

CONSERVATION COMMISSION

NEWSLETTER

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WHY ARE NATIVE PLANTS IMPORTANT?



Native plants are, in a word, local. They are plants that have been growing in a particular habitat and region, typically for thousands of years or longer.

In Massachusetts, we consider all the plants that grew here prior to European colonization to be native. They evolved slowly over time with relatively little interference from humans, although they were an important part of Native American life. These were the only plants growing here before settlers began introducing non-native plants from other continents, expanding agricultural practices, and manipulating the genetics of plants through cross-breeding and now, bio-engineering.

Native plants are important as they provide the foundation for healthy ecosystems. The fruits

and berries of native plants are critical to bird life, and provide approximately 40% of the avian diet as a whole. What might surprise you about native plants is that they are especially important because of the insects they host. On the whole, insects and other arthropods provide about 60% of the avian diet.

So there we have it. Plants provide the foundation for life by capturing the energy of the sun and converting it into biomass for the rest of us to eat, and native plants promote the biodiversity necessary for balanced ecosystems. If we want a sustainable future, it is time to pay attention to the importance of growing natives. Further information and a list of native plants can be found on our website.

ALL ABOUT THE VINTAGE APPLE ORCHARD RESTORATION

During the recent winter storms, many of the vintage apple orchard trees lost limbs or were damaged. The vintage apple orchard has been at Heard Farm for decades.

Currently, restoration includes pruning and fertilizing the existing apple trees and planting new heirloom variety apple trees. The new apple trees have recently been installed.

The old apple orchard is located at Heard Farm and can be accessed through the trail left of the parking lot and walking across the field.

EAGLE SCOUT PROJECT: BOARD WALK AT HEARD FARM

This year Eagle Scout Collin Hess, worked with the Conservation Department to create a board walk at Heard Farm. Creation of the board walk is useful during early spring when the trail becomes very wet.

The new boardwalk has already received a lot of use and can be found to the right of the parking lot, following the trail along the hedgerow between the two fields.

We would like to thank Colin for his efforts. Eagle scouts are encouraged to reach out to the Conservation Department for further information on creating a board walk, kiosk, or other projects.



THE NEWLY PAVED RAIL TRAIL

The base layer of pavement has been installed and the top layer is anticipated to be installed within the next two weeks (remember: stay clear of fresh pavement).

Construction crews are still on site working on other elements of the rail trail, so it remains an active construction site; however, there is evidence of frequent trail use. In advance of the rail trail officially opening to the public we wish to share the rules of use of this new recreational path.

The rail trail is owned by Mass DOT and will be maintained by the state's Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR). It is not a Wayland-owned trail. With that, trail users must heed the following: all dogs **MUST** be leashed when on the rail trail, dog owners **MUST** clean up after their dogs and take the waste bag home to dispose of properly, and this is a multi-use trail. with bicyclists, joggers, walkers and horseback riders, please **SHARE** the trail.

Please stay off the shoulders until they are stabilized with mature grass. The pavement gets very hot so please don't walk your pets on the new asphalt on warm, sunny days.

SPOTLIGHT: POD MEADOW CONSERVATION AREA

Comprised of 32 acres, Pod Meadow provides a walk through Eastern White Pine on the South end of the property transitioning to mixed old growth forest throughout the rest of the property.

Pod Meadow can be found off Old Connecticut Path, where the parking lot is marked by a Conservation sign. The parking lot is located between 418 and 426 Old Connecticut Path. Town of Framingham abuts the western border.

The base of the property surrounding the 3 small ponds is a fairly easy .2 miles walk. However, the rest of the trail systems bring you to the bottom of the property and is a more strenuous walk consisting of .3 miles of trails. The trail distances vary depending on which side you access from the parking lot.

Northern Rough-winged Swallows gather on the ponds and there is a large number of active beavers located on the property; primarily seen during dawn and dusk.

The Hultman Aqueduct transects through the property.

PROBLEMS WITH PET WASTE ON CONSERVATION LAND

On Conservation land visitors are required to carry out any trash they generate. Many pet owners have failed to follow those rules, as bags of dog waste are left behind. While any type of litter can harm the natural habitat, dog poop is particularly harmful because it contains bacteria that seeps into local waterways. Dog waste contributes about 20 percent of all pollutants to local streams. Contaminated water can also flow through storm drains and into local lakes and ponds.

The problem is particularly worrisome on conservation land because the properties are intended to be a haven for wildlife.

There are many health and environmental issues associated with dog waste. Nitrogen from dog waste can cause significant changes to soil composition, killing native plants and encouraging noxious weed growth.

Dogs have a wide variety of intestinal bacteria that harbor parasites. Dogs also ingest their food, medications and vaccinations that are harmful to the environment. Roundworm is one of the most common parasites and can remain in soils for years. For more information, please contact the Division of Natural Resources at 978.318.3285.

