



Complete the Coy's Brook Conservation Puzzle

On a sunny late summer afternoon hosted by the Wequassett Resort on Pleasant Bay, Harwich Conservation Trust (HCT) held its 31st Annual Meeting and announced a new campaign to save the last wooded lot tucked next to the 27-acre Coy's Brook Woodlands in West Harwich. If HCT can raise \$180,000 by December 31st, then the final piece of a very scenic and ecologically diverse conservation puzzle can be completed.

Since that announcement, six generous donors have assembled a \$90,000 challenge fund. To earn the \$90,000 in challenge funds, HCT has to raise \$90,000 in matching funds. So far, HCT has received \$10,000 in matching funds, so we only have to raise \$80,000 more in order to reach the \$180,000 land-saving goal.

22-year Puzzle

To understand the importance of this "Last Lot" it's helpful to reflect on the acquisition history of the Coy's Brook Woodlands conservation puzzle.

Back in 1997, when a 15-lot subdivision was proposed for this fragile upland ridge jutting out into the marsh bordering Coy's Brook, which is the major tributary to the Herring River, HCT embarked on its very first land fundraising campaign to buy 11 of those lots for a bargain sale of \$225,000 from James and Marcia Stewart.

Over the years, the Estate of Charles Hall donated 9 more acres and HCT purchased two more lots from the Stewarts as the conservation assemblage continued to grow.

Unfortunately, James and Marcia passed away, but their three children approached HCT with a rare opportu-

nity to buy the remaining lot. So now, 22 years after the first acquisition in 1997, HCT has a chance to buy the last wooded lot nestled next to Coy's Brook Woodlands.

"If the lot can be preserved, then we're extinguishing another septic system in the watershed, thereby protecting the water quality of Coy's Brook and by extension the Herring River. We would also be protecting the visitor experience to this very scenic trail loop. When you look deeper and closer at some of the wildlife that call this land home because of the mix of habitats, the land-saving reasons become even more compelling," said Michael Lach, HCT Executive Director.

Biodiversity Abounds

The land offers extensive marshside shoreline buffered by pine-oak woodland, the combination of which provides important habitat for a variety of species including songbirds, raptors, reptiles like the Eastern box turtle, fiddler crabs, and monarch butterflies.

Although not listed as rare in the state, the marsh wren like many bird species is declining due to habitat loss. This little songbird actually builds elliptical, domed nests right in the nearby cattail reeds up to three feet or more above the high tide watermark.

Fiddler crabs, called "fiddler" because when it feeds with the back & forth motion of the small claw compared to the big claw, it looks like a fiddle player, live in the intertidal area along the marsh edge that is inundated twice daily by the tides. The males have an oversize claw and they make cylindrical burrows in the mud and sit by the opening, waiting for females to consider their burrowbuilding skills.







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Butterfly weed, a member of the milkweed family of plants, grows on the property. Monarch butterfly caterpillars depend exclusively on the leaves of the milkweed family of plants for food. Monarchs have been in decline due to habitat loss and other factors. Saving the land will help this species, too.

Box turtles join the birds and butterflies as the beneficiaries of this land-saving project. Every box turtle has its own unique pattern of orange, yellow, dark brown, and black starbursts gracing her/his domed shell. They have the potential for long lives (80-100 years), but again, habitat loss has taken a heavy toll.

They have been found crossing Lothrop Avenue nearby and they've also been observed at Coy's Brook Woodlands. With a relatively small home range of up to two acres most of the year, preserving this Last Lot provides these rare turtles with important habitat for survival.

Awards & Archeology

In addition to announcing the Last Lot at Coy's Brook Woodlands Campaign, HCT honored the Garden Club of Harwich as their 2019 Conservationist of the Year for enhancing local wildlife habitat by initiating a "Backyard Wildlife Habitat" program and educating the public about ecologically sustainable gardening practices.

The Garden Club recently sponsored tours of local properties where the owners had made significant efforts to plant native species, remove invasive plants, reduce lawn size, and improve biodiversity.

HCT also honored the Woodworkers Club of the Chatham-Harwich Newcomers as their 2019 Volunteer Group of the Year for building two trailhead kiosks including at HCT's newly preserved 15-acre Cornelius Pond Woodlands (see story, page 12).

