



BRANFORD LAND TRUST

FALL 2025 • VOLUME 35, NUMBER 2

PRESIDENT'S LETTER: IT'S ABOUT COMMUNITY

Thinking about our recent Salt Marsh Celebration (see photos, page 8), I was reminded of all our community partnerships that the BLT has formed over the years.

The BLACKSTONE MEMORIAL LIBRARY and the WILLOUGHBY WALLACE LIBRARY hosted some of the Salt Marsh events, as they often do.

Our friends from AUDUBON CONNECTICUT gave a presentation on assisted marsh migration at Jarvis Creek Farm and co-led a walk along the Trolley Trail.

The BRANFORD HISTORICAL SOCIETY co-sponsored a talk about

the history of salt haymaking given by the USFWS staff from the STEWART B. MCKINNEY WILDLIFE REFUGE.

The TOWN OF GUILFORD supported a field trip to Chittenden Park so that we could see assisted marsh migration first-hand and hear from SAVE THE SOUND about a living shoreline planned for that site.

We also benefited from the expertise of our friends affiliated with MENUNKATUCK AUDUBON who are helping us get started as 'landlords' for a new colony of Purple Martins alongside a salt marsh.

Branford is a beautiful town, full of gorgeous views like the osprey I saw

this summer flying over the Mill Creek marsh back to its nest with a fish in its talons to feed its young.

But it is also beautiful because of the people who live here and their contributions to partnerships in protecting our natural resources. We encourage you to enjoy our upcoming fall programs and join our community in celebrating Branford's diverse natural features! ■

Julie Wagner, President



Julie Wagner and Joan Merrick were featured in *Saving Land Magazine* for their role in helping the BLT achieve Land Trust Alliance re-accreditation.



Recently, eight employees and owner Ken Waterman from Branford's FreeThink Technologies attended a work party at Jarvis Creek Farm to help remove invasive knotweed and mugwort.



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The Branford Land Trust NEWS is mailed to all Land Trust members. It is produced by Words by Jen, Branford.

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LAND TRUST HOUSE RENOVATIONS UPDATE

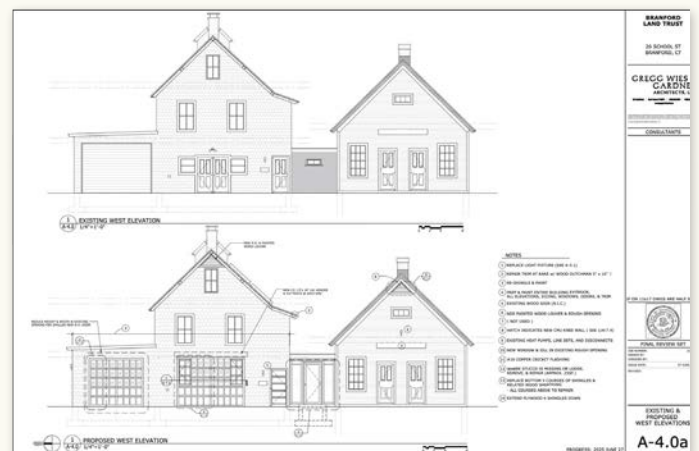
by Bill Chapin

Renovations of the Land Trust House — the historic schoolhouse and fire house on School Street in Stony Creek — are progressing at a steady pace. The project goals include: Energy Conservation, Historic Preservation, Structural Integrity, and Accessibility. With grant funding and your generosity to date, (including the 2025 Great Give campaign, which raised more than \$26,000), completed projects include restoration of the schoolhouse windows, installation of the new septic system, an air-sourced heat pump HVAC system, chimney base repair, firehouse foundation repair, and asbestos abatement.

Planned upcoming projects include: concrete block and framing work to repair deteriorated walls, electrical and plumbing work, lead abatement, second floor apartment rehabilitation, work on the connector building to make it the main entrance into the schoolhouse and firehouse, and raising the roof of the connector building. This work will also enable the first level to be accessible via a sloped new entryway and an accessible restroom. The proposed new entrance through the connector building is shown at the bottom of the architectural rendering below. The proposed firehouse and garage doors will reflect the original appearance and function of those structures.

Roofing, siding, painting, insulation, and exterior grading are slated for the last phase, and plans also include solar installation and an ESS (Energy Storage System, AKA batteries!).

