

May 2020

Friends of Parker River NWR Newsletter

FRIENDS' INTERNSHIP FUND

BY MARYMARGARET HALSEY, FRIENDS BOARD MEMBER

In January 2020, the Friends launched our new "Internship Fund," a multi-year effort to raise at least \$6,000 annually to cover the cost of a Parker River NWR intern. For 10 to 12 weeks, this intern will work alongside refuge staff, who will mentor and guide them as they develop into the next generation of natural resource managers and educators.



The Internship Fund contributes to two of the Friends' most important goals:

1. Provide much needed support to refuge staff
2. Offer hands-on training for young people considering careers in conservation and education

Additionally, internships provide a framework for building a skilled workforce for the future, while enabling young people to explore, connect with, and preserve America's natural resources as they gain professional skills and develop their own careers in resource management.

The refuge regularly allocates available funds to hire numerous interns to assist permanent staff with a wide variety of projects. Interns receive a stipend and free lodging in the bunkhouse, but they must cover their own living expenses and transportation. While internships at the refuge vary, the Friends' are primarily interested in funding a Visitor Services or Biology intern.

Refuge administrators try to treat all interns like professional staff. From one intern's point of view, "Being surrounded by people who share similar concerns and are actively pursuing different avenues to protect the environment or educate and motivate the public on these topics has been the most rewarding part of my time as an intern at Parker River."

To contribute to the Friends' Internship Fund and bring another wonderful, enthusiastic, budding conservationist to our refuge, go to: <https://parkerriver.org>

Or send a check payable to the Friends of PRNWR, 6 Plum Island Turnpike, Newburyport, MA 01950

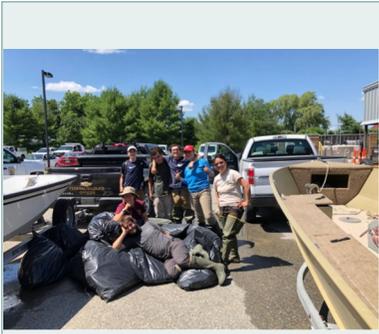


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SPECIAL POINTS OF INTEREST

- New Fundraising Effort: Internship Fund
- Hear what refuge interns have to say about their experiences
- Friends' continue maintenance efforts
- Get a VIP card and support the Friends at the same time
- Friends are new leaders of September's CoastSweep
- Refuge announces new manager



REFLECTIONS FROM A FRIENDS' INTERN

During our Boardwalk Plank Fundraiser, the Friends worked with Newburyport High School to recruit an (unpaid) intern to help with many facets of the fundraiser. We had two interns at different times, the second one being James McKinney. James was recently accepted to the University of Maine at Orono, where he will be double majoring in Human Dimensions of Climate Change AND Environmental Science. Here is James' reflection on his internship with the Friends: *The wildlife refuge is a great place for any intern who has an interest in marine, environmental, or earth science. In my time at the refuge I helped the friends organization with the restoration of the Hellcat Trail. I helped*

by sorting and recording the donated planks so they could be installed on the trail, as well as on the first beach parking site. Accompanying this I learned a significant amount about the history of the wildlife refuge and the ecological significance of protecting the waterfowl on the refuge. I learned a lot about the refuge that I had not even thought existed such as the cranberry bogs and the clam digging flats. Interning at the wildlife refuge was a great learning experience for me and furthered my interest in environmental science.

The Friends are very appreciative of James' hard work and we wish him well in college!

A LETTER FROM THE FIRST FRIENDS' INTERN

The Friends are so excited that we were able to make our first donation from the Internship Fund in 2020. The refuge is using our \$6,000 donation to fund a Visitor Service intern. Matt has spent several years at the refuge and is a true asset. He is the main contributor to the refuge's Facebook page and is fantastic at interacting with visitors in all settings. See his letter to members below.

Hello Friend of Parker River National Wildlife Refuge!