In the fall, the group is also planning on building benches for the new walking trail destination. This carpentry crew volunteers its construction time and talent to complete small-scale building projects that make a big difference for local nonprofits.

Featured speakers Professor Tim Earle and historian Scott Ridley rounded out the event with a presentation titled "Exploring the History Beneath Our Feet" discussing the archeological aspirations and history related to HCT's 49-acre Pleasant Bay Woodlands Archeological Research Project.

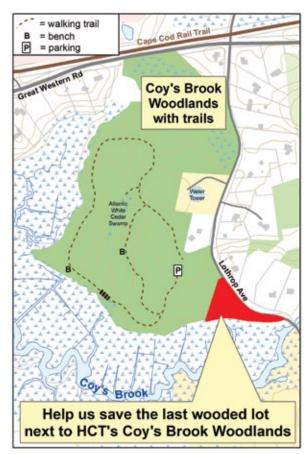
HOW TO HELP SAVE THE LAST LOT...

Please help us raise the \$80,000 left in matching funds needed to preserve the Last Lot tucked next to Coy's Brook Woodlands.

Donate by credit card at harwichconservationtrust.org.

Donate by check payable to Harwich Conservation Trust and mail in the enclosed donation envelope to HCT, P.O. Box 101, South Harwich, MA 02661

Thank you for making a lasting and local land-saving difference for land, water, wildlife, and people.



Map of the Last Lot next to the trails of Coy's Brook Woodlands.



Innovative Eco-Restoration in Harwich Port

In the early 1800s, local Cape Codder Henry Hall, whose bogs were near the beach, found that when sand covered the vines of his cranberries they grew better.

Although Captain Alvin Cahoon, from Harwich, is recognized as being the first in 1846 to sell his crop, it was Hall's moment in 1816 that laid the "sandwork," so to speak, for commercialization of the fruit. It was also a moment that began to change the landscape as naturally occurring red maple and Atlantic white cedar wetlands were cleared to create cranberry bogs.

Every few years since the 1800s, an inch or so of sand was placed on

bogs across the Cape to increase cranberry yields. Culverts and ditches were cut into wetlands to control water flow to and from the tart red berries. Flumes and other water control structures were built in streams to hold back or release flow as needed.

The cranberry crop supported livelihoods especially in the 1800s as the berry high in vitamin C nourished mariners on the high seas. Then in the 1900s cranberries branched out

into juices and other uses mainly through Ocean Spray.

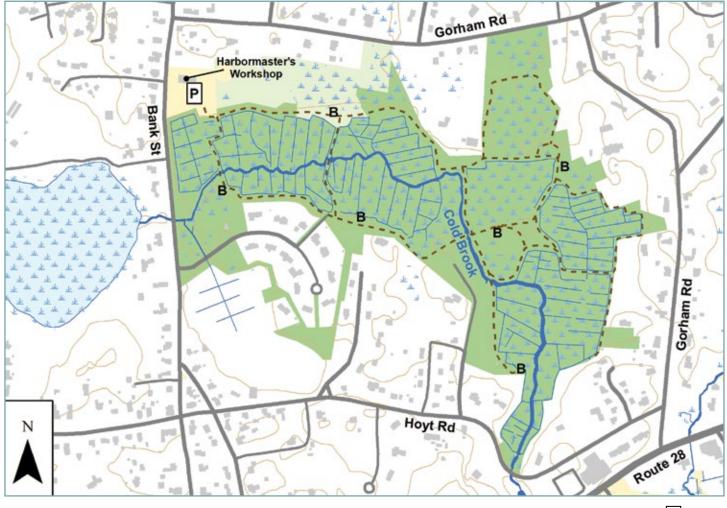
Harwich is proud of its connection to the cranberry, says Michael Lach, Executive Director of the Harwich Conservation Trust. "Cranberry farming has a long and respected history in Harwich," he says.

Cranberry Prices Fall

After nearly two centuries of a good run, prices for the fruit began falling in the 1990s, in large part because of competition from the Midwest and Canada. Bog owners across Massachusetts began taking their acreage out of production. One of

HCT's Michael Lach takes a closer look at a deteriorating flume through which Cold Brook flows on its way to Saquatucket Harbor.





