

# HELP TROUT UNLIMITED RESTORE THE NORWALK RIVER AT SCHENCK’S ISLAND

The Mianus Chapter of Trout Unlimited has been busy at work restoring the Norwalk River throughout town, with a special focus on Schenck’s Island, a 17-acre town and Wilton Land Conservation Trust-owned open space in the heart of downtown Wilton. The chapter was recently awarded a grant of \$8,500 towards this project and they are also seeking an award from Embrace A Stream. Please visit the Embrace A Stream website for more information on how Wilton residents can help: <https://embraceastream.org/projects/mianus>. Learn more about ways you can help the chapter’s work as a volunteer or member at <http://www.mianustu.org/>.



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## Wilton Conservation Commission Newsletter



### LIVING WITH BEARS IN WILTON

Black bears have been the talk of the town in recent weeks after a newspaper reported a bear poacher was apprehended in Wilton by Connecticut Department of Energy & Environmental Protection (CT DEEP) conservation police. Bear hunting is currently prohibited in Connecticut and CT DEEP police, charged with enforcing wildlife protection laws, were able to apprehend the suspect. Bear populations are on the rise in Connecticut according to the most recent data from CT DEEP and the University of Connecticut’s College of Agriculture, Health & Natural Resources (UConn). Naturally with the presence of bears in Wilton comes the increased potential for bear-human interactions. Now is the time to learn how to coexist with black bears in our community.

To avoid unwanted interactions with bears, it is important not to attract them with food. These omnivores have a highly developed sense of smell. They are able to detect even the slightest of food odors. Garbage cans, pet food, compost piles, fruit trees, and birdfeeders provide a very easy meal for a bear waking up after a long hibernation or trying to gain weight as winter approaches. We can all take simple steps to reduce the possibility of a bear encounter by eliminating these food sources. Bird feeders should be removed from your yard in March and re-installed in late November. Garbage should be stored in airtight containers inside of a garage or shed and pet food should never be left outside overnight. After using your barbecue grill, be sure to clean it and store it in a garage or shed. Bears will often revisit places where they have found food in the past so it is important not to attract them in the first place. If a bear is able to feed in areas frequented by people then it may lose its fear of people.

You may be asking yourself “What should I do if I see a bear?” If you do encounter a bear do not approach it or try to take a picture. Also, do not run away or try to climb a tree to escape. Instead back away slowly and make your presence known by waving your arms and making noise. These actions will cause the bear to flee and many times scurry up a tree. If possible wait inside your house or car until the bear leaves the area. Roaming dogs can be perceived as a threat to bears and their cubs. For the safety of your pets and wildlife, always keep dogs on a leash and under control.

If you are lucky enough to spot a bear you can report the sighting to the CT DEEP’s Wildlife Division using this link: <http://www.depdata.ct.gov/wildlife/sighting/bearrpt.htm>

If you need immediate assistance concerning a black bear, you should call the DEEP’s 24-hour hotline at 860-424-3333.

— Mike Conklin  
Director of Environmental Affairs



CC Bess Sadler



# CLEANING UP THE VEGETATIVE BUFFER AT KENT POND

Before we talk about what we’re doing at Kent Pond, a few definitions.

What is a vegetative buffer? This is the area adjacent to a waterway where plants, shrubs, trees help guard the purity of the water by absorbing pollutants from the air and ground by filtering them through the soil before they can run directly into the body of water.

Under natural situations, the vegetative buffer is comprised of native plants. In today’s environment, the introduction of many foreign ornamental plants which have escaped from our gardens and the inadvertent introduction of other plant material, such as those fragments that have come into the US in packing materials, have established themselves in areas that were formerly pristine buffers, and have outcompeted the native plants to become solidly entrenched.

What’s wrong with having invasive plants instead of natives? Most of the invasive plants have entered our area without bringing along their natural predators – insects or diseases that would have controlled their overabundance. As a result, they have free-range to root themselves, climb up plants and trees, strangling them by winding their way toward the sunlight. The sheer weight of these invasives, their using the nutrients available in the soil, their covering their hosts and preventing sunlight needed for photosynthesis compound to diminish the natives along the buffer. Because most of the invasive plants have no insects that enjoy eating them, they do not attract birds; those that do provide berries that appeal to birds become widespread as the birds release the digested seeds throughout our woods and properties, ready for germination.

What’s happening at Kent Pond? Kent Pond, at the corner of Ridgefield and Linden Tree Roads in Wilton, is a 13-acre Town-owned water body that has been a source of delight to wildlife and neighboring residents for many years. It has hosted wildlife and provided fishing, kayaking, ice skating and ice hockey and has offered wonderful vistas of nature to walkers and those just driving along the two roads it intersects. Over the past two decades, however, conditions in the pond itself and along its vegetative buffer have become degraded with many invasive plants, both aqueous and land-based.