If you're passing by, please take notice of the newly planted meadow behind the Land Trust House, as some of the seeded and planted native wildflowers are beginning to show promise. There is ongoing work in an attempt to control invasive plants and native weeds. In the end, it should be quite beautiful! ■



Architectural rendering shows the current building and proposed changes.



Your ongoing support helps us conserve and steward Branford's natural resources. Thank you!

UPCOMING EVENTS

November 23

Annual Van Wie Walk Sunday, 1:00 p.m.

Come along on our annual November hike through the Van Wie Woods. Explore and enjoy the extensive trails of the 100-acre preserve — fields, woodlands, streams, and granite outcrops — donated by two generations of the Van Wie family. Meet by the trailhead near 100 Red Hill Road (off Leete's Island Rd.). Two hike options.

January 1

First Day Walk at Supply Ponds/Queach Preserve Thursday, 1:00 p.m.

Start off the New Year with a walk in the fresh air! Join the Branford Land Trust as we explore the Supply Pond and Queach Preserve on Thursday, January 1 at 1:00 p.m. Two hikes will be offered: a longer walk of approximately 3-4 miles and a shorter walk, approximately 2 miles. Watch for details.

2026 WINTER SPEAKER SERIES

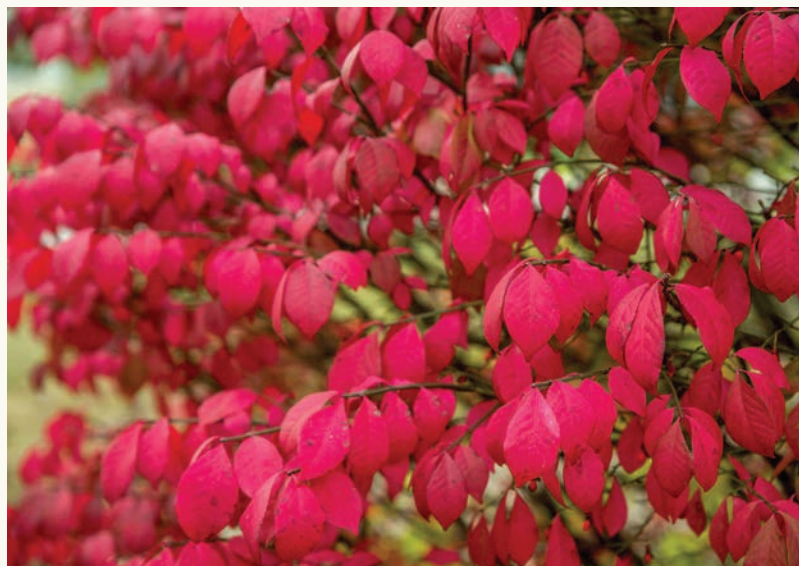
The annual Winter Speaker Series is shaping up to be another line-up of engaging topics for a variety of interests. Watch your email and Facebook posts, and check the Calendar on our site for details to come.

- Saturday Matinee with local Indigenous Elders (Blackstone Library)
- "Outdoors For Everybody" with Justin Brownell
- Supply Pond Preserve Fish Ladder's 25th Anniversary with Tom Cleveland
- "Raising Our Future Ancestors," a conversation about the value of youth nature connection with Two Coyotes Wilderness School, celebrating 25 years

Other themes in the works may include pesticides and environmental changes, and predators and prey. ■



Visit our website for details on the events you see listed above. They're all open to the public, why not bring a friend?



INVASIVE SPOTLIGHT

WINGED EUONYMUS (BURNING BUSH) EUONYMUS ALATUS

Recognizable by its bright red leaves in the fall, Winged Euonymus (Burning Bush) is a deciduous shrub, up to 20 ft. (6.1 m) in height, which invades forests throughout the eastern United States. Occasionally, four corky ridges appear along the length of young stems. The opposite, dark green leaves are < 2 in. (5 cm) long, smooth, rounded and taper at the tips.

The leaves turn a bright crimson to purplish color in the fall. The flowers are inconspicuous, greenish yellow and have 4 petals. Flowers develop in the spring and lay flat against the leaves. Fruit are reddish capsules that split to reveal orange fleshy seeds.

Invasive plants are nutritionally inferior food sources for wildlife. Invasives tend to emerge earlier in the season and therefore dominate an environment. There are no native defenses to inhibit their growth and spread.

Winged burning bush can invade a variety of disturbed habitats including forest edges, old fields, and roadsides. Birds readily disperse the seeds, allowing for many long dispersal events. Once established, it can form dense thickets that displace native vegetation.

