

Stewards' Gratitude

By the Essex Land Trust Stewards

Land Trust stewards try to do most things ourselves. We blow leaves, chain saw trees, clear invasive plants, build contraptions, anything to save a buck. Still, there are occasions when it's best to call on professional help. The trick is to know when. And who. Sometimes a tree is leaning just a bit too much and electric wires are a little too close for a steward to take care of; or a parking lot has fallen into disrepair and needs regrading; or when raked leaves could fill three Olympic size swimming pools. These are the times when the Chief Steward, highly respected for his sagacity, makes a call to bring in outside help.

Which leads us to celebrate and to say thank you to the contractors, store owners and entrepreneurs who pitch in almost every week to help a steward out when he or she is faced with a problem that is just a bit too thorny or just plain overwhelming.



Essex Hardware

Almost every project begins with a trip to Essex Hardware. Hardware for the barn, fasteners for the bridge, paint, chain saw blades...or just advice...we generally go there first. Once we had 40 or so high school volunteers coming to help with a variety of projects at several of our properties. Experience had taught us that you could implore the kids to wear long pants and sturdy shoes to defend against little critters and sharp briars in the woods, but they tend to arrive dressed for a back yard cook out. At the very least, we thought, we could make sure everyone had gloves. Jay Tonks ordered a box load of heavy gloves for the kids and, once they saw the jobs we organized for

them, they rushed to the glove pile. We keep them in a special box and have used them with our volunteers for three years now.

Not a big deal in the sweep of history, but a good example of a neighborly hand from the folks at Essex Hardware.

Giroux Landscaping

Sometimes it's hard to figure out where to start. Morgana's Place is good example. Jim Denham is the steward of Morgana's Place – a 0.27-acre pocket park on the corner of North Main and New City streets. When it was donated to the Land Trust Jim had a vision of what he wanted but was stumped how to start...it was a roughly graded weed patch, a mini dust bowl. Jim called Giroux Landscaping. Paul Giroux's team graded the earth and seeded, he organized the installation of a sprinkler system and donated lawn mowing services once the grass came up. Jim Denham and Giroux transformed an abandoned property into a beautiful park, with a statue of lovely Morgana as the focal point.

Another transformation is taking place at The Millrace in Ivoryton. Acres of dense, impassable, invasive plants have been uprooted, mowed and cleared – beginning the process of restoring part of Ivoryton's history. Our stewards cleared the land (and the river) and made mountains out of the resulting debris. Giroux organized a caravan of

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dump trucks and a tracked bobcat with a huge grabber and cleared the piles in a single morning. He moved mountains that morning and he asked us to call him when we build more piles! Music to an old steward's ears....

Giroux Landscaping mows and winterizes most of the trust's landscaped properties—Falls River, Stanley Park and Cross Lots in particular. They have the equipment and manpower to do in a few hours, what would take our stewards days to accomplish. Paul's one of those professionals we can call, have a 2-minute conversation outlining a project and never have to talk about it again.

Stevens Excavating

The stewards of the Essex Land Trust are, for the most part, above petty jealousies. But we turn green with envy over machines and the bigger the better. Stevens Excavating has the coolest equipment – huge diggers, dump trucks, backhoes, tracked bobcats stuff all stewards thirst after but don't fit in a land trust budget. Instead, we know we can call up Jeff Stevens and ask him to help design and install a new parking lot for Windswept Ridge or clear a trail of boulders the size of Volkswagens. Meet Jeff once and our work is done here. Yep, Stevens Excavating is another “call once” operation. And, Jeff



has a Dad! But you don't call the Dad unless you have really difficult problems say, two 50-foot pedestrian bridges across the Falls River that wash away every year or so, then you call Jeff's Old Man. Show Gary Stevens the site, whine a little about all the rain we've had, and Gary finds a solution that lasts forever. (OK, this only happened once and we haven't installed the bridges yet but we'll have them in place before summer!)

Tree Tender

Al MacGregor, the co-steward for Cross Lots, likes to tell the story of a tall cherry tree growing over a fence into an adjacent commercial property. The tree stretched high into the air over a huge propane tank. Al consulted with the sagacious Chief Steward. The conversation went something like this:



Al: This is a big tree. What would happen if it fell on the propane tank?

