

## INVASION OF THE EMERALD ASH BORER!

The emerald ash borer (EAB) is a small, bright-green beetle, native to Asia, which works its way under the bark of ash trees and kills them by disrupting the flow of nutrients through the tree trunk. The EAB has been present in North America for at least 10 years and significant ash die offs are occurring throughout the eastern U.S. and Canada. Within the past couple years, the pest has found its way into Fairfield, Litchfield and Hartford counties.

Since the EAB's range is only about a mile, new, dispersed areas of EAB-induced ash damage are apparently being caused by the transportation and distribution of infested firewood from other parts of the country. In order to slow the pace of the infestation, the CT Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) has declared a quarantine on the export of locally-sourced firewood unless it is kiln-dried, which kills all insects in the wood. Also prohibited from leaving the area are live ash trees, ash wood chips greater than 1 inch, and ash stumps and waste wood.

If you need firewood this fall or winter for camping or a vacation house outside our local area, you either need to acquire that wood at your destination, or be certain that the wood you transport has been kiln dried, otherwise you run the risk of spreading the infestation.

Various means of biological and chemical treatments are being investigated to combat the EAB, though none are considered both fully safe and effective at this time, so containment continues to be a critical tool. The emerald ash borer is a prime example of how an invasive species can do significant damage to native wildlife when no natural defense mechanism has been developed. There's plenty of excellent EAB information online, including on the CT DEEP website ([www.ct.gov/deep/eab](http://www.ct.gov/deep/eab)). Please do your part to keep the threat contained and help preserve the health and diversity of our northeastern forests.

- Dan Berg, Chairman, Wilton Conservation Commission

Please visit [www.wiltonct.org](http://www.wiltonct.org) regularly to access trail maps, Wilton's zoning and wetland regulations, news about community events and more.



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## Wilton Conservation Commission Newsletter



### A CHANCE TO PRESERVE WILTON'S CHARACTER

The town is on the cusp of preserving one of the most beautiful undeveloped parcels left in town – the Keiser Property on Seeley Road. The property has long been eyed for protection, formally being made a priority in 1996. The rationale for inclusion on that list is simple, the property hits on all of the marks one looks for in determining desirable open space. The property has curb appeal, ecological and cultural significance, and connectivity to other open space.

The property provides some of the most attractive pastoral views in town. Dominated by open fields, and rolling topography, the 39 acres spreads out before the passerby. The views are not only of the property itself. From the high point to the east, one can take in a sweeping vista west across the Norwalk River valley.

It's not just good looks that make this property appealing. A 1,000 foot long stretch of the Norwalk River passes through the property, making it possible to protect the river and is valuable riparian zone. This piece is also part of a patchwork of connecting open spaces that collectively encompass over 150 acres. Culturally, the property reminds us of our agrarian past. The open meadows, defined by classic New England stonewalls, tell of the farm that the house and barns, circa 1756, once supported.

The proposal is to protect the property with a conservation easement, similar to those that have been repeatedly used by the town to protect other open space. The easement prevents development, controls how the land can be used, provides for public trails, and since the land stays in private ownership, the maintenance responsibilities of the property are not the town's to bear. This method of preservation is also far more affordable than buying the land outright.

In the absence of protection, the land could be subdivided into 13 new lots, served by a new road and bridge over the river. Fortunately, the Keiser Family also values their property in its undeveloped state and appreciates what the land means to the fabric of Wilton. In order to halt development, the Keiser Family has agreed to sell the town and Wilton Land Conservation Trust a conservation easement. The cost of the easement is \$2.5 million, with the town seeking voter approval for \$2.2 million and the Land Trust generously paying the remaining \$300,000. The annual cost to the average household would be less than \$20; about the same as a large cheese pizza.

Although it is counter intuitive on the surface, the deal will actually produce an increase in tax revenue. The bulk of the property is already taxed as open space as part of P.A. 490, so there is no noticeable change to the tax rate. The house and barns will also continue to pay the same rate, although the inability to subdivide the land around the house will mean one less taxable lot. On balance, the family is holding back two building lots, only placing an easement on 39 acres. These two proposed lots are currently taxed as open space, which will end once the lots are divided out. The net is one new building lot and the taxes that come with it, providing a pretty fair balance of preservation and revenue.

This is an exciting opportunity for the town; one the commission encourages Wilton residents to support. A Special Town Meeting is scheduled for November 19th, at 7:30pm in the Clune Center. This is when the community will have the chance to vote on preserving this beautiful piece of land.

- Pat Sesto, Director, Environmental Affairs

## THE NRVT IS COMING TO TOWN!

Put on your walking/running/hiking shoes or grab your bicycle — The NRVT is on its way! With early fundraising successes, forward progress to construct The Norwalk River Valley Trail in Wilton Center is in full swing. Following the completion of the overall routing study, NRVT steering committee members have taken on the job of building sections of the trail, town by town. For Wilton, the very exciting Wilton Center Loop Trail is the first project and is set to break ground this November.

What makes this loop so exciting? The loop will be eight miles long, making it a solid stand alone project until sections north and south are constructed and just as important, it connects key elements of the town. Beginning at the intersection of Wolfpit Road and Route 7, the trail moves north and east through lovely woodlands and rich swamps of the undeveloped Super 7 corridor. At the north end of the loop the trail passes through our historic Cannondale Village then west to Allens Meadows. Turning south on existing sidewalks, the trail connects with the school complex and the Wilton Family Y before entering Merwins Meadows' trail leading one into Wilton Center.