Winged burning bush is native to northeastern Asia and was first introduced into North America in the 1860s for ornamental purposes. While it continues to be sold and planted as an ornamental or roadside hedge, Connecticut Public Act 25-126, an act adding certain plants to the invasive plants list, prohibits its sale as of October 1, 2028. ■

(Source: CT Invasive Plant Working Group)

IN THE FIELD: RECENT RESEARCH PROJECTS



THE MICROBIOME OF BLT MARSHES

From Valerie Milici, PhD, Assistant Professor of Biology, the University of Bridgeport

Can we use the marsh microbiome to help make the marsh ecosystem more resilient to climate change? The tidal salt marshes are a critical habitat to many fish, bird, and insect species and they also perform important ecosystem services that absorb carbon dioxide and prevent storm damage. The tidal salt marsh is also an ecosystem that is threatened by climate change via sea level rise, warming waters, salinity change and pH change. In recent years, research has shown that the bacteria and fungi that live inside of the leaves and roots of plants (the plant microbiome) can increase a plant's resilience to environmental change.

Through my research at the University of Bridgeport, I am culturing the plant microbiome of salt marshes in Connecticut, including some of the BLT's marshes, to document the microbes and study if there are certain bacteria or fungi that form protective partnerships with the tidal marsh plants. I hope to use this research to equip organizations, like the Branford Land Trust, with the knowledge (and microbes!) that they may need to best protect this special ecosystem. ■



UCONN RESEARCHERS STUDY BLT SALT MARSHES TO BETTER UNDERSTAND HOW RESTORATION AFFECTS RESILIENCE

From Dr. Beth Lawrence, Associate Professor, Department of Natural Resources and the Environment, Center for Environmental Sciences and Engineering, University of Connecticut

Coastal marshes in the Eastern US are highly valuable but rapidly disappearing habitats. They face many threats including a long legacy of water flow modifications and pollution, urban and agricultural development, and sea level rise. Efforts to protect and restore marshes have increased in recent decades. Scientists and managers are still trying to understand what drives marsh resilience – an ecosystem's ability to resist and recover from change – in the face of ongoing threats and management interventions. Our collaborative team at the University of Connecticut and CT DEEP is using historical datasets, new geospatial analysis products, and targeted field measurements to evaluate how a suite of threats and management actions affect marsh resilience in the Long Island Sound.

This summer, we visited 13 salt marshes across the Connecticut coast including three marshes managed by the Branford Land Trust. We spent one day at each site characterizing vegetation communities and taking measurements related to carbon storage. This data will be combined with site history information from DEEP and a GIS-derived resilience metric to help us understand which factors are driving marsh resilience. Our results will help land managers like the Branford Land Trust make well-informed decisions about how to effectively protect and restore the salt marshes they steward. ■

NEW MASTER WOODLAND MANAGERS COMPLETE COMMUNITY-BASED PROJECTS

The Branford Land Trust welcomes four Master Woodland Managers among its ranks: Bill Chapin, Gordon Hutchinson, Dave McKay, and Matt Reed.

The Master Woodland Managers program is for landowners or anyone with an interest in forest stewardship. The Connecticut Forest and Park Association, with partner organizations including UConn Extension Forestry, Yale, CT Department of Energy and Environmental Protection, the CT Agricultural Experiment Station, Audubon Connecticut, and the CT Land Conservation Council, developed the program in 2021. The year-long course offers a library of online content, outreach opportunities, and many real-time learning opportunities covering an array of subjects, including forest ecology, invasives, chainsaw maintenance, vernal pools, wildlife habitat creation and more, as well as guidance in goal setting for the woodlands of focus.

BILL CHAPIN's project involved the A.M. Young Estate, 3.7 acres on Anchorage Road acquired by the BLT in 2020. The parcel is two-thirds wooded and one-third open field, with varied plant and wildlife species. His goal is to manage the invasive plants, and help healthy native trees and understory plants thrive and become more resilient so the forest and open fields will continue to provide habitat for diverse insect and wildlife populations. Currently, the land is succumbing to invasive plants and Beech Leaf disease.

