

JOSHUA'S TRUST *News*



Climate-Smart Stewardship:
**Restoring a Pitch Pine
Barren at Madeline
Regan Preserve**

Read the full story on pg. 6

Presidential Ramblings

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ON THE COVER

A brush pile is pictured ablaze during a wintertime pile burn at Madeline Regan Preserve in Tolland

→ Full story on page 6

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Update your contact information & communication preferences here:



My three-year stint as the president of Joshua's Trust wraps up this spring, so I am using my final presidential ramble on the most critical component of our mission: land protection. During the winter of 2022–2023 when I was heir apparent to the Joshua's Trust throne I was given the daunting task by then-president Rob Beach to direct the process of developing our five-year strategic plan. The distillation of that plan was that “Everything the organization does should support the central mission of land protection in some way.” The plan established a goal of conserving an additional 2500 acres of land by 2028. It was an exciting and ambitious goal, but it turns out we failed to outline one small detail—exactly how we were going to do that.

Land in Connecticut is precious, and virtually all of it is for sale for the right price. Consider how easy it would be to acquire 2500 acres in five years if we had a gazillion dollars. We could just buy our way to success. But we don't have a gazillion dollars, so we largely need to do land conservation the old fashioned way— sharing and spreading the importance of conservation, generating community goodwill, fostering strong relationships, and tapping into the inherent generosity of the residents of northeast Connecticut.

I'm reminded of an episode from my decades of work in an engineering consulting firm in Manchester. I was sitting in a sales meeting when the CEO went around the room and asked each of us

to describe the sales strategy for our business unit. Each executive around the table tried to outdo the last. When it got to me, I said “It's my strategy to sit at my desk and wait for the phone to ring”. My answer got eye rolls around the table, and a stern and very public rebuke from the CEO, but I was trying to make a point. I ran a particularly non-sexy part of the company—environmental property assessments and hazardous waste cleanups. People generally only hired us for this service when they were forced to, not when they wanted to. Clients came to me not because of an ad on the side of a bus, but because of our reputation and a belief that we could effectively and efficiently achieve their objectives.

I've thought of the “waiting for the phone to ring” story many times since I've been the President of Joshua's Trust. We may know where the high-value privately-owned conservation land is located, but a land protection campaign where we knock on doors and ask people to give away their family's legacy would be decidedly unsuccessful. What we can do is steward our existing lands effectively, continue to build on our reputation built over 60 years, and be active enough in the community so that people know that if and when they want to protect their land that we offer them an option. Proactive acquisition of the most valuable parcels of conservation land will continue to be part of our strategy, and occasionally that will cost us some dollars, but here in eastern Connecticut, even in 2026, waiting for the phone to ring continues to be surprisingly effective. I'm stepping down as President in May but am thrilled to be moving into the chairmanship of the Land Protection Committee where I've got an opportunity to continue with the critical work we do. Onward!

