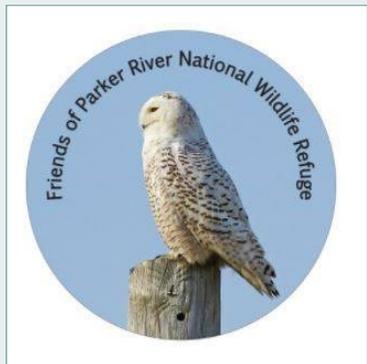


August 2019

# Friends of Parker River NWR Newsletter



## HELLCAT PLANK FUNDRAISER

We have nearly reached our maximum capacity for engraved planks at the Lot 1 boardwalk, which will soon lead to the end of our fundraiser. A big THANK YOU to everyone who has donated a plank! The funds the Friends have raised, along with funding the refuge received from the USFWS National Maintenance Fund, should now completely cover the cost of the Hellcat Trail construction project. The Friends presented the refuge a \$25,000 check in April, and will be able to add another \$15,000 in the near future. There have been discussions about whether engraved planks can be placed elsewhere, including Hellcat, but for now, we will be putting this effort on hold.



## LOT 1 BOARDWALK MAINTENANCE PROJECT



Volunteers (left to right) Bill Gette, Mark Allen, Peter Hickey, and Steve Calkins finish up the Lot 1 railings.

In an effort to help the over-worked maintenance staff at the refuge, the Friends pitched in by rehabbing the boardwalk railings at Lot 1. The railing replacement project supplements the Friends' engraved boardwalk plank program, which is soon coming to a successful completion. The engraved planks and new railings make the Lot 1 boardwalk safer by replacing worn/rotting floor boards and splintered railings. Volunteers donated 83.5 hours to complete the railing project. Future maintenance projects are being discussed. If you're interested in helping, please contact the Board at [friends@parkerriver.org](mailto:friends@parkerriver.org).

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### SPECIAL POINTS OF INTEREST

- Lot 1 boardwalk now safer thanks to Friends volunteers
- Friends' adopt the Visitor Center native plant garden
- Friends fund camp scholarships for local youth
- Volunteers needed for CoastSweep, September 14th
- Refuge to get new manager



## VISITOR CENTER GARDEN

When the Visitor Center/Refuge Headquarters was constructed, a large native plant garden was placed out front. After many years of neglect, the garden became overgrown, and many invasive plants moved in. Friends board member, Lynette Leka, was determined to reclaim this once beautiful garden. With advice from the refuge staff, and assistance from Friends volunteer Lorene Melvin, the two of them managed to remove weeds and have found surviving native shrubs. Lorene obtained new native perennials (from her own garden, donations from

local garden clubs, and purchased from local garden centers), which they planted in the cleared areas. These plants were selected for their benefits to pollinators. For the remainder of the growing season Lynette and Lorene are focused on weeding and watering the new plants. Additional areas will be tackled next spring.

If you would be able to help, or if you have native plants you are willing to donate to the garden, please reach out to us at [friends@parkerriver.org](mailto:friends@parkerriver.org).

*Visit our website ([parkerriver.org](http://parkerriver.org)) or follow us on Facebook (@friendsofparkerrivernwr) for more information about all activities.*

### FRIENDS GUEST LECTURE SERIES

#### October

*Wiggles and Waggles*

by John Rockwood

Thursday, October 10th

7:00 – 8:30pm

Parker River NWR Visitor Center

John Rockwood is the self-proclaimed “Loon Man of NH”, spending hours observing and photographing common loon behavior. His entertaining multi-media presentations tell the story of the fascinating life of the common loon. Follow *Wiggles and Waggles*, comical loon twins, from the day they were hatched until they migrate six months later from the mostly frozen lake to the ocean!

## SUMMER CAMP SCHOLARSHIPS

Thanks to generous donations from Friends members, from memorial donations, and from corporate sponsors, the Friends board is looking for ways to spend this money in a manner that will benefit the refuge and its efforts in the local community. This year, the board has approved expenditures that will provide scholarships for students to attend the Mass Audubon summer camp at Joppa Flats and BOAT CAMP at the Merrohawk Nature School. These camps are excellent at educating the local youth about the environment, in a fun way, helping to create new young naturalists and environmental stewards.

The Friends’ Scholarship Program is in its infancy, with discussion ongoing among the board. Our hope is that next year we will be able to fund an intern at the refuge.

If you would like to donate toward the Friends’ scholarship/internship fund, you can do so through our website, or by sending a check to: Friends of Parker River NWR, 6 Plum Island Turnpike, Newburyport, MA 01950. Make sure you note that your donation is for the scholarship/internship fund.



