

Friends of Canonchet Farm Newsletter, Fall 2023

President's Report

As you all may know, our long-awaited collaborators in our invasives-removal mission were 20 goats of all shapes and sizes who visited Canonchet Farm for two weeks at the end of August and the first week of September.



The goats greeting visitors from their mobile home

Originally our plan was to utilize the goats to clear a thorny, overgrown pasture adjacent to the South County Museum entrance to the Nature Trail. Unfortunately, because this location was just up slope from what the Rhode Island Coastal Resources Management Council considers to be a “wet woods” characterized by skunk cabbage and other wetland plants and therefore within its jurisdiction, CRMC recommended that we find a better, higher, and drier location. So, we did! Many years ago, you may recall, there was a proposal to construct a polo field at Canonchet Farm in an upland woods area in the center of the property. Opposition to this proposal sparked the formation of the Friends of Canonchet Farm in 2007. The polo field proposal died but the area in which it was to be built, the Upper Meadow, has continued to be mowed every summer by the town even though it has never been put to any other recreational use. In fact, most people do not know it even exists. Many invasives have gradually encroached on all sides of this meadow, gradually shrinking the grassy area. We chose the south side of the meadow for our goat-scaping experiment because it lent itself as a prime location for the proposed Narragansett Three Sisters Tribal Garden.

And indeed, the goats accomplished their task of eating everything green in an area that previously had been an impenetrable 12-foot tall, green wall of privet, multiflora rose, porcelain berry, poison ivy and Oriental bittersweet. After the two-week contract period was over, all that was left was the woody remnants of the shrubs and the remains of branches and trees that had been brought down over the years by the weight of the invasive vines.



Green wall of invasive plants before the goats arrived

There remains much plant debris to be removed to make the area suitable for gardening. It would take our wonderful volunteers many man and woman hours to remove this debris by hand. So, we are seeking grant money for mechanical removal, along with fencing to keep out groundhogs and deer and a water-holding capability to be used during future summer droughts. We are exploring an idea of involving the historic Canonchet Farm spring, whose foundation we discovered last winter when we were clearing an area to the north of the Nature Trail. We hope that by the end of 2024 the Three Sisters Garden may become a reality.



Debris left after goat-scaping in the Upper Meadow

Phragmites Removal

Our Phragmites eradication contractor returned in September for a follow-up treatment of the remaining invasive reeds growing around both coastal ponds across from Narragansett Town Beach. The contractor's field notes reported that the 2022 treatment had eliminated 95% of the

Phragmites leaving only isolated clumps along the pond edges and random strands here and there well away from the water's edge. Phragmites, like most grasses, spread by way of rhizomes, which are extended root-like runners just underground that spring up a distance away from the original plant. To minimize collateral damage to other plants, the operators use a wand to brush the leaves of these outliers. In the early fall the plant concentrates on sending nutrients to the roots rather than the leaves, and thus the treatment brushed on the leaves goes right to the roots and kills the plant. It is likely that no further treatment of the Phragmites on the east edges of Lake Canonchet and Little Neck Pond will be needed for the next several years, thus allowing the native plants to return and populate the pond edges. It is a fine thing to now be able to see these beautiful ponds and the new population of native flowers and grasses from the road and sidewalks, when before they had been totally obscured by the invasive Phragmites.



Isolated live patch of Phragmites (center) surrounded by dead stalks from last year

Containing Knotweed

The knotweed that had been hiding the southern edge of Lake Canonchet is now mostly under control. Because the Narragansett Department of Public Works has been mowing this edge during the past summer after the hard work of our volunteers had greatly reduced the size of the knotweed stalks, the plant is no longer thriving with only a small strip right along the lake still growing. Our goat friends apparently enjoy munching knotweed even more than they do porcelain berry and poison ivy, so if we can bring them back another time, perhaps we can turn them loose upon the encroaching knotweed infestations at both the east and west Nature Trail entrances and the large patch that inhabits the slope just below the stable ruin at the South County Museum. This too will save our volunteers many work hours and enable them to focus on keeping the Nature Trail and stone walls in the interior of Canonchet Farm.



Puny 2023 knotweed stand along southern side of Lake Canonchet

Partners

We continue to develop relationships with service organizations, environmental groups, and historical entities such as the South County Museum, whose aid and support enables the Friends of Canonchet Farm to extend its reach both educationally and environmentally. The museum has allowed us to use the Metz Exhibition Hall to add a visual lecture segment to many of our educational walks and talks, thus allowing our walk leaders to introduce and preview the walk segment that follows. The museum has also enthusiastically welcomed our volunteers in its gardening endeavors on the museum grounds, where we now maintain the Native Plant Garden adjacent to the Robinson Cemetery and the Herb Garden outside Metz Exhibition Hall.



