

Deer are majestic woodland animals, and many of us choose to live in our semi-rural woodland communities so we can enjoy the natural surroundings and the wildlife that inhabit it. However, there continues to be consensus that we simply have too many deer. By some estimates, Wilton is home to over 1,500 deer, and the balance in recent years has tipped from “majestic” to “destructive”. Deer are ravenous eaters, destroying much of the natural understory of saplings and shrubs on both private and public land, as well as many a home gardener’s plants, flowers and young trees. Even supposedly “deer-proof” plants turn out not to be, as the deer population grows and the competition for food sources grows with it. Deer also spread the ticks that carry Lyme disease and they cause motor vehicle damage and injury due to collisions.

The Conservation Commission works in conjunction with other Wilton town committees and with our neighboring towns to actively reduce the local deer population. We seek to achieve a balance where deer and people can peacefully co-exist while lessening the public health threat and the degree of natural habitat and personal property destruction that we currently grapple with. This past fall and winter, an attempt was made to reduce the deer population in Wilton by about 300, largely through controlled hunting. Unfortunately, only about half of that goal was achieved. In the coming months you will see outreach initiatives in preparation for the next hunting season. Details will include the various types of planned hunting and the options that landowners have for allowing hunting on our properties. We urge you to learn more about it and give serious consideration to hosting a trained hunter on your land so that we can collectively bring our deer population back to majestic.

- Dan Berg, Chairman, Wilton Conservation Commission

Please visit 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



DAVE FRANCEFORT, VOLUNTEER EXTRAORDINAIRE

Since the Wilton Conservation Commission started over 30 years ago, we have counted on volunteers to help maintain Wilton’s parks and open spaces. Over the past few years the next generation of park volunteers has begun to emerge. One of those rising stars is Dave Francefort.

Dave is actually a Norwalk resident but contacted the Conservation Commission hoping to volunteer as a trail steward in Wilton’s Town Forest where he mountain bikes almost daily. The commission was happy to accept Dave’s offer and he began to focus his efforts to improve the trail system in Town Forest.

Dave, who is an active member of the Fairfield Co. chapter of New England Mountain Biking Association (FC NEMBA), has extensive knowledge of sustainable trail design. This skill set is critical to enable mountain bikers to use trails without excessive damage and safely co-exist with hikers. Dave began by mapping the 9 miles of trails using GPS and recorded problem areas, such as those with erosion problems, poor sight lines, and wetness. Then he prioritized his projects in order to first stop environmental degradation and then ensure long term safety and sustainability of the trail system.

Dave’s first major project was to remedy a soil erosion problem along the orange trail which runs alongside Barretts Brook. Dave determined that a “log crib” could stabilize the slope and prevent further soil erosion. He organized a work crew of fellow mountain bikers and was able to complete the project in one weekend. These various work parties have served to train eight volunteers on sustainable trail planning and maintenance.

Since the completion of this first project, Dave has designed and implemented many more projects including bridge repairs, rock armoring sections of trails and relocating or closing trails. This work resulted in significant conservation of native soils

and helped balance the need for preserving wildlife habitat with the public need for recreational trails. Dave also played a pivotal reactive role as evidenced by the nearly 100 man hours he and others worked to clear downed trees following the notable storms of 2011 and 2012. This work alone saved the town considerable expense as the Commission would have had to otherwise hire help.

Dave’s positive impact in Wilton has not stopped with his projects in Town Forest. As a member of FC NEMBA he organized a Trail Ambassador group in Wilton, initiating three volunteers who have started working in Bradley Park. Through his hands-on work wearing a bright orange “Trail Ambassador” shirt, Dave has developed a rapport with Town Forest users. The Conservation Commission and the residents of Wilton are lucky to have such a dedicated volunteer.

- Mike Conklin, Environmental Analyst

Wilton Go Green Festival 2013!

- Rain or Shine
- A free, community-wide celebration of green living
- Sunday, May 5, 2013, 11 am – 4 pm
- Wilton Town Center

With dozens of educational displays that foster stewardship of our air, land, water, wildlife and other natural resources, the Wilton Go Green Festival is all about the small, thoughtful things we can do every day to make a difference. Fun activities and good food for the whole family:

- Giant Earth Balloon
- Norwalk River Walk
- Sustainable living exhibits
- Live music throughout the day

Co-sponsored by EnergizeCT; funded in part by the Clean Energy Finance and Investment Authority’s Community Innovations Grant program. Hosted by Wilton Go Green, Inc. and the Wilton Library Association. See you there! • www.wiltongogreen.org

YOU ARE WITNESSING AN INVASION

If you're like me, you're regaling as our woodlands awaken and unfurl their spring greenery. But this year, instead of gazing at this rebirth from a distant kitchen window or by scanning the edges of Ridgefield Road or Horseshoe Pond or Cannondale Village as you zoom by, stop and note the swathes of an extremely dangerous alien—Garlic Mustard.

Alliaria petiolata, or garlic mustard, can swallow everything in its path with alarming speed. It was first spotted along the trails and lanes of Long Island in the 1860's, originally brought from Europe as a culinary and medicinal herb. Now, it ravages the forest understory of the entire northern tier of the U.S. all the way to the Pacific coast. Of course, you're doing the math: 1860's...2013, hmmm, that's over 150 years, what's so speedy about that! In fact, most of that expansion has taken place just in the last few decades. Something changed and part of that change is especially evident here in Wilton.

