



## *Friends of Canonchet Farm Newsletter – Fall 2025*

### President's Report

Our all-volunteer organization can report much progress and many accomplishments this fall. Our work crews continued their hard work along the Canonchet Farm Trail, aided by outside civic organizations who came to us for opportunities for meaningful community work:

- In early April, members of the **Narragansett High School Environmental Group** helped clear one of the last overgrown sections of trail on the eastern side of the property.
- Then in early May, a large and very dedicated group of family and friends of **Eagle Scout candidate Damian McCarten** helped us finish clearing the field surrounding the Three Sisters Garden site in the Upper Meadow. Damian had previously completed his Eagle project for us by creating and installing the 29 new blue Canonchet Farm Nature Trail blazes that now mark the trail. Each blue blaze contains a QR code that hikers can use to access information on their mobile phones about a plant, tree or bird commonly found in our shoreline forest.
- In the following week in May, a dedicated group of **Rhode Island National Guard Officer Candidates** from the school at Camp Varnum joined us on a very wet day to clear a tangled thicket of invasives near the repaired stone wall on the western side of the Canonchet Farm trail.
- Finally, on October 25 the **URI Women's Rowing Team**, 55 young women strong, returned to Canonchet Farm for the sixth time to spread 24 tons of sand and gravel in an area of the trail that contained protruding roots and rocks. Once again, the material was generously donated by **South County Sand and Gravel** and the ice cream the team consumed for dessert after pizza was donated by **Brickley's Ice Cream** in Wakefield.



*University of Rhode Island Rowing Team*

## Three Sisters Garden Status

We are on target for opening the long-anticipated Three Sisters Garden next spring in the upper meadow. After the 40' by 60' garden space was limed for the second time in early spring to “sweeten” the soil for the best vegetable growing conditions, the soil was tested, and the PH level is now close to optimum.

In October, **Arrowhead Masonry**, an indigenously owned and staffed contractor, started construction of the perimeter fence despite many rain delays caused by the resumption of weekly storms following the summer-long drought. The 8-foot tall fence is meant to keep out any animal competitors. Landscape cloth, and crushed stone will surround the fence to keep plant invaders from using the fence to grow upon.

A multi-gallon surplus fiberglass tank has been secured that will be used to catch and hold rain water for next summer’s inevitable mini droughts. If necessary, we hope to utilize the historic spring, whose foundation we discovered several years ago behind the South County Museum barn, as a contingency water source. We also plan to roto-till the ground once the fence is completed and before hard frost sets in and lime the garden for a third time. Once April arrives, we have plans, in cooperation with our tribal partners, to hold a celebratory grand opening, inviting town and state officials, tribal representatives, the many volunteers who contributed to the construction, and Master Gardeners to the ceremony. All the

vegetables grown will be donated to needy Indigenous families and local food banks.



***New fence encloses the Three Sisters Garden***

## High Marsh Restoration

A seldom-visited part of Canonchet Farm is a multi-acre section of high marsh extending from the edge of the forest to the shore of Pettaquamscutt Cove at the south end of Narrow River. The marsh has been impacted by centuries of agriculture as early colonial settlers farmed salt hay for animal feed and bedding. To keep fresh water from ponding and killing these grasses, farmers dug a network of berms and drainage ditches across the marsh. When the Seaview Railroad was constructed along the marsh edge and the cove beginning in 1899, an extensive berm was constructed that almost completely obstructed drainage from the marsh back to the cove. This resulted in the silting up of the drainage ditches and the formation of large areas of ponding from the high tides that would periodically inundate the marsh. This led to degradation of plant and animal life like the salt hay and the Salt Marsh Sparrow which nests in high marsh areas.

Save The Bay extended its decade-long marsh restoration effort along many portions of Narrow River to Canonchet Farm last winter. Under the direction of Wenley Ferguson, Save The Bay's Director of Restoration, and her staff, narrow



and shallow runnels were constructed from the ponded areas either to restored historic drainage ditches or all the way to Crooked Brook which wends its way through the marsh and empties into Narrow River through a pair of culverts underneath the old Seaview berm (now a power line right of way). The crew also cleared extensive growth of invasive Phragmites along the length of Crooked Brook as it twists and turns through the marsh from the tree line to the cove. On November 1, on a beautiful afternoon, Wenley led a group on a walk into the marsh to view the progress of the restoration effort. Many of the previous ponds were now mud flats and some native marsh plants had already begun colonizing these drained areas.