*Volunteers pick up trash on the beach. Photo Credit: USFWS*

## PLUM ISLAND COASTSWEEP

**September 14th, 9:00am – 5:00pm**

Over the past 11 years, Mass Audubon's Joppa Flats Education Center, with assistance from Parker River NWR, has organized a beach cleanup on Plum Island as part of CoastSweep, the statewide beach cleanup sponsored by the Massachusetts Office of Coastal Zone Management, which is part of the International Coastal Cleanup organized by the Ocean Conservancy. The Friends are joining this effort, with the goal of expanding to include the area around the Plum Island Bridge, and along the refuge road. Volunteers come and go as they please throughout the day, working for as long or as little as they like. Please join us!

Trash bags are provided at Lot 1 on the refuge, where a dumpster will also be located. It's recommended that volunteers bring gloves, as these will not be provided. Visit the Joppa Flats website (<https://www.massaudubon.org/get-outdoors/wildlife-sanctuaries/joppa-flats>) for more information.

## MEMBERSHIP

The Board of Directors would like to thank all those who have paid their annual membership dues. We are up to 169 members, with many joining or renewing at the Supporting (\$50) or Sustaining (\$100) levels. This source of revenue is essential to the Friends ability to assist the refuge with protecting the unique and fragile habitats that can be found at Parker River NWR, as well as supporting our scholarship/internship program. Renewal notices are sent the month your membership expires, and we wholeheartedly appreciate those who continue to support the Friends each year.

## FRIENDS GUEST LECTURE SERIES

### November

*Ducks of New England*

by Bill Gette

Wednesday, November 13th

7:00 – 8:30pm

Parker River NWR Visitor Center

During the late fall and winter, thousands of ducks migrate to the north shore of Massachusetts. The Parker River National Wildlife Refuge and the surrounding coastal waters, lakes, and rivers are premier viewing areas for this diverse group of birds. Bill Gette, President of the Friends of Parker River, will give a PowerPoint presentation to illustrate the field marks key to identifying the various species. Bill will also discuss the best places along the North Shore to view each species.

**We need additional speaker/topic suggestions. If you know of a presenter, or if there's a topic that you would love to see presented, please contact us at [friends@parkerriver.org](mailto:friends@parkerriver.org).**

## CORPORATE SPONSORS

We continue to thank these organizations for their support:

**Massachusetts Audubon, Joppa Flats Education Center**  
(massaudubon.org)

**Brookline Bird Club**  
(www.brooklinebirdclub.org)

**Bird Observer**  
(www.birdobserver.org)

**Bird Watcher's Supply & Gifts, Newburyport**  
(birdwatchersupplyandgift.com)

**River Valley Real Estate**  
(rivervalleyrealestate.com)

**Essex County Ornithological Club**  
(www.massbird.org/ecoc/)

**Eastern Mass Hawk Watch**  
(www.massbird.org/emhw/)

## BIOLOGY PROGRAM UPDATE

### *Salt Marsh Restoration*

Humans have been altering the salt marsh throughout history, mainly for human benefit. Refuge staff took a different approach in the early 2000s, focusing on alterations that were thought to be beneficial to wildlife. But at the time, climate change wasn't of such concern and no one was considering the impacts of sea level rise. It's now apparent those alterations made less than two decades ago are causing large scale detrimental impacts to the marsh itself, including expansion of pools and conversion or death of vegetation. This is why our refuge biologist, Nancy Pau, has worked with many marsh experts to design and implement this current restoration project, which reverses the earlier alterations to restore the hydrology to a more natural flow. Work has been done in the Plum Island marsh from Lot 2 to

Sub-headquarters. Monitoring to vegetation, hydrology, elevation, and soil chemistry will be on-going for many years to ensure that the marsh rebounds in a positive direction.

See the great article WBUR wrote (and narrated) on this work: <https://www.wbur.org/earthwhile/2019/07/02/salt-marsh-sea-level-restoration-plum-island>



*Geoff Wilson of Northeast Wetland Restoration removing ditch plugs.*

### *Piping Plover Update*

This year is on track to be one of the most productive years for piping plover nesting at the refuge. Heroic efforts by the biology interns allowed many nests to be protected with enclosure fencing, which prevents loss to predators. Mother Nature was also friendly this year, with only minor flooding. Once the plovers have finished nesting for the season, a summary report, with comparisons to previous years, will be placed on the Friends' website (parkerriver.org) and Facebook page.

