

Joshua's Trust News

Protecting Land and Preserving Heritage. Forever.

Winter 2025

PITCH PINE RESTORATION AT MADELINE REGAN PRESERVE

By Alex DiMauro-D'Amico, Stewardship Coordinator

As you enter the Madeline Regan Preserve in Tolland, you will likely notice an abundance of pine trees. Pine trees are coniferous, meaning they produce cones. These cones harbor the seeds that eventually germinate and turn into trees. The vast majority of coniferous trees that you see at Madeline Regan Preserve are eastern white pine (*Pinus strobus*). This is the most common pine tree in the northeast and accounts for roughly 99% of all pine trees in Connecticut.

Despite this species' hardiness and abundance, it wasn't always as common as it is today. Much of our forests' composition has changed dramatically over the last several hundred years due to a variety of factors including climate change, agricultural use, logging, and the suppression of forest fires. When settlers first arrived, the forests were not as dense as we see today, and in the more open landscape that once existed, you would have found a much greater abundance of another pine tree called pitch pine (*Pinus rigida*). If you look closely for the alligator-scale-like bark, irregular canopy, and scraggly stature, you will find pitch pine interspersed among the white pines at Madeline Regan.



Sheep laurel, kinnikinnick, black huckleberry,
and lowbush blueberries

Pitch pine, which often seed in on abandoned farmland or large open areas with dry, gravelly, nutrient-poor soils, has been largely eliminated from the landscape in the northeast. It is happiest among species such as scrub oak (*Quercus ilicifolia*), lowbush blueberry (*Vaccinium angustifolium*), sweet fern (*Comptonia peregrina*), sheep laurel (*Kalmia angustifolia*), black huckleberry (*Gaylussacia baccata*), and kinnikinnick or bearberry (*Arctostaphylos uva-ursi*), to name a few. Together, these species make up the Pitch Pine-Scrub Oak Barrens, one of the most impacted terrestrial habitats in Connecticut.

It is estimated that over 95% of barrens in CT have been lost due, in part, to development. This is an especially concerning statistic considering this habitat type is home to the largest portion of imperiled invertebrates of any of the state's forest community types. Endangered species such as Persius duskywing (*Erynnis persius*) and buck moth (*Hemileuca maia*) all depend on these pine barren habitats.

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The accreditation seal recognizes land conservation organizations that meet national standards for excellence, uphold the public trust and ensure that conservation efforts are permanent.



PRESIDENTIAL MUSINGS

A FOND FAREWELL TO MICHAEL HVEEM

By John Hankins

As you may have heard, our Executive Director, Michael Hveem, retired on December 31. The idea of an Executive Director was a dream first floated at JT Board meetings in 1977 and 1979, and then discussed on an almost continuous basis for more than three decades before we took the plunge to establish this position in 2015. Even in 2015, there was not unanimous support for the idea.

Proponents argued that we had grown to the point where volunteers no longer provided the expertise, continuity, or consistency in approach that was required to manage our growing portfolio of properties and responsibilities. Advocates for the all-volunteer status quo valued the grassroots teamwork approach that had been at the core of Joshua's Trust's identity since its 1966 birth.

After more than 30 years of discussion, a committee of three (President Doug Hughes, Dan Donohue, and Margaret Welch) were given the task of selecting a worthy candidate for an interview and Mike's name rose to the top of the list. His resumé was unique, to say the least, and included a bachelor's degree in history from UConn, a law degree from Boston University, an MBA from the UConn School of Business, and for good measure, a Master of Library Science from Southern Connecticut State University. Michael was licensed to practice law in Connecticut and New York, and had worked in some high-profile jobs in the past, including a stint on Wall Street. What he had not done was manage a land trust. In fact, finding someone with such credentials in 2015 would have been nearly impossible, as only the largest land trusts could afford such a position.

The search committee recognized that what we needed to complement our existing cadre of volunteer conservationists was not another conservationist, but instead someone with the administrative and leadership skills to guide us as we transitioned from a small volunteer organization to something much more substantial.

I sat down with Michael in mid-December and he told me the story of his memorable interview with Joshua's Trust...

