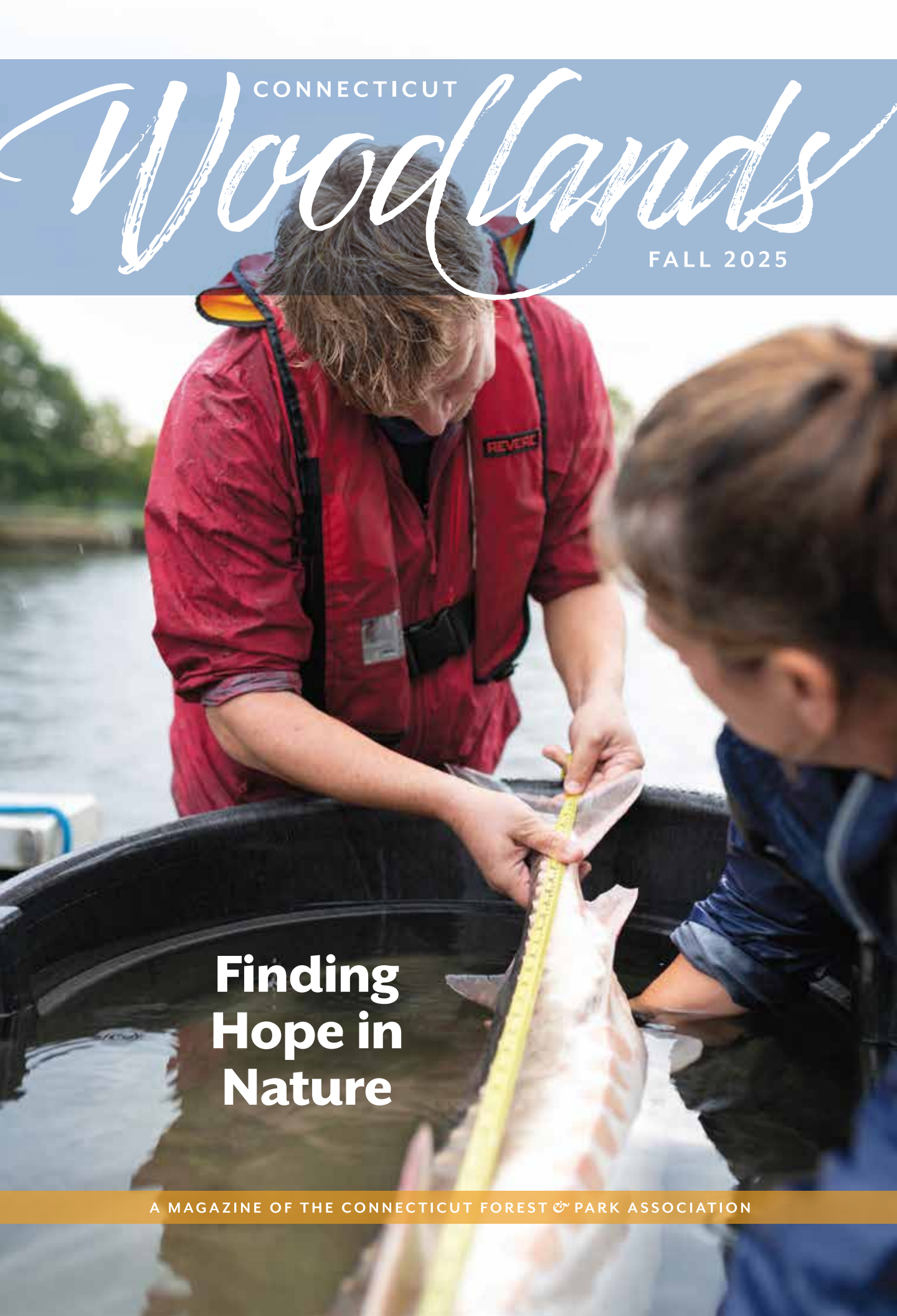


The background image shows two people, likely researchers or conservationists, wearing waders and working in a body of water. They are holding a large, silvery fish, possibly a striped bass, and measuring its length with a yellow tape measure. The person on the left is wearing a red wader with a "REVERE" logo. The person on the right is wearing a blue wader. The scene is outdoors, with a river or lake in the background.

CONNECTICUT

Woodlands

FALL 2025

Finding Hope in Nature

A MAGAZINE OF THE CONNECTICUT FOREST & PARK ASSOCIATION



Land Acknowledgment Statement

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



CONTRIBUTOR'S *Spotlight*

Jake Snyder is a Connecticut-based photographer whose work spans landscape, commercial

architecture, editorial, and portraiture. He holds an M.S. in oceanography from UConn. His photographs can be seen on an information board at Hammonasset Beach State Park and at the Smithsonian Museum of Natural History. We caught up with Jake to learn more about his work and passion for sturgeon.

What inspired you to become a photographer?

When I was young, I had a small point and shoot. I took this image of a bee on a sunflower, (but) when I got home and looked on the computer, it was actually a yellow spider holding onto the bee. I vividly remember being so excited and showing everyone I could. The feeling of seeing the

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On the cover: Researchers Hannes Baumann (left) and Jacque Benway measure a large Atlantic sturgeon from the Connecticut River. Photo by Jake Snyder.

world in a unique way—and seeing things others may not immediately notice—continues to drive my passion for photography.

What was it like to photograph sturgeon for this project?

Interacting with sturgeon is always a pleasure. I worked with the state on sturgeon in a previous summer, so I already had familiarity with their work and sampling methods. Given their protected status, to be able to photograph such a unique animal was a real privilege. It's really hard to have access, so it was an honor to be involved.

What's the connection between landscape and architecture photography?

I had taught landscape photography while in my master's and met someone who needed photos of a school. At

the time I said, "How different can it be than landscape photography?" which I now realize is quite the joke. Since that project in 2017, my hobby has grown into a full time business.

When you're not working, where can we find you?

Currently at home with my two little girls, Madeline (3) and Sadie (1). They take up almost all of my time outside of work.

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Editor’s Note

Eight years ago, I took my first steps on an extraordinary journey, one that would take me to all corners of Connecticut, from the worn mountaintops of Litchfield County to the jagged shoreline of Long Island Sound. Along the way, I’d meet scientists and students, artists and athletes, parents and policymakers, foresters and farmers; inspiring Connecticuters of all ages and expressions who love nature and are devoted to its protection. I’d listen to stories about their connections to the land—stories of hope, healing, resistance, resilience.

On behalf of the many talented writers and photographers whose work have graced these pages, it has been my honor to share these stories with you. And so, it is bittersweet that this is my last issue as editor of Connecticut Woodlands.

