



Friends of the **OSWEGATCHIE HILLS NATURE PRESERVE**

Newsletter – 2nd Quarter 2021

A Message from the President



Because my daughter and I are fully vaccinated, we decided to venture into New York City a few weeks ago. Our destination was The Highline, an amazing green swath of plants and trees on top of an old, elevated train track in a gritty section of lower Manhattan. When the abandoned track was scheduled for demolition in 1999, some people noticed that weeds and wild plants had taken over the structure. Inspiration struck and the Friends of the High Line was formed to advocate for its preservation and repurposing into a public space. (Sound familiar??)

Then, totally by accident, we came upon another amazing, and haunting, sight. Heading back to Grand Central, we cut across Madison Square Park at the intersection of Fifth Avenue and Broadway. As we entered, I noted a large stand of dead trees and wondered why the city had not removed them. But the trees are no accident, rather a public art installation entitled “Ghost Forest”.

What is a “ghost forest?” According to Smithsonian Magazine, “ghost forests are landscapes that form when saltwater begins to flood woodland areas that contain freshwater-dependent trees. The high salinity [of the water] slowly poisons trees, and as they die, all that is left behind are ghostly gray trunks that resemble toothpicks.” Research by Rutgers University and the U.S. Department of Agriculture shows that coastal woodland forests from Virginia through Massachusetts are dying as a result of heavy rain, saltwater surges and flooding from rising sea levels.

The 49 towering dead Atlantic white cedars in the middle of a small green park in New York City serve as stark testimony to climate change and all that is lost because of it. In addition to the visual impact of the trees, recordings of the sounds of wildlife no longer found in the city can be heard by scanning a QR code; (check out <https://madisonsquarepark.org/art/exhibitions/maya-lin-ghost-forest/>). The artist, Maya Lin, an environmental activist, and designer of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, is making a bold statement about the looming environmental crisis.

In our own way, we too are making a statement – that the Hills are threatened, not by coastal flooding (at least not yet) but by development. As evidence of climate change mounts, it becomes increasingly important to protect this fragile woodland so that it remains a safe habitat for flora and fauna, so that the sounds of wildlife do not disappear. We may not be artists, but we can, and will, fight to protect this precious place. Once it’s gone, it’s gone forever.

Kris Lambert



Photo by Kris of the ‘Ghost Forest’ by Maya Lin, in Madison Square Park, NYC

CT Trails Day

This year some lucky hikers were treated to guided hikes on June 5th for the CT Trails Day event. Three groups explored the Hills, the first leaving at 7:30am for a birding hike lead by Bruce Dasinger and his son Andrew. The long hike was led by Paul Parulis and Bruce Kolowsky and short hike by Ralph Bates. A fun time was had by all.



Greg Decker and Kris Lambert welcoming hikers



Bruce Dasinger before the hike



Bruce on the birding walk



Ralph Bates on the trail



Long hike team enjoying the view



Taking a break, enjoying a snack



After the hike and still looking fresh



Can you see him!?



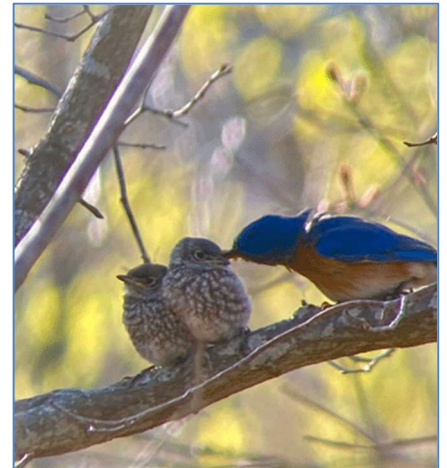
His first close-up!



Spring in the Hills



Photos by Pam Laramie



Spring Plantings

Spring was perfect for planting. We transplanted 4 pitch pines donated by the John Lohmann Preserve in Old Lyme and purchased 50 saplings from the Saratoga Tree Nursery in New York. Also, after lots of TLC, seeds that were gathered from the pitch pine stand in the Hills were successfully germinated and added to the raised garden bed. Volunteers included Ray and Penny Heller, Paul and Barb Whitehouse, Franz Edson, Amy Gonsalves, Bruce Dasinger and Bruce Kolowsky. Come visit the Pitch Pine Park before your next hike!



Clockwise – Paul and Barb Whitehouse; Penny Heller working in the raised bed; Franz Edson and Ray Heller; and Dave Hughes inspecting his donated chickadee house.



Zoning Update

Our 2015 case against Landmark Development, LLC, was heard by Judge Marshall Berger, Connecticut Superior Court/Land Court in a virtual hearing on Wednesday, June 30. In 2015, the East Lyme Zoning Commission gave conditional approval to the developer's proposed high density development. FOHNP and Save the River - Save the Hills have been intervenors on environmental grounds throughout the ongoing legal disputes; Save the Sound became our legal counsel in 2015 and became an intervenor in its own right.

In the June 30th hearing, Save the Sound attorney Chris Kelly presented our arguments that the zone change should be limited to 36 acres and should not be expanded to 123 acres. The additional land is environmentally sensitive land that should be conserved and the developer failed to submit required adequate information on coastal resources, wetlands and stormwater.

"Eight hundred and forty units, 1760 parking spaces, 36 acres of impervious surfaces are the absolutely wrong use for this high priority conservation land on the Niantic River," says Save the Sound Senior Legal Counsel Roger Reynolds. *"The applicant will ultimately have to provide actual environmental information, and when they do we are confident the courts will agree with us."* We will keep you updated on the outcome of the hearing and any new developments in the case as soon as they are available.

Annual Meeting 2021

The annual meeting was held via Zoom on May 17th. This format allowed folks to join that typically could not, including FOHNP member Jeff Alling, from North Pole Alaska!

Board members and officers whose terms were expiring were voted in for another two-year term. They include Vice President, Dave Hughes and Secretary, Raechel Killeen, as well as Directors Don Danila, Caren Linden, Greg Decker, Franz Edson, Mike Dunn, and Liz Paganetti.

After reviewing and approving the annual financial report, we heard from Roger Reynolds our legal defense representative from Save the Sound and an update from Suzanne Thompson from Save Oswegatchie Hills Coalition. Senator Paul Formica spoke to the group pledging continued support for the acquisition of the adjacent 236 acres owned by Landmark Development.

President Kris Lambert recognized Greg Decker's vision and tireless work that brought the pitch pine park project to fruition. Kris announced that the FOHNP Board and the Town Parks and Rec. Department unanimously agreed to officially name the site '**The Greg Decker Pitch Pine Park**'. Greg thanked all those who assisted in the creation of the park and noted that plans are underway to install displays of historical and ecological information. A formal dedication will be planned in the future. At the conclusion of the meeting, members enjoyed watching a video done by Mac and Mike Dunn about the 1962 fire in the Hills and the impact on the bird population.

Reminder!

*Save the River -- Save the
Hills Kayak Regatta is
planned for August 14th
(rain date 8/15)*

Please let us know if you see anything in the Hills that needs attention. Go to oswhills.org; click on the 'Preserve' tab and fill out a form to report any trail issues or concerns. Thanks!

*In wilderness is the
preservation of the world.
~ Henry David Thoreau*

Stewardship News

Greg Decker has made another beautiful bridge. In the days before installation various hikers assisted by carrying planks to the stream on the Red Trail. The new bridge is now in place, luckily installed while the water was low.



Franz Edson, Paul Parulis and Jim Paganetti assisted in the installation.

