From the Statehouse

By Eric Hammerling

2019 State Legislative Recap… It's Not Over Yet

In February, Governor Lamont proposed his first two-year budget for Connecticut, and debates over the FY 2020-21 state budget dominated the 2019 session of the CT General Assembly.

CFPA's top priorities this year included keeping the Passport to the Parks intact, protecting the Community Investment Act (CIA) from sweeps, and authorizing bonding for the Recreational Trails & Greenways program. So, what happened?

Passport to the Parks Remains Intact

To keep Passport to the Parks funding intact, the two key battles were to ensure that there were no diversions of Passport funding to non-park purposes and, two, there were no exemptions to the Passport fee ($5 per year paid on personal vehicle registrations through the Department of Motor Vehicles).

No Diversions: Although the Governor's budget did not propose any diversions, the General Assembly's Appropriation Committee budget proposed diverting $300,000 from the Passport for non-park-related purposes.

No Exemptions: There were several bills introduced to exempt certain groups from paying the Passport to the Parks fee. CFPA's concern was that exemptions for any group would result in an endless parade of special exemptions that could ultimately de-fund the Passport and undermine the maintenance of State Parks. One proposal to exempt households with multiple vehicles from paying the fee on each vehicle would have reduced the Passport funds by over 50 percent, in addition to being challenging for the DMV to administer.

Fortunately, thanks to a significant public outcry led by CFPA supporters, there were no funding diversions from the Passport to the Parks in the final FY 2020-21 budget, and no bills allowing exemptions from the Passport fee were passed.

2019 has been another record-setting year so far for attendance at State Parks as more people learn that Connecticut residents no longer have to pay a fee at park gates. In 2018 (the first year of the Passport), State Park attendance increased by approximately 10 percent over the previous year. Officials estimate that attendance will likely increase by another 10 percent in 2019. Thank goodness there were no diversions or exemptions to the Passport this year, because CT DEEP needs every dollar to sustainably maintain State Parks and meet this increasing demand.

CIA Remains a Dedicated Fund

The Governor's budget proposed sweeping the Community Investment Act (CIA) funds—generated outside the budget from a $40 municipal document recording fee—into the General Fund. Although the sweep would have moved funds to the state agencies who administer CIA funds for open space and farmland protection, historic preservation, affordable housing, and to support a safety net program for dairy farmers at the same levels as FY 2019, these swept funds would have immediately become more vulnerable to budget cuts through intense competition with many programs across state government supported by the General Fund.

The proposed sweep of CIA's off-budget funds into the General Fund ultimately did not happen, but the final budget included an earmark of $1.5 million in CIA funds for the safety net for dairy farmers. The struggle for Connecticut's dairy farmers is urgent and real, but the $1.5 million will likely come at the expense of grants for open space, farmland, and other CIA priorities that are also investments in Connecticut's quality of life.

