



Joshua's Trust News

Protecting Land and Preserving Heritage — Forever.



Year-End 2025 — Fall & Frost



WINTER IN NORTHEASTERN CONNECTICUT

Wildlife — Recreation — Winter Birds — Trails — Habitat Restoration — Season's Greetings

Long-Eared Owl

The Long-eared owl—slender, nocturnal, and known for its tall ear tufts—is one of Connecticut's rarest, and is listed as state-endangered. It roosts in dense evergreens and hunts in open fields rich with mice and voles. Once common, its decline is tied to habitat loss and reduced prey. Joshua's Trust is helping to protect and restore the forest edges and open spaces this secretive owl depends on, giving the species a better chance to return.



Photo: Xianwei Zeng

Season's Greetings

Winter has arrived, bringing crisp air, quiet woods, and a renewed invitation to connect with nature. With the leaves down, it's easier than ever to spot wildlife moving through the land. Our preserves offer peaceful trails and vital habitats to explore. As the holidays approach, we send warm wishes to you and yours —may your winter days be bright, restorative, and filled with the beauty of the outdoors.

CONNECTICUT WINTER BIRDS

Be on the look out while hiking JT Preserves



Northern Cardinal

Male and female cardinals sing, with males performing over 200 songs an hour to defend territory or attract mates. The male's vivid red plumage comes from carotenoid-rich foods in nature.



Dark-eyed Junco

Dark-eyed juncos often return to the same wintering spot, so the birds at your feeder may be repeat visitors. Their nickname, "snowbirds," comes from the belief that their arrival signals winter's return.



Eastern Bluebird

Once a winter visitor, the eastern bluebird now often stays in Connecticut year-round, especially when berries from native plants like sumac, holly, and dogwood are available.

SUPPORT OUR ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP DRIVE

Become a 2025-26 Member

Thank you for your dedication to the JT Mission — protecting the natural and historical beauty of Northeastern CT. Let's continue making a difference together. Your 2025-26 Annual Membership has an immediate impact, every gift helps. A special thank you to our supportive members and incredible volunteers—your support, time, and efforts make everything possible. Wishing you a joyful and peaceful holiday season!



Thankful for You

Tufted Titmouse



STAFF

Executive Director:

David McCarthy

Stewardship Coordinator:

Alex DiMauro-D'Amico

Finance and Administration Manager:

Dawn Brandriff

Development & Communications

Coordinator:

Melica Stinnett

OFFICERS

President: John Hankins

Vice President: Jim Cole

Secretary: Marie Cantino

Treasurer: Mike Willenborg

Trustee at Large: Rob Beach

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Phone: 860-429-9023



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 RAMBLINGS

A STEADY SHIP IN CHOPPY WATERS

By John Hankins

As I make my way through a third and final year as President of Joshua's Trust, I've been reflecting on what makes our organization consistently impactful. We faced some challenges in 2025 - our capable former Executive Director Michael Hveem announced his well-deserved retirement last fall, leaving us with a big gap to fill in the management of the organization as we started the new year. Mike's retirement was followed within six months by three additional employee departures, which brought us most of the way back to the good old days of trying to fill the gaps with volunteer hours. During this timeframe there have been some challenges for me as well - as many of you know I lost Beth, my wife of 43 years, to cancer in July of 2024. Even as she was fading away I received my own (less serious) cancer diagnosis and started on a successful but disruptive six-month chemo regimen in the first half of this year.

Sounds pretty awful, doesn't it? And a lot of it was. What was not awful was that our 12-member Board of Trustees stepped up for me personally and for the organization in general as we navigated our way through a difficult time. After Beth's demise, Vice President Karen Zimmer provided me emotional support and later shared her wise counsel as a dating consultant as I got my feet back under me. Board member and Stewardship Chair Scott Matthies distracted me with opportunities to assist with JT trail maintenance projects. Secretary Marie Cantino provided her steady hand and well-reasoned perspective as we recovered from Mike's departure. The other members of the board were also there for the organization, picking up the slack and providing a huge number of volunteer hours as we conducted a successful search for a new Executive Director.

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THANK YOU TO OUR COMMUNITY PARTNERS



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To learn more about our Community Partner program, please call or email us today. Your support makes an impact!

HOW CAN YOU CONTRIBUTE TO WILDLIFE SUCCESS IN YOUR COMMUNITY?