My companion on this journey has been the inimitable Laura Kolk, whose creativity, keen eye, humor, and hard work have transformed a small print magazine into a stunning keepsake. It’s been a real joy to collaborate with her to bring these stories to life. She will continue working at Woodlands with our new editor, Britany Robinson, a gifted storyteller who will bring a fresh perspective to this magazine, which turns 90 next year.

I’m grateful to Margaret Gibson, our esteemed poetry editor, and to her predecessor, the late David Leff, and to the dozens of Connecticut-based poets whose words have offered us new ways of thinking and being. I’m also thankful to CFPA’s board and staff for their enduring support, especially to Eric Hammerling, who invited me on this journey and encouraged me to take bold steps, and to the multi-hyphenate Clare Cain, who has been a constant partner on this project.

And finally, thank *you* for joining me on this journey. These days, free speech is under attack. Words like “climate change,” “diversity,” and “environmental justice” are being censored and weaponized by those who care more about their own power than about people or the planet. Honest, courageous, compelling stories are critical to creating a safer, kinder, resilient, just world. Please keep reading, keep talking, keep moving.

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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Thanks to photo contributions from Alex Bradley, Erica Cirino, Teresa Gallagher, Haddam Shad Museum, Jake Snyder, Sam Swap, Jay Levy, Sam Yeager. All images of Atlantic sturgeon published in the Fall 2025 issue of Connecticut Woodlands were taken under the authority of NMFS ESA Permit No. 19641.

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Rooted in Resilience

Walking through Connecticut's forests and parks this year, we're reminded how connected and fragile these systems can feel. A fallen tree here, a wildfire there, and suddenly the landscape looks different. The same is true for the systems that protect our public lands.

Federal funding shifts have changed the landscape our programs have relied on for years. Support for programs like Project Learning Tree and Master Woodland Manager have been reduced or eliminated. Cuts to staff in federal programs like the National Park Service and Forest Service, along with broader policy changes, make it harder to maintain the health and resilience of Connecticut's forests and the New England National Scenic Trail.

At the same time, our landscapes are facing more invasive species, extreme weather, and fragmentation from development. In times like these, it's easy to feel discouraged. But we know resilience comes from the roots.

CFPA's strength has never come from a single program or funding source; it comes from the people who make up this community—volunteers, donors, members, staff, and partners. Each plays a vital role in conserving Connecticut for today and tomorrow.

The challenges we face today reinforce the importance of staying rooted in our mission to connect people to Connecticut's forests, parks, and Blue-Blazed Hiking Trails, ensuring these special places are protected and well-managed for future generations. Despite the uncertainty ahead, we know that our programs will continue, our staff will adapt, and our volunteers and donors will make sure the work never stops.

We're investing in our own roots to support that mission. Our Rockfall headquarters is undergoing its first major renovation since the 1980s. This update will replace aging materials and equipment, improve the functional space to support a growing team, and create a welcoming "home base" for staff, volunteers, and donors. We look forward to welcoming you to our headquarters in January!

And we're preparing for our next chapter. We are currently seeking our next Executive Director. For more than 130 years, CFPA has protected the state's open space and natural resources while nurturing a vibrant community of people who care about conservation. We look forward to introducing someone ready to build on that legacy early next year.

While we await the arrival of a new Executive Director, we say thank you and farewell to Connecticut Woodlands editor, Timothy Brown. Over the past eight years, he has transformed the magazine into a powerful mission piece exploring conservation in Connecticut and the people who make it possible. He leaves the magazine in the capable hands of our new editor, Britany Robinson.

As we navigate transition, we're reminded that this work has never been solved by one person, one program, or one moment in time. None of these efforts happen or continue without your involvement and support. Thank you!

Clare Cain is CFPA's Trail Director and Interim Executive Director.



ON THE
Trail

Paugussett Trail

By Teresa Gallagher

The heart and soul of Shelton's Paugussett Trail is the old section where it follows the Housatonic River bluff through Indian Well State Park and the adjoining Birchbank Mountain Open Space for about three miles. This is where I go hiking if I want to pretend I'm in Vermont without the long drive. Each park has its own scenic overlook of the river, accessible from side trails and loops that offer heart-pounding ascents.

Between these two popular overlooks is a challenging stretch of terrain called "Burritt's Rocks." The trail picks its way through rocks of all sizes while the riverbank drops off in green piles of mossy boulders and ferns. There are a few spots you need to use your hands, along with some interesting caves to explore. You'd never know you're just a few miles from Bridgeport.

If you've hiked this part of the Paugussett Trail and didn't care for it, try it again. There have been many improvements over the past decade, and the trail is now closer to its original character. To be honest, I was not a fan of this section when CFPA asked my husband and me to become trail managers in 2015. There were miles of sketchy footing and relentless ups and downs with little reward. We had helped create Shelton's local trail system and were part of the team that in 2013 extended the

Paugussett Trail five miles south to Shelton Lakes. Yet I rarely hiked the trail through Indian Well or Birchbank. I preferred to walk the Paugussett along the reservoirs at Shelton Lakes or head to Monroe's Webb Mountain Park and take the trail up "the wall" to the Lake Zoar overlook.

But there was opportunity for improvement, so we accepted the role of CFPA Trail Manager and got started. My husband wields the chainsaw, and I do the rest. Being the City of Shelton's Natural Resource Manager has been an advantage since I'm responsible for managing some of the lands that the trail passes through; my husband is a member of the city's Trails Committee. Previously, I restored a former CFPA loop at Birchbank that had been abandoned due to ATV damage. After the city purchased the property, I was able to evict the ATVs and open a "new"

town trail. With an outstanding spring wildflower display and scenic cascades, the Birchbank Trail has become one of my favorite trails to the Paugussett.

During my first year as a CFPA trail manager, I focused on the Birchbank section and proposed a major relocation that would pull the trail closer to an earlier route and restore a scenic overlook. The trail had been urgently relocated a few decades earlier in response to proposed housing developments and the footing was tricky in places. Many people were involved in the project, including CFPA, the Shelton Trails Committee, the local tree warden, and an army of high school students in need of community service hours.

The following year the focus turned to Indian Well State Park, where CFPA took the lead and spent the summer



Summer Crews Improve Trails

Since 2017, CFPA has hosted, trained, and supervised paid summer and fall trail crews who repair and improve the 825-mile Blue-Blazed Hiking Trail System. This summer, the six-member Connecticut Woodlands Conservation Corps (CWCC) spent more than 40 nights in a tent and endured oppressive heat, innumerable blisters, and biting bugs to accomplish the following projects:

- a 102-foot bog bridge.
- a 35-foot bridge replacement.
- a 26-foot bridge, with crib steps.
- 29 stepping stones.
- a nine-step stone staircase.
- more than a mile of trail relocations and other improvements.

