



## Why Start an American Chestnut Orchard?

By Pam Peters and Leif Owens

In the case of the Essex Land Trust, it started with a typical walk through a land trust property two years ago when some stewards started noticing what they believed to be young American Chestnuts. Over the course of a few weeks, several more young trees and saplings were discovered in our preserves. Genetic analysis by The American Chestnut Foundation validated the findings as certified *Castanea dentata* (American Chestnut).

Why is this unexpected you may ask?

Prior to the blight in the early 1900s, the American Chestnut made up 25-40% of the forests in Connecticut. When the American Chestnut was a healthy member of our forests it had a key role providing abundant and highly nutritious food for wildlife year after year.

It's also perfect for returning degraded landscapes to diverse and healthy forests due to its fast growth and tolerance of rocky, acidic, and poor soils.

After finding the saplings on land trust property, a few stewards and Vice President Bob Nussbaum, started investigating what it might mean. Fast-forward through online searches and discussions with the Connecticut Chapter of The American Chestnut Foundation (TACF). We learned that through state chapters, TACF is establishing orchards of American Chestnut

hybrids. These orchards are referred to as "Germplasm Conservation Orchards" (GCO). The chestnut hybrids being planted are crosses of the American Chestnut with the more blight tolerant Asian Chestnut. Each generation produced has a greater percentage of the American Chestnut line in the mix. This is referred to as a 'germplasm.' It's a cross-pollination approach.



Photo Courtesy of the American Chestnut Foundation



### What's the goal?

It's about investing in our future by restoring a lost ecosystem, restoring biodiversity in our forests, and environmental protection. During April and May, the land trust board, stewards, and volunteers got busy. If you visit our Cross Lots property today, you'll find our American Chestnut Orchard in the field east of the crest of the hill.

### What was involved in starting our orchard?

Working with the Connecticut Chapter, the Cross Lots field was determined to be

an ideal location due to the good drainage, sunlight, and access to water. Of course, the planting area required some preparation. The preparation started with cutting the vines and brush growing in the field. Fortunately, we have some experts at running a brush hog. Next the property stewards

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made a closer cut to enable a team of 15 plus stewards and volunteers to clear all growth and weeds from 50 three-foot square patches. Each patch then received a square of weed cloth, protective tubing, nutrients, and fertilizer to give the chestnuts a fighting chance against the unwanted ground cover and the dreaded vole. After the 50 nuts were planted it was time to install fencing to deter any deer browse. So, after 100 – 120 hours of a great team effort including laughs, new friends, and a lot of sweat, we have the first stage of an orchard.

The orchard is currently structured with five plots, each containing 10 plantings. Each plot contains a different strain of hybrid.



### What to expect while reaching our goal

In year one, we've been told that a survival rate between 50% - 80% is typical. Any plantings that do not sprout this year will be replaced with one year old saplings next year, so they are on the same timeline with those that do survive. When our saplings reach year five or six, they should start blooming so they can be pollinated. This is the point where they will fruit and nut collection will start, producing the next generation of hybrids.

At some point, we do expect the saplings will show signs of blight. When this occurs, the main trunk may be removed to allow the root stock to continue to send up new sprouts so the process of pollination can continue. Our hope is that someday native wildlife is flourishing again with the abundance of food provided by chestnut trees, biodiversity is being established in forests, and that future generations can enjoy the beauty of the once majestic American Chestnut.

If you're interested in learning more about the American Chestnut tree and other orchards in Connecticut, please visit <https://acf.org> and select 'Find A Chapter.' If you're interested in volunteering and helping maintain the Cross Lots orchard, please contact Pam Peters at [peterspamelaj@yahoo.com](mailto:peterspamelaj@yahoo.com).