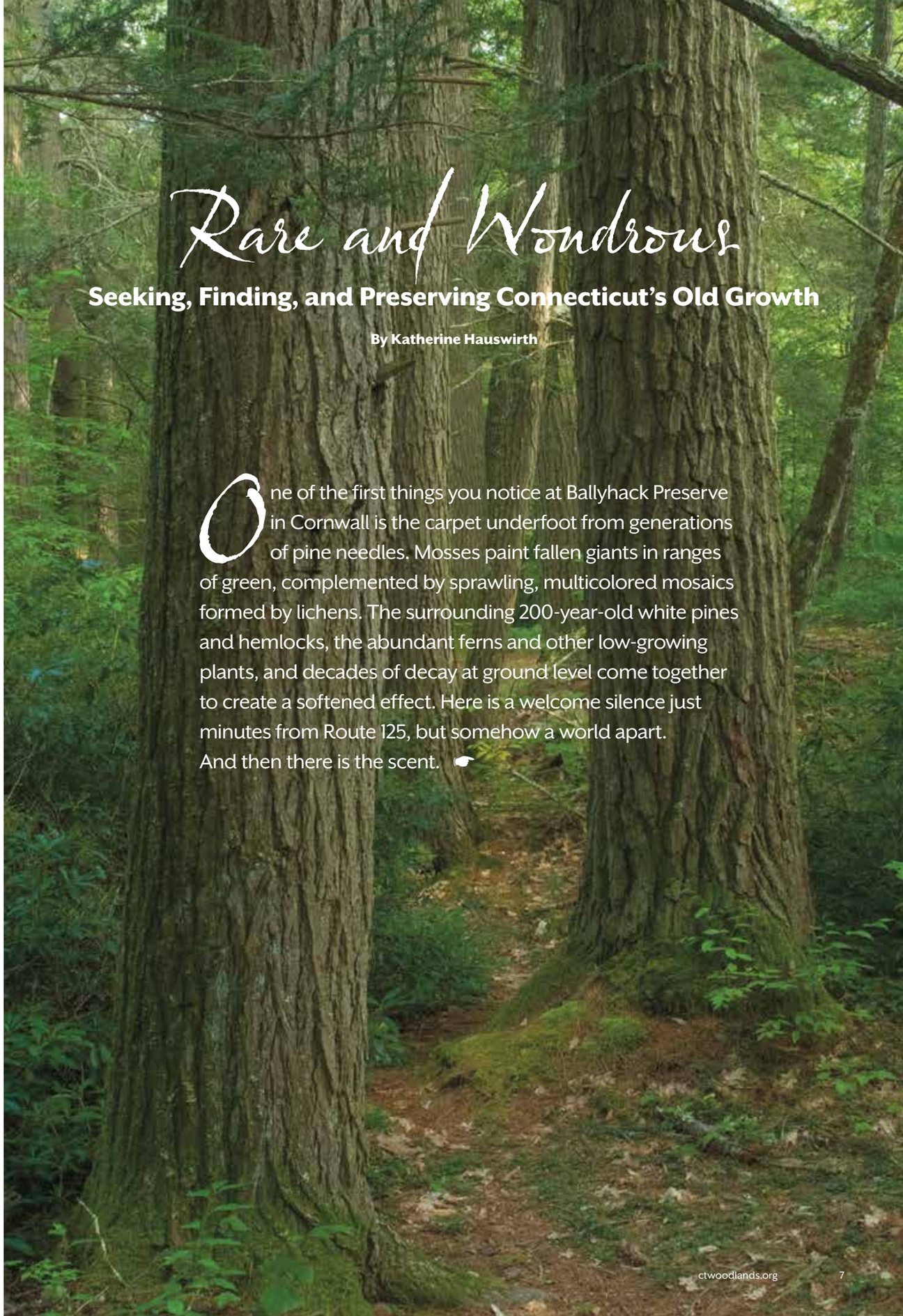
Bond Funding for Recreational Trails & Greenways Still Needs to be Authorized

A "special session" to consider bonding priorities is expected this fall, and the fate of the grants program for Recreational Trails & Greenways currently hangs in the balance. Since 2016, this grants program has invested $10 million in 60 recreational trail projects that improve trails in more than half of Connecticut's municipalities.

CFPA has asked the General Assembly to authorize at least $3 million annually in bonding for recreational trails and greenways. If additional bond funding is not authorized, Connecticut will have no funding left to continue making prudent investments for trails and your health. This would be a huge loss for our state.

So far, 2019 has been a good year at the statehouse for forests, parks, trails, and recreational lands, but your involvement as an individual advocate is essential for ongoing success. Please look for CFPA's email alerts, engage early and often, and you will make a difference!

Eric Hammerling has served as the Executive Director at the Connecticut Forest & Park Association since 2008.



Rare and Wondrous

Seeking, Finding, and Preserving Connecticut's Old Growth

By Katherine Hauswirth

One of the first things you notice at Ballyhack Preserve in Cornwall is the carpet underfoot from generations of pine needles. Mosses paint fallen giants in ranges of green, complemented by sprawling, multicolored mosaics formed by lichens. The surrounding 200-year-old white pines and hemlocks, the abundant ferns and other low-growing plants, and decades of decay at ground level come together to create a softened effect. Here is a welcome silence just minutes from Route 125, but somehow a world apart. And then there is the scent. ☛

Joan Maloof describes it as a "sweet, rich, earthy smell" that fills the senses. She used to attribute this scent to the mountains, but wonders if her own, much flatter Maryland landscape might have smelled that way once, too, "before the grandfather trees were gone, in a time when the trees' breath merged with that of the fungi and the birds and the insects."

Joan, a biologist, is professor emeritus at Salisbury University and founder of the Old-Growth Forest Network (OGFN), which works to identify and preserve old growth as well as plan for *future* old growth. But Joan, who has authored four books about forests and old growth, also emphasizes the importance of simply connecting people with forests. "We want to create the next generation of people who know and understand and love the forests," she says.

