Thanks

President's Report

The Nature Trail has a brand-new boardwalk thanks to Garrett Murray, who completed his Eagle Scout project, along with fellow scouts and some very competent adults. This new boardwalk is located just east of the large vernal pond with the illustrated sign and replaces the oldest and most decrepit one on the trail. Garrett and his crew began work just before 9AM on Saturday, April 4th and were finished just after 3PM. Although the ground was quite muddy, at least the rain mostly held off. The design for the new boardwalk was approved by the CRMC and the town administration and the cost was just over $600-which is important to know because we are facing replacement of most of the rest of the boardwalks in the upcoming years. They were installed in 2012 and even though they were constructed with pressure-treated wood, our very wet environment has taken its toll with many boards beginning to rot becoming potential safety hazards for our walkers. We will begin to target the rest of the boardwalks for replacement based on their condition and whether we have sufficient financial and manpower resources during the next few years. This project made sense from both aspects as more than 10 adults and boys made up the work crew and Garrett and his parents raised all the funds needed for the work. In fact, they raised more funds than were needed and the extra funds were donated to the Friends of Canonchet Farm!



The boys on the boardwalk, Garrett on the left

During the past fall, winter and spring, our Saturday volunteer crew continued their sterling efforts in eliminating invasive shrubs and vines along the trail in multiple places. In October, they began by cutting a new loop trail from the goat-scaped area in the upper meadow, west through an existing cut in the stone wall back to the main nature trail. Next up was clearing both sides of the trail heading east from the new loop, clearing two different 60-foot sections that had again become overgrown since they were first cleared seven and eight years ago. One of the main reasons that Canonchet Farm has such a healthy population of invasive plants is that the soil here is incredibly rich and fertile, a legacy of over 300 years of sheep and cattle grazing. When we dig a hole for new trees that have been planted in prime spots along the trail, we find that after we penetrate the first 6 inches of intertwined roots, we hit soft, dark, rich earth with almost no rocks. And we know where the rocks are: in the multiple stone walls that bisect the property!

The newly planted 8-foot-tall saplings have been re-populating ~~in~~ invasives-cleared areas along the eastern stretch of the trail. They were donated by the Rhode Island Tree Council's tree plantation in Johnston and they are all northeastern US natives like Swamp Red Maple, Hophornbeam, River Birch and White Oak. We have refined our technique and added protective measures to keep the deer from destroying the saplings, by chewing or by rubbing themselves against the trees so hard that they break them. Now when we plant, we add a sturdy stake and a six-foot plastic mesh cage around each sapling. These measures in the more recent plantings have given us a high success rate with the trees thriving in their new spots along the trail. We utilize strong plant science when selecting the locations where we plant. All of the areas where new trees have been planted are places where our volunteers have recently cleared impenetrable jungles of fifteen-foot high privet, multiflora rose and Morrow honeysuckle shrubs that had choked out the native plants and prevented any tree seedlings from sprouting. We planted the new trees relatively close together mimicking the natural woodlands surrounding them. Ultimately as the new trees to grow into a thick canopy in the next few decades, the invasive sun-loving shrubs will have difficulty returning. The next time you walk the trail, notice that areas where the tree canopy is thick, the invasives are few.



On Saturday, March 30, our volunteers, in cooperation with the Narragansett Elementary School PTO, worked to clear invasive knotweed, privet, multiflora rose and bittersweet plants that had been threatening to obscure this extremely child-friendly loop trail behind the school and adjacent to Canonchet Farm. Fifteen volunteers worked for three and a half hours clearing up to five feet on either side of the trail. As usual, the worst infestation and the hardest to clear was Japanese knotweed. This plant, a relative of bamboo, grows 8-10 feet each season and then dies to the ground each Fall. Unfortunately, the huge dead stalk load piles up each succeeding year and as the spring new growth occurs, the weight of old and new plant debris brings the whole mess down over the top of the trail. The volunteers cut and carried away the old stalks but no attempt was made to dig out the pernicious roots of the plant, so the work will have to be repeated each year to keep the trail open. Nonetheless, it was a great day on the trail weather-wise and the volunteers accomplished a lot. This loop trail has a lot of interesting features and can be accessed across the bike path from the back of the school or from the Seaview Railway embankment that forms the border between the Elementary loop and Canonchet Farm. Check it out!



Looking west up the Elementary Trail

This past winter, three northeasters brought such high tides that the ocean crested over the sea wall along the southern section of Narragansett Beach and under the cabanas near the north clubhouse and cascaded across RT 1A and into Lake Canonchet and Littleneck Pond. Most of the debris load, comprising plant material, broken snow fence, asphalt chunks and plastic of various shapes and sizes from the surf was stopped by the lakeside vegetation but was piled high. We sought and were awarded a $750 Litter-free Rhode Island grant from the RI DEM, one of 80 organizations in RI that would mount a cleanup effort to celebrate Earth Day in 2024. On Sunday, April 21st seventeen volunteers came out to clean up the lakesides and along the road. It was a tremendous three-hour effort by the volunteers ~~for~~ accomplishing 90% of the work they set out to do. Multiple garbage bags of litter and piles of organic material were set in place for the Narragansett Parks and Recreation Department to haul away and the lakeside vegetation was again revealed!