Trail map of the Robert F. Smith Cold Brook Preserve

Walking trails

B Bench

P Parking

those owners, whose bog was in the center of Harwich Port, reached out to HCT.

Thanks to donor support, Harwich Conservation Trust (HCT) was able to buy that 66-acre parcel in 2001.

Before HCT's purchase, the site hadn't been fully harvested in awhile and the agricultural infrastructure (ditches, flumes, irrigation lines, pumphouses) needed lots of attention.

At first, says Lach, they explored keeping it an active cranberry bog, but the financials just didn't work. And as the commodity price for cranberries continued to slide, many more bog owners were evaluating how to exit the market rather than enter it.

Creating a New Vision

HCT staff and board members then looked at historical documents to see what the cranberry bog had been in its former life. Although the records are vague on whether it was primarily salt or fresh, it is clear the area was a wetland.

HCT decided to enlist both the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Commonwealth of Massachusetts Division of Ecological Restoration for advice and funding to return the acreage to its more natural state.

"We hope to set a new vision for the site's ecology, thereby helping to enhance wildlife habitat, improve water quality and flow, and really add to the overall visitor experience," says Lach. As HCT's largest protected landholding, the site is now known



InterFluve's Keith Kantack, fluvial geomorphologist (scientist that studies stream processes), installs a groundwater monitoring well at HCT's Cold Brook Preserve.

as the Robert F. Smith Cold Brook Preserve in honor of Founding Trustee Bob Smith who was also the nonprofit land trust's president for the first 27 years.





This series of three images shows eco-restoration of a retired bog complex at the Tidmarsh site in Plymouth, MA. Eco-restoration actions included removing earthen dikes and water control structures, removing sand in selected locations, grading to break apart the former cranberry mat and roughen the wetland surface, plugging agricultural ditches, re-constructing stream channels, and adding large wood to the stream channel and bog surface. All of these actions were intended to re-naturalize the movement and storage of water on the site, restore connectivity, and set the stage for wetland recovery. Photos BY ALEX HACKMAN, MA DIVISION OF ECOLOGICAL RESTORATION.

Cold Brook flows through the 66 acres on its way to Saquatucket Harbor on Nantucket Sound.

Innovative Eco-Restoration

With an evolving eco-restoration partnership, and Cold Brook's designation by the Division of Ecological Restoration (DER) as a priority project in Massachusetts, HCT became one of the trailblazers in the world of planning the restoration of retired cranberry bogs.

Now there are close to 10 more similar projects in DER's pipeline.

"Thousands of acres of bogs are coming out of production so there is a significant opportunity," says Eric Ford, a wetland scientist with the state's Division of Ecological Restoration. "I think it is important to talk about cranberry bog ecological restoration projects because it is something you are going to see a lot more of."

Each bog has its own story. Cold Brook is heavily influenced by its setting, starting upstream of Paddock Pond and flowing under Bank Street into Grassy Pond, which is manmade. It flows under Bank Street for a second time before it hits the retired cranberry bog complex



InterFluve's Maisie Richards, fluvial geomorphologist (scientist that studies stream processes), surveys the topography and bathymetry of the Cold Brook Preserve near its southern end. InterFluve, a consulting firm that specializes in restoration of rivers, lakes and wetlands, has been gathering site data to inform the eco-restoration design process.

owned by HCT and then travels under Hoyt Road and Route 28 before entering Saquatucket Harbor, also manmade, having been carved from salt marsh in the 1960s just before the state's Wetland Protection Act became law.

The Cold Brook Eco-Restoration
Project will include removing, or
partially removing, seven dilapidated
flumes as well as restoring water flow
and helping the straightened stream
channel return to its more original
meandering and sinuous course.

"We aren't trying to turn time back to 1890; but, instead, return the ecological trajectory of the site to that of a healthier wetland/stream ecosystem," says Ford. "Once that's done, Mother Nature will do the rest."

One of the first steps, says Ford, will be removing much of the sand—up to 3 ½ feet in some places—that was put down over years of agriculture. That burdensome sand has made some of the acreage exceedingly dry.

