



Friends of the OSWEGATCHIE HILLS NATURE PRESERVE

Newsletter – Fall 2019



A talented local artist, Barbara Martin, who studied various media in Boston before moving to East Lyme 14 years ago, has shared her new passion of mushroom carving with us. This ancient technique can be traced back to the cave days, when carved mushrooms were traded as currency.



The mushrooms are called “Artist Conk” (*Ganoderma applanatum*), and in the fall they can be found in the Hills on the bark of fallen sugar maples and birch trees.

This perennial mushroom is a bracket fungus and looks like a shelf on the side of a tree. Barbara advises to carefully harvest and always leave a little on the tree, so it will grow back next year. The mushroom is white underneath and very moist, so must be handled carefully since it can be easily marked or bruised by touching it with a fingertip.



Barbara Martin from East Lyme

Carving can be done by sketching with a toothpick and then scraping off the white until it turns black. Once carved, they dry in a few days and can be painted with acrylics and will last for years.



Barbara started carving three years ago for family and friends. Her collection includes bluebirds, cardinals and woodpeckers as well as many flowers and landscapes.



Additional photos of Barbara’s beautiful work can be seen on www.oswhills.org

Report a Trail Condition

The Stewardship team does a fantastic job of keeping the trails in beautiful shape; however, there are times when trees and branches fall, or signage is missing, and you may see the issue before we do.

We have added a form to the oswhills.org site to make it easy to report trail conditions or concerns. If you see any problem, please let us know, so you can help us keep the trails safe. To report a concern, go to <http://www.oswhills.org/trail-condition-info.html>.

To join our amazing volunteer team, send an email to volunteers@oswhills.org



The Human Element

Bruce Dasinger, a FOHNP member, recommended a powerful documentary called ‘The Human Element’ to the East Lyme Library. His recommendation facilitated a screening and panel discussion led by UCONN’s Dr. Jim O’Donnell, Professor of Marine Sciences, and Katie Lund, Director of Engagement at the CT Institute for Resilience and Climate Adaptation (CIRCA).

The film by Matt Testa and James Balog highlights Americans who are on the frontlines of climate change and its impact. Balog tells the story of climate change through the basic elements of Water, Fire, Air and Earth, plus the fifth – human element: *“We are a force of nature. As we change the elements, the elements change us.”* It is available to rent on YouTube, Amazon Prime and other sources.

Save Oswegatchie Hills Coalition Update



Our coalition-building efforts to raise public awareness and support for protecting the remaining undeveloped Oswegatchie Hills continue to add followers, both locally and across the region.

CT Sierra Club, Potapaug Audubon Society and Denison Pequotsepos Nature Center have joined the over 25 organizations already signed on to our cause since we launched the Coalition in early 2015. Local businesses and associations continue to help us, too. Please stop by Café Sol to thank co-owners Tabitha and Brian and the friendly staff for signing up over 60 supporters in September and October. Look for our fact sheets, sign-up clipboard and FOHNP membership brochures on the front counter!

We also have great support from key state-wide conservation organizations. Save Oswegatchie Hills Outreach Coordinator Suzanne Thompson was a panelist at CT Trails Symposium 2019, sponsored by CT DEEP, Connecticut Forest and Park Association, UConn and CT Greenways, in October. Please let Suzanne know of potential speaking opportunities or places where our information can be displayed. Sthompson@ctenvironment.org or 860-662-1531.



Susan Smith, Executive Director of Bike Walk CT, learns about our Save Oswegatchie Hills efforts at CT Trails Symposium

Clark Pond Bridge Recognized

East Lyme is participating in the Sustainable CT initiative, a privately funded certification program run through UCONN's Eastern CT State University. It's a voluntary certification program to recognize thriving and resilient Connecticut municipalities who strive to be collaborative, and forward-looking, while building the community and local economy. There are nine different categories that can earn points, including providing well-stewarded land and natural resources.

We are proud to report that the Clark Pond bridge project was submitted and recognized as a worthy innovative effort for Sustainable CT, and has earned the town 15 points towards future certification.

Seen in the Hills



Pitch Pine Nursery Update



Susan Gonzalez presents a check to Greg Decker and the Stewardship Committee from the Dominion Foundation

To support the final phase of the entrance improvement project, the pitch pine conservation and demonstration area, the FOHNP Stewardship Committee just received a generous grant from the Dominion Foundation. According to Emery Gluck, CT-DEEP Forester, "it is estimated that 95% of the pitch pine-scrub oak barrens have been lost, making these landscapes the most decimated upland ecosystem." FOHNP is trying to make a difference and help restore them!