Chief Steward. I don't know.

Al: How can we cut it down when it's leaning far across into someone else's property.

Chief Steward: You got me....

Al: This tree scares me to death.

Chief Steward: Me too.

Al: I think we should call somebody in to take care of this.

Chief Steward: Call Ed.

Two things are obvious from this conversation. One, Al is fearful the tree will harm the neighbor's property or, him(!) and, two, the Chief Steward, though a man of few words, is decisive and completely in control of the situation. Call Ed.

That is Ed Gardiner of Tree Tender. Ed arrived a day or

so later. He climbed the tree, attached a line from the tree to his truck, cut a small notch and pulled the tree to the Land Trust's side of the fence and cut it down. Fifteen minutes, maybe twenty. He made it look so easy.

We call Ed when we are confronted with a tree problem that scares us, when we fear for our safety. He has helped us so many times we are completely past being embarrassed or feeling inadequate. We just enjoy watching a pro safely resolve a difficult problem. We see so many situations – tree hanging over a neighbor's deck, trees growing onto wires, rotten trees, trees that have fallen onto each other. In each case Ed Gardiner, carefully, often with a great deal of creativity, finds a solution. And departs leaving the scene immaculate.

Innovative Mosquito Management Company

We have never employed this company to manage mosquitos but I'll bet they do a great job. We hired Kurt Ehrhardt's company to remove the invasive phragmites from Great Meadow, about 200 acres of historic land along the Connecticut River. Phragmites is a wildly invasive plant. Its root can grow six feet into the ground



and the stalk can reach over 20 feet tall! It is a bad plant. It crowds out native plants and, in some cases, can suck wet lands dry.

IMM is currently in year two of a three-year work plan to remove acres of non-native Phragmites

from the Great Meadow. They do it with the best technology available and a lot of care. It would take a thousand stewards a thousand years to do what Mosquito Management has done in the last two years. We measure our progress by the return of natural cat tails and wild rice in the fields surrounding the Essex Boat Club down on the end of the pendant bar.

The Land Trust has been addressing these invasive plants

for some time—we are currently in the third phase of the third major work effort in the last 10-15 years – and we have been told that today Great Meadow may have the largest field of native phragmites (yes, there is a natural, good variety of the plant) in Connecticut.

There is a much smaller batch of the nasty stuff in Ivoryton. Kurt is working on here as well. It is in the area of the Millrace that was the Ivoryton skating pond long ago IMM mowed it last year so we could see what the earth looked like underneath the dense stalks. Kurt will be treating the area this fall. (The stewards are wondering if the Land Trust would budget for a Marsh Master like the one in the photo. Probably not.)

Brandon Koslowy Building Company

It's a long story. The short version is the Land Trust needed to build a small barn to store our tractor and a few tools at Cross Lots. We told Brandon what we wanted, how little we wanted to spend and he sketched out a materials list, organized delivery, showed up with an array of tools. He spent two days helping a bunch of stewards with a bigger bunch of thumbs, build a barn. Once it was framed out he stopped by and gave lessons on flashing, roofing, installing windows, trimming and techniques for siding. If we ran into trouble he came after his work



day ended and with only a minor shaking of the head, got us on the right path. It is a very special privilege for our stewards to have a teacher and a master builder supporting the Land Trust team.

So, Thanks! To Jay Tonks and Bob Rayner and the whole gang at Essex Hardware, Paul Giroux, Jeff and Gary Stevens, Ed Gardiner, Kurt Ehrhart and Brandon Koslowy –

thank you. We at the Essex Land Trust are so glad we are your customer and you guys are such wonderful neighbors!

One more thing. While we are all wound up saying thank you, we are obliged to also recognize three guys that show up regularly at Cross Lots and help keep the place presentable – Cottie Barlow, Jeff Lovelace and Ron Cozzolino. When the fields need mowing these three pitch in and make a big job tolerable. Thank you guys!

Mill Pond Fishway

A fishway will be installed on the Centerbrook Architects campus this summer. The following is a news release from The Nature Conservancy that details this exciting project.