The fall CWCC crew is currently out working to make our trails safer and more accessible. If you happen to see them while hiking, be sure to stop and say hello!

Connecting Hartford Students to Nature

This fall, students from Hartford's Thirman L. Milner Middle School are exploring Keney Park through hands-on, forest-based learning experiences. Thanks to a grant from the U.S.

Forest Service, the initiative gives kids the chance to learn about ecology, conservation, and environmental stewardship right in their own neighborhood. By bringing the classroom outdoors, students not only learn about local forests, wildlife, and the importance of caring for green spaces, they also enjoy the many benefits of being outside, including better physical health, reduced stress and anxiety, and improved focus.

We're excited to be partnering our friends at the Keney Park Sustainability Project, Connecticut Land Conservation Council, and UConn 4-H Extension to make these experiences possible. Looking ahead, we hope to expand the program to other Hartford schools so even more students can connect with nature and enjoy the healing power of the outdoors.

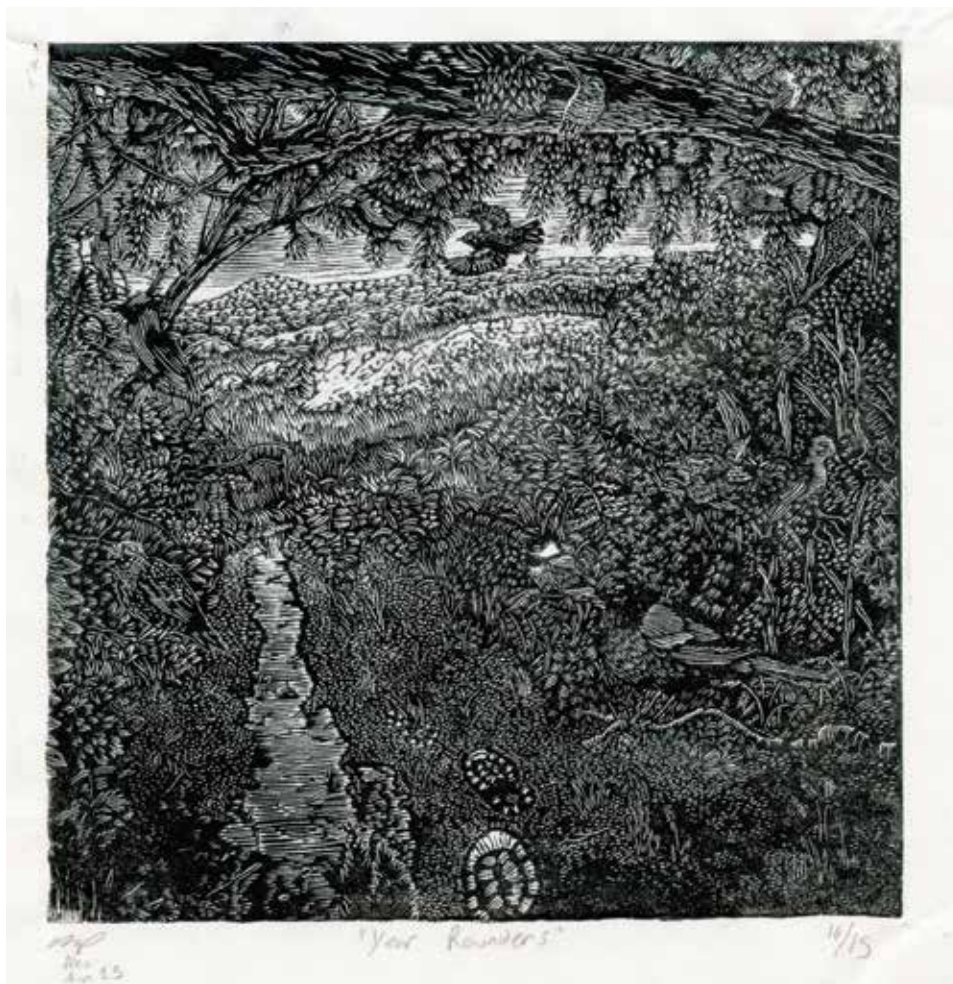
Cultivating Connecticut's Naturalists

In September, 25 new James L. Goodwin Master Naturalists proudly graduated after a year immersed in Connecticut's forests, fields, and waterways, learning to interpret the natural world and inspire others to care for it. Their journey continues as a new class of 28 Master Naturalists begins in November. The program is co-sponsored by the Friends of Goodwin Forest and CFPA.

GIVING A FACE TO FORGOTTEN CREATURES

**Artist Sam Swap uses printmaking
to connect people to nature and the New England Trail.**

By Timothy Brown



It's a warm, mid-September afternoon as I climb the steep, rocky trail to Bluff Head in Guilford to meet Sam Swap, an illustrator, printmaker, and educator—who also started his own publishing company, Third Cat Press. Swap is the 2025 New England National Scenic Trail, or NET, Artist-in-Residence. Since 2012, CFPA and the National Park Service have sponsored the residency, connecting people to the trail through art and education.

I arrive at the bluff sweaty and out of breath. I find Swap calmly perched high on the bluff's edge as a hawk soars overhead. He holds in his left hand a small wooden block. In his right, a sharp engraving tool called a spitsticker. He makes small strokes into the block, removing bits of the tightly grained wood. Later, he'll use the engraving to create an original print that blends the physical world with the imaginary.

**IN A WORLD SATURATED WITH DIGITAL CREATIVES
AND THE GROWING PRESENCE OF GENERATIVE AI,
SWAP'S WORK FEELS UNIQUELY TANGIBLE.**



Artist Sam Swap holds an engraved wood block ready for printing.



**I REALLY STUDIED WHAT I WAS DOING AND PIECED IT TOGETHER BIT BY BIT.
EACH MISTAKE HELPS YOU TO BECOME A BETTER ARTIST.**

Swap's love of Connecticut landscape was cultivated growing up on a pond in Ivoryton. In addition to hiking and biking with his family, he attended and later worked as counselor at the Bushy Hill Nature Center camp. And like many other kids, he dreamed of one day becoming a photographer for National Geographic. But as an undergraduate at the Hartford Art School, he discovered a passion for illustration. "I found it to be a lot more engaging than photography," he said. "I have this background in nature education—and I have this love of communicating about nature through art—so I figured I could just start making my own children's books based around nature."

After graduating, he landed a job as an artist's assistant at the Florence Griswold Museum in Old Lyme where he discovered the artwork of Thomas Nason, a wood engraver best known for creating detailed prints to accompany the published poems of Robert Frost. Swap was inspired both by Nason's work and the Old Lyme Arts Colony—an early 20th century collective that produced some of America's greatest Impressionists—of which he was a member.

