



# Pitch Pine Conservation Project

## Welcome to the Greg Decker Pitch Pine Park

This town-owned parcel was set aside for an educational conservation project to help bring attention to the plight of pitch pines (*Pinus rigida*) and the ecosystem in which they exist. The species is deemed imperiled in Connecticut, and many stands are slowly disappearing for various reasons. Notable stands of pitch pines exist in the Oswegatchie Hills, but like the many others in the state, they are in a slow decline.

One goal of the project is to populate this area with young pitch pines and other native plants associated with them. The pines planted along the meandering path will be left to grow to maturity. The other goal is to mitigate the shrinking pitch pine stands by managing the growth of chestnut oaks that are encroaching on and overshadowing the pines. Pitch pines grown from seed/seedlings will be transplanted to areas in the Hills where they were abundant in order to increase the chances of survival.

## The Mugwort Problem

Prior to being developed as a conservation project, this site was overrun by mugwort (*Artemisia vulgaris*), an invasive species native to Europe and Asia. It was introduced to North America through ship ballast and now poses a threat to native plants. It spreads by underground rhizomes eventually overtaking an area and crowding out native plants.

Eradicating the mugwort took two years. The area was first mowed in June 2018. Then the entire site was covered with clear plastic for one year, causing the ground to be heated to more than 170° F. This process is called solarization. The following year, any remaining mugwort growth was

cropped close to the ground with a weed trimmer. This close trimming deprived the rhizomes of energy, thereby suppressing regrowth and eventually killing them.

Once the mugwort was eradicated, actual development of the site began in the spring of 2020.

*“An estimated 95% of the pitch pine - scrub oak barrens have been lost, making these landscapes the most decimated upland ecosystem.”*

—Emery Gluck,  
CT-DEEP Forester

Left: Eradicating the invasive mugwort made way for the development of the site in the spring of 2018



Right: East Lyme Parks & Recreation assist in the initial mowing of the mugwort



Left: Volunteers cover the site with plastic sheeting to help kill the mugwort by solarization



Right: A generous donation by Riverhead Building Supply made possible the stonework used in the project



Left: VarsenScapes landscapers prep the site and install the paver circle



The unwelcome and invasive mugwort