***Save the Bay's Wenley Ferguson (right, holding a shovel) led a guided walk to the marsh on Pettaquamscutt Cove.***

## Volunteer Spotlight

In this issue we put the spotlight on **Alan Woodmansee**, who is our Trail Work Coordinator, Master Gardener liaison and long-time Board member and is a familiar person to our volunteer crew and walkers on the trail. Alan is a retired surveyor and structural engineer. He grew up in Narragansett where he enjoyed exploring the forests and shorelines near his home in Pont Judith. He joined the Friends of Canonchet Farm Board in 2014 and began to volunteer for the work crew on Saturday mornings, which he now co-leads. Alan is also a Rhode Island Tree Steward and CRMC-Certified Invasive Plant Manager and has been instrumental in FOCF's efforts to replant native trees in areas along the trail where we have removed invasive species. The RI Tree Council cultivates the young trees, which we carefully plant, stake, and protect with mesh to prevent deer damage.



Alan enjoys learning about invasive plants and the camaraderie among volunteers while working on the trails. Alan is committed to improving Canonchet Farm for the enjoyment of the Narragansett and South County communities for years to come. When Alan is not wrapped in invasive plants, he can usually be found with his beloved root slayer shovel clearing the Nature Trail edges of invasive plants.

## Walks and Talks – Fall 2025 and Spring 2026

Our Fall 2025 walks were diverse and well attended:

- In September Ryan and Emily Bouchard returned for an encore walk in the forest identifying mushrooms.
- In October, Alan Woodmansee and I conducted our annual trail walk identifying invasive plants and showcasing our various projects. We also conducted similar walks for URI's OLLI program and the R.I. Wild Plant Society.



- In November, Wenley Ferguson walked with a group into the high marsh.
- Finally, Brian Wallin, noted local historian specializing in Indigenous culture, walked the trail and related sites in Canonchet to Narragansett tribal history.



We are still in the process of finalizing our spring schedule, but we do have plans to again offer a walk to the vernal pools, and a late spring insect and pollinator identification walk with Bruce Fellman. As always, I will send out notifications closer to the date of the scheduled events with a link to the online signup, as well as post the event on Canonchet.org, Facebook and Event Brite. We try to keep these walks limited to a group of 30 to enhance the experience and make sure everyone can hear the walk leader.

## On Pettaquamscutt

The Friends of Canonchet Farm will again sponsor one of the three lectures that are part of the **On Pettaquamscutt Winter Speaker Series** given at the Narragansett Library on Sunday afternoons. This year on February 22 our speaker will be **Dr. Tom Mather, URI's Tick Guy**, with "What's Going On With the TICKS?"

"In Rhode Island, it used to be mostly about blacklegged ticks (also known as deer ticks) and the threat of Lyme disease," says Dr. Tom. "But things are changing -- rather quickly too -- and unfortunately, it's not for the better! New ticks are

moving in, bringing new disease threats. Citizens and medical professionals both need more information and practical solutions, and practice being *Ticksmart*.”

## Spotlight on Invasive Species: Porcelain Berry

**Introduction:** In the 1870s this perennial vine was brought to the United States from East Asia as an ornamental ground cover. A member of the grape family, its clusters of iridescent berries form in autumn, growing in a dazzling array of sparkling blues and purples.



**Description:** Porcelain-Berry grows quickly, forming dense mats that cover native vegetation. It also climbs into trees and can shade out young shrubs and seedlings. The leaves of Porcelain-Berry look very much like grape leaves. Porcelain-Berry can be distinguished from grapes because the pith of the Porcelain-Berry vine is white, whereas that of Wild Grape is brown.

Porcelain-Berry prefers moist, rich soils and full sunlight, although it can tolerate partial shade. It has a vigorous root system and can re-sprout.

**Propagation:** Porcelain-Berry spreads both by seed and vegetatively. Birds and other small animals eat the berries and disperse seeds in their droppings. The taproot is large and vigorous.

**Competitive Factors:** Porcelain-Berry is a highly competitive invader of open and wooded habitats. Once it gets rooted it overtakes everything around it, as its long woody vines grow over the tops of native shrubs and young trees, forming a dense cover that blocks sunlight, shading and killing the plants below. It grows rapidly and can grow as much as 15 feet in a single growing season.

## Final Word

On behalf of the entire Friends of Canonchet Farm Board of Trustees and our members, I want to thank everyone who has supported our efforts to restore and enhance Canonchet Farm ponds, trails, and woodlands by providing generous donations. We cannot do our work without you and your generous support. We recently mailed our Annual Appeal, and we hope to gather sufficient donations for two new initiatives in 2026: Offering \$1,000 environmental scholarships to worthy Narragansett High School Seniors and replacing the deteriorating and infested-with-invasives fence line between the Canonchet Farm Trail and the South County Museum fields. We have an estimate for that work of \$16,500 and we have applied for a \$10,000 Rhode Island Foundation Grant to cover 2/3 of the cost but we will need to raise the remainder. We really need our dedicated members and supporters to help us out with this appeal, so please be generous if you can. You can donate via PayPal at our website: <https://canonchet.org/>, or by mail to Friends of Canonchet Farm, P.O. Box 418, Narragansett, RI 02882.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Thomas Hoagland". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Thomas" and last name "Hoagland" clearly distinguishable.

Thomas Hoagland  
President  
Friends of Canonchet Farm