"One thing I especially love about Connecticut artists and Impressionists is that it was a stylized view of nature, like a lot of old English block prints or Japanese-style printmaking. They were abstracting nature to kind of anthropomorphize it, like frogs in dresses dancing around," he said. "I don't want to do an exact representation of the world because then I could just take my camera. I like adding my own little stylistic flair to it."

Swap's prints are full of intricate details, like other traditional wood engravings and such contemporary illustrators as Maurice Sendak and Bill Watterson of *Calvin and Hobbes* fame. "I was obsessed with how masterful these illustrators were, while also being really good at communicating these stories," he said. "And it just felt like a really good avenue to push myself with a physical medium."

Also, like many of the Old Lyme artists, Swap was inspired to create works of art outdoors—"en plein air"—surrounded by the natural elements, rather than inside a traditional art studio. It's an approach he has honed

throughout his residency, creating a series of prints of the animals that call the trail 'home.'

This is a relatively simple set-up: small maple blocks weighing just one-sixteenth of a pound; an assortment of engraving tools; vegetable-based relief ink (he only carries primary colors into the field); a small wooden frame; and paper for printing. As he carves, a detailed image gradually appears. When he's done engraving, he applies the sticky ink, which is mixed with a wax drier to hasten the drying time. He then sets the block in the frame to make multiple, nearly identical prints. It's a system he has perfected throughout the residency, although he admits there's been a bit of a learning curve. "The first time I went out to Chittenden Park and did this little print, I completely messed it up," he said. "But then I really studied what I was doing and pieced it together bit by bit. Each mistake helps you to become a better artist."

Hikers pause to chat with Swap, intrigued not only about his creative process, but also the residency. "In America, people think from a very



Swap's work, both print (left) and illustration (right), is full of intricate details.

capitalist perspective, like if you're not making money from the art, then what *are* you doing? I'm getting people to celebrate the trail," he said.

He also chats with passers-by about the natural world. His subjects tend to be small, oft-overlooked creatures with complicated reputations, like grackles, which happen to be his favorite bird. Swap sees himself not only as an artistic ambassador, but as a voice for nature as well. He wants people—especially kids—to understand that all species are important, not just the big, famous, furry ones, and that there are countless creatures that often go unseen—such as pollinators or invertebrates—that are critical to healthy, functioning ecosystems. It's a theme woven throughout all his work.

"I love that I can get people on that wavelength with these prints or the books that I write. I just want to give a face to the species in nature that we tend to forget about," he said.

In addition to traditional printmakers and the Old Lyme artists, Swap's work is informed by Hudson River

School painters like Thomas Cole, who also hauled their paints, canvases, and easels deep into nature to work. But unlike Cole and other Transcendentalists who created idealized, artificial landscapes devoid of human activity, he works precisely at the intersection of the natural and built environments. You feel the struggle of a snapping turtle, for example, as it struggles to hurry across a road. For Swap these are more than simply aesthetic choices; they are essential questions about how humans categorize, define, and separate nature that demand our attention.

"It's not a very idyllic scene, but it's something that's necessary in today's life and can't be ignored. It's all about how we attribute this label to some animals to demote them in nature, like our own caste system," he said. "And really, it's helped me contextualize how I want to show these things in my art."

In a world saturated with digital creatives and the growing presence of generative AI, his work feels uniquely tangible, almost nostalgic for a bygone era when art took not only craft, but

also time. It's an approach, he says, that is resonating not only with artists, but art lovers as well.

"Especially in this digital age, people are adopting a slower mentality and pushing back against the rush and crunch of our society to get stuff done fast; to get it *now*. I think adopting that slower mentality is a benefit. It is a new way that you can market yourself to say: I take my time; I am a person; and I made this intentionally," he said. "Rather than like a big conglomerate, you're now like an individual person And I just find it so much more rewarding because people are like, 'I didn't know that this is a thing and they want a piece of it for themselves. I just find that fantastic.'"

Timothy Brown is editor of Connecticut Woodlands.

When it comes to endangered species, good news can be hard to come by. So, when a biologist uses the word “recovery,” he does not do so lightly, particularly when describing an historically abundant fish species that vanished from the Connecticut River decades ago but has recently shown signs of a comeback.

The Atlantic sturgeon (*Acipenser oxyrinchus*) is one of the largest and longest-lived anadromous fish in North America, with a fossil record dating back 160 to 200 million years. These giant fish were swimming around when *Tyrannosaurus rex* roamed the Earth, and their appearance has not changed in all that time. They are heavy-bodied, stretching 14 feet and weighing up to 800 pounds, with a long, pointy snout, a shark-like tail, and rows of hooked plates instead of scales. Beneath the snout are four dangling protrusions, or barbels, used to help detect food on the murky sea floor.

Anadromous fish are born in fresh water, migrate to the ocean, and return to fresh water as adults to spawn. Atlantic sturgeon, striped bass, Atlantic salmon, river herring (alewife and blueback herring), and American shad all are anadromous species found in the state. Of more than 20 sturgeon species found worldwide, two are Connecticut natives: shortnose and Atlantic.

For many people, the sturgeon’s biggest claim to fame is as a source of caviar. But for scientists, the fish is an essential part of both freshwater and estuarine ecosystems, and for that reason alone, very much worth protecting.

Hannes Baumann, a fisheries ecologist at the UConn’s Department of Marine Sciences, is working to save the Atlantic sturgeon, an iconic fish often called “a living fossil.”

“You have a species that evolved before the age of the dinosaurs and survived through unbelievable changes in the Earth’s crust, environment, and climate,” he says. “For humans to be the nail in their coffin would be unbelievably sad.”

By Laurie D. Morrissey
Photographs by Jake Snyder

Not Just a

Biologist Kelly Mosca holds a large Atlantic sturgeon before releasing it back into the Connecticut River.

Atlantic sturgeon once were bountiful along the Eastern seaboard from Labrador to Florida, spawning in the larger rivers along the coast. The Connecticut, Thames, and Housatonic all had spawning populations. Indigenous people harvested the fish for meat and eggs for thousands of years, and Europeans relied on them when they arrived on North American shores. ("More than could be devoured by dog or man," wrote Captain John Smith—and the two sturgeon species have been credited with saving the Jamestown Colony settlers from starvation.)

During the early 19th Century, the pursuit of caviar riches became known as the Black Gold Rush. There was even a use for their sturgeon bladders in manufacturing glass, waterproofing agents, adhesives, and lubricants. The result was a drastic decline in population. According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Agency, close to seven million pounds of sturgeon were caught in 1887 alone.

More recently, the population has suffered from dam building, habitat loss, and continued overfishing, including accidental by-catch. The harvest dropped to 20,000 pounds by 1905 and to 400 pounds by 1989. Both Atlantic and shortnose species are now protected. In 1998, the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission issued a coastwide moratorium on commercial fishing, and the only specimens legally caught today are taken for research and management purposes.

