

Ridgefield Conservation Commission

FALL 2022 NEWSLETTER



The Ridgefield Conservation Commission (RCC) serves the Town by devoting its efforts to the sound development, conservation, supervision, and regulation of the Town's natural resources.



Conservation Tip!

Consider delaying garden bed cleanup until early Spring. Spent flowers and leaves make great food and habitat for a wide variety of creatures.

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Town Votes to Protect 1,200 Acres as Open Space

Residents of Ridgefield overwhelmingly voted to protect nearly 1,200 acres of Town-owned property as open space in perpetuity. This was necessitated because the Ridgefield Conservation Commission, as part of its stewardship of Town open space, discovered that nearly 100 properties, including major portions of Hemlock Hills and Pine Mountain, did not have open-space protection. By working with the Board of Selectmen and Town Counsel, the RCC was able to craft deed restrictions so that these lands will remain open space forever. After approval by Town vote October 19, 2022, the new development restrictions became part of the public record.



Native Plants Increase Foothold in Ridgefield

Efforts by the RCC have encouraged the BOS to adopt the policy that 100% of new and replacement trees, shrub, herbaceous perennials and ground cover plantings on municipal properties will be native to the Northeast. To support the objective of restoring native plants to town-owned property in Ridgefield, this policy also sets forth the town's aspiration to remove invasive plants from Town properties over time.



By doing this Ridgefield will be making more of its land hospitable to native birds, animals and insects. Ridgefield becomes just the second municipality in Connecticut to adopt a natives-only policy, following Newtown's adoption of a similar plan in 2021.

Thanks to the Conservation Commission of Newtown for providing their version of the policy, which we modified. A copy of the Ridgefield policy can be found on our [website](#). A list of Native Plants is also available on our [website](#).

Winged Euonymus Removal

The RCC has been working at Aldrich Park since July with a group of Scouts and their fathers and have cleared several thousand feet of invasive plants with a few acres still to go.