My name is Matt Pfannenstiel and I am sponsored by the Friends of Parker River this summer. I would like to thank you so much for all of your support and this opportunity. I have created a number of new programs as well as expanded on additional ones at Parker River National Wildlife Refuge. Some of the new things includes the weekly craft videos I have been a part of on the refuge Facebook page, creation of a new Climate Change Behind the Scenes Tour, and leading a variety of programs with inner city youth in Lawrence, Massachusetts to promote the Fish and Wildlife Service's "Urban Refuge Initiative." I also have been and plan on continuing to lead other refuge tours including the cranberry bog programs, tidepool programs, and the general behind the scenes tours. Having tagged along with the biologists I have been able to use their knowledge and work to bring it to Behind the Scenes Tours and other outreach opportunities. If you have any questions for me or would like to know more about what I am up to, feel free to reach out and send me an email at matthew_pfannenstiel@fws.gov.

I am excited to see what the future brings once this pandemic is over and public programs will be available again!

*Look forward to hearing from you,
Matt Pfannenstiel*

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE INTERNSHIP FUND

BY KAYTEE HOJNACKI, FRIENDS' BOARD MEMBER

The Friends' new internship fundraising campaign is very near-and-dear to my heart. I started my career at Parker River NWR as an intern in 2008, and spent my 6-ish years there as a non-permanent employee. Funding for my position was always tentative and on a year-to-year basis, which is not a reassuring feeling. This new Friends' effort can help alleviate some of that by providing a consistent funding source for at least one short-term intern.

Much of the work that gets done on the refuge, especially within the biological program, cannot be accomplished without the help and commitment of these temporary employees. While funding for permanent employees is allocated from Congress each year, money for seasonal employees is not and must come from other sources, such as entrance fees, regional project-specific funding, or outside grants. Within the refuge biological program, the only position that is funded in-house is the lead biologist, all other staff must be funded through other sources.

While Parker River NWR is lucky in that it does generate additional funding through entrance fees, only 80% of these stay at the refuge, and what they can be used for is limited to items that will benefit the visiting public. This includes maintenance of roads, trails, and buildings, supplies for public programs or outreach materials, and staffing for positions that qualify. These positions are typically within the Visitor Service department, although funds can be used for a maintenance intern as well. Typically, entrance fees do not fund biological positions, as their research and management doesn't directly benefit the refuge's visitors.

A refuge biological project that is in desperate need of funding is for the Piping Plover Technician. Each year the refuge hires a person for at least six months to monitor the plovers on the beach, keeping track of pairs, nests, and chicks (among many other tasks). For decades, this position was reliably funded by the Regional Department of Natural Resources pot of money, but as the USFWS budget has shrunk over the years, and priorities have shifted, the Regional DNR program has chosen to direct their limited funding to other, higher priorities. This has left refuges' needing to fund their Plover Tech positions in other ways. At Parker River NWR, this position is vital to understanding how the plovers are utilizing the beach, and how best to manage the beach for both the birds and the visitors.

There are many other positions that are in need of funding as well. The refuge has been battling the invasive plant perennial pepperweed since 2006, and for the past five years have hired a team of high school interns to help. This has allowed local youth to get exposure to a career in natural resources, helping to direct many on their college paths. Countless college students have filled summer positions working on projects from invasive plants, to saltmarsh sparrow research, to saltmarsh and shrubland restoration. Visitor Service interns have staffed the gate house, lead public programs, and created numerous outreach materials. Not only do these seasonal employees provide vital man-power for the refuge, it benefits the interns by gaining hands-on experience and leadership abilities. I know time spent working at Parker River NWR has been instrumental in shaping the future careers for many, myself included.

This is why the Friends of Parker River NWR's Internship Fund is the most important task we have created for ourselves. Not only does the refuge need these funds, but the young people whom these funds help to hire will benefit more than we can truly know. They are our future, and we must support them the best we can.

THOUGHTS FROM A REFUGE INTERN

"Over the course of nearly a year, I have been able to be a part of so many different components of the refuge, from working in the gatehouse, to creating handouts for visitors, to assisting with the New England Cottontail Program at Great Bay NWR, to the small more administrative tasks of scheduling and seeing the completion of various maintenance services. All of these responsibilities have given me a far better understanding of what it is to work for the USFWS and other public agencies and made me far better prepared to face an array of tasks and responsibilities."