Since the Atlantic sturgeon was listed under the Endangered Species Act in 2012, the population has increased. The caveat, Baumann points out, is that the fish is late-maturing and does not spawn every year, so gauging the results will take time. Atlantic sturgeons are sexually mature at around age 12 and the females produce eggs only every two to six years. Their reproductive health may suffer from the effects of chemical pollutants such as PCBs, accumulated over the fish's long life.

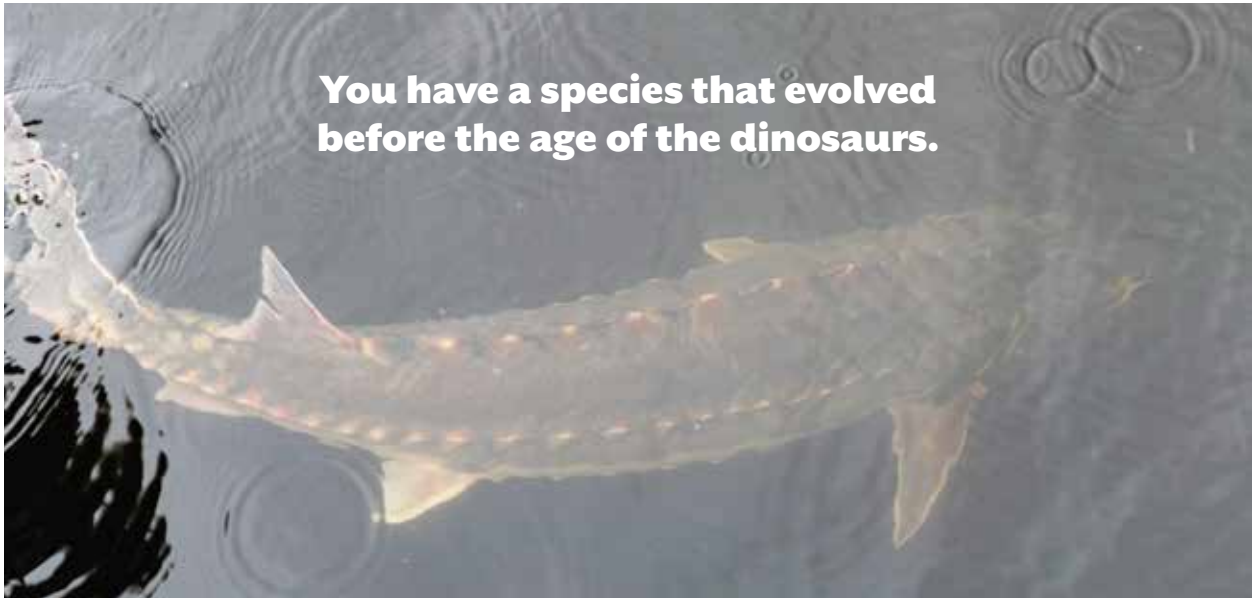
"Any efforts of protection now will take a long time to make the population more robust," Baumann says.

Biologists in Connecticut began monitoring short-nose sturgeon in the late 1980s, collecting fish with skiff trawls and gillnets and attaching visual tags to their dorsal fins. The occasional Atlantic sturgeon the researchers caught were believed to be visitors from the Hudson River that swam around Long Island, rather than fish that entered the Connecticut River to spawn.

In May of 2014, there was a banner event for sturgeon scientists. A team of DEEP researchers, including fisheries biologist Tom Savoy, was motoring slowly up the mouth of the Connecticut River when they pulled up a net containing an Atlantic sturgeon hatchling. It was a stunning discovery, indicating that the species could be rediscovering the river as a spawning ground.

Fish Story





**You have a species that evolved
before the age of the dinosaurs.**

In 2019, Baumann began a collaboration with Savoy and DEEP. They caught tiny Atlantic sturgeons in 2017, 2022, and 2025. Each fish they catch is weighed and measured, and tissue samples are taken from some specimens before being returned to the river. The researchers gather data on age, condition, and migration patterns. In some individuals, they surgically implant ultrasonic acoustic transmitters to track the fishes' movements. Ultimately, the findings may help inform plans that protect the sturgeon's habitat and rebuild their population, although probably not to historic levels.

Researchers are cautious about the prospect of recovery. “We’re not sure if Atlantic Sturgeon are recovering well enough to survive,” Savoy admits. “The 2014 catches were certainly exciting and unexpected, although we had been looking for young-of-the-year sturgeon for decades. Having the genetics tested and documenting that they were the result of spawning in the Connecticut River and not from having swum in from another river was even better. Locally, we have seen some signs of increased abundance. The presence of small, young fish is certainly encouraging.”

Baumann directs UConn’s Evolutionary Fish Ecology Lab, where he and his colleagues investigate coastal fishes with