By JT Intern, Danni Syrotiak

The grasses, shrubs, and forbs found in early successional habitat provide important qualities needed by a variety of wildlife, specifically ground-nesting birds. What exactly is “early successional habitat?” It is the plants and ground cover that develop in an area shortly after a disturbance. There are different types of disturbances: natural disturbances which include extreme weather events like hurricanes, tornados, wildfires, and in some cases, insects or disease. There are also human-caused disturbances such as logging or mowing. Succession is the process in which plant communities develop and change over time - starting at early stages and eventually leading to their final maturity, known as “climax communities.” The phrase “develop and change over time” is a key component of why much of our early successional habitat in Connecticut, and in the United States, is declining.

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*Early successional habitat in Vernon, CT
photo by Danni Syrotiak*

JT INVASIVE INITIATIVE - A NATIVE PLANT WORKING GROUP

Stewarding our preserves

To tackle invasive plants, Joshua’s Trust has partnered with the Ashford Invasive Plants Working Group (AIPWG) and the Mansfield Invasive Plants Working Group to develop an engaging community program focused on removing invasive species across Joshua’s Trust properties. This partnership hosts hands-on educational events that empower individuals of all ages to make a tangible difference in their communities while fostering a connection to the environment. Program volunteers learn about ecological restoration, and how to enhance trails, restore biodiversity, and help maintain our cherished natural spaces.

While invasive species are pervasive throughout Connecticut, the right planning and implementation can help us stay ahead of the curve. We prioritize properties with higher conservation value, which is determined by factors such as wetlands, large unfragmented forests, riparian buffers, or habitats where species of concern may exist.



*JT Stewardship Coordinator, Alex DiMauro-D'Amico &
Stewardship Partner, Our Companions Animal Rescue and Sanctuary*

We rotate the properties where we remove invasives to ensure regular follow-ups, reduction of the seed bank and the promotion of native regeneration. These events will resume in the spring. To learn more or get involved, reach out, subscribe to our emails, and follow us on social media.

GET INVOLVED!

REVITALIZING AN UNHEALTHY FOREST – UPDATE

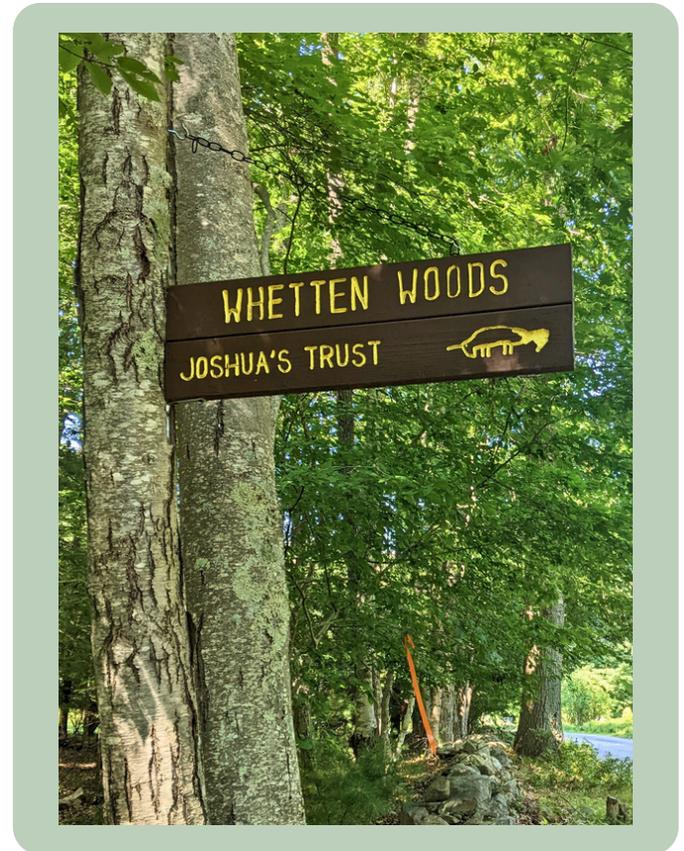
FOREST MANAGEMENT AT WHETTEN WOODS

By Alex DiMauro-D'Amico

We will begin the first phase of our multi-year forest improvement project at Whetten Woods in March of 2026. This will involve removal of all invasive species on Joshua's Trust's 37 acres as well as on abutting town land and Bundy Brook Farm's private land. Invasive removal will be a 3-year effort – returning each year and ensuring that we've achieved at least 90% mortality. In late 2026/early 2027 we will be commencing removal of sick and overcrowded trees.



Whetten Woods contains many diseased trees including black birch with a fungus called nectria canker, oak that have been killed or weakened by the spongy moth, and ash that have been killed or weakened by the emerald ash borer.



