

>>> FALL NEWSLETTER <<<

RIDGEFIELD CONSERVATION COMMISSION



CONSERVATION TIP! CONSIDER DELAYING GARDEN-BED CLEANUP UNTIL AFTER MID-APRIL. SPENT FLOWERS AND LEAVES MAKE GREAT FOOD AND HABITAT FOR A WIDE VARIETY OF CREATURES.



SEASONAL NEWS

LAUZEN IS MOWED & HAYED



If fields are not mowed on a regular basis, they will revert to forest. Lauzen Field, located on McKeon Farm is mowed in mid to late Summer to ensure that any nesting birds will not be disturbed. This year's mowing was later than desired because of a wet summer. But now with the field mowed and hay baled, it is ready for the seasons to come.



The RCC was very fortunate to have Paul Abrahams, P.J. Reiner, Ryan Shirvell, and Dave Sigworth as its seasonal workers. They mowed, weed-whacked, cleared trails and removed invasive species in 33 open spaces with over 50 miles of trail throughout Town. The RCC is grateful for their dedication and enthusiasm in maintaining the Town's open spaces for the enjoyment of the community.

CONSERVATION STEWARDS



➤➤➤ RCC REPLANTS MCKEON ORCHARD

Many of the heirloom apple trees on McKeon Farm have died over the years. In keeping with the Town's ordinance of using native plants, the RCC has added four different native fruiting trees to the apple orchard that sits at the intersection of Ridgebury and Old Stagecoach Roads. The trees are: persimmon (*Diospyros virginiana*), sweet (*Malus coronaria*) and southern (*Malus angustifolia*) crabapple, and paw paw (*Asimina triloba*).

NOTE: GREAT TIME FOR TREE, BUSH AND BULB PLANTINGS

Fall is the best time to transplant and plant bushes, trees and bulbs. As plants are entering their dormant state, there is less stress on them than in Spring and Summer. Also, many nurseries and on-line retailers are offering hefty discounts on these plants. Plants and bulbs can successfully go into ground before hard frosts, which in Ridgefield is increasingly in mid to late November.

ALL MOTORIZED BIKES FORBIDDEN ON RCC TRAILS



After a spirited discussion, the RCC decided to not allow e-bikes on its trails at this time. In the future it may allow e-bikes on a few of its properties. Its main concerns about these modes of transport are the potential for excessive erosion, speed control, destruction of sensitive areas and overall safety. As a reminder to Town residents, all forms of motorized bikes, including e-bikes, are forbidden on RCC trails. We recently have had several reports of motorized bike use in Florida Refuge and have informed the Ridgefield Police Department, accordingly.



➤➤➤ MCKEON IS FOR THE BIRDS

One of the best spots in Town for bird watching is McKeon Farm. Besides the purple martins who have swarmed *en masse* to the condos on-site, many rare fowl can be spotted. Our effort led by Commissioner Allan Welby has been rewarded with an estimated population of 111 purple martins (28 adults and 83 young) at the farm.



HOW MANY CAN YOU ID?



The exterior walls of the small barn at McKeon Farm are beginning to run out of display space for the cornucopia of old and rusty tools that decorate it. Next time you are by the farm check out the array of eclectic items, some of which are over 100 years old. [McKeon Farm Tools Museum](#)



KEEPING TRAILS OPEN, SPACES SAFE



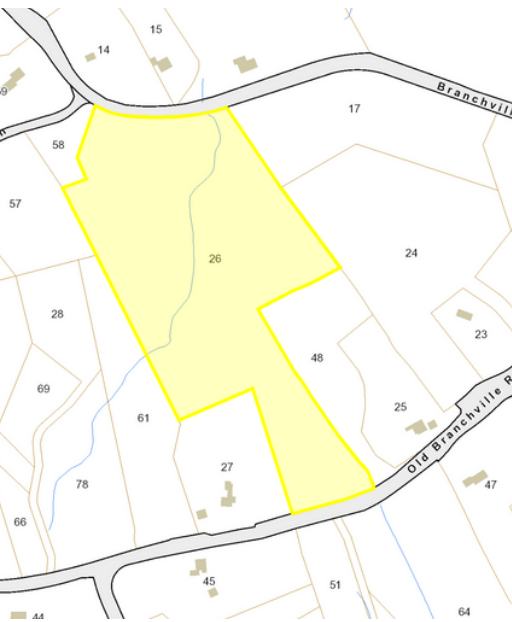
The RCC is responsible for maintaining nearly 2,700 acres of open space in Town. Keeping trails open, safely is a key priority. A number of commissioners are certified in the use of chain saws and respond quickly to reports of downed trees on trails. For the largest of removals, however, the RCC relies on a trusted group of contractors.

