



President's Letter October, 2021

Another summer has passed by at Canonchet Farm and our volunteers have accomplished a lot since our last letter in April. The new trail segment at the west end of the trail was completed in April by a dedicated and talented core group of volunteers. It winds through mature upland woods to the north of the badly eroded segment that was adjacent to the new bike path extension. It is considerably more secluded and almost completely free of the invasive privet, multiflora rose, and bittersweet that infects much of the existing trail, so it is a real pleasure to walk. Make sure you check it out this Fall once the mosquitos have dissipated which is usually by the end of September.



Once May arrived the volunteers wound up their work on the western segment of the trail, the focus of invasives clearing once more turned to the eastern and southern perimeters of Lake Canonchet. During the month of June, with the help and cooperation of the Town of Narragansett who provided us with an open bed truck, we tackled the 8-foot high, 6-foot-wide strip of Japanese knotweed that blocked the view of the lake from Narragansett Ave. Over three sessions in June we were able to cut or uproot every stalk from the pumping station to the intersection with 1A. We filled that town truck three times and added multiple pickup truck loads as well and ultimately filled the dumpster that had been provided by Narragansett Rubbish Removal. Of course, this persistent invasive plant regrew, but not as high, and our last volunteer workdays in September will be devoted to cutting it a second time.



This methodology of cutting the plant down multiple times during the growing year does ultimately starve and kill the plant. The entire eastern edge of the pond facing the beach was similarly infested as the southern edge is now (see picture)



But after years of volunteer work tirelessly eradicating the knotweed there, we only see an occasional plant sprout now. The return of native plants along the eastern edge like swamp milkweed, Joe Pye

weed, blue vervain and pink swamp mallow attest to the resiliency of nature, given just a little help from our dedicated crew.



That same effect has occurred along the nature trail as well. We saw the return of native spring ephemerals like yellow trout lily in May and right now, if one dodges the vengeful mosquitos, white wood asters, goldenrods and Joe Pye weed are blooming in many places where they can get enough sun. Results like this make all the work worthwhile

Town Renews Agreement with Friends of Canonchet Farm

Another notable milestone for The Friends of Canonchet Farm occurred in May, when the Town Council approved the renewal of the working agreement with FOCF for an additional 10 years. After a short presentation given by President Tom Hoagland, the Council was shown the before and after video of the volunteers working to remove invasives from the last significant section of the eastern section of the Nature Trail. There were only appreciative comments from the audience and the new agreement was approved unanimously by the Council. You can view the video here: <https://youtu.be/jTyPxgHOa1E>

Our volunteers have accomplished much in the nearly ten first years of working in the Canonchet Farm property first by restoring the eastern edge of Lake Canonchet and then adding maintenance and restoration of the overgrown Nature Trail a few years later. The vote of confidence given by the town in granting the new ten year partnership will enable us to build on our established work and expand the trail network and extend the lake clearance to Littleneck Pond.

Fall and Winter Program and Walk Notes

With so many RI residents now vaccinated we felt it safe at this point to re-schedule and plan new program walks in the property this Fall. All programs and walks will begin at the South County Museum accessed at the end of Strathmore Street. The following is our confirmed schedule:

- **September 25, 1PM: David Gregg**, Ph.D., Executive Director, Natural History Survey and Senior Fellow, URI Coastal Institute “Invasives in Rhode Island Woodlands”
- **October 2, 1PM: David Vissoe**, URI Master Gardener; Project Leader, Kettle Pond Visitor Center; Board Member, Rhode Island Wild Plant Society “Native Plants Through the years, from initial planting to mature garden”
- **October 9, 6-9PM: Scott McNeill**, Director, Frosty Drew Observatory “Stargazing in October”
- **October 23, 1PM: Tom Hoagland and Alan Woodmansee**, President and Friends of Canonchet Board Member, Certified Invasive Plant Managers and Master Gardeners “Identifying Common Invasive Plants”
- **November 6, 1PM: Jim Crothers**, former Executive Director, South County Museum; high school and college instructor “Canonchet Farm History”
- **November 27, 1PM: Kathie Kelleher**, Past President, Friends of Canonchet Farm “Traditional Post-Thanksgiving Leg-stretcher”
- **December 5 (Sunday), 1PM: Scott Turner**, Former Nature writer for The Providence Journal; college professor; author of "Beauty in the Street: Nature Tales from the Neighborhood". “The Woodlands in December”



In the Spring newsletter the first part of the history of The Friends of Canonchet discussed our origins as an organization. Here is the second part which details what happened next up to present day.