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IN MEMORY OF TERRY WAKEMAN

By Karen Zimmer

In October of 2024, JT lost long-time volunteer and trustee Terry Wakeman after a short illness. Terry had a deep commitment to the long-term preservation of open space and historic sites. He especially loved the Gurleyville Grist Mill and served as a docent and handyman, generous with his time and talent over the years. Terry was the kind of docent who appreciated and explained the simple physics of its machinery and the ingenuity of early industrial people. One day, Terry was asked if he could replace the threshold at the mill, since it was splintering and unsafe. He spent three days measuring, three days studying what wood he should use, and then suggested that they remove a broken peg in the door and fix that as well. That is the kind of meticulous craftsman Terry was. In fact, his business, Bebbington Brook Woodworking, used traditional joinery and antique woodworking tools to make beautiful furniture based on late 18th-century designs.



Terry also served as the President of the board of the Early American Industries Association, a national organization celebrating crafts in American history. He was also a wonderful steward of Friedman Forest in Ashford, maintaining trails on his frequent visits there with Philco, his black Puli. He knew what all the tools in our blacksmith shop were for and was eager to get visitors to hazard guesses about their uses. Whenever we step back in time over the improved Grist Mill threshold, we will gratefully remember Terry Wakeman.

THAMES VALLEY TU FINISHES RESTORATION PROJECT

You may recall from our 2024 Summer Newsletter that a group from Thames Valley Trout Unlimited was working on a bank stabilization project along the Fenton River, close to the Gurleyville Grist Mill. We are happy to report that the project has been completed. According to George Jacobi, a group of TU volunteers showed up on Sunday, October 20th, to finish the stream bank rehabilitation project. Dozens of Christmas trees were dragged to the site, pinned down, then roped, behind the previously created tree trunk and rock barrier. They will collect sediment during floods until the rebuilt bank begins to grow its own foliage - new trees that will stabilize that section of the Fenton River, and help protect the river bank from erosion for the foreseeable future.



Thames Valley Trout Unlimited bank restoration project

Photo by George Jacobi

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HERP DIVERSITY STUDY AT ALLANACH-WOLF WOODLANDS



One of seven coverboards placed around the property, each with a QR code.

On September 7, we had the great privilege of joining the Connecticut State Museum of Natural History (CSMNH) and herpetologist, Dr. Susan Herrick from the University of Connecticut's Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology, to search for herpetofauna, or herps (reptiles and amphibians), at Allanach-Wolf Woodlands in Windham.

Prior to our guided walk, Dr. Herrick strategically placed several coverboards around the preserve. Coverboards, according to CSMNH, are artificial habitats placed in nature that small animals seek out and use for shelter. Scientists place boards of various

sizes in wooded areas near water and visit them on a regular schedule. They identify the variety of animals they observe to learn about the different species (such as frogs, salamanders, snakes and more) who make the forest home. Information such as air, soil, and water temperature are also recorded to learn more about the local environment. It is imperative that these coverboards remain untouched.

Connecticut is home to 12 species of salamanders, 11 species of frogs and toads, 8 turtles (not including sea turtles), 14 snakes, and 1 lizard. Specialists at the Yale Peabody Museum note that CT's herp species depend on vernal pools and fragile traprock habitat. Some live in tidal salt marshes, whereas others require cool, clean mountain streams. Some migrate each fall to ancestral hibernation dens while others burrow deep into mud at the bottom of a pond to survive the cold New England winters. Because some of these species require such specific habitats, they are threatened with extinction due to habitat loss.



A young salamander is examined before it is carefully returned to where it was found.



Many salamander species seek refuge under logs.

According to CT's Department of Energy and Environmental Protection, 8 species of CT amphibians and 14 reptile species are considered endangered, threatened, and/or of special concern. Habitat destruction, degradation, and fragmentation wreak havoc on many species. Successful conservation efforts seek to create large corridors wherein these animals can live, breed, and travel safely.

We are thrilled to be working with CSMNH and Dr. Herrick on this important, ongoing study. For more information, visit csmnh.uconn.edu.

A FOND FAREWELL TO MICHAEL HVEEM (CONTINUED)



Mike Hveem with Paddy and Kirbie

The interview was scheduled to take place at the house of Doug Hughes, who was JT President at the time. Michael arrived for the interview, walked through the door, and ran into a wall of 40 eager individuals packed into a living room, each holding a piece of paper with the questions they hoped to ask. I asked Michael how that made him feel. He responded “Amused”. He was amused, I think, because he saw in front of him a clear and unmistakable sign that this was a group that was not short on energy, passion, or commitment to the cause of conservation. He saw in front of him people that he could work with, a group who would appreciate the organizational skills he was bringing to the table.

