

Joshua's Trust News

Protecting Land and Preserving Heritage. Forever.

Summer 2025

HABITAT GARDEN AT ALLANACH-WOLF WOODLANDS

Notes from a work in progress by Karen Zimmer



Photos by Michelle Poudrette

In 2007, Ada Wolf donated over 100 acres of land on Back Road in Windham. Many local folks (and their dogs) walk this easily accessible and beautiful property. Around 2012, volunteers planned a butterfly garden in the meadow that lies near Lake Marie. After the preserve's steward cleared lilac and forsythia, a group of international students from UConn helped remove sod to make the area suitable for native plantings.

Other invasive plants like autumn olive were removed from the meadow. Landscape cloth was installed, native plants were planted, and the garden was enclosed by a fence to deter deer browsing. Joan Hill created interpretive signs that have informed guests about various aspects of this important habitat for over a decade.

Fast forward to the fall of 2024. Staff and volunteers noticed that the two garden beds needed tending, the interpretive signs were due for an upgrade, and multiple species of invasive plants had moved in. We decided to experiment with bringing back the "butterfly garden" and educational components to the meadow, an initiative spearheaded by Trustee, Marie Cantino.



International students from UConn remove sod from the garden.

As many of you know, native plants are the cornerstone of a healthy habitat and Joshua's Trust is eager to transform this space into a pollinator paradise and educational hub. Marie collected soil samples for analysis, which showed some minor nutritional deficiencies but we decided not to amend the soil as many native plants thrive in the adjacent meadow without any amendments.

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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

UNPLANNED GIVING - THERAPY FOR THE SOUL

By John Hankins

Flyers arrive in our collective mailboxes almost daily from non-profits espousing the benefits of “planned giving,” and I myself have touted the benefits of this type of charitable giving to Joshua’s Trust. It is the gifts by our members that are given on a regular basis – be it monthly, quarterly, or annually - that provide us the consistent income we need to carry on the vital work that our organization does.

But this article is not about that, it’s about “unplanned” giving. I’ve never seen anyone else use that term, but I expect most of you know the concept. Unplanned giving is typically done on the spur of the moment, sometimes shortly after a sudden increase in personal wealth that you were not expecting. A couple of years back, long-term Joshua’s Trust member Doug Hutchinson called me to ask if I knew anyone that would like to buy his used bike. “I can’t ride it anymore because of some age-related biomechanical issues,” Doug reported. I had plenty of connections among the local cycling community, and it didn’t take me long to find someone who recognized that \$900 was a bargain price. He showed up at Doug’s house with his checkbook. “Make it out to Joshua’s Trust,” Doug instructed, and our organization benefited from this unplanned windfall.

The idea of unplanned giving is infectious, and I caught the bug about a year after Doug’s generous action. As many of you know, I lost my wife Beth to cancer last August after 43 years of blissful matrimony. Beth loved to ride bikes, and at the time of her departure she had six of them hanging in our garage, bikes that were now crying out to me to find them a new home.

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SUNSHINE, WATERMELON, AND OPEN SPACE: A SUMMER MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

By David McCarthy

Summer has arrived — the season of sunshine, watermelon, fireflies, and long afternoons spent near rivers and streams. There’s something magical about these warm months that invites us to slow down, step outside, and savor the natural world around us. Whether you’re kayaking along a lazy river, hiking your favorite trail, or simply enjoying the stillness of a forest glade, summer is all about connecting with nature and making memories.

At Joshua’s Trust, our preserves and trails offer the perfect setting for those unforgettable summer moments — from early bird calls to golden sunsets. Each visit is a chance to recharge and reconnect with nature, your loved ones, and yourself.



Common Yellowthroat
(Photo by Michelle Poudrette)

As we say goodbye to spring, I want to thank you for your generosity, volunteerism, and commitment to conservation. Your support helps us protect vital ecosystems, advance our mission, and share the beauty of the land through education and access.

This summer we are thrilled to welcome Dawn Brandriff as our new Business and Administration Manager — a wonderful addition to the Joshua’s Trust team. Her leadership and passion are already making a difference, and her role is made possible by the strength of your continued charitable support. Thank you. We invite you to stop by our Atwood office to say hello to Dawn and the rest of the Joshua’s Trust team.

Looking back on our shared efforts and ahead to summer’s joys, I hope you find peace, wonder, and adventure on a Joshua’s Trust preserve.

Thank you for being part of our mission. Wishing you a summer full of fresh air and lasting memories.

