with the vast alpine environment is nearly unbeatable. But I also love biking; the combination of technical skill and sheer physicality is hard to match. And then there's the simplicity of trail running and hiking. I also love the water in its many forms, floating and communing with forces larger than oneself.

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On the cover: Trails Day hikers take a break near a champion oak along the Mary Moore Preserve Lookout Trail in Sharon, Conn. Photo by J. Koteen Photography.

You have lived throughout the U.S. and abroad. What drew you back to Connecticut?

During the pandemic, schools in D.C. were shut down and Oona was transitioning to middle school. We knew it would be a huge process to build adequate supports for her. Family and friends, easy access to nature, and the American School for the Deaf were key factors to moving back.

How has fatherhood changed your perspective of the outdoors?

Before I became a father, I knew I wanted to share my love of the outdoors with my kids. Having a (dis)abled child required a radical reorientation of my perspective on what that meant. Oona absolutely loves her time outdoors—she worships the sun, wind, and water, and her attunement to fine details and energies has really opened me up to the

subtle qualities of nature. As much as I love the adrenaline of doing hard things, there's more to life than sending gnarly cliffs and running white water. It's just as important to slow down, soak up, and really treasure the short time we have here on Earth with the people we love.

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Editor's Note

As readers of this magazine well know, Connecticut's 825-mile Blue-Blazed Hiking Trail System is one of our state's crown jewels when it comes to outdoor recreation. Each year, thousands of hikers and runners hit the trail in search of adventure, solitude, wildlife, or simply a community of like-minded nature lovers.

In addition to pedestrian and multi-use trails, Connecticut also boasts over 5,800 miles of rivers and streams—140 miles of which are designated Wild and Scenic—plus more than 2,000 lakes and ponds and 600 miles of shoreline. The proximity of these waterways to Blue-Blazed Hiking Trails means that you can enjoy both paddling and hiking on the same outing, as Vince Lasorsa discovered on a recent day trip with coworkers to Lake Zoar (see page 20).

Unfortunately, many Connecticut residents lack equal access to trail networks and clean waterways for swimming, fishing, and boating. In his piece about the state's designated Greenways, areas recognized as important corridors of open space (see page 15), Zbigniew Grabowski argues that linking Greenways with Blueways improves access to both recreational trail networks and healthy waterways. Greenways, he writes, can reconnect people with the natural world.

While sound public policy is critical to healing our relationship with nature, this spring, several Wesleyan University students took a more hands-on approach. Working with salvaged timber that they milled on-site, students designed and built a new gateway to the popular Highlawn Forest trails (see page 8). One of the goals of the undergraduate course, says professor Christian Nakarado, was to challenge students to think critically about their relationship with the forest by allowing the building material—locally-harvested wood—to guide the design process. It's important lesson, he says, as designers and builders strive to reduce their contributions to global climate change.

These stories in our summer issue highlight some of the ways that folks are working to create a different world: one where coworkers are encouraged—and even paid—to recreate together outside; where Greenways principles are embedded in local zoning laws; where building design is rooted in ecological relationships. This summer, I hope you'll make time to reconnect with our shared natural heritage, whether on trails or waterways, or possibly both.

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 and the Blue-Blazed Hiking Trails 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 Trail 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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THE VIEW FROM THE

Canopy

BY ANDY BICKING

As lovers of forests, parks, trails, beaches, and waterways, our community is as varied as the landscape itself. It's no surprise that we gather with friends and family—or seek solitude and a moment's respite from the busyness of modern life—through different activities.

Connecticut Trails Day, the largest trails event in the country, demonstrates that we are hikers, cyclists, canoers and kayakers, beachcombers, horseback riders, trail runners, tenders of trees and forests, rock climbers, urban gardeners, adventurers, and more. Like an artist's brush on a blank canvas, our open spaces, waterways, rail trails, and roadside paths are places where we manifest our intentions on the landscape, respectfully and in partnership with our neighbors.

How do we decide what activity is appropriate for each unique and cherished location? Respect for the goals of the property owner and nature is at the core. Making decisions that enhance the ecological benefits of the land for all people while promoting equitable access to the outdoors is an artful balance. Arriving at a shared decision with different user groups is not always easy. It requires patience and a desire to understand perspectives other than one's own. And the value of sweat equity—I'm thinking of the hundreds of volunteers who made Trails Day happen, and the thousands more who are stewarding trail resources for all kinds of users around the state—figures heavily.

CFPA is committed to creating space for these discussions to occur; to connecting the community with the knowledge to make informed and thoughtful decisions on the landscape; and to manifesting community values through public policy.