The fishway behind Centerbrook Architects will allow migratory fish to gradually ascend 18 feet to Mill Pond. (rendering courtesy of Centerbrook Architects)

Falls River to Benefit from Fishway Construction this Summer

CENTERBROOK, CT (March 12, 2019) – Migratory alewife and blueback herring will soon be able to reach additional high-quality habitat—including the 59-acre Mill Pond in Centerbrook—with The Nature Conservancy’s construction of two fishways on the Falls River this summer.

To be built at the Mill Pond and Dolan Pond dams, the fishways also will benefit migratory American eel and other resident fish and improving overall river health.

The building of a fishway around the 18-foot tall Mill Pond dam, which is slated to begin in late summer, is supported by a generous \$250,000 grant from the John T. and Jane A. Wiederhold Foundation. The Nature

Conservancy continues to raise money to round out support for the project.

The Dolan Pond dam fishway project—expected to kick off as early as July—is supported by the Audubon Connecticut In-Lieu Fee Program and Tom’s of Maine. Tom’s of Maine’s support for the Mill Pond dam project is part of a larger contribution of \$1.8 million to TNC to help restore and revitalize waterways in need.

There are more than 4,000 dams in Connecticut. Most of these dams were built during the Colonial and Industrial periods and no longer serve the purposes for which they were built. They do, however, block fish migration and impact river health.

Migratory fish like alewife and blueback herring need access to upstream freshwater habitat to reproduce and rebuild their own populations,” said Sally Harold, director of river restoration and fish passage for TNC in Connecticut. “These dams keep them from getting to that critical habitat.”

Without a robust population of fish like alewife, an entire host of creatures including turtles, otters, racoons, eagles and many marine fish lose a critical food source.

In cases where dams can't be taken down, fishways—sometimes called fish ladders—provide an alternate approach to opening access to habitat.

Fishways are made up of a series of ascending pools or a roughened chute that allows fish to get over or around a dam. Migrating fish swim upstream through the flowing

water that connects the pools, resting in the pools along the way.

At 18-feet tall, the Mill Pond dam—which is only a half-mile upstream from the Dolan Pond dam—is the larger of two projects.

For that project, The Nature Conservancy is working with Centerbrook Architects, the dam's owner, to develop opportunities for the public to view alewife on their journey upstream through a viewing window that will be incorporated into the fishway wall

The Mill Pond and Dolan Pond fishways will be TNC's second and third fishways on the Falls River. In 2014, TNC and partners built a fishway downriver at the Tiley-Pratt dam.



A ground level view of the proposed fishway at the Mill Pond dam
(rendering courtesy of Centerbrook Architects)

Lawn Pollution a Big Connecticut Concern

Editor's Note: With Spring on the way, many are looking forward to enjoying their lawns and gardens. The following article, although several years old, highlights the need to be careful in how each of us cares for our lawns. This article is reprinted with permission from the Hartford Courant.

By Gregory Hladky, Staff Reporter, Hartford Courant
September 14, 2016

Connecticut's largest agricultural crop by acreage is now something that humans don't eat, benefits very few other creatures, and contributes to the pollution of our air, land and water.

The crop in question is the grass growing on your lawn, on school fields, in state and local parks, around industrial developments, condos and government buildings. And we're growing more of it every year.

Lawn grass now covers more than 245,000 acres of Connecticut's landscape – surpassing the land in agricultural use by better than 13,700 acres, according to a University of Connecticut satellite technology survey.

"In relative terms, it's the fastest growing portion of our landscape," said Chester Arnold, co-founder and co-director of UConn's Center for Land Use Education and Research.

In 1985, lawn grasses covered about 197,634 acres in this state, UConn's survey records show. By 2010, Connecticut's grass coverage had increased to 254,551 acres – an increase of 56,917 acres.

The same quarter-century saw agricultural land in Connecticut drop by nearly 40,262 acres.

Connecticut homeowners, businesses, and governments spend millions of dollars every year on fertilizers, pesticides and herbicides that can get washed into rivers and streams and end up polluting ponds, lakes and Long Island Sound. Exhaust from gasoline-powered lawn mowers has become a significant source of air pollution, and large amounts of gas are spilled annually by people filling their mower tanks.