GORDON HUTCHINSON completed a woodland survey with goals and management suggestions for two tracts owned by the BLT, the Weil and Partnership parcels, accessible via the blue trail from the parking area at the end of Buena Vista Road in Stony Creek. These two contiguous pieces of



Master Woodland Manager Program graduates Bill Chapin, Dave McKay, Matt Reed, and Gordon Hutchinson.

forested land with stands comprised mostly of oak and hickory, but also maple, birch and sassafras, together comprise 41.7 acres along Long Island Sound. His goals for the property include preserving the grasses and native plants in Partnership field as habitat for small mammals and birds while eliminating invasive plants such as autumn olive, multiflora rose and privet; reducing the overall size of Partnership field by about one-third by allowing reforestation with existing saplings and stump sprouts to flourish; removal of diseased trees and educational tree labeling.

DAVE MCKAY chose the Seeberg parcel, a 3.1-acre upland forested wetland with a small stream, due to its forested nature. Deemed mostly farmland prior to 1987, the parcel off Parish Farm Road was conveyed to the BLT in 1998. The southern boundary borders on Regional Water Authority property. Seeberg has a healthy population of tall tree species as well as a varied assortment of understory

shrubbery and herbaceous plants that support native wildlife and pollinators. It provides excellent filtration of water feeding the Saltonstall reservoir and is available to the local residents for passive recreation (no trails).

MATT REED dedicated his survey to restoring and maintaining a wildlife corridor in northern Branford. The residential parcel is nestled adjacent to 200 acres of open space preserves near Northford and Queach Roads. The land was cleared of 25 medium/large trees felled by the 2020 tornadoes, as well as 150 invasive euonymus shrubs (Burning Bush) to allow for ease of passage for native animals such as fox, coyote, deer, bobcat, fisher cat, and weasel. The restoration has also opened the area to allow native birch, oak, and maple saplings to grow, which support bird habitat, including several species of hawks and owls. The final phase underway is neighborhood outreach and education to advocate for fenceless, natural property borders. ■

THANK YOU AND WELCOME NEW BOARD MEMBERS

The Branford Land Trust Board of Directors is pleased to announce the election of officers and directors to the Board at the Spring Annual Meeting in May. Newly elected officers serve two-year terms, and directors, three-year terms. Vacant positions due to early retirements are filled as required.

The membership elected Ellen Skinner for Secretary, and D.J. Smiarowski for Treasurer. A one-year position of Corresponding Secretary is filled by Betsy Herlihy by a vote of the Board of Directors in June.

Four Directors elected for three-year terms are Terry Elton, Clare Hambly, Jonathan Katz and Heidi Richard. David McKay fills a two-year term and Jake Dittes, a one-year term by a vote of the Board of Directors in June.

We sincerely thank retiring Corresponding Secretary Liz Donegan and Directors Bob Hull, Jack Matthias and Allen Miller for their service and hope they remain active members for years to come.

OFFICERS

Ellen Skinner, Secretary

Ellen is an avid outdoors person. Now retired, the Land Trust enables her to engage with the community and enjoy various activities — both outdoors and in. Her career was in strategy, business development, and operational analysis in healthcare. She moved to Branford in 2019 after living and raising two daughters in North Haven. She enjoys gardening, kayaking, bicycling, and hiking. Through the Land Trust, she is discovering some of Branford's hidden gems, has learned how to tell a native plant from an invasive and has become quite an Invasive Wrangler!

D.J. Smiarowski, Treasurer

D.J. Smiarowski first joined the Land Trust board in 2009. He served as treasurer from 2009-2013 and has continued to be involved through the Finance Committee. His family has been very involved with environmental issues. All four of his children have helped his wife Heather with Project Limulus and the Environmental Day Camp. His oldest daughter is the Stewardship Coordinator for a land trust in Massachusetts, and his youngest daughter is pursuing a degree in Environmental Science this fall.

Elizabeth (Betsy) Herlihy, Corresponding Secretary

Betsy most recently served as Director of New Haven Engagement & Business Development for the Greater New Haven Chamber of Commerce, where she partnered with nonprofits, restaurants, and small businesses to support growth and collaboration. A Stony Creek resident, Betsy enjoys life on the water—whether boating, paddle boarding, or simply appreciating the beauty of Long Island Sound. She believes in giving back to the community that inspires her and is proud to help steward the region's natural resources for generations to come. She especially values the way the Land Trust connects people to nature through its trails, programs, and conservation efforts.

