



Friends of the
OSWEGATCHIE HILLS
NATURE PRESERVE

Newsletter – 4th Quarter 2020

Pitch Pine Park and Tree Nursery

Thanks to the vision and dedication of Greg Decker, Stewardship Chair and the Stewardship Committee (through snow, the pandemic, drought, and social distancing), a new Pitch Pine Park and Tree Nursery has taken shape. The park, located at the Memorial Park Drive entrance to the preserve, will help restore pitch pines and provide information about their historical value. The Oswegatchie Hills contain a rare pitch pine grove in southeast CT. According to Emery Gluck, CT-DEEP Forester, “an estimated 95% of the pitch pine-scrub oak barrens have been lost, making these landscapes the most decimated upland ecosystem.”

Master Gardener, FOHNP member, and EL Conservation Commission Member, Penny Heller, designed the landscape for the site. It includes young pitch pines – which will be left to grow to maturity – as well as areas of native wildflowers, ferns and plants. 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.

Greg Decker took freshly cut white oak and steam bent them into curved supports for the concrete benches that look like wooden planks. These curved benches surround a portion of the 20’ circular paver “stage” where talks about the conservation effort, as well as historical uses for pitch pine in Colonial times will be given, and where guided hikes will begin. Greg also created two entrance arbors that are framed with singed mountain laurel branches, symbolizing the 1962 fire in the Hills.

Though not yet totally completed, plan to visit this comfortable gathering point on your next visit to the Hills. This project was made possible by generous grants from the Dominion Foundation and CT Society for Women Environmental Professionals, a private donation from Anne and Jeff Barnhart, and support from Rings End; Riverhead Building Supply; Arrow Head Inc. and Thompson Native Lumber. Please support these sponsors and let them know you value their contributions to the FOHNP. For additional photos, visit oswhills.org



Before



During



After

Pitch Pine Park & Tree Nursery Photo Essay



Greg Decker steamed freshly cut white oak planks to 212 degrees and approximately 25- 30% moisture content to form curved bases for four benches



Installation of the center stone pavers in the area that will be the launching spot for guided hikes

Greg and Don Danila delivering more pavers



215' of walkways surround the park and plantings

Aerial photo of the partially completed park

Greg working on one of the entrance arbors



Split rail fencing surrounds the park

Penny and Ray Heller

Steam bent base for a bench

Pitch Pine Park & Tree Nursery Photo Essay



Greg working on the benches partially surrounding the paver center 'stage'



Greg building the raised bed with Penny and Ray Heller



Members of the stewardship committee hard at work planting



Flowers in bloom at the entrance arbor



Kris Lambert and Master Gardener Penny Heller



New Pitch Pine Sapling



Stewardship and board member Paul Whitehouse



(L to R) Volunteers Paul Parulis, Ray Heller, Penny Heller, Don Danila, Bruce Kolowsky, Kris Lambert, Greg Decker and Paul Whitehouse



Entrance arbor with singed mountain laurel branches

President's Message

To say that this year was challenging is stating the obvious, to say the least. What with Covid, a national election, and unrest across the country, there were times when I did not even want to turn on the television or read one more newsfeed in my email. It seemed better to sit in silence or quickly delete anything in my inbox labeled "Breaking News."

But then I would step outside and survey the woods surrounding my house. I would take a deep breath, trying to identify the various odors assailing my nose – the mustiness of rain-soaked leaves, the earthiness of damp dirt, the pungency of a neighbor's wood fire. I would listen intently, sorting out the mix of sounds – the persistent call of a pileated woodpecker, the soft murmuring of a nuthatch circling a nearby tree, the scuttle of dry falling leaves. Pausing for just those few moments to savor all that was around me brought a wonderful sense of calm and well-being.

Calm and well-being – that is what thousands of visitors to the Hills surely experienced this year. How fortunate that this amazing place exists; that foresighted individuals had the vision years ago to preserve the land; that volunteers today work hard to ensure the safety of trails and undertake important conservation projects such as the Pitch Pine Park and Tree Nursery (featured in this newsletter). If you haven't checked it out yet, you need to stop by soon. And if you see Greg or any other volunteer at work, be sure to say "thanks."

The Board of the Friends also continues to work hard, trying to save the remaining undeveloped land in Oswegatchie Hills. As you may recall from the previous newsletter, the developer is attempting to have wording in the regulations pertaining to Affordable Housing modified to his advantage. As of this writing, the Zoning Commission has not yet made a decision, but we anticipate one shortly – and hopefully one that denies the request. As soon as we know, we will notify you.

All the work undertaken to manage and protect our beloved Hills obviously comes with a price tag – for attorney fees (in the form of an annual donation of \$10,000 to Save the Sound), for tools and supplies, and for the cost of printing and postage. We could not do it without your support so if you have not yet made a gift to the Friends in 2020, please use the enclosed envelope to send it now. If you have made one already, thank you!

Oh, yes - be sure to pause for a moment, take a deep breath, and enjoy the calm that nature provides. May 2021 bring a bit more calm and sanity.

Kris Lambert

Amazon Smile :)

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 purchase 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 'smile.amazon.com'. Thank You!

Email Address

Please be sure we have your email address. If we don't, simply enter it on the oswhills.org home page. This will ensure you are aware of any crucial meeting information or time sensitive news on our precious Oswegatchie Hills.

*I go to nature to be soothed and healed,
and to have my senses put in order.*

~ John Burroughs