Warmly,

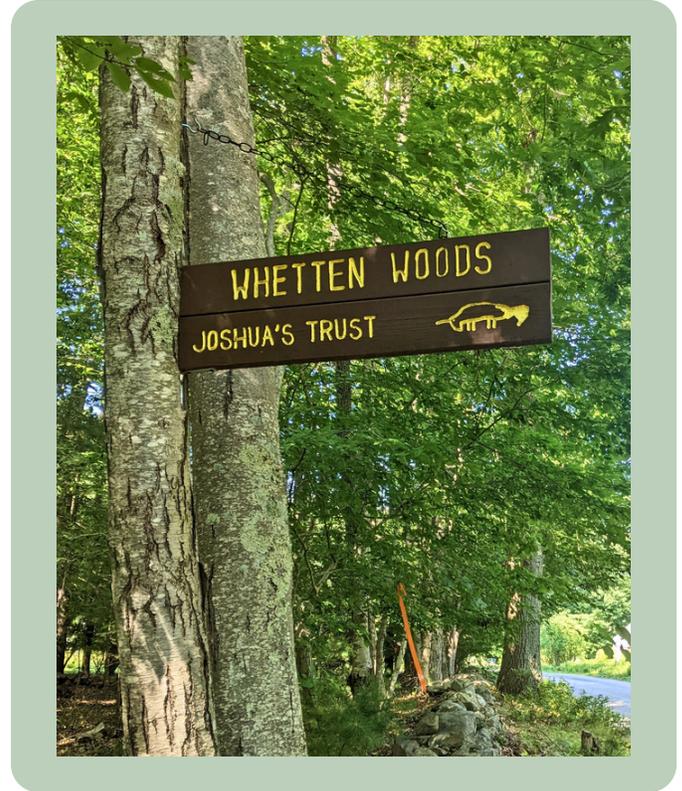
David McCarthy
Executive Director, Joshua’s Trust

REVITALIZING AN UNHEALTHY FOREST: FOREST MANAGEMENT AT WHETTEN WOODS

By Alex DiMauro-D'Amico

There's a certain aesthetic in the forest that many hikers and outdoor enthusiasts favor when ambling around in the woods. Many refer to it as "park-like." It describes a more open forest with little to no understory, providing both unobstructed views and clearer walking paths. While this might enhance a hiker's experience at many preserves, this aesthetic is actually a sign of an unhealthy forest.

A forest should have what's referred to in ecology as "stratification," or the vertical layering of vegetation. Having this mix of vegetation means more diversity, but it also means better wildlife habitat and more resilience. Many critters depend on a dense understory for food, nesting, and shelter. A midstory means that there are new trees ready to replace mature trees that may die due to a storm or disease.



Our Whetten Woods property is a prime example of a site that does not have a healthy vegetative structure (see photos below). This is due, in part, to the exceptionally high deer population in this area which can be detrimental to plant growth. Invasive Japanese Barberry also makes up the vast majority of the understory. Since barberry is largely ignored by deer, it thrives and outcompetes native seedlings, which are also a preferred snack for deer. Even without deer pressure, native seedlings have a hard time reaching maturity when sunlight can't reach the forest floor due to a closed canopy. To make matters worse, much of the overstory at Whetten Woods is oak killed by spongy moth, ash killed by emerald ash borer, and black birch infected with a fungus called Nectria.

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UNPLANNED GIVING (CONTINUED)

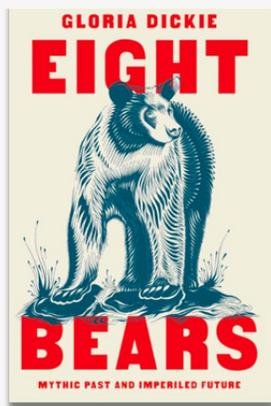
An opportunity presented itself several months after Beth's passing when my friend Sylvia drove into her garage with a bike on the roof. As the height of the car plus the bike was about a foot higher than the opening she was trying to negotiate, a crunchy collision ensued which did little to enhance the structural viability of the bike, the bike rack, or the garage door. With her bike a total loss, Sylvia asked me if she could borrow one from Beth's collection, and she liked it so much that she subsequently offered to buy it from me.

I replied, "Beth would be horrified if you paid me for this – so instead, write a check for \$1,000 to Joshua's Trust" (Thanks for the idea Doug!). After Sylvia wrote the check, I felt great, and I expect Sylvia did also. We'd successfully converted one of Beth's prized possessions into funds to support the JT properties that Beth so loved to visit. She'd be pleased with this outcome. There are still four of Beth's bikes on hooks in the garage if there are any women of medium stature who would like to make an unplanned gift to Joshua's Trust.

READING RECOMMENDATIONS FROM JT BOOK CRITTERS

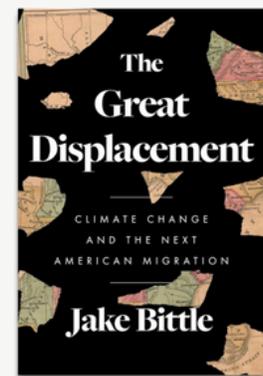
The JT Book Critters group reads nature/science/ environment books during the academic year. We are open to members on a space available basis. If you have questions, please contact the coordinators Robert and Kristine Thorson at bookcritters@yahoo.com.

JT Book Critters recommend the following 2 books discussed in our April and May meetings.



Eight Bears: Mythic Past and Imperiled Future by Gloria Dickie was this year's award-winning creature book. The author traveled the globe to bring readers some memorable stories about the eight remaining bear species: spectacled, sloth, panda, moon, sun, polar, American black bear and brown bear. While some species remain in good shape, others are threatened by the human makeover of the Earth's surface.