Scientists and environmental experts say there have been efforts in recent years to reduce lawn-related pollution, including industry changes in the types of fertilizers being sold and tougher air pollution standards for lawn mowers.

"We have never changed our industry as much as we have in the last three years," said David Christensen, president

of the Connecticut Groundskeepers Association and owner of Christensen Landscape in North Branford. He said his company and many other landscapers are increasingly encouraging homeowners to think about letting their lawns or portions of lawns grow into more sustainable, less polluting wildflower and hay fields.

But Roger Reynolds, legal director of the activist groups Connecticut Fund for the Environment and Save the Sound, said pollution tied to lawns and other runoff continues to be "a huge problem" in this state.

"It is the driver of water pollution today," Reynolds said of nitrogen and phosphorus runoff from septic systems, storm sewers and lawns. Although lawn-related pollution isn't the main source, "it's really a growing source," he said.

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Dead Fish in Long Island Sound

Nitrogen fertilizer washed off lawns gets into streams, rivers, lakes, ponds and eventually into Long Island Sound. Reynolds said it is the primary cause of "over-nutrication leading to algae blooms" that can foul waters and cause large areas of the Sound to become "dead zones" with too little oxygen for marine life to survive.

Jamie Vaudrey, an assistant research professor with UConn's Department of Marine Sciences, said the biggest



problems involve the approximately 110 small inlets and harbors lining Connecticut's Long Island Sound shoreline.

Lawns within 200 yards of these small inlets can have "a huge impact on water quality," according to Vaudrey, who studies the impact lawn pollution has on Long Island sound. The closer a lawn is to a stream, river or an inlet on the Sound, the more of the nitrogen fertilizer will seep under or across the ground and into the water.

Connecticut has spent billions of dollars in the past 20 years making improvements to sewage and stormwater drainage systems in an effort to cut down on the runoff

pollution reaching streams, rivers and the Sound. Vaudrey said that has produced a significant reduction in pollution, but that lawns near those inlets and harbors "can be a big part of that [pollution] load to local waters."

Vaudrey said her research indicates that lawns close to shoreline inlets and harbors contribute about 16 percent of the total amount of nitrogen flowing into those waters. If fertilizer on parks, recreational fields, golf courses and agricultural fields is included, the amount rises to about 27 percent of the total nitrogen pollution. Those figures don't include the nitrogen that flows into the Sound from major rivers like the Connecticut, Housatonic and Thames Rivers.

Coming Events – Mark Your Calendar!



April

May

June

July

September

Essex Land Trust Annual Meeting

Thursday, April 11, 5:30 pm
Essex Meadows, 30 Bokum Road

Edible Mushrooms for the Table

Tuesday, April 23, 7 pm
Essex Town Hall, 29 West Avenue

Geology Cruise with Ralph Lewis on River Quest

Saturday, May 4, 1-3 pm
Eagle Landing State Park, Haddam

Birding and Nature Walk

Saturday, May 18, 8:30 am
Essex Meadows, 30 Bokum Road

Canoe/Kayak Trip North Cove and Falls River

Saturday, June 22, 2 pm
Meet at the public Boat Launch, foot of Bushnell St. off of N. Main St.

Concert in the Town Park

Saturday June 22, 5:30 pm
Essex Main Street Park

Osage Trails Preserve and the Williams Complex Shipyard

Saturday, July 13, 3 pm
Osage Trail Preserve,
Foxboro Point Road

Join members of the Essex Land Trust and Essex Historical Society Follow the Falls team who will describe the history of the Osage Trails property and its connection with the Williams family complex and shipyard. Learn about the various industries which were located in Falls River Cove starting in the late 1600s culminating in a ship-building industry that survived until the 1840s.

Kayak Trip on the Lieutenant River

Saturday, September 14, 9:30 am
Ferry Road, Old Lyme

Join ELT expert kayakers at the Ferry Landing State Park off of Ferry Rd. in Old Lyme. Paddle briefly up the CT River to enter the Lieutenant River for a 2.5-hour trip. Enjoy passing the Florence Griswold Museum and seeing the beauty of this river up close. Intermediate skill level required. Inclement weather will postpone event to September 28.

Woods & Waters is published three times a year. **Jim Denham**, Publisher & Editor

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