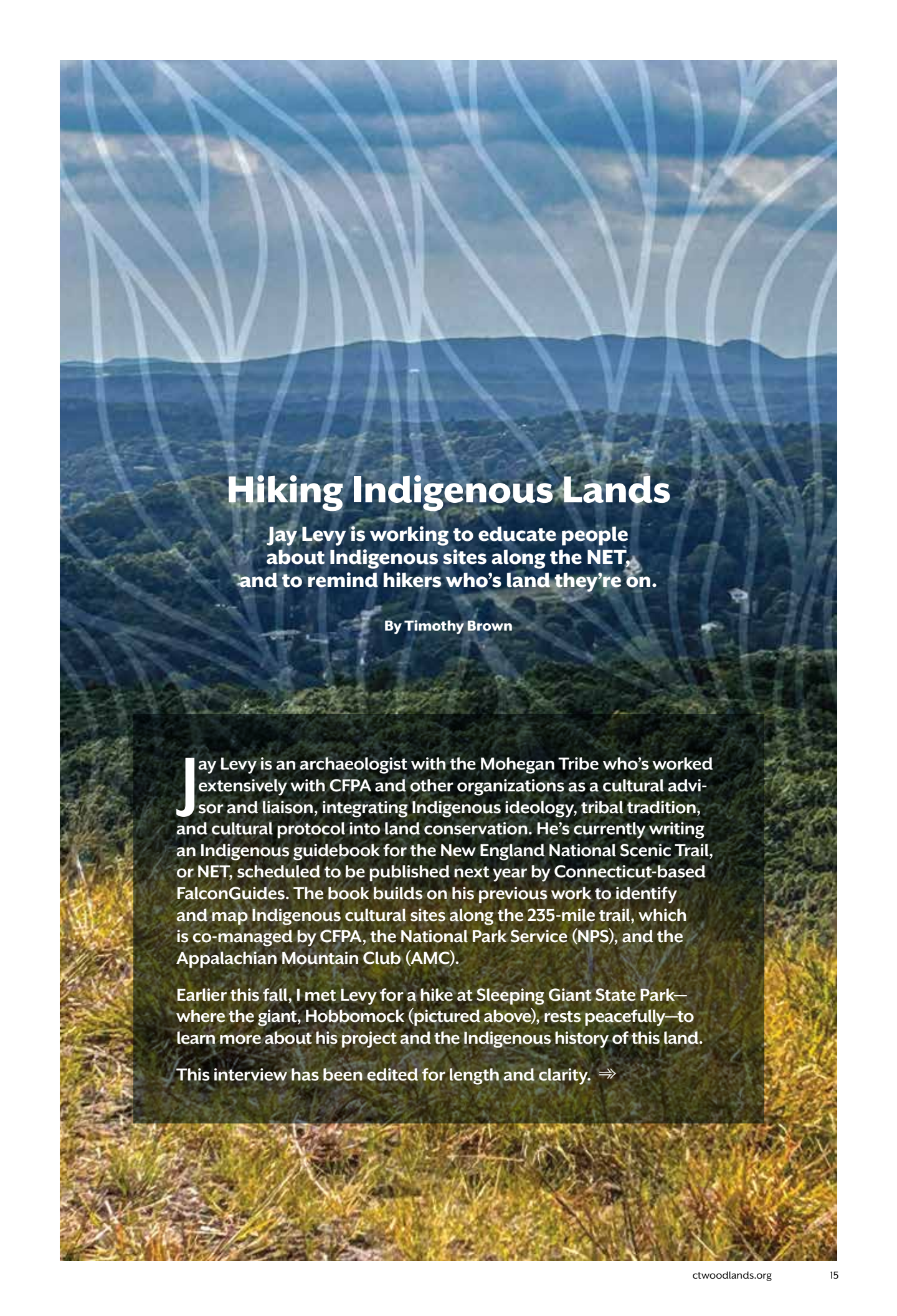
the goal of better understanding the ongoing changes in local fish communities and how they may be able to cope with ocean warming and other environmental factors. He’s cautiously optimistic.

“We found a handful of individuals that were born in the river. If they survive 12 years, hopefully they’ll return to their natal river to breed,” he says. “With such a low level of abundance, it’s very hard for an adult to find another. But it’s reasonable to assume it will happen in the next decade or two. We have yet to see a female with eggs, which would be a better and more definitive proof that they’re using the river as spawning grounds.”

Baumann believes that nature has an amazing capacity to restore itself, but it needs our help. If you spot an Atlantic sturgeon—whether it’s breaching, accidentally caught, or washed up on shore—contact DEEP. You can help give a new lease on life to a species that’s and just possibly keep a living fossil alive.

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.





Hiking Indigenous Lands

Jay Levy is working to educate people about Indigenous sites along the NET, and to remind hikers who's land they're on.

By Timothy Brown

Jay Levy is an archaeologist with the Mohegan Tribe who's worked extensively with CFPA and other organizations as a cultural advisor and liaison, integrating Indigenous ideology, tribal tradition, and cultural protocol into land conservation. He's currently writing an Indigenous guidebook for the New England National Scenic Trail, or NET, scheduled to be published next year by Connecticut-based FalconGuides. The book builds on his previous work to identify and map Indigenous cultural sites along the 235-mile trail, which is co-managed by CFPA, the National Park Service (NPS), and the Appalachian Mountain Club (AMC).

Earlier this fall, I met Levy for a hike at Sleeping Giant State Park—where the giant, Hobbomock (pictured above), rests peacefully—to learn more about his project and the Indigenous history of this land.

This interview has been edited for length and clarity. ⇒



This map shows traditional Indigenous territories overlapped along the NET (in green). “Territories were intertwined, braided,” says Levy (left).



CW: The NET doesn’t pass through Sleeping Giant. Why was it important for you to include Hobbomock in the book?

JL: The focus is on the Indigenous history of the NET and Hobbomock is just such a huge part of the Connecticut River Valley, and he keeps popping up where he’s left a mark on the NET. He’s got a pretty significant role in shaping the landscape—not just forming the hills and the valleys—but as a cultural hero to the people, and not just for Quinnipiac people. He taught us a lot—he was teaching people how to care for the Earth. We’ve lost a lot since colonization.

How did this book project begin?

I used to work for Appalachian Trail Conservancy as an Indigenous Partnership and Research Coordinator where I developed a territorial map of the Appalachian Trail. I was a CFPA Trail Manager for the Narragansett Trail at the time, and they heard about that work. They received a grant from NPS and asked me if I would do an (Indigenous) site survey of the NET. I did it, and (then) NPS and AMC contacted me to continue the project going into Massachusetts to the northern terminus, so I did that. I was kind of reestablishing those places, reestablishing those

traditional routes—up these mountains and down them, reestablishing the connection to the land, not just for Tribal folk but for the public. I loved that project, walking these areas, finding out who’s land I am on.

Most people I know would never consider the question of whose land you’re on.

It’s so natural for me. Not just in the woods—out there, too. When I’m going down to Dunkin’ Donuts to get a coffee, I wonder, *Whose land am I on?* Those were once important sites. Still are. A lot of the old Indian trails are now roads, and they lead to those places.

I don’t see a strong definitive line between nature and the concrete world. I see a decline in the woods, slowly turning into that concrete world; the lack of respect; the invasive species coming in to choke out the native plants. My eyes are here just as they are out in the concrete world.

How did you decide which Indigenous sites to include?

Talking and walking with elders, sitting with them, building up those relationships. Then going to those sites. I had to pick sites that were not culturally sensitive, ones that were fairly easy to hike to, and tell the story about the Indigenous continuance, presence, stewardship of those lands. There’s no Indian reservation along the NET, but it’s all ancestral territory.

Who is this guidebook for?

The book is for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous readers. I’m trying to record these stories for everybody. We all need to take care of the Earth. It just can’t be the Tribal kids; we need everyone on board for our species to survive. And for non-Indigenous

We can’t understand fully or respect each other without knowing all our histories.

people to say, “I read this in an Indigenous guide-book, and we need to protect this,” that’s good. But I could also use it as a tool for cultural education for tribal youth. When I bring them on hikes, I’ll give them the book and say, “If you want to go on another hike, call me up! Or go ask your grandparent about these places.”

Why is it so important to use original place names?

Early Puritans and colonists saw us gather at tallis slopes, or glacial erratics, or a waterfall. We’d gather there not just because it was a good fishing spot, but to share these teachings. And they would see us gather and would conveniently rename it Devil’s Garden, or Devil’s Hopyard, or Satan’s Kingdom to demonize the Native people and put them into a view of deep devilishness or evil. So, there are talks about renaming them to their original names, renaming and reclaiming these places. Erase that part of history, erase Hobbomock. They are teachers; they’re our Elders.