– Shelby Stoll, Visitor Service and Maintenance Intern

"I was a biological intern in 2016, and that internship was one of the highlights of my college career. I woke up excited every day for work, immersed myself in field research and gained valuable skills such as using the Geographic Information System (GIS). Every day was different. One day I might be out pulling the invasive species pepperweed and the next sampling nekton (small fish and invertebrates) or searching for saltmarsh sparrow nests. Through the internship, I was able to prove my leadership and initiative skills which led to a volunteer position at the USFWS regional office in Hadley, which helped set me up to work for the Service upon graduating."

– Lauren Healey, Biological Science Technician

FRIENDS' EVENT AND ACTIVITY UPDATE

Due to the current global COVID-19 pandemic, all Friends' events and activities are on hold until further notice. The refuge has suspended all volunteer activities, which eliminates our ability to help. Once we are again able to volunteer and host events, we will inform members through email, Facebook, and our website. We hope you all stay healthy and happy during these unusual times and we look forward to seeing all our members again in the future!

GOT YOUR VIP CARD YET?

BY MARYMARGARET HALSEY, FRIENDS' BOARD MEMBER

The Friends recently received a generous contribution of \$1,190 from Newburyport.com. This successful loyalty card program created by local owner, Laura Bentley, donates 40% of its VIP Card sales to 23 community non-profits, including the Friends of Parker River NWR. The VIP Card loyalty program rewards cardholders, encouraging them to patronize restaurants, shops, lodging, and specialty services in our local community.

As a media partner, Newburyport.com provides free advertising of Friends events on its Events Calendar and social media platform, and generously enables card purchasers to select their favorite non-profit to receive part of the purchase price of the loyalty card. Our check represents 119 cardholders who directed the gift portion of their VIP card purchase to the Friends. We're grateful to each and every one of them, and to the generosity of Newburyport.com.

Here's how it works and how YOU can help the Friends help the Refuge:

When you purchase a VIP Card for \$25 (or 2 for \$40), you receive deals at 180+ Greater Newburyport businesses, and have the opportunity to donate \$10 of your purchase to your favorite VIP Community Partner. Of course, we encourage you to select Friends of Parker River NWR!

Order your card and help the Friends help the Refuge at <https://www.newburyport.com/parker-river-wildlife-refuge/>.



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



FRIENDS ADOPT PLUM ISLAND COASTSWEEP

BY BILL GETTE, FRIENDS' PRESIDENT

Starting this year, the Friends have assumed on-going responsibility for coordinating the annual CoastSweep beach clean-up on the refuge, and other parts of Plum Island. This maintenance effort, typically conducted in September, is undertaken in cooperation with the Massachusetts Office of Coastal Zone Management.

On CoastSweep day, we typically attract over 200 people of all ages. There is always great excitement and a genuine feeling of stewardship among the volunteers who clean the beaches, parking lots, and trails.

The Friends will announce the date of the 2020 CoastSweep later this summer and hope that you will join us. We already have several schools and civic groups interested in helping.

UPDATE ON FRIENDS' MAINTENANCE WORK

BY BILL GETTE, FRIENDS' PRESIDENT

The Friends of Parker River NWR have completed three maintenance projects within the last six months, two on Plum Island and one at the Visitor Center.

Friends' volunteers have contributed 100 hours of labor to replace the decaying railings along the boardwalk that leads from Lot #3 to the beach. In total, our volunteer work groups installed 744 linear feet of railings with composite decking material that will last for decades (and won't leave splinters in visitors' hands!).