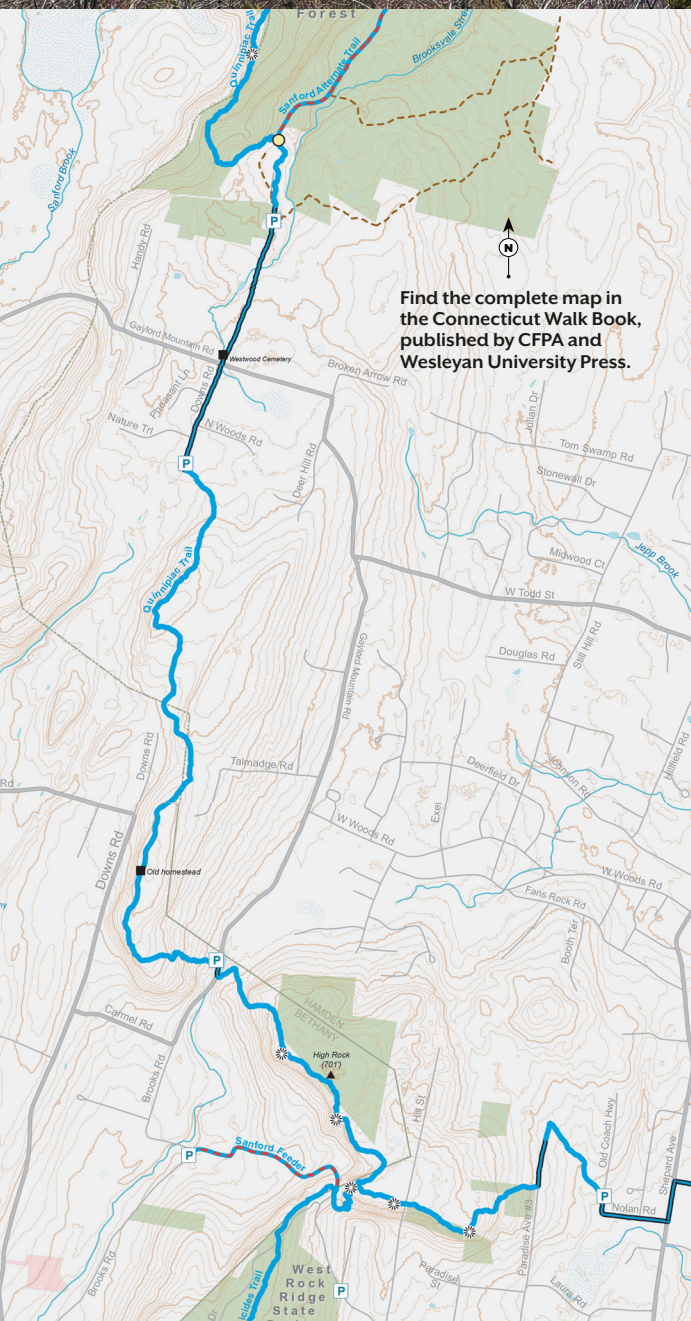
This spring, the Connecticut General Assembly approved \$10 million in bonding for the Recreational Trails Program and related open space protection. Working together to educate our lawmakers about the transformative power of this investment in the future holds great potential as the need far outstrips current funding. The legislature and governor should also be thanked for recommitting to Passport to the Parks, ensuring that Connecticut residents can visit state parks, forests, and beaches at no cost. At the same time, several threats became apparent during the legislative session.

Multiple bills were introduced that would have enacted great harm to public lands by proposing that forests and parks held in the public trust be conveyed to private interests. Fortunately, our community rallied to oppose and redirect these measures that would have forever transformed Lamentation Mountain in Berlin, Nipmuck State Forest in Woodstock, and wetlands in Enfield. We must remain vigilant to ensure the negotiated agreements to conserve these sites are adhered to.

This issue of Connecticut Woodlands embraces and celebrates the Trails Day volunteers and trail users that make our state a great place to live, work, and play. Collectively, we have tremendous power to enhance our quality of life and ensure ample outdoor recreation opportunities for future generations.

See you on the trail!

Andy Bicking is the Executive Director of CFPA.



Quinnipiac Trail

Brooks Road to Gaylord Mountain Road

By Sandra Glick

In August of 1996, my family moved to a new home in the northernmost corner of Hamden. At that point, my entire hiking experience consisted of the Sleeping Giant Tower Trail and a single day hike at Chatfield Hollow that landed my husband in the hospital with poison ivy. Having discovered a part of the Quinnipiac Blue-Blazed Trail around the corner of my house, I hiked up a small section of the trail in fashionable “hiking” boots that were—as it turned out—not suitable for hiking. I still remember the foot pain! Despite the discomfort, something touched me that day. I kept hiking, but with suitable boots and gear.

Over the years, I have hiked this trail and many others in Connecticut and neighboring states. But hiking this particular section of the Quinnipiac has also been my way to just get some fresh air and exercise; my refuge; my comfort; a place where I can enjoy the woodlands. Upon retirement, my goal was to help maintain this trail that has brought me so much joy. Little did I know what that promise would entail.

I retired in March of 2018, just two months before a devastating tornado hit Hamden. Locally, the tornado left a path of destruction from Bethany to Gaylord Mountain, down to Sleeping Giant Park and on to Wharton Brook and Tylers Mill Preserve. My backyard became a refuge for turkeys, raccoons, woodpeckers, red fox, and many other displaced wildlife. Streets were blocked by downed trees. Others fell through homes, impacting over 200 families. The then-trail manager, Ralph Fink, and I attempted to walk the trail a

couple of days later. It was impassible. Nearly every tree with a blaze was down, often blocking the trail. We started on Brooks Road and bushwhacked our way up to Mad Mare Hill. At that point, we called his wife to pick us up on Downs Road in Bethany and we bushwhacked our way down to the road.

For the next three months, we spent two-to-three days each week clearing the 3-mile-long trail. CFPA sawyers and “swampers” from across the state volunteered their time to help with the cleanup. We worked in three-hour shifts and attacked one section of trail at a time. The sawyers (who worked in pairs) would very carefully cut down the trees on the trail. After each cut, the swampers would move the cut logs to the side of the trail. I learned that newly fallen trees can be unpredictable and watched several experienced sawyers jump out of the way as a fresh cut triggered movement of the rest of the tree. As you can imagine, it required the utmost concentration. We had to stop before exhaustion—and the oppressive heat—caused us to make mistakes. I can’t begin to convey my appreciation for the generosity of these volunteers.

In some places, the destruction was so bad we couldn’t even identify the original trail. Finally, at the beginning of August we cleared the very last section. During this process, I learned how to identify trees from the inside out. Red oaks are red in the inside and have a wonderful scent. Chestnut oaks have a black circle on the inside. The top of the hickory tree twists off during a tornado; pine treetops are sheared. During this time, I also met Scott Gray and Polly Buckley. They are wonderful mentors who taught me how to maintain the trail and how to identify many trees, shrubs, and wildflowers.