Our plan is to create openings in the canopy so that we can encourage the new growth of healthy, native species. The overall goal of this project is to improve forest health and wildlife habitat. As a result, these woods will remain resilient so that hikers can continue to enjoy Whetten Woods for generations to come.

JOSHUA'S TRUST AWARDED \$11,553 IN A CLCC GRANT

Joshua's Trust was awarded a Climate-Smart Stewardship Grant from the Connecticut Land Conservation Council (CLCC) for our Madeline Regan's Pitch Pine Restoration Project. With the funding, we've upgraded some of the



equipment that allows us to care for our properties and the flora and fauna that they host. Most notably, we've outfitted our tractor with a grapple bucket that will make it easier for us to move wood and brush as well remove invasive species.

KEEPING OUR TRAILS SAFE, OPEN, AND ACCESSIBLE

From blazing summer days to frosty winter mornings, the Stewardship Committee and staff at Joshua's Trust are always at work

caring for the landscapes we love. Through every season, they tirelessly work to restore habitats, enhance biodiversity, and maintain the trails that connect us to nature.



JT Stewardship Coordinator,
Alex DiMauro-D'Amico

PRESIDENTIAL RAMBLINGS CONTINUED

Remarkably, as we head into 2026, it feels like Joshua's Trust is firing on all cylinders. We've hired an energetic and insightful Executive Director in David McCarthy, who has quickly re-assembled a professional staff and allowed the Board to focus on our central mission, land protection. As we approach the end of 2025, we find ourselves weeks away from closing on over 600 acres of donated land and conservation easements in Hampton, Ashford, Coventry, and Mansfield, with at least 10 additional acquisition projects in the pipeline.

So here's my ask this month – first, dust off that fall appeal envelope you received recently from Joshua's Trust and consider a year-end donation to support the preservation of land in northeast Connecticut. Second, consider whether you or someone you know might be a good candidate for our Board of Trustees. We'd like to add another three or four people who can provide us with a diversity of perspectives as we continue to steer this land conservation ship. If you know such a person, have them contact us at administration@joshuastrust.org.

SEASONS GREETING FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Dear Joshua's Trust Community,

Winter has arrived in Northeastern Connecticut, bringing crisp air, open views, and a quiet beauty across our preserves. With the canopy down and the landscape softened by frost and snow, it's one of the best times to spot deer moving through the fields, owls perched high in the trees, and fox tracks weaving across fresh snow. Joshua's Trust lands provide essential refuge for wildlife year-round, and winter offers a special chance to experience these places in a new light.

As we reflect on the past year, I'm deeply grateful for the dedication and generosity of our members, volunteers, staff, and community partners. Together, we've strengthened our stewardship work, cared for thousands of acres of protected land, and expanded opportunities for our community to learn, explore, and connect with nature and history. Every trail maintained, program offered, and habitat restored is possible because of your support.

Conservation is at the heart of everything we do—protecting heritage and open space, enhancing ecological resilience, and ensuring that future generations inherit the landscapes we experience today. Your involvement has helped Joshua's Trust continue this vital work throughout 2025, and we are proud of the meaningful progress we've made side by side.

As the holiday season settles in, I invite you to renew your Annual Membership and celebrate the land we collectively protect. Bundle up, step outside, and enjoy the quiet magic of our preserves—whether on a quiet walk, a family hike, or a peaceful moment in the woods.

Warmest wishes for a joyful and nature-filled season,
David McCarthy - Executive Director, Joshua's Trust

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ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP

LET'S MAKE A DIFFERENCE
TOGETHER



Your 2025–26 Annual Membership has an immediate impact - every gift helps. As a member, you will remain active in our mission through Annual Meeting voting privileges, invites to special events; and you're kept informed through email updates and quarterly printed newsletters.

Donating is quick and secure. We are a 501(c)(3) charitable nonprofit, which may make your gift to support our regional conservation work tax deductible.

DONATE



JOIN OR RENEW – TODAY!

JT BOOK CRITTERS

JT Book Critters held two discussions during Fall 2025, all based on award-winning nonfiction.

READING RECOMMENDATIONS FROM JT BOOK CRITTERS

In October, we started the year discussing - *Is a River Alive?* by Robert MacFarlane (2025). The internationally renowned author lyrically and philosophically writes about his adventures in three places where rivers are under threat – Ecuador from mining, India from pollution, and Canada from damming – while exploring the idea of rivers having legal rights.

In November, we discussed regenerative agriculture, giving readers a choice between two related books.