John Hankins
Board President, Joshua's Trust

1 YEAR,
3 TOWNS,
5 PROPERTIES,
232 ACRES, &
\$0.00

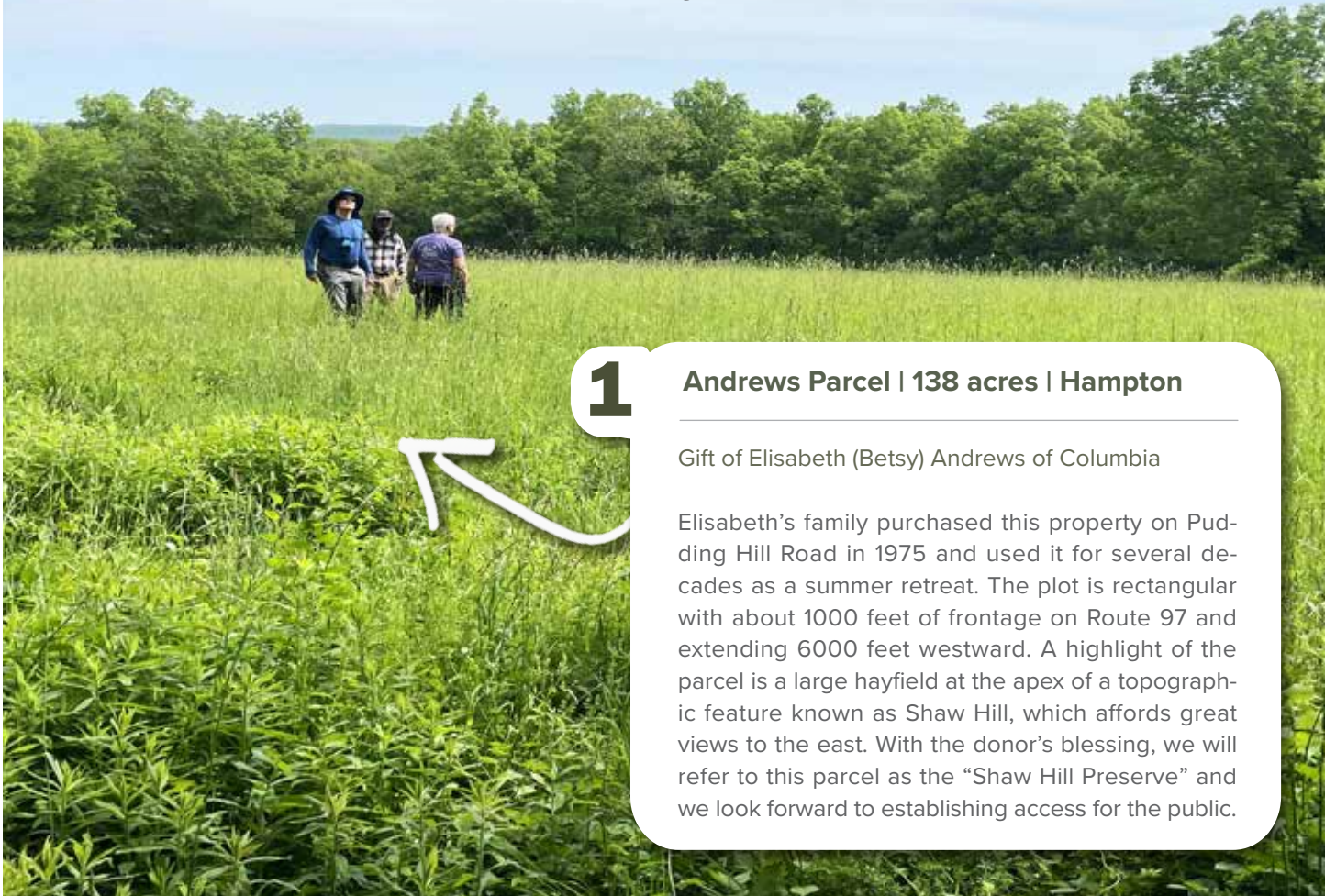
Land Donation— It’s Still a Thing

John Hankins
Board President, Joshua’s Trust

At any given time, the Joshua’s Trust Land Protection team is typically tracking between 10 and 20 properties that could result in either owning land outright or holding conservation easements that protect the land from development or abuse. After 60 years of doing this important work, we’re accustomed to both disappointments and successes, but by any measure, the end of 2025 was in the latter column. Through a combination of donor generosity, the hard work of our team, and lucky circumstances, we closed on 232 acres of conservation land spread across five properties in three towns in 2025—nearly 227 acres of that in December alone. Total purchase price for these five properties: ZERO, a clear indication that generosity and a commitment to land conservation remain alive and well in northeast Connecticut.

We’ll be providing more information about these new parcels over the coming months, but here’s what came our way during a few short weeks at the end of the year:

Note: Included in the numbers above but not pictured in this article is the acquisition of Fish’s Woods Preserve in October of 2025. This beautiful, 5.3 acre property is located in Mansfield directly across the road from Joshua’s Trust Gurley-Mason Mill Site and was gifted in fee by Art and JoAnn Freeman, whose generosity ensures its protection for generations to come.



1

Andrews Parcel | 138 acres | Hampton

Gift of Elisabeth (Betsy) Andrews of Columbia

Elisabeth’s family purchased this property on Pudding Hill Road in 1975 and used it for several decades as a summer retreat. The plot is rectangular with about 1000 feet of frontage on Route 97 and extending 6000 feet westward. A highlight of the parcel is a large hayfield at the apex of a topographic feature known as Shaw Hill, which affords great views to the east. With the donor’s blessing, we will refer to this parcel as the “Shaw Hill Preserve” and we look forward to establishing access for the public.

Land Donation—It's Still A Thing

Scarpino Parcel | 6 acres | Hampton

Gift of Brothers Ralph and Paul Scarpino

This property has been in the Scarpino family since 1959. Although relatively small, the parcel provides an important access to Hampton's 160 acres of forested open space to the south, which in turn abuts the aforementioned Andrews parcel further to the south. The Andrews and Scarpino properties, together with another nearby 47 acres donated to us by Robert Inman in 2024, have significantly increased our conservation impact in Hampton.

2



3

Forest Road Parcel | 15 acres | Mansfield

Gift of Chris Kueffner, Joshua's Trust Board Member

Prior to the donation of this property on Forest Road, Chris successfully removed invasive barberry and implemented a site-wide patch cut, both efforts assisted by a grant provided by the National Resource Conservation Service (NRCS). Going forward Joshua's Trust will manage the property as early successional habitat. We are hoping by this time next year to be able to report on the acquisition of additional forested land in the area.

White Parcel | 68 acres | Coventry

Gift of the Frederick S. White Trust

This property on Cooper Lane is the final block of land connecting open space owned by the Town of Coventry and Joshua's Trust's existing Couch Preserve. The parcel contains valuable habitat on the shore of Eagleville Lake, an impoundment of the Willimantic River. Existing forest roads that criss-cross the property will be the backbone of future hiking trails that will connect to existing trails on Joshua's Trust and town-owned land to the north.

4



The future of your family's land could be preserved forever, too.

Joshua's Trust has protected over 5,500 acres of land in the past sixty years. Want to learn more about donating land? Reach out to us to start a conversation.

CONNECTICUT'S LAST STANDING STONE GRISTMILL

Open Sundays

1:00–5:00PM

May–October

Opening for the
season on May 17!

The 191-year-old Gurleyville Gristmill is the only stone mill of its kind in Connecticut. Located on the beautiful banks of the Fenton River in Mansfield, the mill contains a complete system of preserved milling equipment, offering visitors a unique opportunity to observe 19th century gristmill technology.