## Millrace Walk & Talk

**O**n June 4th, 2022, precisely 40 years after the great Ivoryton Flood of 1982, Essex Land Trust steward Scott McCoid led a group of over 70 interested individuals through the land trust's Millrace Preserve. Scott provided a vivid summary of the event caused by the dramatic failure of Bushy Hill Dam in Deep River, sending over 200 million gallons of water down the Falls River, that caused or contributed to the failure of six other dams and devastated Centerbrook and Ivoryton sections of Essex. As the group walked along the Millrace's trails, Scott's described the history of Ivoryton, the industry that gave the town's name, detailed descriptions of the many historic homes, and the community which has since become home to many. A photo gallery of the event can be seen on the land trust's website: <https://essexlandtrust.org/gallery-2/>



# The 1982 Ivoryton Flood, Part 2:

## The Morning After; Newspapers Tell Survivors' Tales

By Steve Knauth

*In the flood's immediate aftermath, newspaper reporters from the Old Saybrook Pictorial, the Hartford Courant, the New York Times, and others came to the scene to record the tales the shocked and dazed survivors told, even while the harrowing events of that fateful night were still fresh in their minds.*



"The Falls River [had become] an unimaginable monster; up-rooted trees, thrown about like so many match sticks, pieces of lumber from the Pratt-Read plant, resembling Pick-up-Sticks, huge gouges in the pavement ... in some cases, no pavement at all ... only mud, rocks, and gaping holes. But perhaps the most touching sight is the faces of the people," wrote Marge Ward in the Middletown Press.

"The last time I saw anything like this was in Germany, in 1945," one resident told her.

Chris Dewey was playing Monopoly with friends when the power went out and his Main Street house was shaken by a sudden pounding, recorded Bob Semak of the Courant. "It felt like someone banging on the side of the house with a sledgehammer," Dewey recalled. Looking outside, he saw a wall of water rushing down the street. "It looked like a tidal wave. It was a white wave covering everything. It just swelled up like a lake."

Jayne Perrin's father watched from the porch of his Ivory Street home as the water rose up his front steps. "He tried to close the door, and it wouldn't close," Perrin said. "The water started coming in all over the place." Her father's car ended up in a tree the next morning while her mother's lay upside down in the street.

Gary Wind had evacuated his parents from their Main Street home around 9 p.m. on Saturday. He returned on Sunday day to find the 30-year-old house pushed off its foundations and the out-buildings gone. "My father's [house] just destroyed. My parents both cried when I told them what happened. There was a shed out back that I can't find any pieces of. The only thing left of the garage is the roof. I just don't know what we're going to do."

Carleton and Leslie Barlow, looking out from their recently renovated carriage-house home on Saturday evening, found themselves almost surrounded by the rushing waters, already battering the structure's foundation as it roared down Main Street and the Falls River bed by Ivory Street. "We got out just minutes before. We're lucky to be alive," said Carleton.

Sharon and Henry Gordon spent a terrifying night in their car, cut off from their home. "We wanted to go to a motel but couldn't get through. So, we stayed in the car, parked high up in someone's driveway," said Sharon, Henry adding, "We'll figure out what to do when the shock wears off."

Cliff Ward, an Essex volunteer firefighter came upon a 17-year-old boy caught in a tree, surrounded by rushing water clogged with debris. Using a 10-foot boat to effect a rescue, Ward approached the hysterical youth, only to have the small craft capsize. Fortunately, Ward was able to save both himself and the boy.



The scene at Pratt, Read and Co. was one of complete devastation; the heart of Ivoryton had been torn out, leaving what one person described as a "sea of rubble strewn with parts of fences, pieces of metal and other litter." A few people roamed about in the debris, looking for golf equipment.

John Doane, a 35-year employee, came with fellow work-

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organ at church on Sunday morning. “She wanted a boat to come and pick her up.”

The Essex Town Hall, with Town Clerk Betty Gaudenzi and Secretary Ginger Conwell on hand, was just as busy. “People are calling about aid, about what roads are open, about water, about how to get to Ivoryton,” Conwell told Claudia Van Ness in the *Courant*. “Some are calls from out-of-town, trying to find out how friends and relatives are.”