This year, the neighbors decided to take back their recreation site and established Friends of Kent Pond, a group that is fund-raising to clean-up the water and that is rolling down their shirtsleeves to begin tackling the removal of the invasive plants in the vegetative buffer.

Starting with a walk along the buffer to identify what is growing there, it became clear that beneath and behind the masses of invasive plants along the road stand many native trees and shrubs that are beautiful and healthful to a vegetative buffer: Sassafras, Birch, Beech, Mountain Laurel, Maple, Oak, Alder, Hickory, Bayberry and needless to say, Linden, and plenty of herbaceous plants including Goldenrod, Asters, Jewelweed, and many others that provide habitat and nourishment to pollinators, other insects, to birds and mammals.

What’s needed is to uncover these treasures and allow them access to the nutrients and sunlight they require to thrive. The Friends of Kent Pond have begun this task, starting at the pull-out along Linden Tree Rd. and working their way East, cutting and untwisting Oriental Bittersweet from their hosts’ stems, pulling out Mugwort and Japanese Stiltgrass by their roots, cutting down Common Reed and Burning Bush and working their way through stands of Multiflora Rose, Japanese Knotweed, Wild Grape, Porcelain Berry, and various other invasives that now call Kent Pond their home.

Working for two hours (9 – 11 a.m.) each Saturday morning in Fall (weather permitting), these volunteers are making headway to release the natives and give them the Winter months to prepare for renewed growth in Spring. The Town’s part of the buffer is close to a mile in length, so there is lots of work to be done.

To join the effort, come wearing long pants tucked into socks or boots, long-sleeved shirt, hat, sunscreen, and bring along water, heavy gardening gloves, clippers, loppers and/or hand saw. All helpers are welcome and help will be available to identify the good plants from the bad! To get more information, or to pre-register, email Jackie.Algon@wiltonct.org.

— Jackie Algon  
Conservation Commissioner

# WHAT IS THAT SCRATCHING NOISE?

If you’ve seen a flying squirrel, it may not have been under the best circumstance. Flying squirrels normally nest in tree hollows, but have been known to gain entry into houses by chewing through attic vents and other small openings around dormers and roof ridges, creating nests and food caches. They also occasionally fall down chimneys.

Wilton’s mature forests provide the perfect habitat for the Southern Flying Squirrel (glaucomis valans), who don’t really fly, but rather glide through the air from tree to tree using a patagium, a furry membrane that stretches from the front leg to the back. The squirrel is able to stabilize its glide with its tail, and uses cartilage in its wrists to help steer. Flying squirrels are much smaller than Gray squirrels, about 8 to 10 inches in length, with large dark eyes for excellent night vision. Their diet consists of acorns, nuts, seeds, berries, blossoms, mushrooms, moths, beetles, and small bird eggs. They have two broods a year, in early spring and again in summer. Their main predators are owls, hawks, raccoons, weasels, and even cats.

Homeowners should check for vulnerable entry points and seal them up to prevent flying squirrels (and other squirrels) from setting up a den in the attic. Consider trimming overhanging tree limbs to deter squirrels from accessing the roof. If a squirrel falls down the chimney, it is a good idea to drop a long rope down the chimney to encourage it to climb back up rather than open the damper to allow it into the house. These nocturnal, social animals are most active around 2 to 3 a.m., so if one or more are in your attic, you will likely hear it in the wee hours of the morning.

— Colleen O’Brien  
Conservation Commissioner

# CARRY-IN/CARRY-OUT

The Conservation Commission would like to applaud the Wilton Parks & Recreation Department for implementing the Carry-in/Carry-out pilot program for trash and recyclables at town-owned fields, parks and trails. The program requires all field, park and trail users to be responsible for removing all of their own trash and recyclables.


The pilot program is consistent with the Town’s commitment to conservation and sustainability. Taking responsibility for our waste encourages awareness of our impact on natural resources and can prompt environmentally friendly behaviors such as recycling, and use of eco-friendly reusable containers. It fosters a partnership between visitors and the parks by encouraging all visitors to act as stewards conserving the parks for future generations to enjoy.

Please note the following town facilities are exempt from the Pilot Program: Veteran’s Memorial Stadium; Kristine Lilly Soccer Field, Middlebrook Softball Fields (Field 1 & 2), Merwin Meadows and Schenck’s Island will not be included in the pilot program, and the town is placing separate recycling and trash receptacles at these locations.

Thank you for being a steward of Wilton parks, fields and trails!

— Susan DiLoreto  
Chairman, Conservation Commission

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