The Great Displacement: Climate Change and the Next American Migration by Jake Bittle is a remarkable book containing a series of very personal stories of individuals and communities in the US already being displaced by natural disasters. The author wants readers to think more about these fellow Americans and then ask ourselves how we collectively might better prepare for the expected historic internal geographic migration as our planet keeps warming.



HABITAT GARDEN (CONTINUED)

This spring, a work party gathered to remove the deteriorating landscape cloth and some of the invasive plants. Unfortunately, cypress spurge (*Euphorbia cyparissias*) and other noxious weeds have proliferated. It will likely be an ongoing battle to keep those at bay. Although this spurge is attractive, it is not only aggressively invasive, but also toxic to humans. Skin contact with the sap can cause a rash, and if eaten, one should contact poison control. We were all wearing gloves around this plant!



The next step was to find corrugated cardboard and wood chips to mulch the garden and discourage weeds from returning. Marie has many talents, but did you know that dumpster diving is one of her skills? She found enough

cardboard for one of the plots, so several folks gathered for another workday, spread the cardboard on one plot, and then covered it with three pickup truckloads of wood chips from the Mansfield Transfer Station. The second plot is part of the experiment: how much worse will the invasive plants be in the non-mulched garden?



On Mother's Day some hardy moms came by to plant some native plants from their own yards, including bee-balm, great blue lobelia, yarrow, sneezeweed, golden groundsel, evening primrose, virgin's bower, wild strawberry, joe pye weed, windflower, blunt and narrow leaved mountain mint, golden alexander, boneset, violets, ironweed, foxglove beardtongue, pasture rose, frost aster and milkweed. We decided to use the un-mulched area for ground covers and native shrubs, which should be able to compete better with lower plants like spurge. We will continue to add plants, weed the two plots, and monitor for deer destruction.

For details and directions to Allanach-Wolf Woodlands in Windham, please visit the Explore page at joshuastrust.org. You can find this preserve and all others, listed either alphabetically or by town. As a gentle reminder, all dogs must be leashed and waste must be cleaned up and removed. Please help us keep these habitats safe for wildlife and other guests.

To learn more about volunteer opportunities, call our office or email our Executive Director, David McCarthy at david.mccarthy@joshuastrust.org.



WHETTEN WOODS (CONTINUED)

We've begun the multi-year process of addressing these ecological concerns through active forest management. Over the course of the next three years, we will be removing invasive species as well as removing certain trees in order to control disease, make more openings in the canopy to promote native species, and create more wildlife habitat.

Whetten Woods will look vastly different as this project unfolds. Most notably, you will notice

woody debris scattered throughout the property. While this may appear unsightly, it serves several important purposes: the organic material decomposes into nutrient-rich soil that benefits surrounding plants and animals; it provides valuable wildlife habitat for salamanders, small mammals, invertebrates, pollinators, and many other species; and it shelters seedlings from deer browse. Much of the woody debris will also be made into large brush-piles designed to serve as nesting areas for a variety of animals.

As a permanently protected property, Whetten Woods needs to be cared for with the future in mind. Our goal is to make this site more resilient to climate change, disease, invasive species, and many other ecological pressures so that our native flora and fauna can thrive and future generations of hikers can continue to enjoy our open spaces.



Beech leaf disease is caused by a microscopic nematode, *Litylenchus crenatae*, that feeds inside the leaf buds. As leaves drop, the tree is no longer able to photosynthesize, causing it to die.

Japanese barberry, *Berberis thunbergii*, is an invasive shrub that can form dense colonies that inhibit the growth of native plants.



From our website: *Whetten Woods, donated by Nate and Theora Whetten in 1988, is a thirty-seven acre preserve located near Downtown Storrs and the University of Connecticut. A center loop trail is accessed by a parking lot on Hanks Hill Road and by a trail across town property in Downtown Storrs. The loop trail crosses a stream over several bridges and stone walls, emphasizing the area's agricultural heritage across the terrain. The adjacent town preserve contains a vernal pool and the University of Connecticut conducts several ecology studies in the area. The preserve offers recreational opportunities to walkers and trail runners and also serves as a conservation resource for the broader community.*

Whetten Woods is currently open to the public. For more details and directions, please visit our website at joshustrust.org/nate-theora-whetten-woods-2/.

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What's Inside:

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BECOME A MEMBER TODAY

Our members are critical to the mission of Joshua's Trust. Be a part of land protection, habitat restoration, historical preservation, and more with a donation today.

Please call David McCarthy, JT's Executive Director, at (860) 429-9023 or stop by our headquarters at the Atwood farmstead for questions about membership.

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The Gurleyville Grist Mill is open every Sunday afternoon from 1 to 5 PM.



The Gurleyville Grist Mill, located on the beautiful Fenton River, offers a unique opportunity to observe rural 19th century gristmill technology. It contains a complete system of preserved milling equipment. Stop by any Sunday until mid-October for a tour with our volunteer guides.