Two primary vectors in the spread of garlic mustard are the white-tailed deer and forest fragmentation created by suburban development. White-tailed deer prefer to eat our native plants. In doing so, they expose the soil and disturb it with their hooves giving, in essence, a prepared seedbed for the hundreds of seeds that one garlic mustard produces in its lifecycle. Unfortunately, garlic mustard is quite distasteful to deer and they avoid it entirely. In addition, many newcomers to an ecosystem, like garlic mustard, get their toehold in what is termed an "edge habitat", that is, the narrow transition space between a lawn, a roadway, a meadow, or a fence line and the forest. Every subdivided building plot in a wooded community, by definition, comes with its own circumference of edge habitat. Garlic mustard at first thrives in the sunny openings created by the cuts, but is so adaptable that soon it creeps into the shady understory of the forest canopy.

Now I get to play the role of that TV pitchman who claims, "BUT WAIT, THERE'S MORE"!! Garlic mustard has no natural predators. It not only outcompetes native plants by monopolizing light, moisture, nutrients, soil and space, it insidiously releases a chemical into the soil that halts the growth of our native species, including the saplings essential to replacing mature trees as they suffer canopy loss and

blowdowns. The long range effects can be devastating to our biodiversity, wildlife, soil retention, and, yes, even our real estate values.

So, what can be done? For now it may be a matter of containment rather than complete eradication. Scientists are honing in on a biological control but have not yet gotten to the point where they can perform field tests. Of course, we can all participate in slowing down this nasty weed, but be patient because garlic mustard seeds are viable for 5 – 10 years, so your diligence must persist. The easiest approach is to keep an eye out for new colonies then go after them. Garlic mustard is a biennial, so learn to identify the plant in its different stages. It must be prevented from setting seed. Two manual methods of control are to pull the plant up by its roots, starting in mid to late April when the second year plants are beginning to flower, or to cut off the flowering heads to prevent it from setting seed, though sometimes this may result in a second sprouting. Here's a fun video link on garlic mustard identification and control: www.in-sitevideo.com/wff/garlicmustard.html Watch it with the kids and grandmom, too. We all have a stake in stopping this alien invasion.

- Donna Merrill



RIGHT TREE, RIGHT PLACE

The urban tree canopy describes the trees that populate our city or town centers and are increasingly being lost due to old age, poor planning, improper care and other stresses of the built environment. How we manage and improve this urban tree canopy has a direct economic and environmental impact on us all.

The Wilton Tree Committee has developed a management plan to improve its urban tree canopy with funding in part by a grant from the CT Department of Energy and Environmental Protection for urban forestry projects. The plan is based on the annually updated tree inventory for the Wilton Center and includes an outreach component to property owners for shared maintenance of privately owned trees that serve a public benefit. It addresses tree health, replacement policy, pruning and maintenance, as well as whether the tree is located on private or public property.

By joining the program, the private tree owners commit to retaining their trees for their public value. Private property owners and the town become equal participants in preserving the trees we have in and around Wilton Center.

A major emphasis of the tree management plan is to implement 'right tree, right place' standards when planting trees in the Center. The concept advocates that

tree selection be matched to the particular conditions of the site. This includes planting trees that have short mature heights close to utilities and roads while allowing progressively taller trees further from roads and wires. These standards must be followed to ensure clearance over sidewalks and streets, open sight lines, and unhindered utilities.

Anyone can list the many benefits of trees – shade, beauty, windbreak, privacy, cleaner air, less runoff, and the increase in property values to name a few. However, the key to these benefits is to select the right tree and plant it in the right place. This not only assures a lifetime of satisfaction, it also reduces maintenance costs and the potential for disruption of power lines during storms.

Some of the factors considered when choosing a tree for a site include the ultimate size and shape at maturity of the tree and root system, requirements for sun, shade, water and soil, tolerance to pollution, disease, insects and compaction, strength of wood to weather conditions, fruit production and of course — aesthetics.

If we choose the right tree for the site and plan for maintenance, we can look forward to watching the trees we plant grow and mature into healthy specimens that enhance our community and add to the aesthetic 'sense of place' that is Wilton.

For information about the tree donation program and more about 'right tree, right place' please see the Tree Committee website:

www.wiltonct.org/departments/environmental/tree.html

- Susan DiLoreto

A New Connecticut Law Regulates the use of Phosphorus

Phosphorus, a common component of lawn fertilizer, is a naturally occurring mineral that is necessary for plant growth, but excessive phosphorus in water bodies can lead to toxic algae blooms and depleted oxygen levels harmful to fish and other aquatic animals.

As of Jan. 1, 2013:

- No application of phosphorus is allowed on an established lawn without a recent soil test.
- No application of phosphorus is allowed within 20 feet of a body of water, 15 feet if your spreader has a deflector.
- No application of phosphorus is allowed between Dec. 1 and March 15.
- In stores, products containing more than .67 percent phosphorus must be kept separately and identified with signage.

Exemptions: New lawns or lawns being repaired; a recent soil test showing a need for phosphorus; fertilizer with less than .67 percent phosphorus; agricultural land and a golf courses.

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