

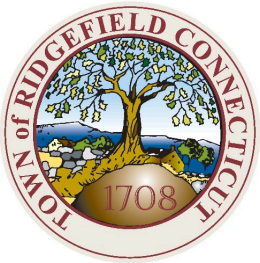
Ridgefield CONSERVATION COMMISSION

SPRING 2021 NEWSLETTER



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Ridgefield's Conservation Commission serves the town by devoting our efforts to the sound development, conservation, supervision and regulation of the town's natural resources.



DID YOU KNOW?

The Conservation Commission maintains 55 miles of trail in over 30 open spaces that range from easy to difficult.

"Hiking our town's various trails during this COVID year was a lifesaver for us! It brought our family together in a way that I didn't expect!" – Erin C.



BEAUTIFUL WINTER SUNSET OVER BARLOW MOUNTAIN FROM THE PINE MOUNTAIN OVERLOOK

Pine Mountain has many trails and also one of Ridgefield's highest points. A wonderful hike right in our backyard! Visit our "Catalog of Open Spaces" to learn more about all our town's trails and open spaces.

www.ridgefieldct.org/conservation-commission/pages/catalog-open-spaces

GroHappy's Blog:



NOT SO HIDDEN INTERESTS:

Have you ever observed all of the incredibly diverse trees in our town? It's fun to be able to put a name to trees that we might see every day. Here are a few!

River Birch (far left): For texture it is hard to beat river birch (*Betula nigra*) with its flaking sheets of gray, brown, salmon, peach, orange or lavender bark. Like all birches, its horizontal lenticels create a confusing pattern to those more accustomed to bark that is more vertically oriented.

American Sycamore (middle left): A close second is the American sycamore (*Platanus occidentalis*), which is often confused with the imported London plane tree. Its base's thick brown bark emerges from the ground morphing to a patchy white and brown that sloughs off in scales or plates.

Shagbark Hickory (middle right): Shagbark hickory (*Carya ovata*) is perhaps one of the more common and generous trees in New England. The nuts of this hickory are delicious and coveted by people and squirrels alike. And as its name implies, mature trees have chunks of shaggy bark hanging off their trunks.

Striped Maple (far right): Harder to find, but no less interesting, is the striped maple (*Acer pennsylvanicum*). It is a much smaller tree than most native maples as it grows beneath them; its bark is smooth and green or greenish brown. It features long white or pale vertical lines on younger wood. Look for it in thickly forested areas.

Meet The Commissioners

Ever wonder who keeps all our open space trails cleared and passable? One of the key functions of the Conservation Commission is to maintain and create new trails in our open spaces. Our trail maintenance efforts have been enhanced by the feedback we receive from our Ridgefield Rangers. About 100 fallen trees have been removed in the last season. This year (along with Scout participation), the Conservation Commission oversaw new trail bridges at the Schlumberger, Casey Lane, Barrack Hill, and Hemlock Hills open spaces. Also constructed was an Interactive Trail at Ridgebury Slope/Peterson Gorge, a new trail in Hemlock Hills (green/orange), and the new Goodwill Trail on the Schlumberger property. This work is primarily done by three of our highly qualified commissioners and seasonal staff along with occasional assistance from Parks and Rec staff, outside contractors, and our Rangers. Here are three of our fantastic commissioners:



Dave Cronin has a degree in Physics and Optics and worked for many years at Perkin Elmer. During 40+ years living in Ridgefield he has been a hike leader and trail maintainer for the Appalachian Mountain Club. After retiring from Perkin Elmer in 2000, he joined the Commission and has spent his 20 years maintaining and building trails on the town's open spaces. He has also provided all of the mapping used by the Commission in defining these spaces.



Matt Sharp is a Senior Vice President at Citibank with a 30-year career in banking. Matt has lived in Ridgefield since 1997 and joined the Commission 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.



Jim Liptack has been a Ridgefield resident since 1990. Jim has spent the last 32 years teaching science at Wilton High School. He has a BS in Mechanical Engineering, an MS in Education, and a CAS in Secondary Science Education. Jim has been actively working with the Appalachian Mountain Club, as trail crew since 1978 and trail section manager since 1984. He has been a trail maintainer for the Connecticut Forest and Parks Association since 1984. For the last ten 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 Conservation Commission since 1990 and has worked as a volunteer sawyer for us.