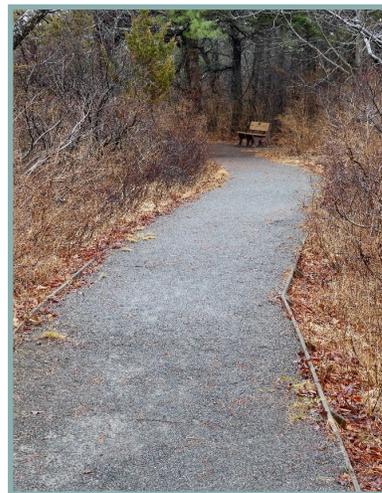


At the Visitor Center, the Friends took on its most ambitious project to date. Friends contributed 209 hours of labor to repair the boardwalk and deck on the river side of the building (the "back deck"). The project entailed removing the old decking – a very time consuming effort – and replacing it with composite material. The Friends then replaced the railing and steps. Much of this work was done through the winter months when visitation to the Visitor Center is slow and impacts to visitors would be minimal.

In March, the Friends raked the path, cut back vegetation, and weeded the edges along the Pines Trail. This trail was officially adopted by the Friends in 2018, assigning responsibility of its upkeep to our dedicated volunteers.

The Friends were poised to start another large maintenance project – the replacement of the deck on the east end of the Visitor Center (the "classroom deck") – when volunteer efforts on the refuge were suspended due to the COVID-19 emergency. This project will begin when volunteering is once again permitted at the refuge.

If you are interested in contributing to the Refuge by volunteering your time and talent, please consider joining our Friends work groups. We do good work and have a lot of fun. You do not need to attend each work session, only when you have time or an interest in the project. If you would like to be added to our Work Group email list, please send an email to friends@parkerriver.org.



THOUGHTS FROM A REFUGE INTERN

"I owe the start of my career to Parker River and the wonderful staff who work there. As a young biology student in 2012, I received my first wildlife internship from Nancy Pau. I spent that summer mist-netting and banding saltmarsh sparrows, monitoring nesting beach birds, and performing vegetation and nekton surveys as part of a region-wide project aimed at assessing the health and biodiversity of the saltmarsh ecosystem. It was and still remains one of the most fulfilling summers of my life! I learned an incredible amount from the biological staff, and the experiences I gained led me to four more seasons of employment with USFWS. I am now in graduate school, and the tools I gained during the summer of 2012 are still guiding me. Parker River should be on everyone's bucket list of places to work."

– Claire Revekant, Former Biology Intern

"I interned at Parker River NWR the summer of my sophomore year of college and it was a one of the best summers of my life. I was a management intern, which meant that I got a taste of every aspect of working at a wildlife refuge. I assisted the biologists with wildlife and habitat monitoring, created signs and field guides for public education, rode along with the law enforcement officers, and logged vehicle miles for paperwork. Working at Parker River provided a variety of skills that helped in future jobs and job interviews. The experience was also invaluable in helping me discern my career goal of working in the wildlife conservation field."

– Sze Wing Yu, Former Management Intern

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
(birdwatcherssupplyandgift.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

We mentioned the refuge's salt marsh restoration work in our last newsletter, but there is even more exciting news! Great Marsh partner organizations have seen the great work happening at the refuge and are now committed to restoring the natural hydrology within half of the Great Marsh (8,000 acres) in the next 10 years. This is good news for the saltmarsh sparrow and other wildlife that rely on the marsh for their survival, and for humans, who rely on the many beneficial functions the marsh provides. The refuge and their partners are currently pursuing three grants to restore 1,000-1,5000 acres on USFWS, ToR, MassWildlife, Greenbelt, and Town of Ipswich lands.

Back on the refuge, the next phase of their restoration is beginning near the Salt Pannes. Northeast Mosquito Control will be lowering plugs that were put in for Mosquito Control 10 years ago. The

original intent was to keep water on the marsh to support fish that eat mosquito larvae. With more flooding, the marsh is wet all the time, supporting breeding mosquitoes everywhere. Lowering the plugs will reduce mosquito breeding. It will also allow the groundwater to recede in between flooding tides, allowing the saltmeadow cordgrass to form thick meadows that support breeding saltmarsh sparrows.