On Monday, despite only limited access to downtown Ivoryton, Essex First Selectman Richard Riggio went on the road, making a first-hand inspection and setting up a command station at the Ivoryton baseball field, to assess the situation. “It’s impossible to give a dollar figure on the damages, I really can’t talk numbers that large,” Riggio said to the *Pictorial*. “It’s going to be millions of dollars.”

ers to see if they could help dig out the ground floor. “The first minute I came to look at the place, it caused me to cry. It’s like a family has gone.”

Essex Constable Ronald Krajewski, an Ivoryton resident, standing amidst the destruction on Sunday afternoon summed up the prevailing feeling. “There’s no resemblance to the place I knew before. It’s just a mud hole now,” he said.

### Dealing with Disaster

Beginning early on Saturday evening, the Valley Shore Emergency Communications Center, set up at the State Police barracks in Westbrook, started taking calls at a rapid clip, wrote Lisa Westerberg in the *Pictorial*. Dispatcher Carol Nash and five others, the latter called in to handle the emergency, received more than 2,000 calls in all that night.

It was critical work. “We had to keep the police constantly up-dated on which roads and bridges were out,” Nash said. Calls involved medical emergencies, automobile accidents and people asking which roads were still open.

In one instance, there was a call from an Essex couple who were trapped in their house with water up to the second story. Rescue units simply couldn’t reach them, and it wasn’t until morning that they were finally rescued, said Nash. “Fortunately, they were okay.”

On a lighter note, Nash recalled one woman who called because she was scheduled to play the

And it was a grim picture. Water mains had been destroyed; there was no running water. Power and phone lines were down, cutting electricity and communications. Roads and bridges were washed out, hindering access for emergency crews and residents alike. And, with some residents having fled their homes, more than 100 evacuees needed a temporary place to stay.

In the end, a host of state and local organizations, including the National Guard, Essex’s police and volunteer fire departments and combined their resources in a successful recovery effort.

Their inspiring stories of hard work and co-operation are coming up in Part Three: Putting Ivoryton Back Together.



# Volunteer Spotlight: Bob Nussbaum, Ageless Wonder

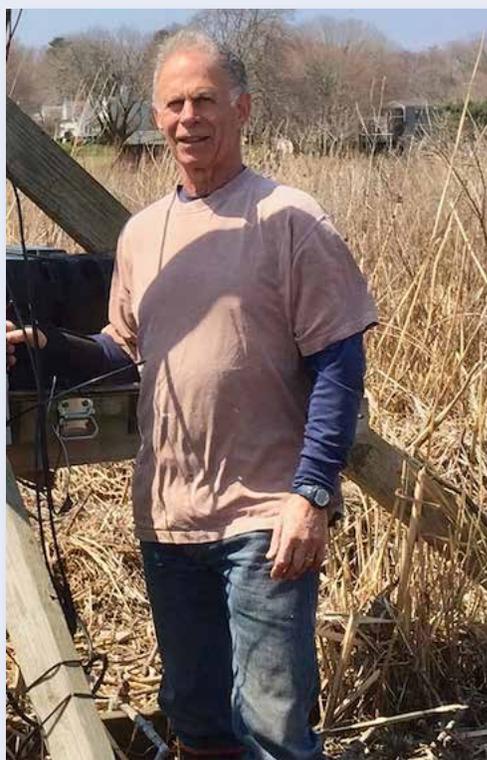
In this issue, we highlight the long term, remarkable work done by Bob Nussbaum over the last 16+ years for the Essex Land Trust. During this time, no other individual has had more impact on the strategic direction, operational efficiency, financial stability, and growth of the land trust. Bob's formal roles have been President, Vice President, Development Chair, Membership Co-Lead, Database Manager, Steward at Large, and key member of many committees – Executive, Finance, Land Acquisition, Stewardship Steering and our new Social Media Committee.