Pastoral Song: A Farmer's Journey by James Rebanks was a Nature Book of the Year for 2021. It is a beautifully written memoir that offers insights into historical agricultural pressures and trends by following three generations of the author's own family who farm in England's Lake District.

Wilding: Returning Nature to Our Farm by Isabella Tree starts in 2001 when the author and her husband abandon conventional intensive farming on their degraded 3500 acre estate in southeast England and begin a wildly successful experiment to create diverse habitats for wildlife and endangered species.

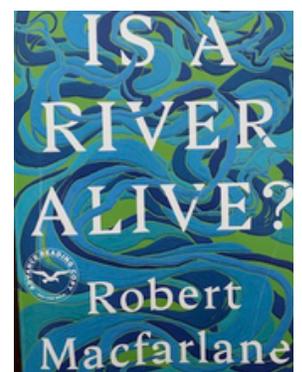
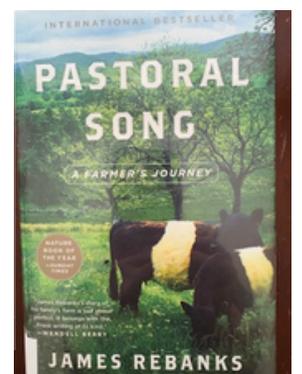
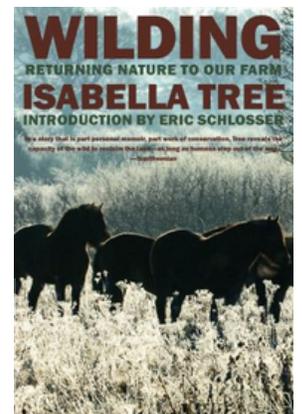
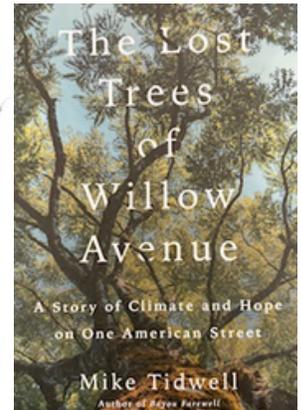


In December, we're reading - ***The Lost Trees of Willow Avenue: A Story of Climate and Hope on one American Street*** by Mike Tidwell (2025). It is a personal account of how global climate change is affecting us all everywhere, including in his own neighborhood in suburban Washington DC. The book is a relatable case study showing how human and ecological communities are being impacted.



The JT Book Critters group reads Nature/Science/Environment books. We are open to members on a space-available basis. Please direct inquiries to bookcritters@yahoo.com.

Kristine and Robert Thorson,
Coordinators



HOW CAN YOU CONTRIBUTE TO WILDLIFE SUCCESS IN YOUR COMMUNITY? CONTINUED

Early successional habitat is one of the most endangered ecosystems in the US, and it is important to understand that one of the ways we can stop this decline is through active management. When left unmanaged, early successional habitat begins to fade away. As the tree canopy develops, the plant species that formerly thrived in those conditions do not receive enough sunlight. This habitat can very quickly become mature forest, no longer supporting the same species. Although mature forests provide their own benefits, species like American Woodcock, Prairie

Warblers, Indigo Bunting, and Eastern Towhee are left without nesting and breeding habitat once early successional habitat starts disappearing. Many of these species are listed as threatened or endangered in several northeastern states and studies have shown that the American Woodcock has declined by 40% over the past 30 years. The Prairie Warbler, as listed in the 2025 State of the Birds report, is designated as a Yellow Alert Tipping Point species, meaning that it has lost more than 50% of its population in the past 50 years. According to the North American Breeding Bird Survey, this species declined by an estimated 1.9% per year between 1966 and 2023, resulting in a total decline of 67%.

How can you as a landowner and community member contribute to wildlife success? Firstly, it's important to understand that cutting or thinning trees, mowing, and prescribed burns help support wildlife that depend on this habitat. Moreover, being able to identify invasive species that can overtake and outcompete native shrubs and plants is another crucial element involved in active management. With increased sunlight reaching these habitats, invasive species often have a better chance at establishing themselves. Keeping an eye out for these non-native plants and removing them will help natives that would otherwise struggle without your intervention. Alex D'Amico, Stewardship Coordinator at Joshua's Trust, has been putting in the time at Agnes' Pasture - a property that was historically meadow and has since grown in with invasive autumn olive, eastern white pine, and fast-growing hardwood species. "We are reclaiming the meadow through mowing and are making brush piles which will in turn improve nesting for a variety of species," says Alex.