Recently, the refuge received funding from the Regional Office to restore the marsh between the Salt Pannes and Sub-HQ. This area has lots of expanding pools and eroding marsh. Using a combination of ditch remediation (healing ditches using hay) and runnels (baby creeks), they will repair the hydrology of this area. After restoration, they expect to restore the flood and ebb regime to pre-ditching period, and for the reduced ditch and creek network to be self-maintaining.

Great Bay New England Cottontail Update

At the Great Bay New England cottontail breeding pens, 4 females overwintered, and 4 males were relocated from Rhode Island prior to the halt of all captive-rearing work due to COVID-19. They hope these 8 rabbits will produce young this summer. Refuge intern, Shelby Stolls, is monitoring pen activity, checking for signs of baby rabbits or potential predators. The Canadian documentary, "Remarkable Rabbits," aired in April for Easter, and features the New England Cottontail breeding program, and the Great Bay pens prominently. <https://www.pbs.org/wnet/nature/blog/good-nature-remarkable-rabbits/>



MAINTENANCE PROGRAM UPDATE

Hellcat Trail Restoration

Even amid the COVID-19 pandemic, construction continues on the Hellcat Boardwalk. The contractor is on track to finish the restoration work by their deadline of December 2020. When construction is complete (and all inspections are passed), the refuge will be hosting a reopening event. Stay tuned to the refuge's Facebook page for periodic updates and progress videos.



VISITOR SERVICE UPDATE

Refuge Closed to Vehicles

Most of you are already aware that the refuge is closed to vehicles until further notice due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Pedestrians and bicyclists are still welcome (there is no entry fee). Parking on Plum Island is limited to residents only, and the towns have been actively ticketing and towing non-resident vehicles. Visitors are welcome to park at the refuge visitor center/headquarters then walk/bike down to the island. All restrooms, observation towers, and most of the refuge beach/boardwalks are closed. Please abide by all closed signs and posted regulations. Reopening announcements will be posted to the refuge website and Facebook page when they are available (timeframe unknown at this time).

Online Programming Content

During the current social-distancing rules, the refuge is unable to provide their usual slate of public programs. This

had the Visitor Services staff searching for new ways to provide programming materials. They came up with several! First off, they have been hosting "Facebook Live" videos for various arts and crafts projects (they are archived on their Facebook page, check them out!). Secondly, they launched the "Piping Plover Learning Activities" webpage where they are uploading fun shorebird-related activity sheets. They are brainstorming new ideas and hope to launch new ones soon!

Conservation Film Festival

We were all bummed that the Conservation Film Festival could not go on as scheduled. The jam-packed schedule was definitely not going to disappoint! The refuge is currently hoping to run the festival in the fall. A final decision and a new date will be decided upon later this summer. Stay tuned to the refuge website and Facebook page for more information.



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.

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MaryMargaret Halsey
Kaytee Hojnacki
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REFUGE STAFF UPDATES

New Refuge Manager Announced

We are excited that the new Refuge Manager has finally been selected for Parker River NWR! Matt Hillman, currently the manager at Monomoy NWR on Cape Cod, will be the new manager. His start date has yet to be decided due to the current COVID-19 pandemic, but we will welcome him with cheer when he does arrive!

Maintenance Position to be Filled this Fall

For many years, Parker River NWR had two permanent, full-time maintenance workers who worked above and beyond to make the refuge such a lovely place for visitors and staff to come to. Since the retirement of one in 2013, the refuge has been unable to fill that permanent position due to budgets, instead filling it with a term employee (max of 4 years). Hiring and retaining the right person for this position has been difficult (the job is no walk in the park!), and four people have rotated through it since 2013. Once again, the refuge will attempt to fill this position, waiting until fall (due to COVID-19) to advertise. In the meantime, the refuge is once again left with one maintenance employee.

Friends of Parker River NWR
6 Plum Island Turnpike
Newburyport, MA 01950

E-mail: friends@parkerriver.org
Website: parkerriver.org
Facebook:
[@FriendsOfParkerRiverNWR](https://www.facebook.com/FriendsOfParkerRiverNWR)