A year later, Clare Cain, CFPA’s Trail Director, asked me to manage this trail section. I accepted. The diminished forest cover has changed the character of this woodland in many ways. The open areas have given rise to a succession forest. We now see a true mixed woodland that includes pin cherry, black birch, hickory, white pine, American hornbeam, hop hornbeam, staghorn sumac, tulip poplar, sugar maple, American chestnut saplings, and sassafras. The understory includes pink lady’s slipper, plumed Solomon’s seal, meadow rue, maple leafed viburnum, and high bush blueberry. This proliferation of plant life has also brought its challenges. Instead of using a pruner, we need to use battery-powered string and hedge trimmers to beat back the brambles growing in the open, sunny paths along the trail. Fortunately, the birds and other wildlife have returned to their habitat.

Hiking this trail never gets boring. Of the thousands of times I hiked this trail, there is always something new: a scarlet tanager sitting on a branch; a red bellied woodpecker’s distinctive call; the discovery of a stand of newly



rooted pink lady’s slippers; sarsaparilla growing along the trail for the first time; ravens defending their territory.

My favorite section is the ridge on Mad Mare Hill. The lookouts include views of both Lake Bethany and Lake Watrous. One of the things I like most is from Downs Road in Hamden up to Mad Mare Hill, the trail is an easy incline. This makes it a great choice for beginning hikers. You can hike as far as you want knowing that the way back will be all downhill. Stonewalls crisscross the entire trail. After a recent trail re-route on the Brooks Road section, the Bethany section of the trail now crosses a brook and wanders up the hill along two wide switchbacks instead of heading straight up the hill. So, if you are looking for a relatively easy hike, this may be the perfect trail for you.

Sandra Glick is a wife and mother of two sons and grandmother of three boys. She retired from a technology career in 2018 and works part time as a Travel Advisor. In addition to hiking and trail maintenance, she likes to kayak, bicycle, and make quilts for her family.



A large, freshly cut log lies horizontally across the frame, resting on metal tracks. The log's surface is smooth and light-colored, showing the natural wood grain. The end of the log, in the foreground, is rough and shows the circular growth rings of the wood. In the background, a worker in a black and yellow safety suit and helmet is visible, working with a red machine. Another person is standing further back in the forest. The ground is covered in brown leaves and debris, and the background is filled with bare trees, suggesting a late autumn or winter setting.

DESIGNING WITH THE FOREST IN MIND

A group of Wesleyan students recently created a new gateway at Highlawn Forest. The project, which focused on the design-build process, not just the product, represents a new model for ecological design.

By Timothy Brown

On a recent sunny spring morning, two vanloads of Wesleyan University students arrived at the entrance to Highlawn Forest, a popular walking trail located behind CFPA's Rockfall headquarters. But these students weren't there to hike; they were constructing a new gateway to the forest as part of a semester-long, design-build art studio called "Wood: Building with the Forest." The class, taught by Christian Nakarado, an assistant professor of art at Wesleyan, looked—and acted—like a professional construction crew. Wearing leather gloves and hard hats and working in small teams, some students used drills with long bits to join large red oak beams together while others lifted the heavy beams into place. By noon, the new gateway had begun to take shape.

Located in nearby Middletown, Wesleyan has offered an applied design-build studio for more than a decade. Several years ago, students in the class, then taught by Elijah Huge, built the canopy entryway and benches at CFPA's headquarters. Nakarado, an architect by training who has worked throughout the U.S. and abroad, says although his course shares some similarities with Huge's, the main difference is the focus on ecological design whereby the materials on hand—in this case, trees and wood—guide the process. It's the opposite of how most architects work, he says.

"Instead of designing something based on a particular function that we drop into a particular place, which is the way that architects typically think about designing something, we wanted to start from the materials at the site that we were working in, which was a forest site," he said.

Students—whose majors range from studio art to environmental studies and urban studies—began the course exploring similar projects from around the world and discussing what might be best for the forest. For their first assignment, simply called "The Stud,"

Nakarado gave each student an 8-foot-long 2-by-4 and asked them to build something as tall as possible using only joinery and twine; no nails or glue were allowed.

"Part of the point of that project was to learn something about structure and about the material 'wood,'" he said. "But it was also to think a little bit about this anonymous commodity that is a 2-by-4. We are all used to going to big box hardware stores and seeing stacks and stacks of these things. That is an experience that is totally devoid of relationship."

Items made from local wood foster a material link in people's minds and an appreciation for the resource around us.





mud season; transport it for secondary processing; and then assemble the finished pieces on a timeline was certainly a logistical challenge.”

Working on site became an educational opportunity not only for the students, but also for hikers and other passersby who stopped to ask questions about the project. “It’s a valuable lesson about locally grown wood and how it is possible to extract lasting value from trees when they are done being ‘trees,’ so to speak,” Worthley said. “I like to think that items made from local wood foster a material link in people’s minds and an appreciation for the resource around us.”

Nakarado agrees. “When the students are going to the forest and they’re seeing the trees where they fell, and they take part in the milling on site of logs into individual lumber, and then they take those to the shop and they mill them into the sizes that they want to use—there’s real care and delicacy in that process that I don’t think takes place in most other ways of designing and making.”

The students also met with Helen Poulos, a plant ecologist at Wesleyan and an expert on northern forest systems. Poulos walked through Highlawn with the students, describing the trees and ecology of the forest.

“It was great to get her perspective,” Nakarado said. “By the time we began designing some of the details for the project that was selected, the students wanted to be real purists.” They didn’t want to use any metal, or anything purchased from a big box store; they only wanted to use materials that came from the forest, he says.

“We had to do a little compromising to think about what was feasible in the amount of time that we had, and the level of experience and ability that we have. But the students, ideologically, fully bought into the premise of the studio.”

It’s a relationship that goes both ways. Instead of thinking about the space solely in terms of the materials it had to offer, students began to think about what they had to offer the space in terms of design. “We didn’t necessarily know what we were going to make or how we were going to make it,” said Nakarado, “but we knew we weren’t going to be working in a conventional design sense.”