MORE OPEN SPACE

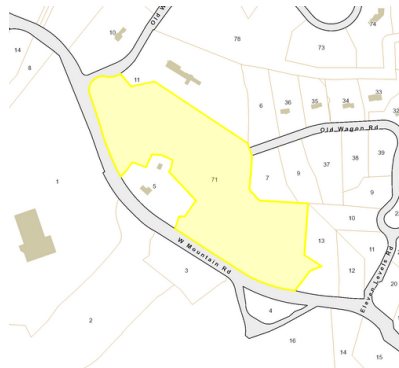


ACQUISITION

A new property off Branchville Road has just been added to Ridgefield's open space inventory. What makes this parcel special is that it is smack in the middle of undeveloped State land, which together would add up to over 40 acres of pristine forest that is adjacent to another large plot of open space. There are many options on this piece of land for trails and scenic views.



In addition, the Town recently approved the transfer of nearly 18 acres of open space off Old West Mountain Road to the RCC. It is in the process of deciding how to manage this parcel.



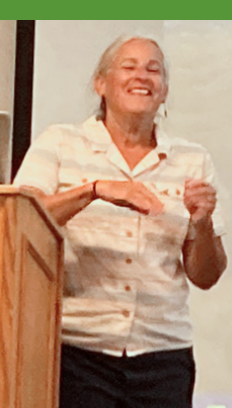
The Town acquired (through condemnation) 7.52 acres of land from the former Port of Missing Men property. This land is north of and adjacent to Sturgis Park and will become part of that park.

In the Spring of 2022, the homeowners of a property on Old West Mountain Road directed the removal and topping of a dozen trees on open-space land adjacent to Round Pond without the permission or knowledge of the RCC. In a negotiated settlement, they have paid the Town a financial settlement and agreed to a process where they may be permitted to trim certain trees on Town land as part of a view easement. Ambiguities on the original deed helped to create this situation and led to the settlement. The homeowners also violated wetlands regulations (IW-22-19), which has since been corrected.



TOWN SETTLES OPEN SPACE VIOLATION





The Ridgefield Natural Resource Inventory Story Map

**NRI TO BE
PUBLISHED
THIS FALL**



After a large research effort by the RCC, academic partners, and resident citizen scientists, the Town's Natural Resource Inventory (NRI) will be published this Fall. RCC commissioner Jean Linville gave a preview this Summer to a packed audience at the Ridgefield Library as part of an exhibit of the Town's open space areas and natural resources. The story boards used were created by Pace University.



SIGNING PINE MOUNTAIN



New signs have been placed on Pine Mountain trails to better guide both bicyclists and hikers. Please stay on the proper trails when visiting any of the Town's open-space properties.

MARTIN BANDING



Sixteen Eastern bluebird nesting boxes were made available at McKeon Farm in Spring/Summer 2023. Thirteen of the 16 boxes were used by both Eastern bluebirds and Tree swallows. Nesting success was quite high and many of the birds raised second broods. A total of 40 Eastern bluebirds and 77 Tree swallows were fledged. The Purple martin nesting structure was enlarged this year following the great success of the 2022 nesting season. The number of nesting gourds was doubled this year to a total of 36 of which 21 had nests this year. Eighty-four baby martins were produced from those nests. As part of an ongoing research project the Conservation Commission banded 71 of those babies (up from 22 in 2022). Five of the 22 birds banded in 2022 returned to occupy the Martin colony this year. Numbers of returning birds are expected to expand next Spring.



NEW CONSERVATION COMMISSION MEMBER



Jana Hogan has lived in Ridgefield since 2002. She has been involved with conservation-related organizations throughout her time in Ridgefield. She served on the Board of Woodcock Nature Center as President; she is a founding member of the Pollinator Pathway and currently serves as the Vice President. She is a member of the Ridgefield Action Committee for the Environment (RACE) and the Ridgefield Garden Club, volunteers for the Norwalk River Watershed Association and the ecotype project at the Hickories, and is a Scout Merit Badge Counselor for Connecticut Yankee Council.