Informally, Bob's influence extends much further – our liaison with Town Hall, the Land Trust Alliance, other land trusts, mentor, the original Millrace bridge builder, visionary, osprey platform designer/ builder and webcam guru. Bob has been a key player in our American Chestnut journey – from initiating

early conversations with the American Chestnut Foundation through clearing our Cross Lots orchard and planting the chestnuts. Bob's dedication includes his future commitment to the land trust as a charter member of the land trust's legacy program, The Falls River Society.

It is fair to say that if we have done it in the last decade and a half, you can be sure that Bob's fingerprints are all over it. And Bob has also been the voice of reason when we have floated ideas that are beyond our budget or capabilities. In general, Bob is always our "go to" person when we do not know where to turn for answers or advice. And for that and everything else Bob has done for the land trust we are eternally grateful. There is just one question – for a man who has done so much for so long - why hasn't he aged?

## Way back when ..... and now!



# Essex Land Trust 53rd Annual Meeting

After a two-year hiatus due to the Covid-19 pandemic, our 53rd Annual Meeting took place on May 19 at the excellent Essex Meadows facilities and its Hamilton Hall. Approximately 100 guests attended both the reception and business meeting. The business meeting approved last year's meeting minutes and a cohort of 11 Board members. A detailed Annual Report, which includes a list of all members on record for 2021, has been mailed out to all members and can also be accessed on our website (<https://essexlandtrust.org/annual-report-for-2021/>)

Despite experiencing a second year of the Covid-19 pandemic, the land trust continued to pursue its mission involving the community in numerous events and activities. Outdoor experiences provided the ideal tonic to weather the restrictions imposed by health regulations. Caring for our preserves continued to be a major focus area and our finances remained solid due to the strong, ongoing financial support from our members and sponsors. We thank all who continue to contribute to the land trust.

At the conclusion of the meeting, the Board of Directors met to elect a new slate of officers, pictured below, from left to right: Deb Carreau, Treasurer, Jeff Croyle, President, Carrie Daly, Secretary, Bob Nussbaum, Vice President.



For those unable to attend the meeting, following is a selection of pictures from the occasion. All photos courtesy of Leslie Barlow.





# Coming Events – Mark Your Calendar!



## August 13, 11AM

### Kayak/Canoe Essex's North Cove and Fall Cove

Launch at Bushnell Street launch landing at foot of Bushnell Street (best access off North Main Street), Essex. Explore Essex's North Cove and Falls River Cove with avid kayaker and Essex Land Trust President, Jeff Croyle. Enjoy expansive views of Essex's Great Meadow, largely preserved by the Essex Land Trust, and learn about the industry, including shipbuilding, located in Falls River Cove during the 18th and 19th centuries. Plan to arrive early to sign a waiver and launch your kayak/canoe for a timely departure. A safety boat will accompany.

## September 15, 5:30PM

### Fern Ledge Hike followed by Happy Hour at Surfridge Brewery

Meet at the parking area alongside the Middlesex Hospital Occupational Medicine facility, off Route 153, Westbrook Road. This 20-acre preserve sits astride the Essex-Westbrook town line and, after the recent purchase of 3 acres, now connects to Farm Hill Estates, 4-acre plot in Ivoryton and Westbrook deeded to the land trust when a housing

development was established along Carol Drive.

With its steep terrain and high ledge overlooking a working farmer's field, Fern Ledge has a unique place among Essex preserves. Trails wind through woodlands and among old stone walls, offering glimpses of Birch Millpond below. The planned hike will be followed by a drive to Surfridge Brewery for socializing (located at the former Witchhazel factory, next to the Essex Steam Train).

## September 24

### Connecticut Conservancy's 26th Annual Source to Sea Cleanup. Save the Date

The Essex Land Trust is proud to be a part of the Connecticut River Conservancy's Annual Source to Sea Cleanup. The event involves hundreds of volunteers in small groups across all four Connecticut River states. Groups will cover nearly the entire length of the Connecticut River from Stratford, NH all the way to Old Saybrook, CT and included many tributaries along the way. The land trust will be announcing more details including locations closer to the date.

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