DIRECTORS

Jake Dittes

Jake grew up spending summers on the Branford shoreline, specifically along the Farm River, and graduated from Branford High School before going on to study engineering. He now is a licensed professional engineer specializing in ecological restoration—working to restore shorelines

Ellen



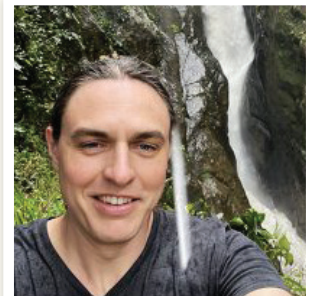
DJ



Betsy



Jake



Your ongoing support helps us conserve and steward Branford's natural resources. Thank you!

through living shoreline and marsh restoration projects and restoring rivers through dam removals and culvert replacements. In August, he moved back to the New Haven area full-time and now works at Save the Sound, continuing his commitment to protecting and restoring the ecosystems he has loved since childhood. He loves being outdoors and can often be found hiking with his wife and their dog.

Terence Elton

Terry served as Branford's Manager for Special Projects and Economic Development through five administrations, from 2001 until retiring in August 2019. Terry has been a Branford resident for 28 years with Branford attorney Elizabeth/Betsy McMahon, where they raised their four children. He is a native of the "cricks and hollers" of western Pennsylvania, attended Wheeling Jesuit College [Wheeling University] and graduate studies in International Relations at American University's School of International Service. Community activities have included Branford Rotary Club and current president of BCTV [Branford Community TeleVision].

Clare Hambly

Clare works in educational publishing and has a background in conservation and environmental education going back to her upbringing in South Africa. A keen walker and naturalist, she moved to Branford with her husband Peter from NYC in 2021 and is thrilled to contribute to the valuable work of the Land Trust. Her favorite walks are around the Stony Creek Quarry!

Terry



Clare



Jonathan



David



Jonathan Katz

Jonathan retired from his law practice at the end of 2024 after many years of business, environmental and personal injury litigation. He believes that Branford's quality of life and its property values are enhanced by open space, and that interesting things happen at the edge where people interact with the land. He currently serves on the Acquisitions Committee and stewards several BLT properties in Indian Neck. This is his third multi-year term on the BLT board. His interests include bicycling, light hiking and battling invasive plants. Jonathan lives next to BLT-owned salt marshes in Indian Neck.

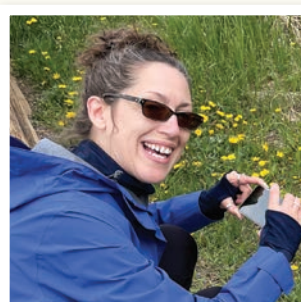
David McKay

David worked as an OB/GYN for many years in Massachusetts and retired in 2020. Along with his wife Nancy he moved to the Leetes Island Road area of Branford in 2023 to be closer to family. Shortly thereafter he joined the Branford Land Trust Maintenance Crew and subsequently the Hikes Committee. He currently is Steward for Saltonstall SSA-9 in Branford. His hobbies include hiking, gardening, landscaping, motorcycling and being Poppy to his grandchildren.

Heidi Richard

Heidi has been a Lindsey Cove, Short Beach resident since 2017, following more than 25 years in New Haven and an upbringing in Massachusetts. With her Master's in Environmental Studies, her passion lies at the intersection of human connection with nature. She helped to plant over 100 trees and build community in her former neighborhood, and led Sustainability strategic planning, best practice activities, and environmental stewardship service in partnership with community organizations for 20 years at Yale. Following early retirement, Heidi has been supporting the BLT with various administrative, financial and event functions, as well as exploring various properties around town. She was appointed Membership Committee Chair and is honored to share and advance the BLT mission. Heidi's interests include photography, writing, and gardening. ■

Heidi





Salt Marsh Celebration!

To kick off the Jarvis Creek Farm Salt Marsh Migration and Restoration Project, the BLT sponsored a series of well-attended educational activities for all ages to learn about the importance of salt marshes. Thanks to everyone who came out!



JULY: *"The History of Salt Haymaking in New England Marshes"* at the Blackstone Memorial Library, co-sponsored by the Branford Historical Society, a presentation by Shaun Roche from the Stewart B. McKinney National Wildlife Refuge.



AUGUST: *Book Talk - The Outermost House* by Henry Beston at the Willoughby Wallace Memorial Library, led by Rabia Ali.



AUGUST: *Salt Marsh Plant Walk* along the Stony Creek Trolley Trail with botanist Lauren Brown and Jack Matthias, Manager, Coastal Resilience for Audubon Connecticut.