It was Clare Cain, CFPA Trails Director, who initially suggested to Nakarado that the students create a gateway to Highlawn using red oaks from the forest that had been toppled during a recent winter

storm. In addition, Tom Worthley, an associate extension professor of forest sustainability at UConn who has collaborated with CFPA on several projects, had access to a mobile mill that students could use to mill the timber on site. It sounded like a great learning opportunity for the students. But they first had to move the trees and get them ready for milling.

“The trees were large, still hung up in other trees and located on a very sensitive site, which presented a series of interesting technical challenges,” said Worthley. “To salvage, move, and process such heavy material safely, without severe ecological destruction—during

We are all used to going to big box hardware stores and seeing stacks and stacks of 2-by-4s. That is an experience that is totally devoid of relationship.

Wesleyan University organized a student design competition, similar to a competitive bidding process. Working in small teams, students spent three weeks creating designs for the gateway and then voted on which one they liked the best. To reduce any potential disappointment, students rotated among three teams so by the time they presented the final design to CFPA for critique, everyone had contributed to each design.

“During the competition, it’s distinctly three different groups in literal competition arguing each week about whose design is better,” said Matty Shields, who served as teaching assistant for the studio. “But once we moved into the fabrication and on-site stage, all the groups dissolved and the class actually worked together—physically—to get it built.”

As the client, CFPA made the final selection. Ironically, no student had voted for the design. But by the time they lifted the frame into place, Nakarado says, everyone had come around to loving it.

“It’s a valuable design process lesson in its own right because often the client will pick the design that nobody expects,” he said. “But in community-based design, as this was in many ways, it’s all about working together and finding compromises.”

It’s estimated that 40% of carbon emissions worldwide are related to building construction or operation, and architects—and the schools that train them—are having to come to terms with their role in advancing global warming. While design-build studios are increasingly common at architecture schools, Wesleyan’s course is uniquely focused on energy

and materials, working at the local level, and challenging students to think about ecology and other species in their design.

“The hands-on and technical problem-solving experience will be remembered by all participants and adds a richness to a project going far beyond the on-screen planning and design, not just of the structure itself, but of the process also,” Worthley said.

Nakarado hopes that whether the students one day become architects, or artists, or homeowners who want to renovate their home, they’ll be

thinking differently about the places that those materials come from after taking this class.

“We were cutting down this beautiful slab that came from one of the oaks and the students were upset that we had to cut it into smaller pieces,” he recalled. “They were like, ‘This is such a beautiful piece of wood.’ They understand that wood in a way that they just wouldn’t if we hadn’t been through this whole process this semester together.”

Timothy Brown is editor of Connecticut Woodlands.



TRAILS DAY JUNE 18 1-2 CELEBRATION

Celebrating Connecticut Trails Day

This year, CFPA and 128 partner organizations cosponsored 185 different events in 111 towns. From family-friendly hikes and educational walks to demanding trail races and trail maintenance projects, there was something for everyone. Thank you to everyone who helped make this annual event—the nation's largest trails celebration—such a success!





The background image is a dark, moody photograph of a night scene. A full moon, which has a distinct pattern resembling a turtle's shell, hangs in a deep blue sky. Below the moon, a calm body of water reflects the moon and the surrounding dark silhouettes of trees and foliage. The overall atmosphere is quiet and contemplative.

Wood Turtle

You turn
to look up
at me. In
danger.
Your eyes
shine the
black light
of eons.
Your high-
domed cara-
pace sculpted.
Thirteen
sections:
Nipmuck
people have
always known:
each one
a moon.
I'd like
to say you'll
change my
life. I'm not
so sure of
that. But
I stay
with you for
what seems
like years.
On the sand-
y bank. Your
orange
neck stretch-
es. The wide
brook always.
About
to bend.
Away.

Jonathan Andersen

Jonathan Andersen's most recent book of poems, "Augur," (Red Dragonfly Press) was the recipient of the David Martinson-Meadowhawk Prize and a finalist for the 2019 Connecticut Book Award in Poetry. He is a professor of English at Connecticut State Community College - Quinebaug Valley.

REGENERATIVE PATHWAYS

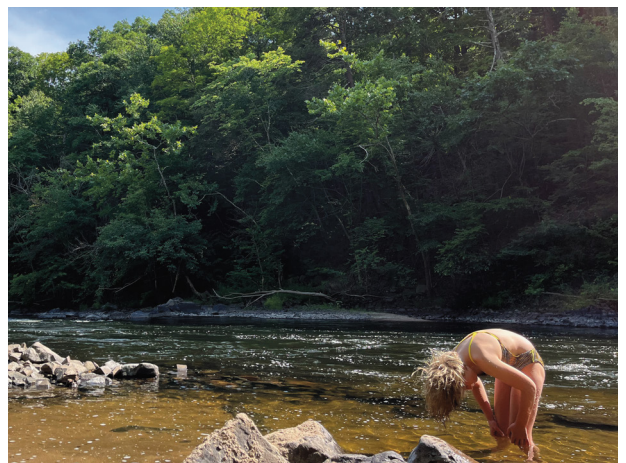
Connecticut's Greenways are a model for landscape conservation and can help restore our connections with nature.

Words and pictures by
Zbigniew Grabowski



I grew up on the banks of the Fenton River. Almost every sunny day—and a good number of rainy ones—after school my mom and I would walk along its murmuring waters and find a place to picnic. As I grew older, the Blue-Blazed Nipmuck Trail became my haven, a place where my imagination could roam. As I wandered through the witchy hemlock grove south of the Stone Mill and the gnarled ridgelines of old glacial drumlins, I was free to breathe clean air, watch trout, and after the occasional heavy rain, float the river all the way to Mansfield Hollow.

Now as an adult living on the banks of the Farmington River, I share these same pleasures with my daughter, Oona. Almost every day after school we find tranquility in any one of numerous local trail systems, including the Tunxis, Metacomet, and Farmington rail trails. On warm spring and fall days—and all summer long—we also canoe. Oona loves to flop overboard and float the quiet sections, vigorously kicking and splashing against the current, scattering the trout and salmon below.