Historically Indigenous people didn’t own this land. Did they share it?

It definitely was shared; a lot of people don’t know that. And that’s the difficulty I had in creating Indigenous maps—you’re making these maps with lines. I started using dots, and that wasn’t working. Then I started using a fade-in-and-out. But (territories) were intertwined, braided. You had your village, and outside were the planting grounds, and outside the planting grounds were all the hunting grounds, and all those hunting grounds were shared. Today we still come together intertribally, socially, ceremonially.

I don’t see a strong definitive line between nature and the concrete world. I see a decline in the woods, slowly turning into that concrete world.

Why is reciprocity with the land so important?

I think there’s a universal understanding of taking care of the land because she takes care of us. So why would we harm her? Why would we continue to take from her without giving back? Even giving thanks is a way to give back. As Indigenous people we give back. When I go into the woods, I leave a little offering like tobacco, or a saying of thanks. It’s not good to be constantly taking, taking, taking.

When you talk about “the land,” are you talking about more than just what we’re walking on, like the plants and animals as well.

Animals are our kin. They’re our brother and sister; they’re that close to us. They’re not just an object or something to walk on, they are relatives. That rock and that plant and that tree have a relationship and we’re part of that as well. And a lot of us choose to harm—or don’t acknowledge—that relationship. We all could have that connection to the land. It just depends on what you want and what the purpose of your life is.

Is it difficult to navigate both Indigenous and Western worldviews?

We say we’ve got one foot in the canoe and one foot out. You’re always trying to balance it. If you have a strong upbringing in the culture, it’s easier, but even one moment with an Elder can change a child who’s not been brought up in the culture.

Historically, did Indigenous people do trail maintenance?

Not trail maintenance like we do today, but there were landmarks that guided you through the forest, (like) stone piles or cairns; some say that bent trees were also. A lot of times natural landmarks, like a large glacial erratic, indicated where you go down a ravine to find water, or something like that. A lot has been lost in terms of petroglyphs or maps carved into stone, but those were used to navigate. Tribes also actively managed the land—limiting hunting, burning to clear underbrush, clearing forest to create game habitats, and the keeping the forest healthy. Today (management) is still done but also includes dam removal and bringing the language back to the land.

Throughout our hike, I keep thinking about the word “relationship.” Obviously, there’s history and culture in your book, but you’re also helping to reestablish relationships.

Not just history. That’s important, but I’m trying to get beyond that, which is hard to put into a book. It all started going downhill with the Invasion. I keep calling it that because not only was it an invasion of people and different cultures, but also what they’re bringing with them, all the non-native species. And I see it in the plants. They’re being choked out, literally, like we were choked out. And I see them suffer, and I see they’re not producing as many berries.

These lands, we all share now. It’s all part of our history and we can’t understand fully or respect each other without knowing all our histories. That’s what I’m trying to do with this book—to bring out an Indigenous perspective of where we’re hiking.

Timothy Brown is the editor of Connecticut Woodlands.



Raising an Eco-Conscious Kid

Lessons from the Bramble

By Erica Cirino



“KEE-AAH, KEE-AAH, KEE-AAH!”

I retreat from the blackberry bramble to squint up at the treetops through beams of midsummer sun. There she is, a red-shouldered hawk, calling from a towering pine. I cast a glance at my 11-month-old peacefully asleep in his stroller, the dog sitting at attention by his side. The hawk is telling us we're too close to her nest. I push the stroller to another patch of prickly plants. The hawk hushes and the woods feel still again—save for the buzz of mosquitoes, the occasional squirrel, or songbird rustling nearby.





Harvesting blackberries has become my daily meditation after recently moving to an off-grid homestead in need of some TLC. In doing so, I aimed to significantly reduce my family's reliance on the harmful consumer-based and industrial systems that run much of our modern world. A confluence of factors, including my remote job, a partner who knows how to build and fix things, and previous off-grid living experiences helped make this possible. While not everyone may have the opportunity—or the desire—to live this way, we felt it was right for us and for our child, who we hope will learn to treasure the Earth and understand that he is a literal part of it. However, it's possible to raise an eco-conscious kid whether you're living in the country, a city, or somewhere in between. The key is, wherever you are, to help your child foster a caring and respectful relationship with the Earth.

It's no secret that kids (and adults) today are increasingly disconnected from the Earth and other living beings. A profusion of screens, endless cycles of consumerism, and social isolation fuel this trend. Some children have little or no access to safe outdoor spaces. According to the National Recreation and Parks Association, children today spend just four to seven minutes outdoors in unstructured play each day—compared to an average of seven and a half hours in front of screens. Today's children can easily identify 1,000 corporate logos, yet many struggle to name just 10 animals and plants living in their own neighborhoods. And research shows that children who do not spend much time in nature suffer physically with increased risk of adverse health conditions such as asthma and obesity, as well as mentally, with slower development of communication and social skills, compared to kids who frequently go outside.

As I bend around another impossible tangle of vines, I remember how I weighed these realities when I decided to become a parent. After professionally documenting the plastic pollution and climate crises and other human-made catastrophes for more than a decade, I've become hyper-conscious of humanity's challenged relationship

If those of us who do choose to have children can manage to share both our love for the Earth and an ethic of planetary stewardship with our kids, then hope for a better future still remains.

with the rest of nature, and indeed, with itself. Once you see the problems, it's hard to look away. There's plenty of data emphasizing the immense ecological costs of raising a child in hyper-consumptive nations like the U.S.: one study found that having one fewer child in the Global North slashes an individual's carbon dioxide emissions by 58.6 metric tons per year, compared to the 2.4 metric tons of CO₂ emissions saved annually by living without a vehicle. But statistics like this reveal a stark fact: It's not having kids that's the problem, it's how we live with our kids that taxes the planet. If those of us who do choose to have children can manage to share both our love for the Earth and an ethic of planetary stewardship with our kids, then hope for a better future still remains.

Suddenly, I hear a *scratch-scratch-scratch*. I turn toward the stroller and see my son stretching; he's waking up from his nap. We smile at each other, and I start picking closer to the edge of the bramble where he can see me clearly. He watches me fill the purple-stained pockets of my smock with huge, heavy berries that shine like onyx jewels. Sometimes the biggest, juiciest berries slip from my fingers and drop to the ground. These berries, I tell my son, we leave as gifts to the Earth; they will nourish insects and fungi, and turn into soil. And I remind him that we must leave some ripe blackberries to feed the bears, birds, and other creatures. We are forging a culture of care and gratitude for Earth and each other.