## MAINTENANCE PROGRAM UPDATE

### *Lot 3 Boardwalk Alterations*

Maintenance staff and volunteers have been busy working on the Lot 3 boardwalk while it has been closed for plover nesting. They are lowering its height, which makes unnecessary the need for railings and makes it safer for visitors. You'll be able to see their hard work once that section of beach opens later this month.

### ***Hellcat Trail Restoration***

The section of the Hellcat Trail that has been under construction since the spring is almost complete. All that remains is for the contractor to complete some small projects the refuge has requested. Once these are complete, the trail will be open to the public.

The larger Hellcat Trail project will begin either this fall or winter. This involves construction of the rest of the trail, making it all ADA accessible. The Dune Loop will be completely rerouted to eliminate the stairs and will move the platform further out into the dunes. A new connector trail will allow visitors to more easily access the Dune Loop from the Marsh Loop without needing to walk nearly all the way back to the parking lot. A spur trail with a platform will again allow for access into North Pool. Bids from contractors recently closed, with selection occurring in the coming months. An Environmental Assessment for the Dune Loop and new connector trail construction will be published within the next few weeks and will be open for public comment for 30 days. Contact the refuge for more information.

## **VISITOR SERVICE UPDATE**

### ***Kayak Trail Markers***

Staffing limitations prevented the refuge from getting the Kayak Trail markers out earlier in the summer, but they are there now. These colored and numbered posts lead kayakers from the refuge’s boat ramp (across from Lot 1) up Little Pine Island Creek (orange markers) or Pine Island Creek (yellow markers). See the refuge’s website or Facebook page for more information.

### ***Special Permit Lotteries***

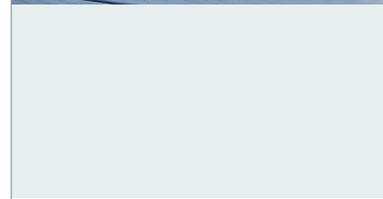
The refuge issues multiple permits in which they administer through a lottery system. The application period for berry picking (of beach plums and cranberries) and drive-on surf fishing lottery just closed (open for the month of July). The open application period for the Parker River NWR and Great Bay NWR deer hunts is September 1 – 30. Contact the refuge or see their website for more information.

### ***Groundwork Lawrence Partnership***

As part of the USFWS Urban Refuge Initiative, Parker River NWR has teamed up with Groundwork Lawrence. Refuge staff has been working with Groundwork Lawrence youth on various education and environmental improvement projects, both at the refuge and in Lawrence.

### ***Public Program Schedule***

Be sure to check out the public program schedule each month (refuge or Friends’ websites and Facebook pages, or at the refuge Visitor Center). August is packed with many one-time-only programs, including Green Cleaners and Personal Use Products, Stargazing at Hellcat, Storyteller Yoga for Kids, and Poetry Workshop. There are also the summer-only programs including Tide Pool and Beach Discoveries. Also, don’t miss the Conservation Cinema or the Climate Café!



**WATER  
TRAIL**



**Parker River  
National Wildlife Refuge**



## FRIENDS OF PARKER RIVER NWR, INC.

We're a 501(c) (3) nonprofit corporation dedicated to supporting the US Fish & Wildlife Service Parker River National Wildlife Refuge. Our Friends organization is entirely dependent upon volunteer support and funding from membership dues, donations, grants, and fund raising events.

### Board of Directors

Bill Gette, President  
Doug Chickering, Vice President  
Lynette Leka, Treasurer  
Kate Murray, Secretary  
Weston Forsblad  
MaryMargaret Halsey  
Kaytee Hojnacki  
Dave Williams

## REFUGE STAFF UPDATES

### *Refuge Manager Change*

At the end of May, Refuge Manager Bill Peterson left to take a project leader position at Horicon Leopold National Wildlife Refuge Complex in Wisconsin (closer to his family!). It was a quick 4+ years that Bill was with us, and we appreciate all his hard work. The Regional Office is currently in the process of hiring a new manager for Parker River NWR, who we hope will start this fall.

### *Summer Interns*

For those of you that have been around the refuge for years, you're familiar with the changing faces that come along with summer staffing. Interns are integral to getting work done around the refuge during the busy summer months. This summer, interns have been helping in all departments: staffing the gatehouse, conducting maintenance work, assisting the biology team (especially with pepperweed pulling!), and developing and conducting public programs. Many of them are only here for a few months (although the refuge is now able to keep some staff members for a year or more!), so be sure you say hello and thank them for all their hard work!

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