These two rivers—the Fenton and the Farmington—have more in common than providing for our family outings; they are both designated Greenways, two of over 100 areas of statewide importance for connecting open space and recreational trails, providing corridors for wildlife, and protecting water quality. These areas include the entirety of

THE CORE OF THE GREENWAYS CONCEPT IS MULTI-USE CONNECTIVITY, ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP, AND LINKING DIFFERENT TYPES OF TRAILS WITH PROTECTED LAND.

CFPA's Blue-Blazed Hiking Trail System. According to Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) Trails Coordinator, Kimberly Bradley, the core of the Greenways concept is multi-use connectivity, environmental stewardship, and linking different types of trails (both single-use and multi-use paths, for example) with protected land. Connecting Blueways, or waterways, with Greenways combines access to our rivers with active transportation networks. The benefits of becoming a state designated Greenway include increased access for funding for land acquisition, river access projects, and trails for residents and visitors alike. In addition, participating municipalities are eligible for real estate tax abatements for certain types of recreational trails.

Aside from the permitted impacts of wastewater treatment facilities and industries, diffuse development, fertilizer and pesticide use, atmospheric deposition, paved areas, dams, and agriculture all contribute to statewide water quality issues, requiring systemic change. I also recognize the relative privilege of having these Greenways in my backyard. Unfortunately, most of the state's assessed surface waters are designated as "impaired," and the distribution of Greenways is highly uneven. Folks who live in urban areas often lack access to continuous trail networks and clean waters for swimming, fishing, and boating. In many ways Connecticut residents face ongoing systemic water quality challenges. Aside from the permitted impacts of wastewater treatment facilities and industries, diffuse development, fertilizer and pesticide use, atmospheric deposition, paved areas, dams, and agriculture all contribute to statewide water quality issues – requiring systemic change.

Building on work led by Charlie Vidich at the Western Connecticut Council of Governments, UConn's Center for Land Use Education and Research (CLEAR) is examining the effectiveness of current municipal zoning regulations in protecting cohesive networks of open space and habitats adjacent to wetlands and waterways supposed to be protected by the Inland Wetland and Watercourses Act. Some towns, such as Granby, have created zoning overlays that protect riparian networks, conserved lands, and working farms and forests. But most of Connecticut's towns do not

have similar rules. Ironically, the six towns we identified with no zoning protections for riparian buffers had similar amounts of forested land cover as those who have a combination of restrictions on development, agriculture, and removing vegetation. We also found that towns *without* zoning protections had less impervious surface than other towns, including those *with* zoning restrictions. This suggests that the overall development pressure within a town currently drives the ecological integrity of its waterways. It also highlights a critical need to be proactive in protecting and restoring our stream and river networks. CLEAR research suggests that over a third of our watersheds are in critical need of recovery, and over 40% are in need of active restoration strategies. The good news is that more than a quarter of our waterways are in pretty good shape, many of which fall within designated Greenways.

These findings call for a combined approach at multiple scales. Throughout Connecticut, we need to restore and protect riparian networks, create diverse trail systems, and connect smaller green spaces in towns and cities through street trees and green stormwater infrastructure. Our trail systems are also being affected by climate change; more extreme precipitation is rearranging drainage paths, increasing erosion and the amount of silt that ends up in streams and rivers. Adapting our trails to the impacts of climate change will take even more collaborative efforts. By taking a comprehensive approach, we can address inequalities in access to clean waters and healthy environments.

Voluntary programs like Greenways and land trust acquisitions must work in concert with regulations to maintain the integrity of riparian areas and trail networks, as both are vulnerable on private lands. For example, last year some friends and I attempted to hike from Collinsville on the Tunxis Trail through the Nepaug State Forest to the trails in Nassahegon State Forest, but a new subdivision had cut off access to the Tunxis Trail, forcing us to bushwack through a swamp and eventually hike on the road. While building good relationships and securing easements with landowners are vital, so is enshrining continuous networks in town Plans of Conservation and Development and zoning.



Maintaining connected landscapes will have synergistic effects of reconnecting people with nature, but people connect with nature in different ways. As a hiker, accessible trail system advocate, and mountain biker, I've been involved in the development of shared single track, Blue-Blazed hiking, equestrian, and bicycle trails in areas that are appropriate for multi-use trails. Negotiating the perceived needs of different types of trail users can be challenging, but through compromise we can ensure adequate access for all.

It will take significant work to build coalitions and public support to meet the State's goal of protecting 21% of Connecticut's land as open space. While there should be a natural alliance between those seeking better recreational access with those advocating for cohesive networks of conserved lands, in practice, these seemingly aligned goals are often in conflict. As people increasingly seek health through outdoor recreation, resources like Connecticut Trail Finder can help them connect with nature. But we need to do more. Embedding Greenways principles in local zoning laws presents a different model of conservation. Greenways remind people of the beauty of the natural world and give them space for healthy recreation. But they also lead us toward a genuinely "green" path of development, one that acknowledges and leverages our interdependency with natural systems. Our recognition of this interdependency can help us meet our conservation goals by increasing the value of regenerative agro-ecological systems; knitting working

landscapes, biodiverse habitats, and public easement recreation trails together—as is common in the United Kingdom and Sweden—and move us toward a regenerative and circular bioeconomy.

We need big transformations in the infrastructures of everyday life—energy, water, sewerage, transportation, food, building materials, clothes, and consumer products—to conserve our landscapes in the face of climate change. As one small, but meaningful step, we should leverage Greenway and Blueway concepts to enhance landscape connectivity while catalyzing the many interdependent transformations we need to improve our environmental quality. Now 13, Oona's preference for swimming over the iPad shows how clean rivers and high-quality environments are an effective antidote to the alienation of our hyper-technological society, and a reminder that we can align our human needs with the larger forces of the natural world.

Zbigniew Grabowski is a scholar and athlete committed to working towards harmony between people and our planet. A Polish arrivant and the father of a (dis)abled child, he has pursued activism, engaged scholarship, and practice across three continents. He currently serves as an associate extension educator in water quality at UConn's Center for Land Use Education and Research.

