



# Friends of the Oswegatchie Hills Nature Preserve

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## Newsletter—Winter 2017

FOHNP thanks Dominion for printing this newsletter

### A Message from the President

I have just come in from tracking down a pileated woodpecker (*Dryocopus pileatus*) that has been hammering away in the Hills. Evidence that he's around--the tell-tale rectangular excavations--appeared this fall in a tree near my driveway. I had seen him about a month ago, and now I could hear him even from inside the house. He was in a large, old oak tree, drumming away to announce his territory and to attract, hopefully, a mate.

According to CT DEEP, Connecticut is home to 7 species of woodpeckers. They are an important part of the ecosystem, helping to control insect populations and create nesting cavities for other birds and mammals. The pileated woodpecker, largest of its kind in the state, requires large tracts of deciduous or mixed forests for nesting.

Loss of habitat due to development is the greatest threat to woodpeckers. The Hills are a perfect and safe environment for pileated woodpeckers and for all the wildlife that abounds there. That is why it is so important for us to continue our efforts to Save Oswegatchie Hills and to steward the preserve wisely for all to enjoy. Please renew your membership in the Friends today and join us at the Annual Meeting on May 13 at 10:00 a.m. in the East Lyme Community Center.

*Kris Lambert*

### Oswegatchie Hills provide Home for a Rapidly Disappearing Ecosystem.

Stewardship Committee Chair Greg Decker recently read an article about an imperiled ecosystem: the Pitch Pine-Scrub Oak Barrens. Written by Emery Gluck, Forester with the Connecticut DEEP, it was a fascinating history of the pitch pine, discussing its role in U.S. history and how its former use and lack of fires led to its current diminished state today in Connecticut. It is estimated that 95% of the pitch pine barrens have been lost.



Emery (center) identifies some of the trees in the Hills

Knowing the Hills are home to stands of pitch pine, Greg contacted Emery and invited him to evaluate the stands. Emery hiked with Committee members in February. As he explained, in most areas of the state, you could walk all day without seeing a single pitch pine,

which makes the stands in the Hills that much more special.

"Connecticut's...sand plains barrens, along with ridge-top pitch pine-scrub oak barrens and heathland, are the most important shrubland habitat for rare moths and butterflies such as the buck moth (*Hemileuca maia maia*) and Gerhard's underwing (*Catocala herodias*).

"The remnants are now overrun with taller white pines (*Pinus strobus*) and other hardwoods; fire is no longer prevalent to keep competitors at bay.



*The group stops at a stand of Pitch Pines*

"Pitch Pine-Scrub Oak ridge-top and sand barrens are down to 0.04 of 1 percent of the Connecticut forest, and the conifer now composes less than 1 percent of all the pines that grow in the state." (Excerpted from article by Emery Gluck)

Historically, pitch pine had many uses for colonists and subsequent residents, including:

- a substitute for candles (knots in trees contain enough pitch to sustain a flame, hence its nick-name candlewood),
- use in shipbuilding as a preservative for rigging, and waterproofing material for the ships' hulls;
- use for "axle grease and to tar and feather a scoundrel;" (Gluck)
- turpentine, which was made from sap from the trees;
- "Rosin for making adhesives, sealants, coatings, printing inks, emulsifiers, and chewing gum." (Gluck)



*Emery was very happy to see that the OHNP pitch pines are in fact accompanied by scrub oak.*

Besides the lack of new pines, there is another concern. The southern pine beetle, which has affected the Jersey Pine Barrens lately, recently has been found in Connecticut. This could be bad news for the older stressed pines.



*Emery shows us good news: a pitch pine seedling!*

After our hike, Emery was very upbeat about our pitch pine/ scrub oak. "Very nice," said Emery, "Although a fairly small area, what you have here is rare, and very much worth protecting."

## Save Oswegatchie Hills Coalition Update

Winter hasn't slowed our momentum in building public awareness and support for preserving the remaining 236 acres of undeveloped Oswegatchie Hills and the Niantic River estuary that they protect.

Watch for these upcoming presentations – you are welcome to attend. Please encourage your friends and neighbors to come, too:

- Potapaug Audubon Society, Thursday, April 6, 7 pm at Old Lyme Town Hall, 52 Lyme Street
- Guided hike of OHNP for Potapaug Audubon Society, Saturday, April 8, 1 pm

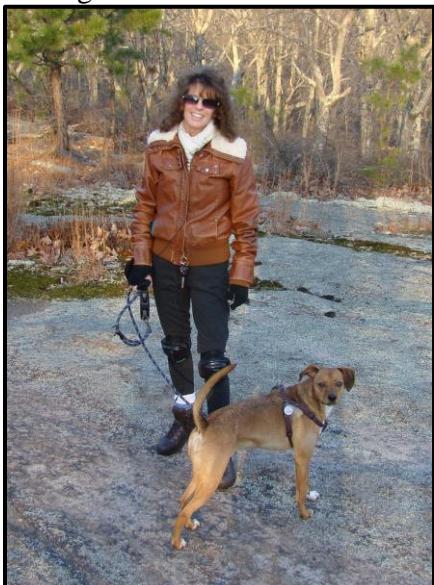
- Library Talk, Old Saybrook Acton Public Library, Tuesday, April 18, 6:30 pm, 60 Old Boston Post Road

Check out Friends and Connecticut Fund for the Environment (CFE) Facebook pages for upcoming Earth Day-related events at which our Coalition display may appear.

Suzanne Thompson, Save Oswegatchie Hills outreach coordinator, [s.thompson@ctenvironment.org](mailto:s.thompson@ctenvironment.org), or at 860-434-5754.

### A Friendly Reminder to Dog Walkers

A member of our Board of Directors was recently snowshoeing along the Yellow Trail, when a deer ran across, followed by a large black dog. Later in the hike, his party sighted a deer, possibly the same, twice more. The dog was spotted once again, by itself. It had a collar and tags and was a solid black color.



*Frequent preserve visitor Susan Ostrowski and her dog, Eli, observe the leash requirement and fully enjoy the Hills*

A friendly reminder, dogs must be leashed at all times in the Preserve. No matter how trained your dog is, you never know how it will react if wildlife crosses in front of it.

Please keep your dog leashed!

### Signs Around the Preserve

You may have noticed several new signs in the Preserve to help direct you to specific points of interest and help navigate the trails. New signs point the way to the new spur trail, blazed Blue and White, which features a small crawl-through cave and a quartz pit. Other signs lead to the granite quarry and Mt. Tabor, and to entrances at Damon Heights and Chapman Woods.



These signs are not ordinary signs. Wood for these signs is from local stands of native cedar, cut on the Ledyard's historic Up-Down Sawmill. This mill is an original water-powered sash sawmill built in 1877. Greg Decker, Stewardship Chair, hand paints the signs using the Town's adopted colors of maroon and white.



## FOHNP thanks the following members for their generous support in 2016

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Albert Yost  
Bob and Chris Young

Editor's Note: Every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of this list. However, we are only human so if you find an error or omission, please let us know

Renew your membership in Friends of the Oswegatchie Hills Nature Preserve today to help ensure that the Hills are preserved for future generations.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_

(Please note that the Friends of Oswegatchie Hills Nature Preserve does not share or sell member information.)

Enclosed is my gift in the amount of:

\$500       \$250       \$100       \$50       \$25      Other \_\_\_\_\_

If your company matches gifts to non-profit organizations, please be sure to enclose a matching gift form. **Thank you for your gift!**

Please make checks payable to FOHNP, Inc. and mail to: Friends of the Oswegatchie Nature Preserve, ATTN: Membership Chair, P.O. Box 163, Niantic, CT 06357