Did you know? The stone building which houses the machinery was built around 1835, but a sawmill operated on the site as early as 1723. The first gristmill was added around 1750.

The Gurleyville Gristmill



Climate-Smart Stewardship: Restoring a Pitch Pine Barren at Madeline Regan Preserve



The 29-acre Madeline Regan Preserve in Tolland is the location of an exciting ongoing conservation project to encourage a climate-resilient habitat through the use of prescribed burns.

Upon discovering six healthy pitch pine trees among many dying ones in the white pine-dominant preserve—evidence of a once-larger stand of pitch pine—Joshua's Trust Stewardship Manager Alex DiMauro-D'Amico set into action an ambitious multi-phase project to restore a habitat which enables the living pitch pines to receive the full sun needed to begin recreating the original pitch pine barren, a fire-dependent ecosystem that is disappearing as we actively suppress wildfires.

After approval from the Joshua's Trust Stewardship Committee, the project was subsequently awarded a \$11,552 Climate Smart Stewardship Grant by the Connecticut Land Conservation Council, equipping Joshua's Trust with the tools needed for pitch pine habitat restoration at the Regan Preserve and for continuing to integrate climate-smart stewardship on our properties in the future.

The project site has transformed drastically over the last year. The clearing and piling of under-story brush in the summer of 2025 became the fuel for a blazing farewell to an endless winter.



On February 27, Joshua's Trust conducted a controlled burn on four 50x50' brush piles at the Regan Preserve. Contributing writer George Jacobi spectated the burn to learn more about the project. He compiled his field notes and has shared with us the 'Regan Rehab Recipe', a creative take on this conservation project.

→ [Read his story on page 12](#)

Pitch pine-scrub oak barrens are considered the most impacted terrestrial habitat in Connecticut. Pitch pine itself is estimated to account for less than 1% of pine in the state. The many dead pitch pines at this preserve paint a clear picture of what happens without active management of these sites. Because pitch pine is well-adapted to warmer and drier environments, it is expected to be hardy in the face of a changing climate.

Pitch Pine (*Pinus rigida*)

Common names: torch pine, hard pine, black pine, yellow pine

Appearance: often has twisted, gnarled, or irregular shape; can reach heights of 30-80'

Needles: stiff, yellow-green, 2-5" long

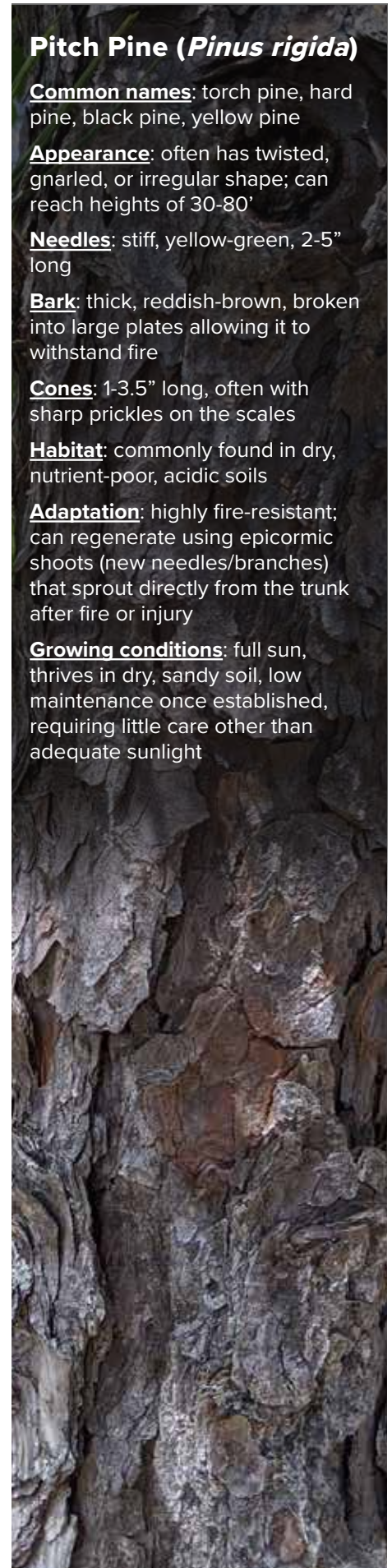
Bark: thick, reddish-brown, broken into large plates allowing it to withstand fire

Cones: 1-3.5" long, often with sharp prickles on the scales

Habitat: commonly found in dry, nutrient-poor, acidic soils

Adaptation: highly fire-resistant; can regenerate using epicormic shoots (new needles/branches) that sprout directly from the trunk after fire or injury

Growing conditions: full sun, thrives in dry, sandy soil, low maintenance once established, requiring little care other than adequate sunlight