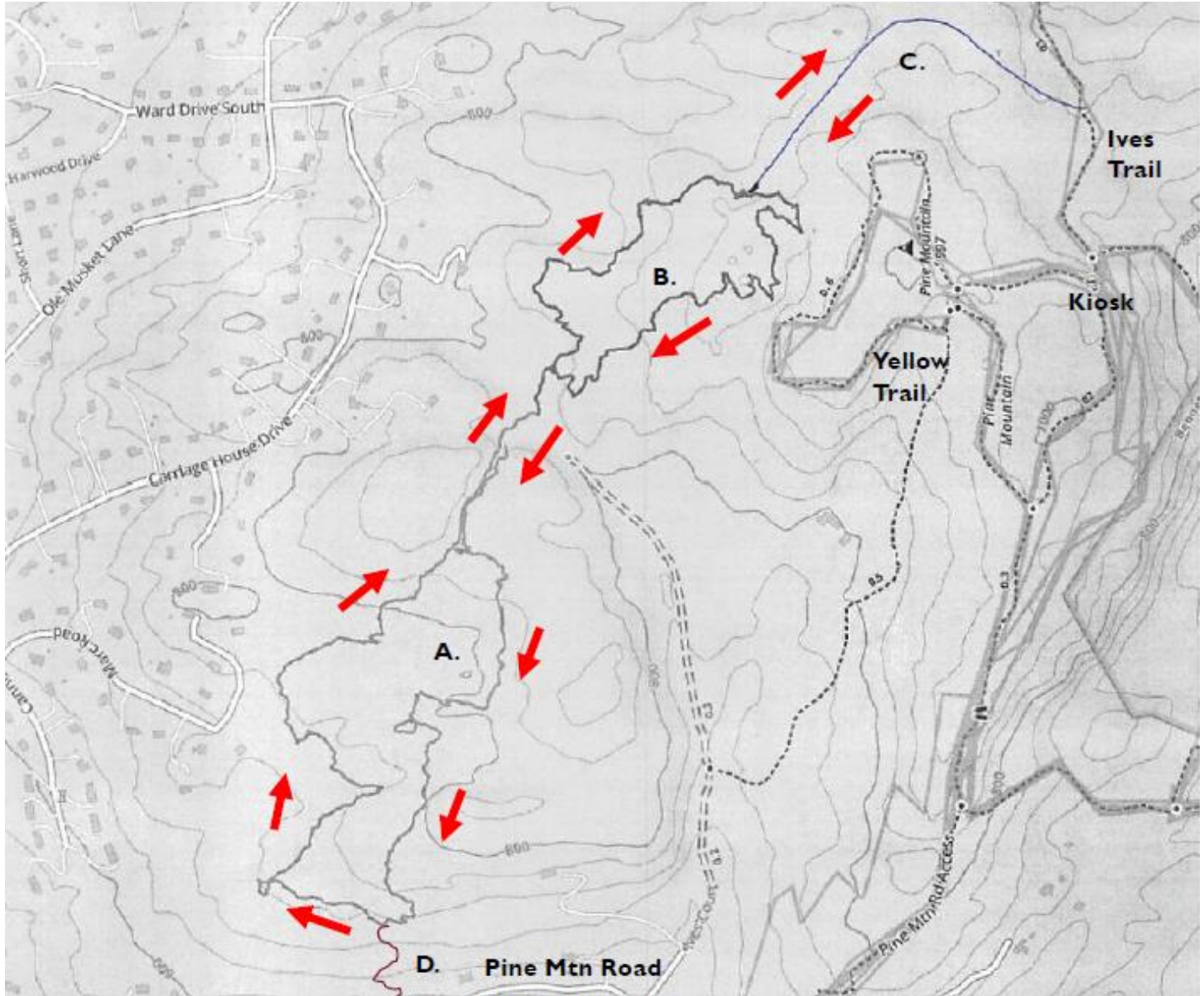
Hawk Watch

Mid-September is the start of hawk watching season in Connecticut, as birdwatchers throughout the area look to the skies for raptors migrating from points north to their southern wintering ground. The RCC sponsored two hawk watch field trips last month and the hawks did not disappoint. For both, over 10 different species and hundreds of hawks and raptors were spotted. A high point was of two separate Merlins, a bad-tempered little falcon that buzzes past hawk watchers with speed and determination, flying nearby. A newly minted bird lover spotted her first bald eagle. And viewers spotted hundreds of hawks circled above catching the thermals on their way to points as far away as South America.



New Trails Flagged on Acquired Boy Scout Property

This year's acquisition of 52 acres of property owned by the Boy Scouts is being followed up with a series of new trails that are being built by the New England Mountain Bike Association—Fairfield Chapter under the supervision of the RCC. This unspoiled space has seen little use over the last 50 years and has a wide range of native trees, shrubs, and plants. Trail construction should begin in 2023 and will link this open space to the Pine Mountain trail system.



Improvements Continue at McKeon Farm

In addition to several thousands of feet of split rail fencing that was replaced this year, there have been many improvements at McKeon Farm in 2022.

They include:

- Removal of invasive plants and trees along the 1,000 feet of stone walls boarding Old Stagecoach Road (as well as other locations).
- Repair and refurbishment of stairs leading from the pollinator garden to wetlands adjacent to Lauzun hayfield.



Before



After

- The RCC hopes to further improve the parking area off Old Stagecoach this Fall by having a gravel base installed.

Open Space Parcels for Deer Hunt Approved

The Board of Selectmen approved RCC's selection of 21 open-space parcels open to hunting for the Winter 2022 to Winter 2024 seasons. Over the next three years, these parcels will be rotated so that only seven are open to hunting when public school is in session during deer hunting season. All active parcels are marked with signage, indicating their use for hunting. The vast majority of hunting is done via archery. Please visit our website [Deer Hunt | Ridgefield CT](#) for the schedule and more information.

Purple Martins Banding

Led by RCC commissioner Allan Welby, a group of residents got together to band the local purple martin population. Bird banding data helps scientific research and management and conservation projects. McKeon Farm has one of the largest nesting sites for purple martins in the area.



Meet the Commissioners

The RCC consists of 11 volunteer Ridgefield residents (nine commissioners and two alternates) who serve the Town for staggered three-year terms. Commissioners are appointed by the BOS to devote their efforts to the sound development, conservation, supervision and regulation of the Town's natural resources. Our commissioners hold a wide range of strengths and skills that enhance the RCC's mission. Meet three of the members:

Jean Linville is a visual artist, educator, writer and native plant farmer at The Hickories Organic Farm in Ridgefield, CT. Currently, Jean is a member of the Caudatowa Garden Club. She became a member of the Commission in 2020. Jean holds a Ph.D. in Interdisciplinary Studies from Union Institute and University, a MA in Fine Arts and Arts Education from Vermont College of Norwich University and a BS in Art Education from SUNY Buffalo State College.

Jim Liptack has been a Ridgefield resident since 1990. He is a retired science teacher from Wilton High School. Jim actively works with the Appalachian Mountain Club and the Connecticut Forest and Parks Association. For the last 10 years, he has also been the overseer of trails for the Connecticut Appalachian Mountain Club, scheduling and overseeing all maintenance and construction on the trails. Jim has been an open space ranger for the RCC since 1990, joining the commission in 2021. He has a BS in Mechanical Engineering from Rochester Institute of Technology and an MS in Education from the University of Bridgeport and a C.A.S. from Southern Connecticut State University in Secondary Science Education.

Matt Sharp joined the RCC in 2020. He was a Scout Troop Leader for Ridgefield's Troop 116 from 2006 to 2019. While in scouting, Matt served as Advancement Chair, Committee Chair and High Adventure Chair. He planned and led backpacking trips to the Adirondacks, Appalachian Trail CT & NY, Yosemite, John Muir Trail, High Sierra Trail Sequoia/ Mt. Whitney, Teton Crest Trail, Rocky Mountain National Park and North Cascade National Park. In 2019, Matt became a Trail Maintainer for the CT Appalachian Trail. Matt has a Bachelor's Degree in Finance from Fordham University. He currently works in the field of finance.