SEPTEMBER: *"Marsh Migration at Jarvis Creek Farm"* at the Blackstone Library, a presentation by Jack Matthias of Audubon Connecticut.



SEPTEMBER: *Marsh Migration in Action!* a field trip to Chittenden Park in Guilford where the team completed a marsh migration project similar to the one about to start at Jarvis Creek Farm.



Tabor Marsh Work Parties
Two Saturday Work Parties focused on Tabor Marsh where volunteers learned to identify and then remove invasive plants along the marsh.

DID YOU KNOW...the Branford Land Trust preserves many acres of salt marsh that protect our coastal communities from increased flooding due to climate-related sea level rise. They also provide important habitat for native species like Purple Martins, a Species of Special Concern here in Connecticut.

Purple Martins Artwork
by Ele Willoughby,
minouette.etsy.com





COMMUNITY-SUPPORTED ENVIRONMENTAL DAY CAMP

On August 15 the Branford Land Trust welcomed 25 young campers back to Killam's Point for the 28th Annual Environmental Day Camp — a full day of hands-on exploration designed to spark curiosity and foster environmental stewardship in children ages 5-9.

From tide pool adventures and woodland hikes to cave exploration, wildlife rehabilitation, and nature crafts, the camp each year offers a rich blend of education and fun and has introduced hundreds of children to the wonders of the Long Island Sound and its surrounding habitats.

Amongst the tireless volunteers who led activities, chaperoned groups, and otherwise made sure that everything went smoothly and safely, we were joined by several young adult volunteers — former campers who have returned to share their love of nature and take part in the fun.

The camp's ongoing success is thanks to the tireless efforts of Martha Rice, whose dedicated leadership and behind-the-scenes organization have kept the program thriving. Her work exemplifies the Branford Land Trust's mission to protect open space and to connect people — especially the next generation — with the natural world.



"I volunteered because I think it's important for kids to spend time outdoors and get curious about the natural world around them and the variety it holds."

Christian Bjork,
Woodland Exploration
Leader

"I grew up in the area, so any excuse to return there is always amazing. Killam's Point is beautiful, and the Land Trust does such an amazing job with the camp. I always loved seeing exotic birds and animals that come every year, and it keeps me looking forward to the next!"

Tim Rice, Chaperone

"I enjoy the environment and the friendships that Killam's Point has brought me."

Kellen Grehl, Chaperone

OUT & ABOUT WITH THE BRANFORD LAND TRUST



BEACON HILL

Thanks to our friends at the Shore Line Trolley Museum, walkers enjoyed a scenic trolley ride and a hike at the Beacon Hill Preserve to see Signs of Spring, led by naturalists Lauren Brown and Julieann Michaelson in April.

KILLAM'S POINT

The BLT and the First Congregational Church of Branford co-sponsored a hands-on program to learn about the ecology and importance of horseshoe crabs. The program was led by Martha Rice at Killam's Point Conference Center in May.

Click here for ways YOU
can support the BLT
and these community
programs:



branfordlandtrust.org/help



TROLLEY TRAIL

Hardy souls enjoyed the annual Mother's Day Bird Walks with guide Chris Woerner despite the chilly temps. More than 40 species of birds were identified by sight and sound.



BRANFORD FESTIVAL

Overcast skies did not deter visitors from stopping by the BLT tent at the annual Branford Festival in June.

YOUNG'S POND & BOB'S WOODS

BUG OUT! A Forest Insect Walk was led by Julie Michaelson in June at Young's Pond Park and Bob's Woods.



VAN WIE WOODS

Kids, parents, and grandparents came out to build their own natural fairy houses at Van Wie Woods in a workshop led by Rachel Obbard in July.



RED HILL WOODS

Branford native and UCONN graduate student Christian Bjork led a Guided Tree Walk at the stunning 29-acre Red Hill Woods in September.



**BRANFORD
LAND TRUST**

P.O. Box 254
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*After you read this newsletter,
don't just toss it in the recycling
bin, pass it on to a friend!*



BRANFORD INVASIVE WRANGLERS have been busy this year! They've worked to fight back celandine at the Lucy T. Hammer Woodlands on Cherry Hill Road, burning bush and garlic mustard at the Flax Mill Road Preserve, Japanese stilt grass at Red Hill Woods, and mugwort on the green trail of the Van Wie Preserve. Invasive plant control is a challenging, multi-year process, but we are seeing results. Want to join in the effort? Email us at info@branfordlandtrust.org.