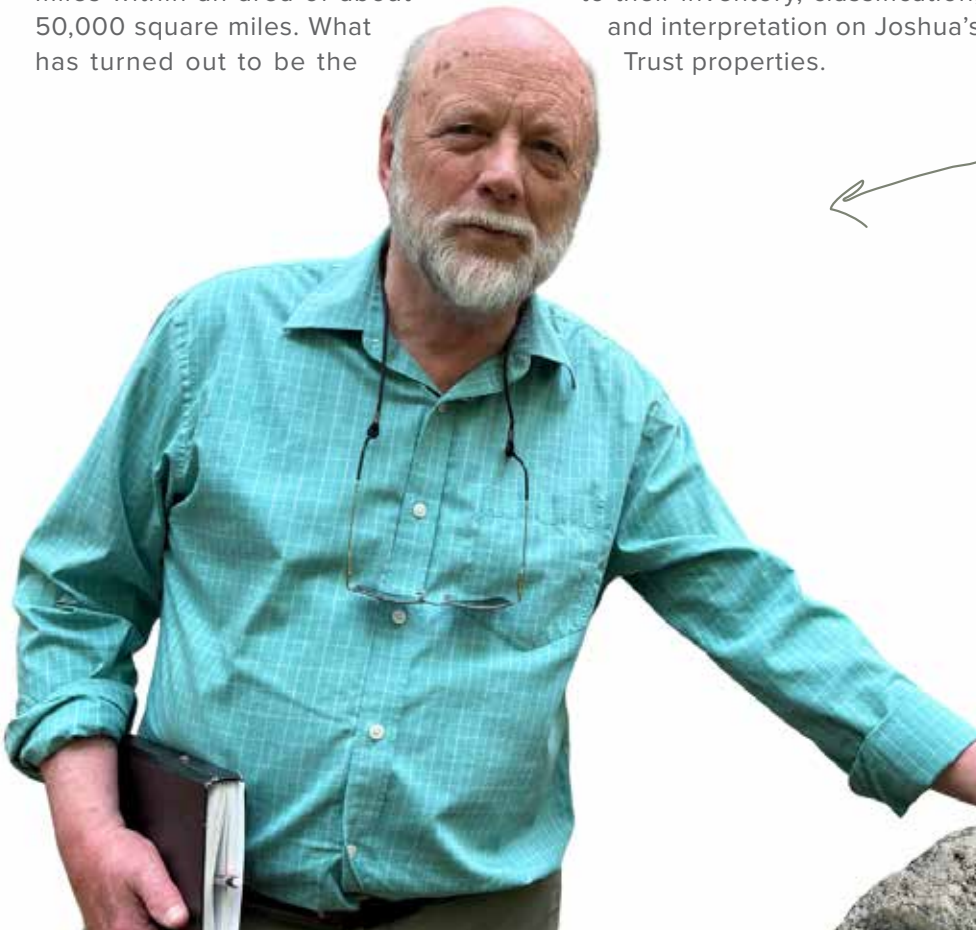
Save the Date!

Join Joshua’s Trust staff, trustees, and volunteers to reflect on another successful year of protecting land and preserving heritage—our 60th!

Robert Thorson to Present at Annual Meeting: *Drylands and Wetlands: Landforms and Legacies of Human Agency*

In early New England history, freshwater wetlands were considered miasma to be loathed, drained, and converted to more productive use. By the early 1970s, however, the values of freshwater wetlands in New England had been recognized and they began to be protected by state and federal regulations, even though the majority had either been created or altered by agroecology and hydro-power development. Much the same can be said about New England’s grid-work of drystone walls estimated at 200,000 linear miles within an area of about 50,000 square miles. What has turned out to be the

region’s signature land-form resulted from the same human agencies at wetlands. But with respect to wildlife habitat, they are complementary drylands whose ecological functions as volumes, areas, and lines enrich habitat diversity in ways that are only just beginning to be investigated. For decades, Professor Thorson has been trying to make a peer-reviewed science out of stone walls as part of a vision for more effective conservation and management. This talk will be a status report on that emerging science with specific attention drawn to their inventory, classification, and interpretation on Joshua’s Trust properties.



60th Annual Meeting
Open to all



April 18th
4:00–6:00PM
Holiday Hill Day Camp
Mansfield, CT

**RSVP
HERE**



FEATURED SPEAKER

Robert M. Thorson (Thor) is a Mid-western native, turned Northwestern geologist, turned Northeastern academic. Since 1984 he’s been a resident of the Town of Mansfield and has served on many of its committees. For Joshua’s Trust, he’s co-coordinated its Nature-Environment-Science reading group with Kristine Thorson since 2016, and has guided its annual Earth Day walk since 2021. Currently, he is a Professor of Earth Sciences at the University of Connecticut with a research focus on literature, the link between New England’s landscape, archaeology, history, and ecology. His work as a journalist was recently featured in the Washington Post, The Atlantic, and Smithsonian. His most recent book, *The Walden Experiments*, will be released by Princeton University Press in September.