To raise an eco-conscious kid, I believe in spending time outside as a family, every single day. Each of us needs to feel grass, sand, soil, and water touch our skin; to place a hand on the bark of a tree, experience its solidness, its life. He may not understand fully now, but I will continue to teach our son to “be gentle with plants, as they are alive, like us” each time he tugs a fern frond from the ground. Our son is thrilled by touching smooth pebbles, crunching dried leaves in his fingers, and walking on soft grass; watching deer wander the orchard eating fallen apples, the hawk soar through the air. We encourage exploration and play, we are not afraid of dirt, and we don't stress about minor scrapes and bruises.

While picking, I pull back the stroller's mosquito net and hand my son a few of the smallest berries. He promptly squishes the berries in his hands and pops them in his mouth. As he chews, I describe how the berries will come

back to nourish us year after year if we care for these woods we call home. He smiles at me with purple-smeared lips. He is learning where food comes from, what it looks like, how it grows.

By now my pockets are bulging with blackberries. It's time to head back to the house to start dinner, some of which was grown in our garden, and the rest of which was bought at the grocery store. I acknowledge the reality of living in a modern consumer society where culture, advertising, and social pressures try to entice us to *Buy, Buy,*

Buy—often, the newest and best of everything. It can feel hypocritical to buy gear to spend time in nature when inevitably that gear has some kind of deleterious impact on people and the planet—from the polyester in your hiking pack to the PFAS in your rain gear.

However, you can set an example by resisting the pressure to buy more and instead buy better, that is, do your research and take only what you need, what will last, and what you can afford. Opting for pre-loved gear instead of buying new—or making do with what you already have—has the least impact on people and the planet. This kind of conscious consumption can help teach your child that life is not about the brands or quantities of material things you possess, but the quality of the time you spend. Between our now-daily berry picking, and our usual jogs and walks, I estimate that we’ve put more than 2,000 miles on my son’s all-terrain stroller since he was born—equivalent to more than 1,000 hours together outdoors.

In today’s fast-paced, hyper-consumptive, high-tech world, it can feel more challenging than ever to raise eco-conscious kids. For example, while we’ve done much to eliminate synthetic substances from my son’s life, not every item he touches is completely plastic-free. While limited screen time has been linked to positive outcomes for kids, technological literacy is also critical for today’s youth. As more of us become aware of the urgent environmental crises we face, the pressure to do more as parents has never been higher (as any parenting social media feed will reveal). As we find ways to navigate, we must resist comparisons: Focus on doing what you can right now, not what others seemingly cannot.

What’s more, it’s important to understand that individual choices alone will not wholly solve the systemic problems we face. However, embodying the values we want to see reflected around us is a necessary step forward. Fully divorcing from mainstream consumer products and systems is unrealistic. Some use of fossil fuels and plastics, as well as visiting big-box stores due to lower costs, are a reality for most people, including my family.

Crossing the yard to the house, our dog gallops happily ahead of the stroller. I feel fortunate to have found our home here, the place my son will grow up. Smiling, I see a few last berries along the trail. To reach them, I gently ease my arm around a spider web to avoid tearing it, a reminder that our Earth and everything on it is connected by a single thread and must be cared for so the connections life depends upon do not break.



I remind him that we must leave some ripe blackberries to feed the bears, birds, and other creatures. We are forging a culture of care and gratitude for Earth and each other.

*Erica Cirino is a writer and artist who explores the intersection of the human and more-than-human worlds. She serves as communications manager at the non-profit Plastic Pollution Coalition and is best known for her widely published photojournalistic works, including her award-winning book, *Thicker Than Water: The Quest for Solutions to the Plastic Crisis*.*



A Last Autumn

The leaves were turning and tumbling
along the street, they were blown
by an unknowing wind.

The leaves were crossing the road,
where there were no crosswalks.

The leaves, skirting leaf blowers,
avoided the tines of a rake. They were blown
by an unknowing wind.

The leaves were stripping the trees
to bare branches held up to the sky.

The leaves, they were attacking each other
as humans do. They were blown
by an unknowing wind,

these leaves of a last autumn,
when nothing comes back again.

James Finnegan has published poems in Ploughshares, Poetry Northwest, The Southern Review, The Virginia Quarterly Review, as well as in the anthologies: Good Poems: American Places; Laureates of Connecticut; Shadows of Unfinished Things; Waking Up to the Earth; and Of Hartford in Many Lights.

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Pathways

Connecticut is home to at least a half-dozen species of anadromous fish, including the American shad (*Alosa sapidissima*), our state fish, who spends most of its adult life in the ocean, but must return to the freshwater system from which it came to spawn. Historically, shad was an important food source for local Indigenous people who built stone weirs to catch them each spring. But the boney and oily fish was less popular with European colonists, who disparaged them as “Poor Person’s Salmon.” As Atlantic salmon stocks began to plummet in the mid-17th century, however, shad took on a greater role in early American cuisine. According to the Haddam Shad Museum, by 1760, shad fishing had become “an industry of much profit and importance.” Legend has it that it was shad that saved George Washington’s army from starvation at Valley Forge during the brutal winter of 1778.

Traditionally, the migrating fish were caught during the day by haul seining; fishermen used long, vertical nets to trap them (like other anadromous fish, migrating shad do not feed, making them difficult to catch). But by the mid-twentieth century, dams, pollution, and increased river traffic had greatly reduced their numbers. Today, state law limits shad fishing at night using drift nets.

Catching shad may be tricky, but with each fish containing up to 1,000 bones, filleting them is an artform. Haddam, the historical epicenter of Connecticut’s shad industry, once boasted nearly twenty fishing sites and an annual harvest of over 200,000. And each May from the 1920s through the 2000s, Spencer’s Shad Shack, a popular nearby

landmark, served locavores and shipped shad to hungry customers in New York City.

Although their numbers today are a fraction of what they used to be, like the Atlantic sturgeon, there are signs of hope. Shad can still be found in each of Connecticut’s four major river systems, including the mighty Connecticut, where runs have increased significantly over the past half century. And you can try shad—typically smoked or baked—along with its prized roe each spring at various fish markets, including Hale’s Shad in Rocky Hill, or at annual events such as the Rotary Club of Essex Shad Bake or the Shad Derby Festival in Windsor, which have both been held since the 1950s.

These photos of shad fishermen were taken near Haddam in the late 1930s. Courtesy of the Haddam Shad Museum.





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The background of the lower half of the page is a photograph of a forest. In the foreground, a tree trunk is covered in thick green moss. The background shows a dense forest of tall, thin trees with green foliage, slightly out of focus.A smaller version of the Connecticut Forest & Park Association logo is located in the upper right corner of the forest background image.

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J. Koteen Photography