

December 22, 2018



**Friends of Parker River
National Wildlife Refuge, Inc.**
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Press Release

December 22, 2018, Friends of Parker River National Wildlife Refuge, Inc., Newburyport, MA

Friends of Parker River National Wildlife Refuge and Newburyport High School Partner in Continued Efforts to Help Restore the Refuge's Hellcat Trail Through the Friends' Boardwalk Plank Fundraiser

Through a partnership with Newburyport High School, NHS students Rory O'Connor (Spring 2018) and James McKenney (Fall 2018) have spent a number of their after-school hours working on projects with the Friends of Parker River National Wildlife Refuge, Inc., an all-volunteer non-profit corporation supporting the refuge. Rory and James are both enrolled in the 'School to Career Program', which affords students the opportunity to explore career aspirations and gain work experience through internships within their community. According to Cheryl Zaino, a School to Career student support counselor at NHS, "our goal is to provide students with real world experiences in order for the students to make educated decisions about their future."

Our 2018 interns reached out to Friends, not only in an effort to fulfill academic needs, but also to help the Friends with its continued efforts to support the Parker River National Wildlife Refuge and preserve the environment and wildlife of this unique barrier island.

During their internship with the Friends, Rory and James played an integral role in assisting with the Boardwalk Plank Fundraiser for the Hellcat Trail, which began in 2017. They met with Friends' members twice each week to organize, label, photograph, and document each plank as they came from the engraver. Once each plank has been documented, it is ready for installation on the Lot#1 boardwalk.

Parker River National Wildlife Refuge began the process of replacing the Hellcat Trail Boardwalk in 2017. The new trail design will widen narrow trail sections, replace old wooden planks, and replace stairways to maintain public safety and to comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) standards for accessible design, providing all with the opportunity to experience coastal forest, marsh, and sand dune environments.

The Hellcat Interpretive Trail System at the Parker River National Wildlife Refuge has been a treasured destination for visitors for more than 35 years. The trail consists of the interconnected Marsh and Dune Loops containing more than a mile of elevated boardwalk meandering through dunes, vernal pools, maritime shrubland, maritime forest, and marsh habitats. Many of the 300,000 annual visitors to the Parker River National Wildlife Refuge hike the trail.

The funds, less the costs of engraving, are to be used for an early phase of Hellcat Trail replacement project while also improving the beach boardwalks starting with Lot #1. With a \$100 donation, people may show their support for the refuge by ordering a new plank of synthetic recycled material that has been engraved with a name, memorial, or message. To date, donors have ordered more than 300 engraved plank and Friends will present more than \$20,000 to the refuge at the Friends' Annual Meeting in January 2019. The refuge has been installing the planks on Lot #1 as weather and its maintenance team's resources permit.

Help save the Hellcat Trail and improve boardwalks on the refuge! To receive an order form, please contact Friends at friends@parkerriver.org, pick up order forms at the Refuge Visitor Center, or make a donation online at parkerriver.org.