Yes, Michael would be herding cats for the foreseeable future, but as far as he was concerned, they were mostly well-behaved cats, and they were mostly running in the same direction.

The deal was sealed and the Trustees decreed that January 1, 2015 would be his first day of work. The Trust had moved into the Isabelle Atwood House on Wormwood Hill Road only a few days before Mike started with us, and he entered his new

office to find it piled high with ornate furniture, pottery collections, and a myriad of other antiques.

First on the agenda was the monumental task of applying for re-accreditation with the Land Trust Alliance (LTA). As part of this process, LTA let us know that Joshua’s Trust was in need of an organizational make-over, which kicked off a process by which we essentially dissolved the existing board and re-started the organization with a new set of bylaws that included term limits on board positions to promote a constant infusion of new ideas and energy. Suffice to say, it was a tumultuous process.

Michael has weathered each of the storms we’ve put him through over the last ten years admirably, including two successful rounds of re-accreditation, five different Presidents, and an untold number of clogged toilets, leaking roofs, rodent infestations, and all the other things that you get to deal with at the helm of a small non-profit. As we’ve continued to grow, we’ve added staff positions, and of all the things Michael has done for us, he’s most proud of his ability to select and mentor effective conservation-minded employees to continue our legacy.

Michael walks out the door at the end of 2024 with a whole lot of Joshua’s Trust minutiae in his noggin’, and we will miss his uncanny instant recall about facts, figures, and anecdotal snippets. But Michael also leaves with us an organized system of record-keeping and a staff that through his mentorship has the skills and good judgment to carry us forward, even as we work on the challenging task of identifying and bringing on board our next Executive Director.

Good luck to Mike on his future endeavors – his energetic German Shepherds are very excited about this new development!

PITCH PINE RESTORATION PROJECT (CONTINUED)

It isn't just development that has caused this species to suffer. Pitch pine is a tree that is largely dependent on fire. Historically, wildfires were much more common than they are today, burning as much as one in 33 acres annually in the early 20th century, as opposed to today's one in 4,000 acres. These fires were started both naturally, by lightning strikes, and by Native Americans in order to improve foraging and hunting for themselves.

In the early 20th century, we began suppressing wildfires, which over time has dramatically modified our landscape. Trees that are easily killed by fire, like red maple (*Acer rubrum*), became much more abundant, while species more resistant to fire, like white oak (*Quercus alba*) and pitch pine, suffered.

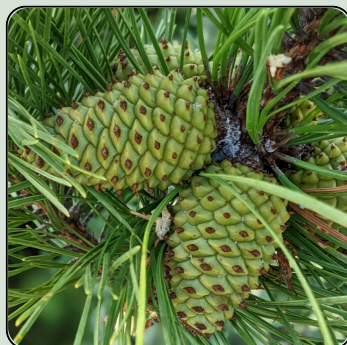
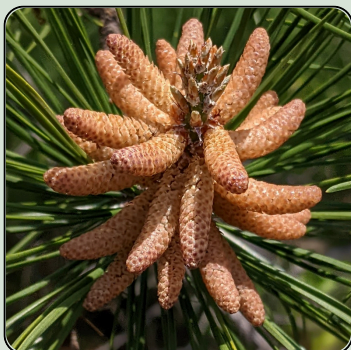


Pitch pine with epicormic growth

Pitch pine is also often outcompeted by other tree species in the absence of fire. It requires a lot of sunlight in order to grow, so species that are more tolerant to shade can often tower over them, starving them of sunlight. You can see evidence of this right here at Madeline Regan: many of our pitch pine have already died as a result of being out-competed by the more vigorous and fast-growing white pines.

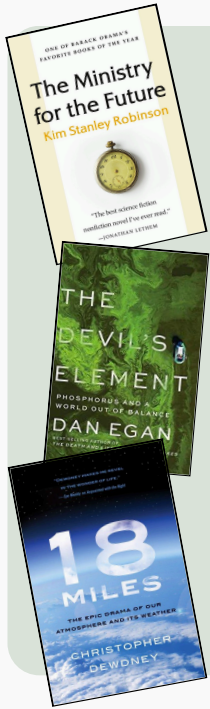
Without active management such as prescribed fire or forest thinning, Pitch Pine-Scrub Oak Barrens will continue to decline. Joshua's Trust is working to maintain the pitch pines at this preserve via active forest management. You may see white pines that have been felled – this is to give the pitch pine ample sunlight to grow and hopefully reproduce. Leaving the cut trees on the ground helps to limit deer browse which will give pitch pine seedlings a better chance. Additionally, as the trees decompose, they feed a variety of insects, fungi, and other microorganisms. The trees will eventually break down into soil and their nutrients will benefit surrounding plants and animals.