Land Trusts: Important Partners in Watershed Protection

Kathy Demers

Volunteer; Joshua's Trust,
Natchaug Watershed Advisory Board

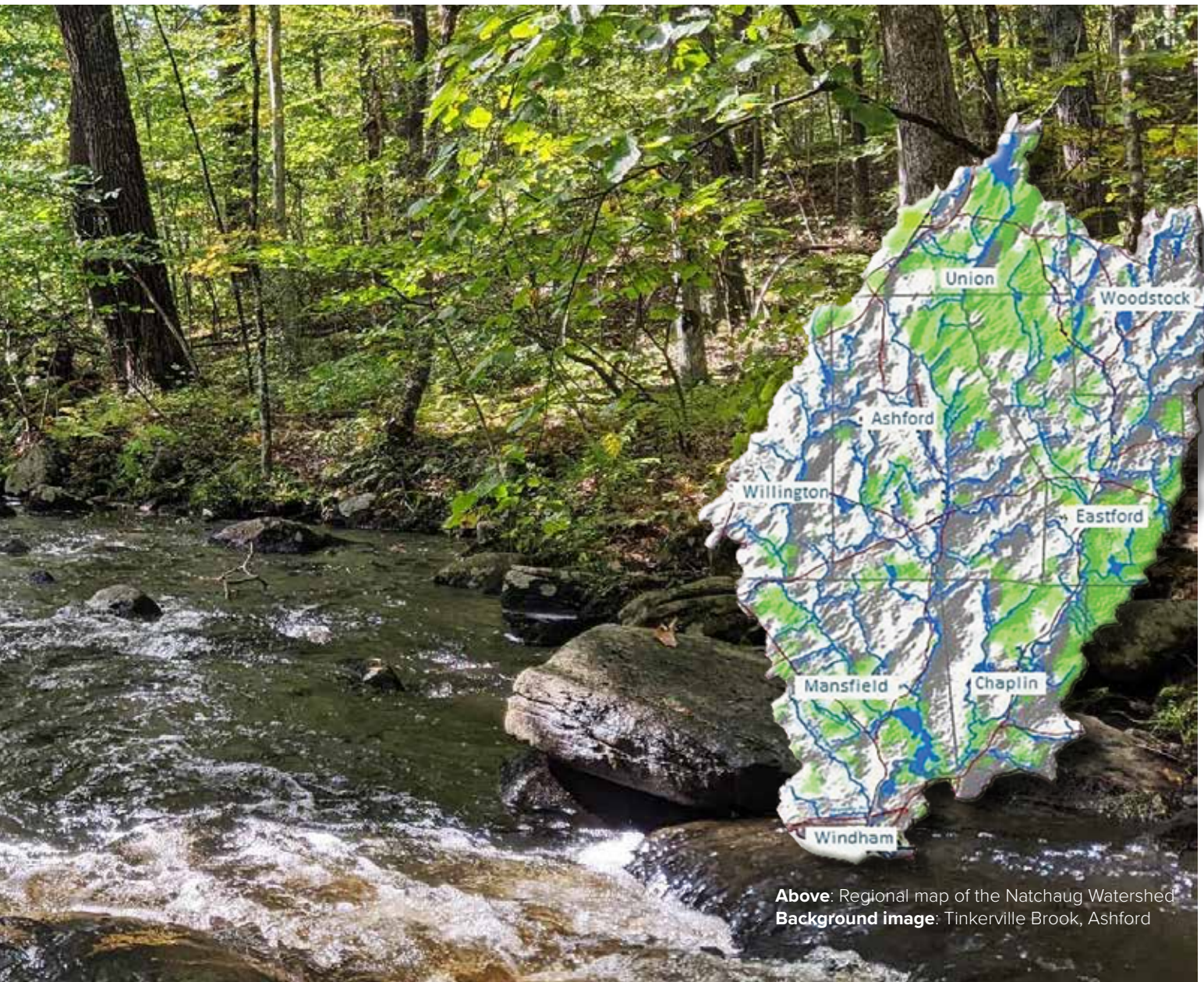
As you travel Route 44 from Storrs/Mansfield to Eastford you cross over three major rivers that flow through our area: the Fenton, Mount Hope and Natchaug Rivers. These scenic rivers are fed by many smaller streams and brooks, some so small you could literally jump over them. Ultimately their waters all converge behind the Mansfield Hollow Dam and flow to the Willimantic Reservoir, an important drinking water source for 22,000 people living in Willimantic and parts of Windham and Mansfield.

The rainwater and snow melt that

feed these three rivers drain mainly from land in the towns of Ashford, Chaplin, Eastford, Mansfield, Union, Willington, Windham and Woodstock. This 164 square mile drainage area is designated as the “Natchaug Watershed” and has the honor of being the largest drinking water supply watershed in Connecticut. It is recognized as an overall healthy watershed due to the high amount of forest cover (about 75%), minimal development impacts and a good amount of state, town, land trust and privately owned permanently protected land.

The quality of the water present in any watershed can be affected by substances that are picked up and

carried along by rain and snow melt as they move across land surfaces. Leaves, soil, fertilizer, pesticides, oil, grease, pet and livestock waste, road salt and other contaminants can be deposited into streams, rivers, and lakes, especially if no natural filtration takes place before precipitation enters them. Paved roads, parking lots, sidewalks, driveways, roofs and other impervious surfaces do not allow precipitation to infiltrate into the soil, so surface contaminants can be swept along into storm drains and flow into nearby waterways. During heavy rainstorms, large amounts of water flow swiftly over these impervious surfaces into watercourses contributing to flooding, bank erosion, sedimentation



Above: Regional map of the Natchaug Watershed
Background image: Tinkerville Brook, Ashford

and water temperature rises that can affect humans as well as aquatic species like native brook trout which require clean, cold water for survival. High levels of nitrogen and phosphorus from excess fertilizers, animal waste and poorly functioning septic systems can enter water bodies and contribute to algae blooms.