DRUM ROLL, PLEASE!

Listening for Connecticut's Ruffed Grouse

By Laurie D. Morrissey



It's a chilly April morning, just before the sun rises over Barkhamstead Reservoir. A young woman steps out of a Chevy Silverado wearing a winter coat to ward off the pre-dawn cold. She walks along the dirt road, stopping every 600 feet to turn and face north, south, east, and west.

Anna Toledo is listening. Fortunately, she has a good sense of hearing; she leaves her hat in the truck so her ears are not covered. Suddenly, there it is—the sound she was hoping to hear. A faint drum roll that starts slowly and speeds up to a whirr and lasts about eight seconds before stopping abruptly. It means there is a male ruffed grouse nearby doing his best to attract a mate. A few minutes later, she hears it is again. To the Connecticut DEEP wildlife biologist, it's a good sign. Ruffed grouse have become relatively rare in the state, and the department is trying to understand why.



Scan the QR code to see—and hear—a male ruffed grouse drumming. Video courtesy of Nathaniel H. Taylor; Cornell Lab of Ornithology | Macaulay Library.

Roughly the size of a chicken, with a short crest on its head, *Bonasa umbellus* is the most widespread upland game bird in North America. However, its population has declined by at least 50% throughout the eastern United States, and by nearly 70% in New England. In Connecticut, this once-familiar drumming sound is seldom heard outside of a few towns in the northwestern corner of the state. Toledo had never heard it until joining her first drumming survey with the DEEP's Natural Diversity Database Program. She watched a video to learn what she was listening for.

Not all of Toledo's spring surveys yield results. There are days when she hears not a beat. Even when she does, she may not get a glimpse of the drummer. Ruffed grouse are excellent at staying hidden, thanks to their cryptic coloring. The variation of white and darker feathers gives the bird a mottled look when it's on the ground hoping to escape the notice of foxes, coyotes, and other predators. Their color, either reddish brown or grayish brown, depends on the phase. Both occur in Connecticut, but the gray is much more common. The color phase is most obvious in their fan-shaped tail, which has a wide black band near the end, edged with a frill of grayish white.

And then there's the feature that gives this beautiful fowl its most common nickname, "Old Ruff." The male's black neck feathers nearly encircle its head and are erected during courtship displays. When a cock is in full display, this ruff, along with his fanned-out tail, make him appear twice his normal size.

Old Ruff's unique drumming sound baffled listeners, including biologists, for a long time. Because the displaying cock often drums while perched on a downed tree trunk, it was thought that the bird was striking his wings rapidly against a log. But in 1932, a Cornell University ornithologist captured the moment with a slow-motion movie camera. A frame-by-frame analysis proved its wings were beating against nothing but air—at a rate of 45 to 50 times per eight-second whirr. The cock leans back on his tail and fans his cupped wings vigorously, forming a momentary air vacuum—in effect, producing successive sonic booms.

For a bird that can't sing, drumming is a signal that serves a dual purpose in breeding season, announcing its presence to both potential mates and rivals. Depending on the density of tree cover, the drum roll can carry a quarter of a mile or more. Years ago, hearing this sound on spring evenings in Kent, I thought someone was starting up an old farm tractor on a distant hillside. As with most skills, success takes practice. Young males may go through the motions and make merely a dull flapping sound, or no sound at all. The drums go silent in winter since all they would do is signal their presence to predators.

The preferred habitat of a ruffed grouse is mixed deciduous and coniferous woods, especially forest patches that have been disturbed by logging or weather events. They feed on buds and catkins of early successional species such as birch, cherry, and aspen, making old fields full of woody shrubs particularly attractive. But these areas are increasingly scarce. "We don't have enough young forests in Connecticut to support a large number of grouse," says Will Cassidy, a small game biologist at DEEP. Only a small percentage of Connecticut's 1.8 million acres of forested land consists of trees less than 30 years old.

According to Cassidy, certain areas are being managed for grouse, along with woodcock and New England cottontail rabbits, which favor the same kind of real estate. One such tract is the Goshen Management Area, where cutting trees allows sunlight to reach the forest floor so seedlings can take root. Ideally, a forest patchwork is created and maintained with a variety of forest age classes.

Grouse fly only short distances. They do not migrate, and never fly very high or move far from home. They explode into flight suddenly when startled, but quickly settle back down in a more protected spot. (If you've ever experienced this while walking along a trail or back road, you'll understand the reason for the nickname "heart attack bird"). They survive the winter on twigs and dormant buds and withstand extreme cold by snow-roosting. When snow is

10 inches deep, they plunge in and bury themselves. They stay hidden, conserving energy until they need food. Then they stick their heads out of the snow, look around, and if the coast is clear, burst into the air.

April is nesting season, with the hen laying nine to fourteen eggs over a two-week period in a slight depression in leaf litter. Only about half of the chicks that hatch survive the summer; wet weather and predators both take their toll.

Fluctuations in the grouse population are normal, but biologists are concerned about the bird's apparent decline throughout the Northeast. Young forests are critical for at least 50 species identified in Connecticut's Wildlife Action Plan. DEEP is working to restore these habitats by partnering with public and private organizations and forest owners throughout the state and region.

Even in areas where young forest types are regenerating, Cassidy says the grouse do not appear to be increasing. "It's a bit of a head-scratcher," he says, adding that threats now include West Nile virus. Blood samples provided by hunters may eventually yield some clues. "This year, the birds have been pretty quiet," Cassidy says of the spring surveys. "Only one route of our four produced any drumming."

Like the eerie nighttime call of the whip-poor-will, the drumming of a ruffed grouse is heard less and less often in the Connecticut woodlands. For those who have heard this iconic sound of spring, the loss of Old Ruff would be something to grouse about.