Mature forests and more heavily forested areas provide nesting and breeding habitat to certain species, while other species, like the aforementioned Indigo Bunting and Eastern Towhee, will continue to decline in the absence of early successional habitat. More than 73% of forestland in the region is privately owned, and it is important that landowners take an active role in managing these habitats for the variety of plants and animals that depend on them for their survival.

As climate change, increased development, and invasive species continue to shift the landscape, the impact you can have as a landowner will continue to grow. By understanding the value of early successional habitat and taking part in active management, you can help sustain the wildlife that depend on these disappearing ecosystems.



Invasive species Japanese Barberry- Elizabeth Couch Preserve- photo by Danni Syrotiak



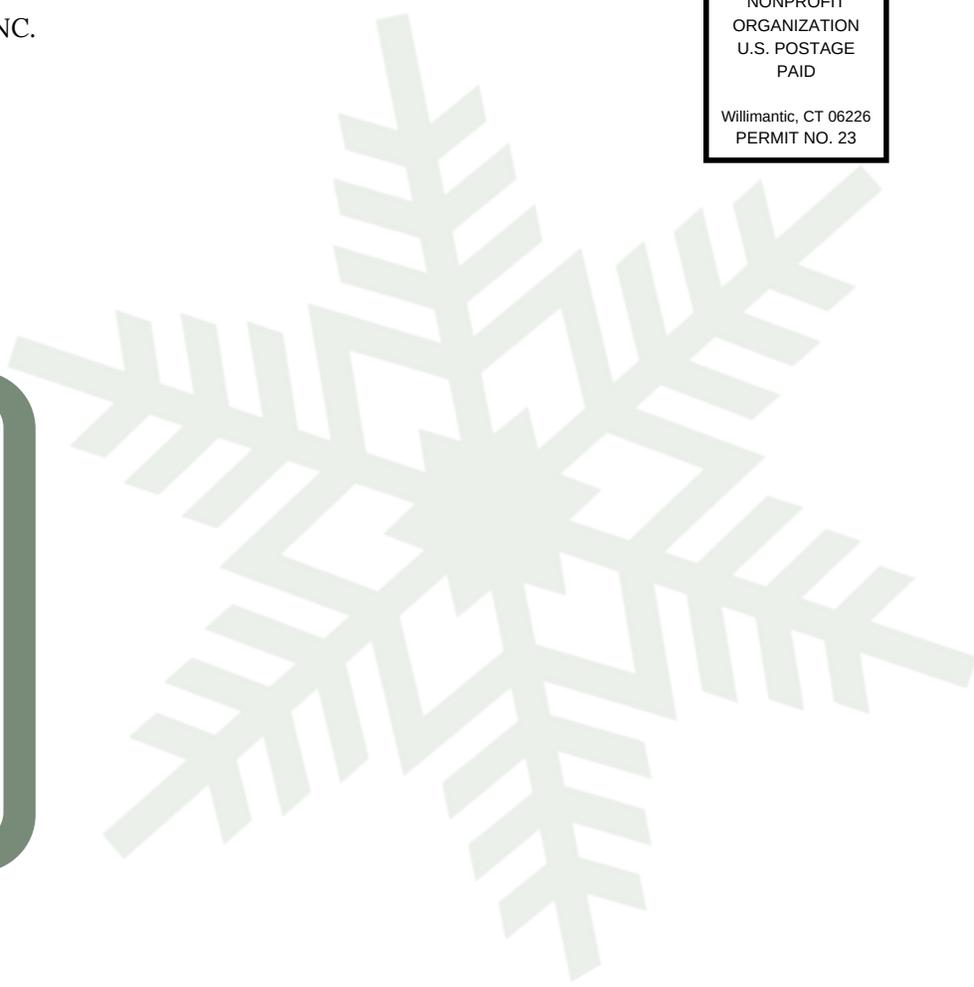
Prairie warblers are a key indicator species for the health of the state's scrubland habitat.

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What's Inside:

- Invasive Initiative - A Native Plant Working Group
- Contributing to the Success of Wildlife
- A Winter Message from the ED
- Whetten Woods Update
- Presidential Ramblings
- Reading Recommendations from JT Book Critters



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 Executive Director, at (860) 429-9023 or stop by our headquarters at the Atwood farmstead for questions about membership.

SUPPORT - EXPLORE - CONNECT



Explore and protect nature in the Quiet Corner for generations to come

We invite you to experience the beauty we've preserved, connect with nature, and enjoy the 40+ miles of trails we maintain. Join us in safeguarding the land and history that connects us all.

WANT TO SEE MORE OF JOSHUA'S TRUST?

Follow us on social media or subscribe to our eNews.



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