Bog owners would "mow all the trees down and apply sand, so you get feet of sand on top of wetland, which separates the land from the groundwater. Basically the site isn't functioning well anymore ecologically," Ford says.

Eco-Restoration Benefits

All of these contemplated ecorestoration changes will pay numerous environmental dividends; improving terrestrial and aquatic habitat, promoting a self-sustaining ecosystem, improving water quality, enhancing fish and wildlife passage, increasing resilience to climate change and sea level rise, improving opportunities for passive recreation, and reducing nitrogen-loading in Saquatucket Harbor, which leads into Nantucket Sound.





Restoring the wetland will allow it to take up more nitrogen, preventing it from entering the harbor. The nitrogen will feed plant life in the wetland without harming the ecosystem, reducing effects in the harbor. With too much nitrogen there, "you get fish kills, eelgrass is destroyed, things of that nature," says Ford.

The eco-restoration plan is about 50 percent complete. "There are a lot of moving parts to these eco-restoration projects," Ford says. "The time scales for planning, permitting, and implementation are more in decades than a year or two."

But more and more eco-restoration practitioners are finding that the time and monetary investment are worth it. Ford said recent state studies revealed extensive economic activity resulting from restoration project investments. The analysis found that, for every \$1 million spent, the average economic output of a restoration project generates a 75 percent return on investment and creates or maintains 12 and a half full-time-equivalent jobs. These results equal or exceed those for other capital projects such as road

and bridge construction, and replacement of water infrastructure, Ford said.

Lach says HCT is striving to raise funds to complete this restoration project. An updated trail system with a wheelchair-friendly loop is planned, including signage to highlight emerging habitats. The Trust has already reached out to the Cape Cod Botantical Club for monitoring help; local Harwich and Chatham fifth graders from the Monomoy Regional Middle School have incorporated learning about the project into their curriculum.

If all goes well, a great result would be enhancing the migration of American eels and potentially encourage the return of river herring.

"My dad knew the place," says Brad Chase, Diadromous Fisheries Project Leader with the Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries. "I think we will eventually get herring into Grassy Pond which is fantastic."

They have already begun bringing back eels with the installation of an eel ramp, appropriately nicknamed the "eel-a-vator."

Both species are vital forage components for a variety of much larger fish—tuna, striped bass, cod and more. In turn, these species help support commercial and recreational fisheries as well as contribute to the sustainability of the peninsula's economy.

"Restoring the natural ecology to the heart of Harwich Port is not just a story about this one special area," says Lach. "It's a narrative about the bigger picture of connectivity: connecting natural stream flow between pond and harbor, connecting wildlife to restored habitats, connecting people to the land, and connecting students to science who will then become the next generation of decision makers endeavoring to protect Cape Cod's diverse yet fragile environment."

By Doreen Leggett

Community Journalist and Communications Officer

Cape Cod Commercial Fishermen's Alliance

Sign up for Alliance eNews: capecodfishermen.org

Sign up for HCT's eNews: harwichconservationtrust.org

VIDEO, FAQs, & MORE RESOURCES

Are you intrigued by this innovative eco-restoration project?

Watch a three-minute video at <u>harwichconservationtrust.org</u> to learn more.

Click the "Save Land" tab and in the dropdown menu click "Cold Brook Eco-Restoration Project."



Land Stewardship Volunteers Make a Difference

Meadow Restoration

Thanks to widespread support from the Cape Cod community in 2017, HCT was able to purchase and preserve 17 acres on Muddy Creek that flows into Pleasant Bay.

This property, now called Muddy Creek Headwaters, has been transformed by the ecological restoration of 1.5 acres of grassland meadow habitat. This area was formerly occupied by an abandoned house and derelict tennis court.

HCT worked with Blue Flax Design on the meadow restoration project, resulting in a wildflower-rich meadow of black-eyed susans, partridge pea, butterfly weed, and blazing stars.

Now the meadow is established and no longer needs artificial irrigation.

HCT is working with an engineer on a parking area design. The volunteer Chatham-Harwich Newcomers' Woodworkers Club installed a trailhead kiosk and volunteer Eagle Scout Carl Furner led the effort to build three benches.