Laurie D. Morrissey is a New Hampshire-based writer whose work has appeared in Connecticut Woodlands since 2016. She has also been published in Northern Woodlands, Art New England, New Hampshire Home, Appalachia, and numerous poetry journals.



Exploring Pryden Brook by Boat and Boot

A group of coworkers discovers the joy
that comes from spending time together outdoors.

By Vince Lasorsa

Kettletown State Park is a haven for outdoor enthusiasts. Located in Southbury in southwestern Connecticut, hikers will delight in the extensive network of trails that wind through forests, along scenic vistas, and past serene ponds throughout the sprawling 600-acre park. Campers will find well-equipped facilities, including spacious campsites. Nature lovers can explore the stream-side boardwalk, which offers a relaxing stroll amidst rippling waters and lush vegetation. The park's boat

launch provides boaters with easy access to Lake Zoar, a reservoir on the Housatonic River, bordered by Kettletown State Park to the east and Paugussett State Forest to the west.

Last summer, I had the pleasure of kayaking Lake Zoar. The 900-acre lake—the fifth largest waterbody in Connecticut—offers beach access, swimming, excellent bass fishing, and boating opportunities for both motorized and non-motorized watercraft.

As part of my role at L.L. Bean to plan outdoor discovery events, I arranged for a kayaking expedition from Kettletown State Park to Pryden Brook Falls. This trip was part of our Outdoor Experience Day, a special initiative where L.L. Bean employees are granted one day of paid time per year to spend outdoors with coworkers. We fondly refer to these as OEX days.

I was excited to lead our small group of seven coworkers plus one husband, having chosen Lake Zoar for its scenic beauty as well as the opportunity to both kayak and hike on a single outing. I had previously hiked the Zoar Trail loop from the parking area in the lower Paugusset State Park and envisioned a unique experience of paddling and then hiking to the waterfalls.

We embarked on our adventure in five kayaks and one canoe. As we gathered at the boat launch, our excitement soared, fueled by a shared love of the great outdoors and a thirst for adventure. The calm waters of Lake Zoar reflected the serene beauty of the surrounding landscape, setting the stage for a memorable experience. We set off, synchronizing our paddle strokes as we glided gracefully across the glistening lake. A sense of tranquility enveloped us. Towering trees and verdant vistas reminded us of the beauty that thrives within these protected areas. As we paddled across Lake Zoar, we witnessed a majestic red-tailed hawk soaring gracefully above, a fleeting yet unforgettable moment of magic.

We guided our boats toward a sandy beach at Lower Paugussett State Forest for the hike. Lower Paugussett State Forest is connected to Upper Paugussett State Forest via the Blue-Blazed Zoar Trail, a 6.5-mile loop that boasts stunning views of the lake as you pass through mixed hardwood forests and hemlock groves. With our hiking shoes

on, we headed out on the trail. We followed the meandering path; our senses heightened by the sights and sounds of nature. Lush green foliage enveloped the trail providing shade on this warm summer day. A chorus of birdsong echoed through the trees complementing the gentle babbling of the nearby brook. We spotted playful chipmunks darting across the trail and gray squirrels bounding through the canopy. Along the stream's edge, we caught glimpses of garter snakes basking in the sun and listened to the gentle chorus of frogs in the nearby wetlands.

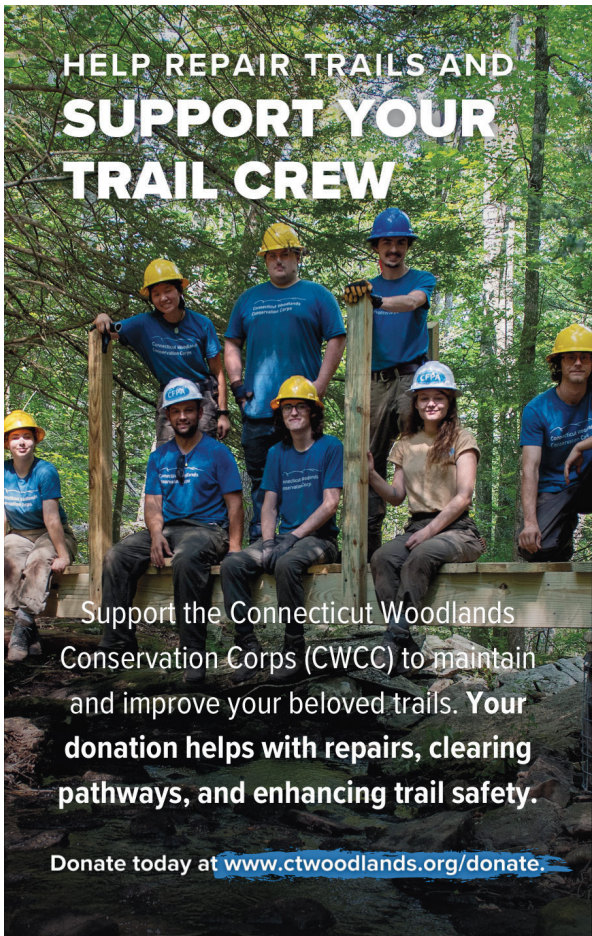
After a short but invigorating hike, we arrived at Pryden Brook Falls, the park's crown jewel. This magnificent waterfall cascades down a series of rock formations before reaching a natural pool where hikers can cool off. Rugged cliffs and thick vegetation provided a stunning backdrop. We took a moment to savor this hidden oasis, a place where nature's wonders are on full display. It reminded us of the profound beauty that exists in our world waiting to be discovered and cherished. As we made our way back along the Zoar Trail and to our boats, our hearts were filled with a sense of gratitude for the natural wonders that surround us and the memories we had created.

Our paddling expedition was not just about the thrill of adventure, it also reinforced the bonds we share as human beings. Immersed in the serenity of this picturesque landscape, we were reminded of the responsibility we all share in protecting and conserving these precious habitats for future generations.