South County Museum Herb Garden

The URI Women's Rowing Team returned to Canonchet Farm on Saturday, October 7, when 40 young women and their four dedicated coaches spread 22 tons of sand and gravel on the western trail in a little over two and a half hours utilizing tools and wheelbarrows borrowed

from the URI Master Gardening Program at East Farm and the Narragansett Parks and Recreation Department. The bulk of the work was to mitigate erosion that was affecting the new trail that our volunteers cut three years ago that was exposing large tree roots and creating trip hazards. The trail material was generously donated by South County Sand and Gravel Company and the ice cream that topped off the team's pizza lunch was donated by Brickley's Ice Cream in Wakefield.

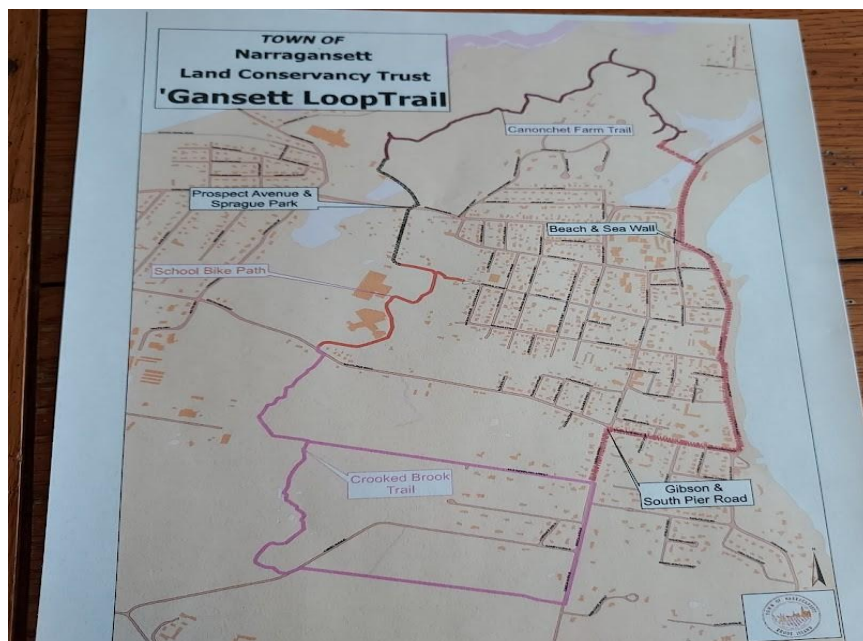


Hard at work moving gravel and packing down the trail

Gansett Loop Trail

The Narragansett Land Conservancy Trust is proud to announce the establishment of the **Gansett Loop Trail**, which enables the dedicated hiker to walk a nearly continuous 5.7-mile walk around the center of Narragansett encompassing the existing Crooked Brook Trail, the Canonchet Farm Trail, the Narragansett Town Beach, and the seawall. Often thought about and sometimes proposed in the past, the trail is now a reality with its own accompanying map. Starting at the Pier Middle School parking lot, the Loop Trail:

- Crosses South Pier Road to the Crooked Brook Trail
- The Crooked Brook Trail crosses Kinney Avenue and ends at Gibson Avenue
- Go left (north) on Gibson, taking a right onto South Pier Road down to the seawall
- Head north on the seawall continuing onto the Town Beach just past the South Pavilion
- Cross Boston Neck Road onto Anne Hoxie Lane into the parking lot
- On the right (north) of the parking lot enter the Canonchet Farm Trail
- Continue along the Canonchet Farm Trail to the end by the Community Center
- Go left past the Parks and Recreation parking lot and through the Sprague Park parking lot to Kingstown Road
- Cross Kingstown Road at the bike crossing and go up Prospect Ave to its end
- Go left onto the bike path extension past the Narragansett High School and Pier Middle School back to parking lot



Educational Walks and Talks - Fall 2023

October 7, 1-3 p.m. - "Bruce Fellman Walks the Canonchet Farm Trails." Bruce's ***A Naturalist's Journal*** column appears in newspapers throughout Rhode Island.

October 15, 1-3 p.m. - "Trees: An Ingredient of Community." Explore the Canonchet Trail and our relationship with trees with Craig Hotchkiss of the RI Tree Council.

October 22, 1-3 p.m. - "Identifying Invasives and Canonchet Farm Nature Trail Progress Report" is an annual trail walk with Tom Hoagland and Alan Woodmansee of the Friends of Canonchet Farm.

Nov 18, 10:00 to 11:30 a.m. - "Native American Heritage in Canonchet." Join Lorén Spears, Executive Director of the Tomaquag Museum, for a trail walk in Canonchet Farm.

A Final Word

Another year is rapidly coming to a close and that means it's time for our annual fund drive. A letter asking for your ongoing support will reach your actual or virtual mailbox after Thanksgiving and, on behalf of the entire Friends of Canonchet Farm Board, I want to thank everyone who has donated to support our efforts in the past to restore and enhance Canonchet Farm ponds, trail, and woodlands. We cannot do it without you, and we are very grateful. I hope that you will once again make a generous contribution this year using the **Donate** button on our [website](https://www.canonchet.org) (Canonchet.org) or by old-fashioned mail once you receive our donation envelope to Friends of Canonchet Farm, P.O. Box 418, Narragansett, RI 02882.

[Tom Hoagland](#), President
Friends of Canonchet Farm