OUR RANGERS MAKE A HUGE DIFFERENCE!

Our trail crews help to keep all open spaces safe and passable for the public to enjoy, but it is our Rangers who serve as the “eyes” for the Conservation Commission. Rangers are volunteers who help the Commission take care of open spaces by keeping trails clear of limbs, maintaining the painted blazes that mark the trails, and report open space violations to the Commission. Ranger responsibilities include:

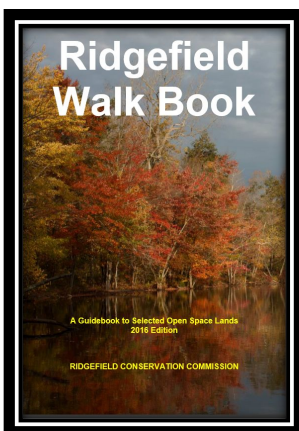
- Walk a trail (or open space) at least four times per year (just four times!!!).
- Keep trails free of any debris or litter (if you are able).
- Be on the lookout for any damage.
- Check to see if trails are clearly marked.
- Communicate your comments to the Conservation Commission.

Trail crew clearing a fallen tree at Hemlock Hills

If you are interested in becoming a Ranger, email us at RidgefieldRangers@gmail.com. “Rangering” is also a great family activity!!!

We recently completed the new Bear Mountain Trail (white trail) which adds a nice loop option to the purple trail. This new trail can be found in the Catalogue of Open Spaces. For a detailed look at all of our hiking trails, check out our Walk Book! Our Walk Book was written in 2016 and new trails have been added since then. Check out our website for the most updated trail information!

www.ridgefieldct.org/conservation-commission



Our Walk Book can be purchased at the Conservation Commission office, Books On The Common, and Squashes on Main Street.

Cornerstone Home & Garden Partners With Conservation Commission



Cornerstone Home & Gardens (CHG) connected with the Ridgefield Conservation Commission and created an Educational Gardening Experience in the upper meadow of Ridgefield's McKeon's Farm. This project provided increased job experiences for the young adults with Autism Spectrum Disorders & related disabilities and also led to increased community networking.



Pollinator Garden at McKeon

The Conservation Commission and the Norwalk River Watershed Association have partnered and are assessing a large meadow area at McKeon Farm and recommending native plantings that will support a vast array of native pollinators (including many specialists that need certain plants) that our landscape is now missing. Entomologists have conducted surveys of the pollinator population at the Farm to see what we do have, and will continue to survey for two years after we plant, to see what new pollinators we attract and succeed in supporting. The Ridgefield Pollinator Pathway is building a community of volunteers to work on a 3-year meadow restoration project at town-owned McKeon Farm. Email info@pollinator-pathway.org to join!

Fun Fungi Contest Winner!

We had two first place winners for our “Fun Fungi Photo Content!”: Zoe Guerrero and Liza Kraft. Zoe’s photo was taken at Hemlock Hills, and Liza’s at Bear Mountain! Thank you to everyone who submitted photos!!



From left to right: ‘Chicken of the woods’ (*Laetiporus sulphureus*) & ‘Shaggy Inkcap or Shaggy mane’ (*Coprinus comatus*)

Great Job Scouts!



The Conservation Commission has been working with Scout troops 116, 19, and 76 for many years on over 50 projects! Most recently, Lucas Kay completed his bridge project at the Goodwill Trail; Gabriella Rogers finished her Levy Park Trail Project; Caroline Vilinskis organized a crew to remove 300 feet of invasives from stone walls at McKeon Farm; Isaac Joseph created the interactive trail at Peterson Gorge, Katie Bitner developed the new white trail at Bear Mountain, and Sophie Desmarais improved the Mar-Joy Pond trail. WELL DONE SCOUTS! We love our collaboration and we look forward to working on many more incredible projects together! (more on scouts in our next newsletter)