



Fall & Winter, 2022

President's Report

For our dedicated and hard-working volunteers, this spring and summer could be characterized as the great Knotweed Fight. We have been working hard over the last several years to reduce and ultimately eradicate the huge knotweed stand along Narragansett Ave. on the south side of Lake Canonchet. Over the years this stand has grown 10 to 12 feet high and 8 feet wide, totally obscuring the view of the lake from the south. For the second summer, our volunteers hit the stand three times, working in the high heat and humidity and filling multiple times the dump truck provided by the town. Additionally, the town crew mowed the stand when it rebounded to a height of 18 inches. The result of this concerted effort has been a very visible reduction in the size and health of this noxious plant. So the residents of the town are going to have a view of the lake all winter for the first time in many years. The work is not done though: the plant will rebound again next year. But if we keep at it, ultimately we will be able to restore native plants in this area.



View of Lake Canonchet from Narragansett Ave. post-knotweed clearing

A second persistent and obnoxious knotweed stand is on the grounds of the South County Museum between the historic ruin of the Sprague estate stable and Anne Hoxie Lane. Our volunteers cut this stand down twice in April and May, dumping all the cut material in the large dumpster generously provided to us by Narragansett Rubbish Removal. This hillside was also overrun with invasive porcelain-berry and garlic mustard. The cut material filled the dumpster one and half times but by the time summer came along and the volunteers shifted focus to Narragansett Ave, the knotweed stand returned, only somewhat chastened. We will do battle again next spring.



View of Sprague Stable ruin post-knotweed-clearing

The other major initiative undertaken by our volunteer invasives removal team was the reopening of the previously impenetrable Boy Scout Troop 2 Trail entrance that joins the trail just to the west of the iconic large glacial erratic near the west parking lot entrance. This trail had become so overgrown with the usual privet, multiflora rose, Morrow honeysuckle and oriental bittersweet that it took four Saturday mornings of volunteer crew work in March and April to clear a 10-foot-wide swath on the 50-foot-long loop trail. As you emerge from the Boy Scout entrance onto the main trail there is a great vista directly ahead to Littleneck Pond, which our volunteers had opened up the previous Fall. Then, to keep it open, the grass and weeds that had grown on the trail after it had been cleared of the invasives was mowed in mid-summer. If you walk the trail this fall or winter be sure and check it out; the improvement is dramatic.



View of Littleneck Pond looking north from trail

Our “goat-scaping” initiative to clear the invasives-overrun field behind the South County Museum has been delayed pending approval by the Rhode Island Coastal Resources Management Council, the agency that controls any development or invasives removal work within 200 feet of wetlands or water of any kind. Their concerns about goat-scaping are twofold: possible E coli pollution eroding into the Narrow River and concern that there may be some native plants that would be consumed by the goats when they eat the invasives. We are formulating a proposal with Applied Biosystems to address these concerns and hope to present it to the CRMC in January. Once we have permission to move forward, hopefully during the summer of 2023, we hope to work in conjunction with the Narragansett tribal council to build a tribal food garden in part of the field, featuring a showpiece Three Sisters garden of corn, beans and squash. We were successful in raising most of the money needed to deploy the goats with grants received from the RI Foundation and the South County Garden Club along with \$700 raised when we participated in the April 1 401 Gives program for the first time.

Phase 2 of the Native Plant Garden that we first installed in 2020 at the South County Museum will be implemented in the spring. The South County Garden Club has generously given us an additional grant that we will use to add more native plants to both the garden and to the landscape surrounding the museum buildings. It will also fund the purchase of plant identification signs for the trees, shrubs and native flowers on the grounds so that visitors will be able to identify the diverse plants on site. Lastly, the grant will also allow us to purchase deer fencing and soil enhancements. Recently, the museum has also asked the Friends of Canonchet to take over the maintenance of the iconic herb garden next to the Metz building, which we have agreed to do.

The Canonchet Farm high marsh restoration project is now slated to begin in late winter and early spring 2023. Recently the Save The Bay managers of the approved project have been on site establishing base points and templates for the proposed runnels that will be dug by volunteers to drain the impounded “ponding” areas back into the Narrow River over a period of years. Most of the ponding in the Canonchet high marsh stems from environmental damage that goes back to the construction of the old Sea View Railroad embankment in the early twentieth century, which effectively blocked the natural drainages of the area. We are planning a public lecture on this project in January at the Narragansett Public Library.