By conserving and stewarding over 5,500 acres of woodlands, meadows and wetlands across the region, Joshua's Trust is a valuable partner in helping to protect water quality in multiple watersheds, including the Natchaug. Unlike developed parcels which often contain large amounts of impervious surfaces, undeveloped land and

vegetated cover protect watersheds by acting as natural sponges and filters, reducing storm water runoff and minimizing pollutants. Intact forests and wetlands absorb and store rainfall, reducing the risk of flooding and slowly releasing ground water to recharge streams, rivers, and residential wells, keeping them flowing during dry seasons. Deep root systems of trees and other plants stabilize soil, reducing erosion that can cause sedimentation in rivers and destroy aquatic habitats. The Trust's natural landscapes perform all of these important ecosystem services that help keep our waterways clean and healthy.

UPCOMING OPPORTUNITIES TO LEARN MORE ABOUT WATERSHEDS

→ **A Watershed's Delight at Tinkerville Brook Preserve**

APRIL 11 | 10:00am–12:00pm

Explore how this healthy & intact ecosystem contributes to the flow of clean water from the brook to the greater Natchaug watershed. **Registration required.**

→ **Naturally Natchaug Clean Water Festival**

MAY 2 | 9:30am–3:00pm

Windham Water Works
174 Storrs Road, Mansfield
Visit us at the Joshua's Trust table!



Restoration Pruning Begins in the Historic Atwood Orchard

The historic Atwood Orchard at the Joshua's Trust headquarters in Mansfield Center—home to over twenty heirloom apple varieties—is currently undergoing a restoration pruning plan to ensure the ongoing health and longevity of the trees. The 3-year pruning plan is part of a larger enhancement project to transform the Atwood Orchard into a cherished community resource & learning space with expanded plantings, DNA testing, thoughtful interpretive signage, updated maps, and the potential for exciting new programming.

The apple trees, many of which are "original" and exceed over 100 years of age, represent one of the oldest intact orchard plantings in the region. These impressive specimens of heirloom varieties are no longer commercially available and were originally from regionally specific and place-based cultivars.

The restoration pruning is being conducted by pomologist* and arborist Matt Kaminsky, doing business as Gnarly Pippins, a name he uses for his work in orchards and more specifically around the intersection of cider-making and apple culture, orchard culture/management, and the foraging of wild apples.

We're excited to share more about this project in the upcoming months, including how you can get involved and learn more about the Atwood Orchard's sweet history and blossoming future.





Russet Northern Spy Jonathan



Sheepnose Gilliflower Pearmain



Streaked Pippin Red Astrachan Stayman Winesap

Apple varieties identified in the Atwood Orchard, paintings by Scott Rhoades



Baldwin McIntosh

"Gnarly Pippins" is a loving nod to the untamed, indigenous apple of the temperate world. Limitlessly adaptable to its present surroundings, the genus *Malus* encompasses as much variation among its denizens as we the humans do. The image of the wild apple tree is not refined, not cultivated, but rather a raw notion of abundance and self-reliance. In this sense, Gnarly Pippins connects us to the wilderness of the untended landscape in how we relate with these special trees. Those who favor the natural apple, with all its blemishes and pride, over the ostensibly "civilized" apple of modern growing practices, bear the badge and attitude of Gnarly Pippins."

-Matt Kaminsky

The thousands of tiny holes in the trunk of this tree may look concerning, but most healthy trees survive the pointillistic damage caused by Yellow-bellied sapsuckers, a North American species of woodpecker known for repetitively drilling neat, horizontal rows of quarter-inch holes in the bark of a tree to feed on sap and trapped insects.

Sapsuckers are known to have a strong preference for white birch, which has the highest sap sugar content, but we think they may have a preference for the heirloom apple trees in the Atwood Orchard as well.



Regan Rehab Recipe

George Jacobi
Contributing Writer

Objective: the successful restoration of a locally endangered ecosystem, a (small) pitch pine/scrub oak barren at the Madeline Regan Preserve.

The understory at this site is almost exclusively a doghair thicket of white pine. The following 'rehab recipe' is being cooked up at the Regan Preserve to allow more pitch pine, oak, and other native species to seed and grow at the site.



Ingredients

Ford F-150 pick-up truck
Kubota tractor
Chain saw
XL Tarps
Drip torches
Resilient volunteers
Town of Tolland Fire Permit
Snow shovels
Time
Funding
Perseverance
Knowledgeable leadership

STEP 1

Combine ingredients and drain excess liquid

Spring–Summer 2025: Last Spring, white pine saplings and invasives were cut down to open the understory. UConn students gathered the brush into five large piles. In August, the piles were covered with 50x50' tarps to dry out through the winter.

STEP 2

Store in fridge

Winter 2025–2026: The piles were overwintered under tarps until it was time for them to burn. Before burning, the tarps had to be removed from the piles, but unfortunately, this winter's excessive snowfall had to be removed off the tarps first. Hardy volunteers were enlisted to help remove the snow and ice from each pile, a thankless and exhausting job. Underneath the tarps were dry piles of brush ready to burn!