The conceptual plan on right, shows the pitch pine nursery design, with some planted pitch pine trees left to grow to maturity. Benches will surround a portion of the circle and the area bordered with split rail fencing and native plants, grasses and wildflowers. Penny Heller, Master Gardener and FOHNP member has created the draft planting plan for the project.

In early November Matt Varsen, from VarsenScapes, started work on grooming the site and installing a 20' circular paver 'stage'; the cost of the pavers is being discounted by 50% through Riverhead Building Supply of East Lyme. Once that is complete, EL Parks & Rec will machine dig the post holes for the 170' of split rail fencing, which was donated by Rings End of Niantic.

The pitch pine saplings once large enough, will be transplanted up to the ridge tops in the preserve to help repopulate the dwindling imperiled species. With a focus on conservation education, interpretive signs also will be installed, and talks about the conservation effort as well as historical uses for pitch pine in Colonial times, will be held prior to guided hikes for visitors in the center circle. This space will offer a comfortable gathering point to start guided hikes, as well as a place to cool down, reflect and relax after a magical hike in the Hills.



Future pitch pine nursery and conservation area

Letter from the President

Recently my husband and I spent a week in Hilton Head with friends who own a timeshare there. We drove down so that we could enjoy stops along the way and then continue on to Florida to visit friends there. Among the stops we made were an old plantation outside of Charleston, a local nature preserve in Walterboro, SC, the Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge west of Boyton Beach, and a regional nature preserve in West Palm Beach called Grassy Waters.

Each of the places we visited provided insight into the various ecosystems of the South. At Magnolia Plantation there were massive, old live oaks draped in “Spanish moss” leaning precariously over the Ashley River and a “black water” swamp created by years of slow-moving water filtering through decaying vegetation. The main feature of the 400-acre Walterboro Wildlife Sanctuary, a project of dedicated volunteers, is the “braided” creek swamp, so named because of the network of creeks snaking around tiny, pop-up islands. In contrast the Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge, part of the Everglades, comprises nearly 144,000 acres. Wildlife abounds and I was lucky (or foolish depending on how you think) enough to get a photo of a huge alligator lying on the side of the trail. Shortly after I took the picture and tiptoed past, it stood up, walked across to where I had been standing only minutes before, and slid into the water. Grassy Waters, also part of the Everglades, spans 15,000 acres and is not only a refuge for unique plants and animals but also serves as a freshwater supply for residents of the Palm Beach area. We were really lucky to see an everglade snail kite, an endangered species, and white ibis as we walked a few of the 25 miles of trails.

As wonderful as each of these places was, I found myself always thinking about the Oswegatchie Hills. I guess I don't have to tell you how fortunate we are to have this unique and amazing preserve in our own backyard, but I will say it just the same. We are *so lucky* – that there are 457 acres of unique forestland providing habitat for innumerable species of flora and fauna and that a dedicated corps of volunteers ensures it is well managed and stewarded. But none of this would be possible if we did not have your continuing support. If you have not made a gift yet this year, please use the enclosed envelope to send it now. And if you have made one already, thank you.

Kris Lambert

Amazon Smile :)

Don't forget, this holiday season (really anytime) if you shop at Amazon, you can support the 'Friends of the Oswegatchie Hills Nature Preserve' easily through your purchase! Amazon donates 5% of the price if you use Amazon Smile. Just select us as your charity under “*Your Account*” and 5% of the purchase price will be donated by Amazon. If you've already selected FOHNP as your charity of choice through Amazon.com, Thank You!

Everybody needs beauty as well as bread,

places to play in and pray in,

where nature may heal

and give strength to body and soul alike

John Muir from *The Yosemite*; Copyright 1912

Annual Membership

We need your help to continue the important work of preserving the Hills. Please renew your membership; funds go to maintaining the preserve for future generations to enjoy and to continue pursuing opportunities to acquire the adjacent land.

We want to keep you informed. Dominion, who for years had generously donated printing services had to stop, so now we must pay for the printing and mailing costs. To help reduce costs and paper waste, we are emailing the newsletter twice per year. Please be sure we have your correct email address. We will keep it confidential and only use it to send the newsletter and critical time-sensitive information (sent via ‘bcc’ to protect your privacy). Sign up on the home page of www.oswhills.org or send it to info@oswhills.org. Thanks.