Last Spring many volunteers cut back and dug up invasive shrubs and vines in a fifty-foot section of the Littleneck Pond shoreline, opening up a beautiful view of the lake for the first time in years. A long-time dream of The Friends of Canonchet Farm's treasurer and founding member, Richard Vangermeersch was to install a 'contemplation bench' somewhere along this shoreline and now thanks to our volunteers and Richard's generosity, that dream will become a reality. And it will one of a pair as another longtime member also generously donated funds for a memorial bench for a beloved family member. The benches have arrived and we hope to see them installed before summer by the Narragansett Parks and Recreation staff.

Updates:

Goatscaping Phase 2

The goat-scaped area in the upper meadow is turning green again as the goats ate all of last year's leaves and vines but did no damage to the shrubs and roots remaining. This is about to change however, as we have employed a contractor to grub out those woody remainders and clear the field for tilling in preparation for the installation of the tribal Three Sisters garden and adjacent pollinator meadow. We have secured grant money for this vital second phase of the planned transformation of this tangled invasive jungle to a productive and beautiful garden space. Once the ground is prepared and free of stumps, roots and shrubs, the next phase will be to build a garden deer and groundhog fence

around the 50 by 50 foot garden space and arrange an irrigation system utilizing the historic spring that was found on the property a few years ago.

Linear Park

The town of Narragansett has again submitted a grant request to fund the first phase of the linear park vision, including a picnic pavilion and a new fishing pier with associated landscaping. A decision on this is not expected until this summer.

Invasives Remediation

The phragmites reeds that infested both Lake Canonchet and Littleneck Pond have been treated professionally in 2022 and 2023 with great success to the point that we are seeing native plants like cattails and mallows grow up in the spaces formerly occupied by the phragmites. We will monitor the ponds for regrowth this summer to determine whether further treatment is necessary. The large infestation of knotweed along the southern edge of Lake Canonchet was under control last summer and this winter due both to the efforts of our volunteers and the town of Narragansett public works department which mowed the area several times to keep the plant from regrowing. Hopefully this mitigation effort will continue this summer. We have also contracted with the firm that handled the phragmites infestation to return this August to treat three areas on the farm where knotweed is spreading: at the community center and beach entrances and an area behind the Sprague stable ruin across from the South County Museum.

Educational Walks and Talks-Spring 2024

Our RI amphibians walk with naturalist Bruce Fellman was unfortunately impacted by this spring's epic rainfalls that made the western reach of the trail a morass of mud and water. The walk was postponed once but the rescheduled date was cold and damp and turnout was low. Our second scheduled lecture and walk in April with past South County Museum Director, Jim Crothers was well attended but again due to inclement weather, the walk portion was cancelled.



Jim Crothers and audience

We still have a pair of educational walks scheduled for May that are detailed below. We will also send out a notice a couple weeks before with the tickets link.

Saturday, May 18, 10:00 am "Avian Life at Canonchet Farm". The Audubon Society of Rhode Island comes to Canonchet Farm! Meet us inside the South County Museum's Metz Building for a brief introductory talk, followed by a birding hike on our trails. Lauren Parmelee, Audubon's Senior Director of Education, will share her vast knowledge of local birds and tips for learning how to identify them. Bring binoculars if you have them, or borrow a pair from Audubon. This guided walk is sponsored by Friends of Canonchet Farm and is free and open to the public.

Saturday, May 25, 10:00 "Native American Heritage and Sustainability in Canonchet". We are delighted to host Silvermoon LaRose, Assistant Director of the Tomaquag Museum. For thousands of years, the Narragansett Tribe hunted, fished, gathered and farmed this area. She will share history, culture and traditional ecological knowledge. Her particular focus on this walk will be the ways Narragansetts revered and still practice sustainable use of the land. Silvermoon will meet us and begin our walk at the South County Museum parking lot. This guided walk is sponsored by Friends of Canonchet Farm and is free and open to the public.

Saturday, May 11 The Friends of Canonchet Farm will honor past President Kathie Kelleher with a Memoriam Celebration at the South County Museum. At 1:30 there will be a guided walk along the Nature Trail that Kathie loved so much and was instrumental in its' rehabilitation over the last seven years. At 3:00 there will be a short program followed by refreshments. All members are invited to come and share their memories of Kathie.

A Final Word:

On behalf of the entire FOCF Board and our members, I want to thank everyone who donated to support our efforts in the past to restore and enhance Canonchet Farm lakes, trail and woodlands. We cannot do our work without you and we are very grateful. We had a successful 2023 Annual Appeal with well over 100 generous individual donations recorded. We welcome donations at any time, so if you'd like to support your local environmental organization you can do so via PayPal at our website: https://canonchet.org/, or by ~~old fashioned snail~~ mail to Friends of Canonchet Farm, P.O. Box 418, Narragansett, RI 02882