STEP 3

Grill over high heat

February 27, 2026: Secure burn permit and ignite piles on a cold windless day when smoke will disperse straight up into the sky. Volunteers, exhausted from the previous hours of snow shoveling, watched as a drip torch ignited the slash piles. The thrilling barbecue went off without a hitch.

STEP 4

Reduce heat and allow to season, mix until smooth

What's next? This summer, any pines, black birches, and maples that were too large to burn will be felled, further enlarging the footprint of an open forest floor. There is also potential to broadcast burn to remove the thick white pine duff and small slash while enriching the already ideal sandy soil for successful pitch pine and scrub oak seed generation.



STEP 5

And serve...!

As we monitor the after-effects of the understory clearing and pile burn, any pitch pine and oak seedlings will be identified and protected from deer using cages, enabling them to reach their full potential. The sandy soil at this site

is rare and we believe this project is addressing untapped potential. This site already contains species considered to be part of the pine barren ecosystem, including blueberry, wintergreen, huckleberry, and the rare trailing arbutus. Keep a look out in future newsletters as we report on the progress at this site.

Book Critters Report

Robert & Kristine Thorson
Coordinators

This past winter's prolonged cold and deep snow provided a wonderful backdrop for the Joshua's Trust reading group during the past three months. We read and discussed these three books via Zoom.

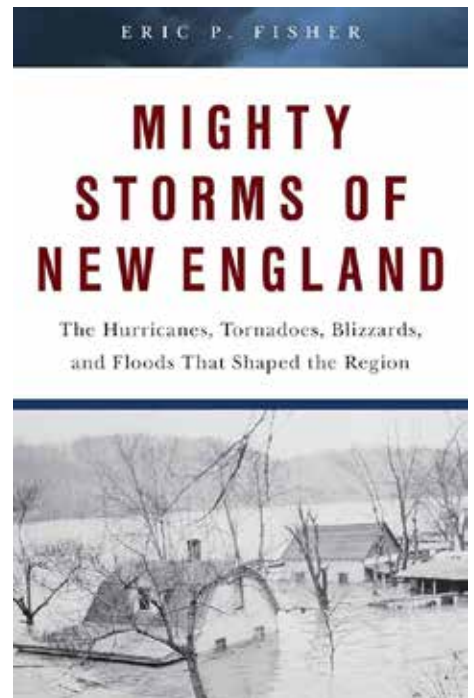
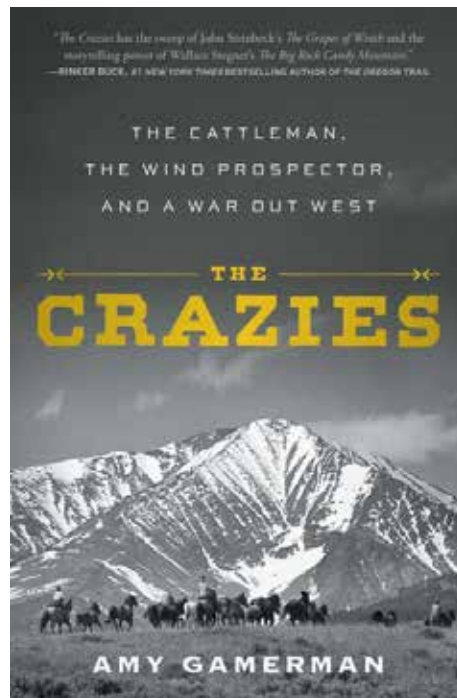
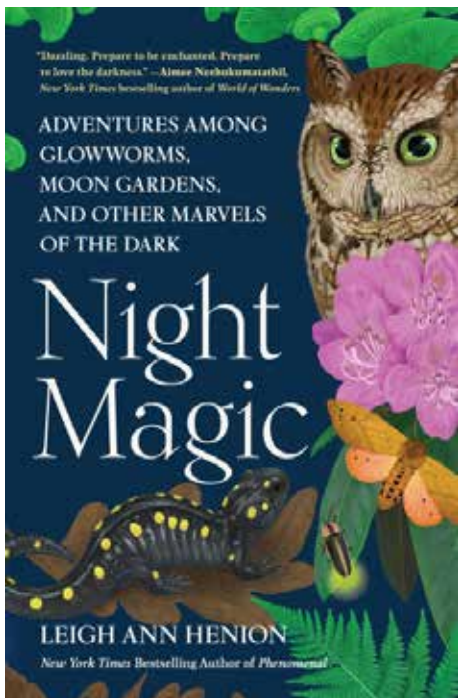
In January, we contrasted our short and cold winter nights with *Night Magic: Adventures Among Glowworms, Moon Gardens, and Other Marvels of the Dark* by Leigh Ann Henion. Its focus was the often unseen beauty and natural

history of Appalachian nights, and the threats of light pollution. Synchronized fireflies and bio-luminescent fungi were of special interest to many.

Our February read was *The Crazies: The Cattleman, The Wind Prospector, and a War Out West* by Amy Gamerman. The book title refers to a scenic mountain range in western Montana where a wind energy project proposed by a financially struggling rancher threatened the view-sheds of his super-rich neighbors. The book follows a complex community conflict full of memorable, real-world characters.

We finished the winter in March with *Mighty Storms of New England* by meteorologist Eric P. Fisher. In twenty-one short chapters, the author reports on a sample of historic New England weather events beginning in 1635 and continuing into recent times: heat waves, snowfalls, hurricanes, tornadoes, floods, wildfires, and ice storms.