As you are walking along the Old Connecticut Path, the Esker Trail, or anywhere else in Connecticut, keep your eye out for this fire-loving tree. It's been through a lot in the past several hundred years, and with proper management, we hope it can continue to support the myriad organisms that depend on it and its associated habitat.



Male and female pitch pine cones. Pitch pine also produces serotinous pine cones that are covered in a thick resin that must be melted by fire in order for the cone to open and release its seed.

READING RECOMMENDATIONS FROM JT BOOK CRITTERS



The JT Book Critters recommend three award-winning titles from the fall discussions.

The Ministry for the Future by Kim Stanley Robinson. This “science fiction nonfiction novel” envisions a world challenged by climate change. While the beginning is devastating, the middle explores global responses to rising temperatures that lead to a positive ending.

The Devil's Element: Phosphorus and a World Out of Balance by Dan Egan. Informative, readable account of the vital element phosphorus, written to raise awareness about phosphorus-related environmental issues, a looming phosphorus shortage, and the need for increased action to protect our food and water.

18 Miles: The Epic Drama of our Atmosphere and its Weather by Christopher Dewdney. Imagine prose poetry about the air we breathe, the weather we experience, and the changes in store.

A LASTING LEGACY FROM THE BURNS FAMILY

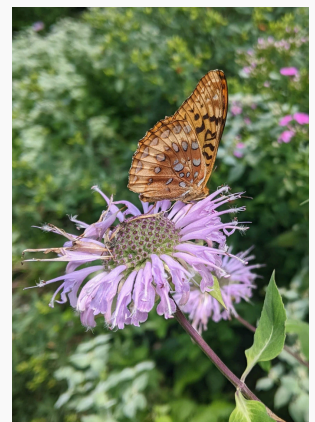
We'd like to send a special thank you to Rachel Burns. In July, Rachel reached out to us to discuss a donation in memory of her father, Eban Burns, who passed away in June, 2023. In a letter to us, Rachel wrote,

“My dad loved animals and nature since he was a child. He always loved camping, hiking, and just spending time in the woods. He would often take hikes with his friends on trails owned by Joshua’s Trust.”

When my dad was older, he would take walks several times a week to a pond and meadow a few miles from his house to sit by a stream and be in nature; he called this place his church. He loved seeing wildlife there, especially the deer and monarch butterflies. The owners of the meadow would often mow it in the middle of summer, which would kill all of the monarch eggs and caterpillars, and that would upset him very much since he knew how important preserving wildlife habitat is, especially in urban areas.”

Thanks to Rachel's generous donation, we will be able to fulfill Eban's dream of protecting meadow habitat for pollinators like the monarch butterfly and more. With this gift, we plan to buy a large tractor to maintain and restore critical meadow habitats and will re-dedicate the Broadway Meadow open space set aside in Coventry to honor Eban.

We hope to raise an additional \$20,000 for tractor accessories and stewardship costs related to improving these vital ecosystems. Stay tuned for more information regarding the new JT tractor and news specific to our meadow restoration and revitalization efforts.



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NATURE MAGNIFIED

Join us on February 22 at the Madeline Regan Preserve in Tolland for a fun exploration of the micro world as seen through a small handheld magnifier. Visit our Events page at joshuastrust.org for more details.
*Registration is required.

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BECOME A MEMBER TODAY

Our members are critical to the mission of Joshua's Trust and have the important role of voting on new trustees and other issues at our Annual Meeting every April. Be a part of land protection, habitat restoration, historical preservation, and more with a donation today.

Any donation makes you a member for one year. Join Joshua's Trust today by returning the envelope in this newsletter or by visiting our website at joshuastrust.org/ways-to-give.

Please call Michelle Poudrette, JT's Interim Executive Director, at (860) 429-9023 for questions about donations of any kind.