Once parking and the trail are fully in place, HCT plans to open this property to the public by spring.



Abandoned house removed to make a meadow.



Clean canvas for starting a meadow.





HCT's Tyler Maikath uses a chainsaw to clear a downed tree from a trail.

Tornado and Tree Clearing

July 23, 2019 was a day to remember as three tornadoes touched down on the Cape, including Harwich.

As the storm front and swirling winds suddenly swept in, the HCT staff and volunteer Chris Joyce huddled in the hallway of the office in South Harwich. Trees were snapping all around. While the office property was mostly spared, Harwich Center suffered great damage.

In addition, several conservation lands with walking trails were heavily

impacted with downed trees. Many trees were snapped and uprooted by the tornado as it barreled through HCT's William and Barbara Hacker Wildlife Sanctuary on the bike trail and the Town's adjacent Island Pond Conservation Lands.

The Town's Bell's Neck Conservation Lands also suffered tree damage and blocked trails. And HCT's Cornelius Pond Woodlands on Queen Anne Road, which had been just about ready to open, also had a setback with several downed trees closing off the trail loop and taking down a utility wire.

Volunteers to the Rescue

To clear the trails, Tyler Maikath, HCT's Outreach & Stewardship Coordinator was joined by a crew of dedicated volunteers on multiple days in August and September.

More than 15 volunteers came out to help successfully clear the trails. A number of particularly hazardous broken trees hung up in other trees ("widow makers") will be cleared by skilled sawyer volunteers from the non-profit organization Team Rubicon.

Most of the trails are now open for the fall hiking season.



HCT's trail-clearing crew takes a break during tornado clean up.



Using loppers for the job, (from left) Michael Lach of the Harwich Conservation Trust and Selectmen Don Howell and Ed McManus snipped the ceremonial ribbon to open the new trail at Cornelius Pond Woodlands.



Some members of the Woodworkers Club of Chatham-Harwich Newcomers: Jay Arthur (top) Chris Seymour, Joe Linehan, Jim Meehan, (back) Bob Labrecque, (top) Wayne Glifort, Warren Chase, Steve Patzman

TRAIL NOW OPEN

Cornelius Pond Woodlands Shows Power of Conservation Cooperation

When citizens, businesses and government come together to save key tracts of open space, almost nothing—not even a tornado—can stop the momentum.

That was the message from Michael Lach of the Harwich Conservation Trust, who helped cut the ribbon for the new Cornelius Pond Woodlands conservation area.

"It takes a village to preserve priority lands," he said. The 14.9-acre parcel off Queen Anne Road was home to the Ovaska family for more than 80 years starting in the 1930s, and was put on the market for \$1.15 million in 2015.

Wanting the public to enjoy the same natural vista they had seen for decades, the family agreed to sell the property to HCT for \$800,000. The Trust raised \$500,000 toward the purchase, with the state contributing \$85,000 and foundations chipping in \$15,000; through the Community

Preservation Act, Harwich residents contributed the remaining \$200,000.

When it became clear that the house could not be salvaged, the Robert B. Our Co. donated the equipment and staff to remove it. Volunteers and members of AmeriCorps Cape Cod blazed a walking trail. The Chatham-Harwich Newcomers' Woodworkers Club built a kiosk. And the parking area was installed by town DPW crews. The goal had been to open the trail in July.

Then came the tornado, which toppled or damaged many trees on the property. That prompted a second round of work at the site, with volunteers spending weeks clearing away trees and debris to make the walking trail safe again. Their work

was completed in time for a September 23rd ceremonial ribbon-cutting, attended by town officials, HCT volunteers, and supporters.

"We're so grateful for such widespread community support," Lach said.

Selectman Don Howell said it's great when government acquires open space, but there are not always guarantees that the land will be conserved forever. When HCT protects property, there is a "great assurance that my great-grandchildren will be able to walk here and see exactly what I see," he said.

Assistant Town Administrator Joe Powers said the project represents "a perfect example" of how the Community Preservation Act can boost open space acquisition projects.

When he considers requests for assistance from nonprofit groups, Harwich DPW Director Lincoln Hooper said he weighs the public benefit of the project. "Everything the Harwich Conservation Trust does is in the public's best interest," he said.