The Joshua's Trust Book Critters group reads nature, science, & environment books and is open to members on a space-available basis. Please direct inquiries to bookcritters@yahoo.com



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Become a Community Sponsor and your company's logo could be here, too! Support land preservation & gain positive exposure with our constituency in our 16-town region.

Want to learn more?

Contact Melica Stinnett at melica.stinnett@joshustrust.org



Upcoming Events

Connecting you to our preserves and conservation mission through guided hikes, educational programs, community events, and more!

Our programs are free and open to the public. Some programs have limited space and require registration.

GUIDED HIKE

A Watershed's Delight at Tinkerville Brook Preserve

APRIL 11 | 10:00am–12:00pm

Join Kathy Demers and Barbara Scott to explore how the healthy and intact ecosystem at Tinkerville Brook Preserve contributes to the flow of clean, cold water from the brook to the greater Natchaug watershed beyond. **Registration required.**

COMMUNITY EVENT

Joshua's Trust 60th Annual Meeting

APRIL 18 | 4:00pm–6:00pm

Holiday Hill Day Camp

41 Chaffeeville Road, Mansfield

Join Joshua's Trust staff, Trustees, and volunteers in reflecting on another successful year of protecting land and preserving heritage—our 60th!

Open to all! RSVPs encouraged.

GUIDED HIKE

Commemorating Two Revolutions in Lebanon, CT

APRIL 22 | 2:00–4:00pm

Our Annual Earth Day Walk led by Robert M. Thorson will take place at two sites near each other in Lebanon, CT: The War Office near the Lebanon Green and Pigeon Swamp Preserve. **Additional details on our website. Registration required.**



Scan or visit
joshuastrust.org
for event details
& to register

WEBINAR

Conservation-based Estate Planning: Planning for the Future of Your Land

APRIL 23 | 6:30–8:00pm

Hosted by The Last Green Valley

What makes your land special? Learn about the mechanics of a conservation transaction: finding the right legal tool and land trust partner. **Registration required.**

COMMUNITY EVENT

Maypole Celebration

MAY 2 | 2:00–4:00pm

Atwood Farm

624 Wormwood Hill Rd, Mansfield

Open to all!

GUIDED HIKE

Contemplative Walk at Wolf Rock Preserve

MAY 9 | 10:00am–12:00pm

Join Board Member Debbie Pallatto at Wolf Rock for a guided walk, stopping for contemplative reflections along the way. **Registration encouraged.**

GUIDED HIKE

History Walk at Mason's Mill & Fish's Woods Preserve

MAY 16 | 10:00am–11:15am

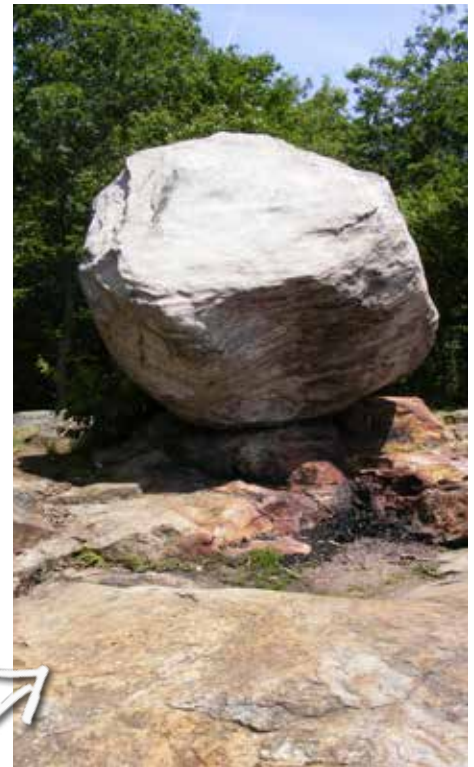
Join historian Altina Waller for a guided local history walk at Mason's Mill and the adjacent newly-acquired Fish's Woods Preserve. Explore the importance of water-powered mills in daily life preceding the American Revolution and their industrial transformation afterwards. **Registration required.**

GUIDED TOURS

Gurleyville Gristmill Opening Day

MAY 17 | 1:00–5:00pm

Set on the banks of the peaceful Fenton River, this incredibly-preserved local heritage site is the only stone mill of its kind in Connecticut. Join us to celebrate the 2026 Opening Day. **Open to all!**



COMMUNITY EVENT

CT Open House Day

JUNE 13 | 1:00–4:00pm

Atwood Farm & Gurleyville Gristmill

Explore both the Atwood Farm Museum & Gurleyville Gristmill! Our heritage sites are just two miles apart in Mansfield. **Open to all!**



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February's frigid winter weather didn't stop us from exploring the snowy grounds at Atwood Farm for animal tracks with volunteers Kathy and Chris Demers. Participants of all ages were excited when these tracks were spotted in the snow... Can you guess who made these?



ANDOVER · ASHFORD · CANTERBURY · CHAPLIN · COLUMBIA · COVENTRY · EASTFORD · FRANKLIN
HAMPTON · LEBANON · MANSFIELD · SCOTLAND · TOLLAND · WILLINGTON · WINDHAM · WOODSTOCK