In this one loop two business centers, two train stations, a school complex, the Y, and beautiful natural areas are all connected... no car needed! This connection is not lost on the schools either. NRVT members have been working with the Wilton High School science department to be sure the trail and its connection to vernal pools and diverse natural communities can enhance their outdoor classroom.

A major part of bringing this trail to life is, of course, fundraising. The four-mile eastern half of the loop will cost \$1.6 million to build. The western half will

come together in association with other municipal projects or use of existing trails and sidewalks. The fundraising effort for the eastside bolted out of the gates with a substantial \$125,000 gift from Betsy and Jesse Fink in early September. Their intent was to be the catalytic seed of action and that has been the case, as two more notable donations followed from Greg and Gina Jansen and Tim and Kari Roberts of Wilton. This is an exhilarating way to begin.

Early fundraising success will allow the team to construct a ½ mile demonstration section from Route 7 to Raymond Lane. Groundbreaking is expected by late November. Keep an eye on the newspapers or NRVT-Trail.com for updates on our progress. If you are interested in contributing to the trail, please contact fundraising@nrvt-trail.com or mail donations to P.O. Box 174, Georgetown, CT 06829. The Friends of the Norwalk River Valley Trail is a 501(c)(3) non-profit corporation, making your donation fully tax deductible.

- Pat Sesto, Director, Environmental Affairs

## RECYCLE YOUR PAINT ALL YEAR LONG

In the past, the only options for unwanted paint disposal were to let latex paints air dry and dispose in our household garbage, or bring oil-based paints to a Household Hazardous Waste Collection.

This past summer, a non-profit organization called PaintCare initiated a paint recycling program in Connecticut in response to new Paint Stewardship Legislation. The law requires paint manufacturers to assume the costs of managing unwanted paints and stain. The program shifts the cost from local municipalities to a pay-as-you-go system.

PaintCare has worked with local paint retailers including Keough's Hardware, Wilton Hardware and Sherwin Williams to provide convenient year-round drop-off points for unwanted house paint and primers, stains, sealers, and clear coatings (e.g. varnish). They do not accept aerosols (spray cans), solvents, and products intended for industrial or non-architectural uses.

Residents are limited to recycling to 1 – 4 gallon containers per week. This approach should give PaintCare time to remove the paint from the stores and prevent the retailers from being inundated.

PaintCare also has a free “Large Volume Pick-Up Service” for residents or businesses with at least 300 gallons. More information about PaintCare and the paint recycling program as well as an updated drop-off locator can be found at [www.paintcare.org](http://www.paintcare.org).

Residents are encouraged to use this service as opposed to the Household Hazardous Waste Day, where the town pays for disposal. The commission will evaluate the Paintcare recycling program over the next year. If the program is successful, the commission may opt to cut costs and not accept paint at future Household Hazardous Waste Collections.

- Mike Conklin, Environmental Analyst

## THE BUZZ ON HONEY BEES

A great amount has been written about why honeybees are dying. Farmers, beekeepers and scientists offer explanations from viruses, pesticides, scarcity of bee food, loss of habitat and mites. Each of these circumstances is difficult for a hive; and each can lead to colony collapse disorder.

A relatively new class of pesticides, neonicotinoids, has been shown to affect bee behavior. Seeds are soaked in the pesticide and the plant that emerges is systemically protected from pests. Unfortunately, the pollen and nectar of such plants contain trace amount of the pesticide. Bees exposed to this pesticide in labs have shown changes in behaviors; bumblebees have stopped making queens and honeybees lose their ability to navigate.

The Varroa mite has been the bane of beekeepers since it was introduced into this country in 1987 from South American bees. This mite feeds on the hemolymph or blood of a bee and can spread any number of diseases while removing nutrients from the bee, shortening its life expectancy and weakening its immune system. The conundrum is the pesticides used to rid the mite from hives can also negatively affect the bee.

Fungus infections have likewise affected hives since the mid-1990s and contributed to low populations, low honey yield and hive collapse. The Foulbrood bacteria similarly affect hives and beekeepers have been dealing with them for years.

Loss of natural habitat continues for bees as farmlands and rural areas are developed. Bees need

a variety of food from a variety of natural sources throughout the spring, summer and fall. As land is taken for buildings, drone zones and favorable bee locations such tree interiors and amid rocks are lost. Additionally, naturally occurring bee food such as clover, goldenrod, milkweed, poppy and sunflowers are eradicated.

To add to the stress of bees, farming in the United States is making bee food less available. The vast acres of corn planted across our country are supplanting the varied, natural vegetation that feeds bees. Bees do not pollinate corn; there is no food available in those many acres for the bees. There are movements to create feedlot beekeeping much like industrialized chickens and cattle, that include feeding bees sugar or corn syrup. The issues with this movement are many and include creating disease prone and weak bees less capable of pollinating our high-income crops like almonds, apples, asparagus, blueberries and broccoli.

What can you do to help the bees in the United States? Plant flowers and vegetables in your garden in such a way that blooms are continuous from spring to fall. Create a water feature that is still and has rocks or leaves for the bees to land upon. Read labels and do not use pesticides that harms the bees. Finally, support your local beekeepers by purchasing and eating locally grown foods.

What affects the bees affects us. There are over 100 different crops dependent upon honeybee pollination. With limited pollination, production will be limited. While the economy will be affected, so will our diets. As certain foods become scarce, our diet will suffer. Albert Einstein was more pointed, “if the bee disappears from the surface of the earth, man would no more than four years to live. No more bees, no more pollination, no more man.”

By Debbie Dellinger



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