Educational Walks and Talks

Our fall schedule of Walks and Talks:

Sun, Sep 25, 1 pm: Tim Cranston, Historian and Writer, "Canonchet Farm Trails a Treasure"

Sun, Oct 16, 1 pm: Lauren Parmalee, Sr Dir Education, "Audubon Society Comes to Canonchet"

Sun, Oct 23, 1 pm: Tom Hoagland and Alan Woodmansee, "Identifying Invasives in the Landscape"

Sat, Nov. 5, 1 pm: David Gregg, RI Natural History Survey, "Finding Your Niche in Nature"

Sat, Nov 12, 1 pm: Beth Laliberte, URI Teaching Professor, "Canonchet Geology Rocks!"

Our Spring 2023 schedule is not yet complete but we hope to have at least four additional walks and talks in March and April. When the schedule is finalized it will be emailed to members.

FOCF and the URI Master Gardening Partnership-Part 2

The collaboration between the Friends of Canonchet Farm (FOCF) and the URI Master Gardeners Program continues to play an integral role in helping FOCF meet its goals of preserving, improving, and managing the Canonchet Farm property along with the Town of Narragansett. The origins of this relationship were discussed in our spring newsletter, while this article will discuss the ongoing work and results of this partnership.

The first joint land stewardship project ever undertaken by URI Master Gardening was the Canonchet Invasive Plant Control Program to eliminate invasives and restore the native habitat around Lake Canonchet across from Narragansett Town Beach. This partnership was developed thanks to the persistent efforts and vision of Rosemary Smith in 2013. Then in 2015, FOCF was asked by the Town of Narragansett to add the work of restoring habitat along the 1.3-mile Canonchet Farm Nature trail that runs from the town beach to the community center. This turned a summertime part-time effort into a year-round effort to influence and restore the native ecology of the entirety of Canonchet Farm.

Initially a working model with two parts was developed. First, a removal plan required volunteers to work one day a week with multiple crews of four or five people that would receive specific instructions on handling the plants. Hand tools were used to remove the unwanted vegetation. Then, in the following week, the crew reviewed their work and then went to work on the next designated section. Repeated treatment is needed to remove invasive species. The second part of the model was the maintenance plan, which required volunteers to police the work, remove new shoots and replant the cleared area with native plants. All of this work was done with the approval and guidance of the Narragansett Parks and Recreation Department under the town council.

With the ongoing success of the Invasive Plant Control Program, the joint Community Project expanded with a greater educational focus. Placing publicity in local newspapers, collecting volunteer attendance data, cooperating in gathering scientific information on water quality and wildlife, and adding information to the URI MG website all added to the visibility of the Friends of Canonchet Farm and their role in restoring native habitat. Initiatives included public education by means of guided talks and walks on diverse historical and ecological topics along with the creation of specialty informative brochures that detailed the history, geology and map of the trail and its adjacent property. These brochures are available at kiosks on either end of the trail.

Each summer, the URI College of Environment and Life Sciences offers a two-day Invasive Plant Manager certificate program that trains RI residents, nursery employees and master gardeners in the science of managing and mitigating Invasive plants. Four members of our board are both master gardeners and invasive plant managers.



Lake Canonchet shore is now cleared on Invasives

The two day course traditionally winds up with a walk through Canonchet Farm along the nature trail where the certificate candidates can view the evident successes of our joint program.

In 2019, an invasive plants booklet was adapted from an existing Invasive Identification booklet developed by the Jamestown Restoration group that had been created to remove invasives and restore native ecology at Taylor Point located under the Pell Bridge in Jamestown. With their permission, Friends of Canonchet Farm expanded their booklet to feature the 15 most common southern Rhode Island invasive plants and has made the booklet available online and at multiple distribution points in communities like libraries, chambers of commerce, and parks and recreation offices.

FOCF has continued to develop and expand the volunteer corps of Master Gardeners and concerned local citizens who work on habitat restoration in Canonchet Farm. Trail volunteer co-leaders Tom Hoagland and Alan Woodmansee, both master gardeners, have continued to lead volunteer group work around Lake Canonchet and Canonchet Farm Trails on Saturday mornings in the fall, winter and spring and around the lakes each summer. New volunteers are always welcome — there's still much work to be done.

Furthermore, plans for a Linear Park have been developed by Randall Collins, Jr., of Beta Group Inc., for the area around Canonchet Lake. These plans were presented to the Town Council in 2018 and they added funds for this multi-year project in 2021. We hope to have an improved open space park with a walking path and structures for shade in the not-too-distant future. People will be able to enjoy the beauty of the natural environment that FOCF, along with our master gardener partners, have worked so hard to preserve.

Our gratitude goes to Rosemary Smith for providing the information about the history of the relationship between FOCF and MG, and for all the time she spent making this happen. We also appreciate the help of all the master gardeners who have assisted us in our work. We look forward to our continued partnership.