History of The Friends of Canonchet Farm - Part 2

Charlie Lee, the first FOCF Vice-President’s vision for the organization to grow was modeled upon that of the Central Park Conservancy. Tragically he died in an automobile accident in 2010. This led to a period

of uncertainty for the organization but fortunately, Tom Fortier, the President, was able to guide the group with his park management expertise and gentle leadership. Ray Kagels then became Vice President and brought his organizational skills to formulate our bylaws and processes needed for a non-profit in guiding the work.

Partnering with the town's management initially proved to be challenging. But in 2010, with a new Town Manager, Grady Miller, and a new Director of Parks and Recreation, Steve Wright, the partnership really began. With their assistance and encouragement, the group signed an agreement to work under Steve's direction to preserve and improve Canonchet Farm. The Master Plan Committee delivered its final plan in 2011 and it included the concept of a Linear Park to be installed between the lakes and Boston Neck Road.

Over the next decade the FOCF's activities became focused on the removal of invasive plants, first on the Eastern side of Lake Canonchet and then on the interior Nature Trail. Also, FOCF has developed a community focus by working with other non-profits on their projects. The FOCF group has partnered with the Narragansett Tree Society, the URI Master Gardeners' program, various URI professors and students, Narragansett Boy Scouts, the South County Museum, and the URI Women's Rowing Team.

Narragansett Boy Scout Troop 2, under the direction of Bill Bivona and his organization, The Narragansett Tree Society, began improving the Nature Trail which was overgrown and swampy. Bill and his team of volunteers constructed and installed 92 sections of four-foot-wide wooden boardwalks over the muddy sections of the trail. This was a three-year project, finally completed in 2011, that added to and greatly enhanced the Canonchet Trail.

Other FOCF projects over the years have included removing discarded asphalt in the beech grove, removing trash from a dump in the upper meadow, creating educational signage along the trail and lakes clean-up after Hurricane Sandy. On the educational front, URI Geology professor Elizabeth Laliberte, also a FOCF board member, created a Geology Trail brochure with her students as a companion piece to the Geology Loop Trail that had been laid out by the late URI Geology Professor, Jon Boothroyd. She also developed a History Trail brochure that educates walkers about the many historical locations and artifacts located on the Canonchet Farm.

FOCF's ongoing project today is habitat restoration and improvements along the lakes and Nature Trail. Groups of volunteers work throughout the year to remove invasive plants and keep the trails clear. Another important and popular ongoing activity organized by the FOCF is an educational series of guided walks in the Spring and Fall. Some of these notable guides have been: Tom Fortier, arborist and past FOCF President; Robert Thorson, author and expert on New England's stone walls; Jon Boothroyd, URI Research Professor Emeritus of geology; Scott Turner, nature writer; and Nancy Karraker, URI associate professor of Herpetology to name a few. These hikes have grown more popular over the years and give residents and visitors from all over RI, an opportunity to explore and discover the wonders of Canonchet Farm.

For the future, the FOCF plans to renew and continue their partnership with the Town Council and work toward achieving one of the goals of the Master Plan. This goal is to create a Linear Park along the shores of Lake Canonchet and Little Neck Pond which sit across the street from the Narragansett Town Beach. Randall L. Collins Jr., a senior associate at Beta Group, Inc. created a conceptual plan for the FOCF and it was presented to the Town Council in 2018. The 2021 town budget has added a proposal to

finance an RFP as the next step in this multi-year process. Ultimately, if the Plan comes to fruition, Narragansett will have a newly improved open space park where residents can use walking paths with structures for shade and relaxation and enjoy the beauty of the natural environment that FOCF has worked hard to preserve.

The Friends of Canonchet Farm Board and volunteers consists solely of your dedicated, committed, and persistent fellow citizens who remain determined to restore habitat and preserve the Canonchet property for future generations to enjoy. Our achievements are a matter of record but there is more work to be done!

*Special thanks to Richard Vangermeersch for his research that unearthed a vast collection of newspaper articles from the Narragansett Times, the Independent and the Providence Journal that chronicled the events involving the Friends of Canonchet Farm. Also, thanks to Kathie Kelleher, an original member and past president, for sharing her vast knowledge about the group and to Tom Hoagland, the current president, for his contributions. For more information visit our webpage Canonchet.org or our Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/friendsofcanonchetfarm>