Vince Lasorsa is an avid outdoor enthusiast and writer based in Newtown. He has a passion for exploring nature and enjoys sharing stories about people, places, and nature's wonders. When not on the trails or waterways, you can find him at DEEP and at L.L. Bean, inspiring others to embrace the great outdoors.





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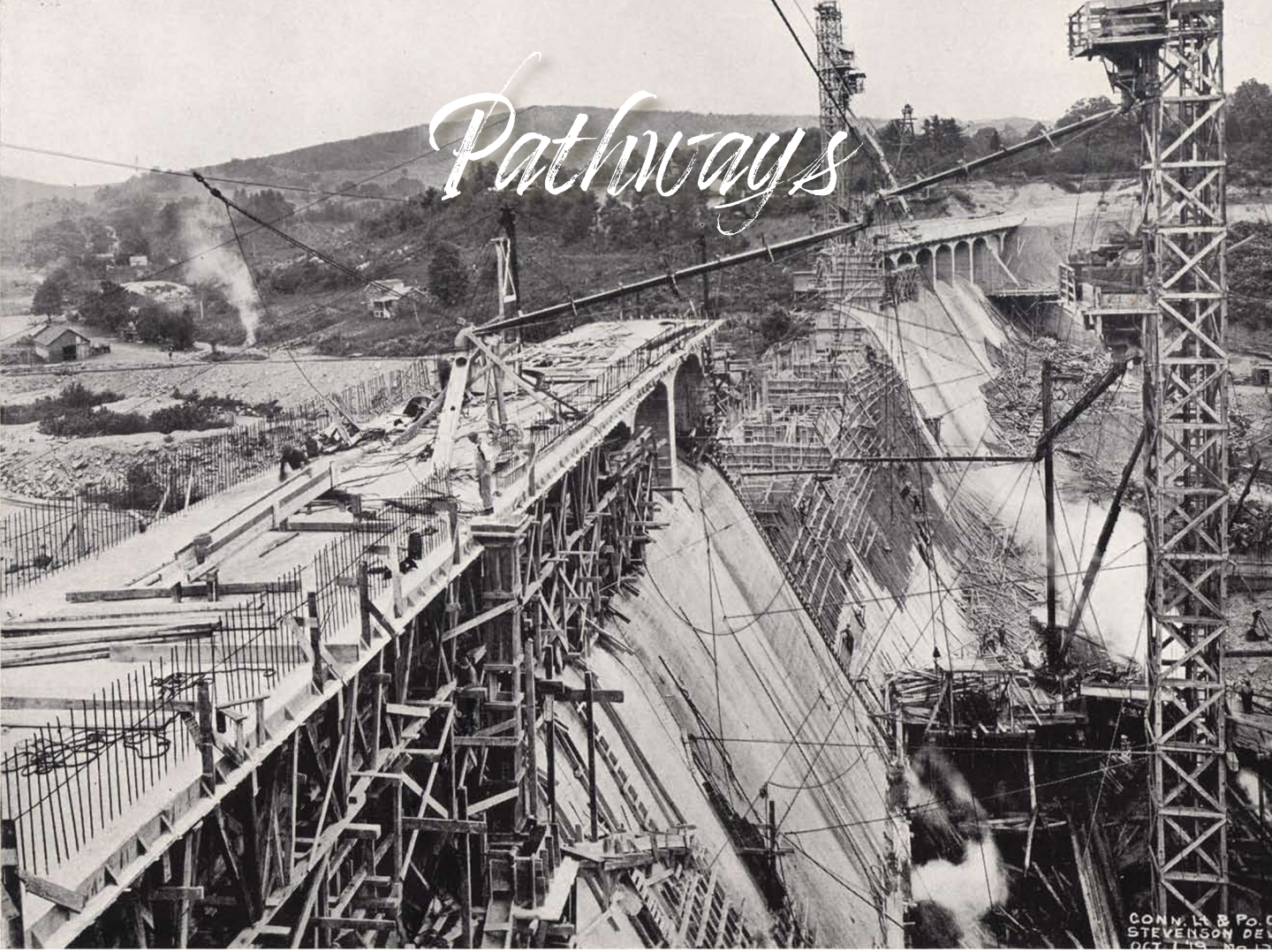
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Pathways



Lake Zoar, located along the Housatonic River between Oxford and Monroe in southwestern Connecticut, is one of the state's most popular destinations for boating, fishing, and swimming. But visitors might be surprised to learn that the 10-mile-long lake, which boasts 27 miles of shoreline, is only 125 years old, created in 1919 by the construction of the Stevenson Dam.

As early as 1800, travelers used a wooden suspension bridge to cross the Housatonic, which flows from the Berkshires in Western Massachusetts southeast to Long Island Sound. But the bridge was susceptible to flooding and ice flows and had to be rebuilt several times throughout the 19th century. In 1899, the Housatonic Power Company began to draw up plans for a dam. While flood control was one of the reasons used to justify the dam's construction, its main purpose was to generate electricity.

Connecticut Light and Power Company began construction of the dam in 1917. It would take two years and some 800 workers to complete the massive project, which has been called "the most ambitious engineering feat on the East Coast at that time." Workers used mules and carts and

steam-powered cranes during construction, and created a company town that had a 300-seat mess hall, a small hospital, blacksmith and carpenter shops, two cement plants, a coal-fired electric power station, and a church.

Supported by 24 concrete piers built into gneiss, hard bedrock that formed some 400 million years ago, the 125-foot-tall dam is nearly a quarter mile long. It completely transformed the landscape, raising the water level 76 feet and flooding parts of several neighboring towns. The town of Pleasant Vale, a once thriving small community, lies at the bottom of the lake. While many homes and other buildings had to be abandoned, graves were relocated to higher ground prior to the flooding.

Today, the Stevenson Dam, which generates 28-megawatts of electricity, is one of the few remaining concrete dams in the country that still supports a road. Each day, over 10,000 vehicles cross the dam on Route 34, a tight, two-lane highway that is especially popular during the fall foliage season.

Photo courtesy of the Oxford Historical Society, Inc.



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