Just 800 feet west of HCT's office, a pair of ospreys successfully fledged two chicks this summer on a platform

installed by Eversource.

After removing the initial nest on a utility pole, the utility company installed the platform for the birds after the successful lobbying efforts by many people in the community. After being inspired by our feathered neighbors, HCT will be installing a new osprey pole in Red River marsh this fall.

We hope the pole will attract a new pair of nesting ospreys in the spring of 2020.

"The broadest, and maybe the most meaningful definition of volunteering: Doing more than you have to because you want to, in a cause you consider good." – Ivan Scheier

The new walking trail is a loop that follows the old private driveway to the location of the old house, which has been restored to a sweeping meadow and will be maintained that way, HCT Outreach and Land Stewardship Coordinator Tyler Maikath said.

The meadow has a number of pollinator-friendly plants including butterfly weed, and showcases the native pitch pines and oaks that call the area home.

The trail parallels the shore of Cornelius Pond, but for conservation and regulatory reasons, does not reach the pond itself. The land is home to a rare species, Plymouth gentian, which flowers under ideal conditions near the pond's edge.

A portion of the land shows the damage from the July tornado, but other vegetation seems to be stimulated by the openings in the tree cover. Some of the low plants are pyrogenic, meaning that their flowering and reproduction relies on periodic fires. It is likely that at some point in the future, controlled burns will need to be carried out on the property to reduce the risk of wildfire and to stimulate new plant growth, Maikath said.

By Alan Pollock

Cape Cod Chronicle

INTERESTED IN VOLUNTEERING?

If you would like to volunteer with HCT, please visit harwichconservationtrust.org, click the "Volunteer" dropdown menu, and then click the first link in the list to fill out a volunteer interest survey.

HCT's Tyler Maikath will then follow-up, arrange a time at HCT's office to chat about your interests, and find a match with HCT's diverse volunteer activities.



Summer Walkabouts

Tempted to Take a Hike? Check out our schedule of upcoming walks by clicking "Walks & Events" at harwichconservationtrust.org.

While you are on our site, sign up for HCT's eNews if you would like to receive email updates about walks, talks, and other events.





Tyler Maikath, HCT Outreach & Stewardship Coordinator, leads a walk and shares some laughter with guests on the first day that the new trail opened at Cornelius Pond Woodlands.

PHOTO: ALAN POLLOCK, CAPE COD CHRONICLE



Walk leaders Marcus Hendricks (foreground) and Todd Kelley chat with guests at one of the Native Nightlife Full Moon walks starting at Doane Rock, Eastham.

PHOTO: VINCE DEWITT



On a Native Nightlife Walk, the evening twilight offers a different perspective with subtle changes in sunlight as well as behavior by crepuscular wildlife (crepuscular means more active at dawn and/or dusk).

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PHOTO: VINCE DEWITT



On Sept. 9th, HCT volunteer walk leader Mark McGrath led a group of intrepid walkers across the Cape Cod Bay tidal flats at low tide from Brewster to Rock Harbor, Orleans. Brewster Natural Resource officer Ryan Burch (center in gray shirt) shares insights

Donation Dedications...each and every donation represents a thoughtful and generous contribution that helps to save special places.

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Donna, the best Aunt a girl could ask for! Crystal & Garin Casaleggio My grandchildren who love Harwich
Lynn Schweinshaut

Harwich (what a nice town) Kelly Barber

Chris Joyce

Joseph & Lynne Lavier Jim & Ellie Poor

Michael Lach Sally & Bob Bullard Kathy Meyers R. Dennis O'Connell Pem Schultz

Karin & Bob Larson Joan Nickerson

Mother Nature Carol A. Chichetto

My 16 years in Harwich, now Provincetown Brian N. Michaelan

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Our dog Theo who loves Bells Neck Trails! Wendell Sharp

Mike, Tyler, Jane & Alva & their hard work.
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Email: info@harwichconservationtrust.org

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Preserving land to protect woods, water, wildlife, and our shared Cape Cod quality of life.

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On the cover: This serene scene of the Last Lot (pictured on front at right) perched above Coy's Brook was captured by Gus Romano.