But what exactly *is* old growth? Old growth is difficult to define, but generally considered forest that has never been cut. There's also secondary old growth—forests that were harvested, but have since regenerated. Joan, however, tends to eschew a precise definition of old growth, joking that "probably as much wood fiber has been spent discussing that as is contained in all the eastern old-growth forests!" Moreover, old growth differs according to the forest type. "You could have a 200-year-old forest in the eastern U.S. and that would be considered an old-growth forest," Joan notes. "But if you have a 200-year-old redwood forest, that's not really an old-growth redwood forest."

Bob Leverett, coordinator for two Massachusetts counties in the OGFN and the cofounder of the Native Tree Society, agrees that arguing over what old growth is misses the point. Bob is widely credited for putting New England's old growth on the map, but he says the bigger issue is to understand the ecological role of older trees, including their ability to sequester large amounts of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere more effectively than younger trees. Young trees growth fast, but older trees have much more leaf surface area for photosynthesis. A small percentage growth in a very large tree can overwhelm a high percentage growth rate in a young, small tree.

> We want to create the next generation of people who know and understand and love the forests.
>
> **Joan Maloof**

Only a small fraction of Connecticut's old growth forests remains. Photo below by Bob Leverett. Photo on previous page by Laura Kolk.

Connecticut's remaining old growth, estimated to be just one-tenth of one percent, is generally found in areas where trees could not be felled or removed easily. For example, the hike into Sage's Ravine, which straddles the Connecticut-Massachusetts border, is moderate-to-strenuous. Those who undertake the steep, rugged descent will find themselves surrounded by old-growth hemlocks and oaks. Bigelow Pond in Norfolk boasts several hemlocks estimated to be over 300 years old in the lower reaches of a rocky area. And "Old Growth in the East: A survey" lists an eight-acre stand at Mount Riga of white pine, eastern hemlock, American beech, and yellow birch that have likely never been logged due to access challenges.

Ballyhack Preserve, however, is a great "starter" trail that provides hikers with the experience of being in an old-growth forest without demanding an especially athletic venture. The mildly winding, half-hour walk takes in the Valley of the Giants, designated a State Critical Habitat and described by the Cornwall Conservation Trust as "a bottomland stand of massive, old eastern white pines and eastern hemlocks that tower above the canopy." The tornadoes that wreaked havoc on the nearby Cathedral Pines in 1989 were kinder to Ballyhack, allowing more of the old trees to stay rooted. When so many of the Cathedral Pines fell, the Nature Conservancy, which owns the property, resisted a call for salvage logging in order to study how forests regenerate after a natural disaster.

A hiker at Ballyhack Preserve in Cornwall.

Bob says that people who have experienced an old growth area come away with a deepened appreciation for the forest as much more than simply a resource for human consumption. Many bird species such as the Blackburnian warbler (*Setophaga fusca*), for example, prefer older forests of spruce, balsam fir, pine, and hemlock with high canopies. Hollow cavities that develop in decaying trees create important nesting places for many creatures. Even fallen trees play a crucial role in enhancing the habitat for reptiles, amphibians, and insects, and the moisture in old-growth areas provides key support for wildlife, fungi, and microorganisms. Studies suggest that biodiversity is much higher in old-growth forests; when these woods are disturbed that biodiversity is quickly diminished—a heightened threat in this time of climate crisis.

Foresters used to consider older forests as "overmature," which, from a commerce perspective, translated as "not economically viable;" forests that included dying trees were often described as "diseased" or "decadent." But these days, land managers increasingly view forests as dynamic ecosystems with multiple values. The USDA's 2015 Conservation Practice Standard on Forest Stand Management recognizes the need to retain snags and downed trees in order to support wildlife as well as facilitate carbon storage.

More than 70 percent of Connecticut forests are owned privately. Landowners can promote old-growth characteristics by not harvesting certain "reserve" trees. "Generally speaking, Connecticut's older and larger diameter hardwoods and pine are cut too soon. Retaining some reserve trees as standards through another rotation might be a nod to maintaining old growth characteristics," says CFPA Board of Directors member, Star Childs, a forestry consultant and trustee at Great Mountain Forest. In addition, landowners are starting to reap the economic benefits of not harvesting older trees. Carbon offset projects compensate landowners

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who make long-term commitments to storing carbon on their property in the form of trees.

"My hope is that eventually forest carbon offset projects might encourage landowners of many size tracts to retain higher density and longer age rotations, if not for old growth, for the good of soils, inoculants, and other unseen forms of biodiversity," says Star, who's about to close a carbon offset deal at Great Mountain.

Communities can also help to protect forests by establishing easements. Joan points out that not all easements explicitly prevent logging, and well-intended individuals or organizations may be unaware of this until it's too late. Forever-wild easements typically prevent logging as well as building, subdividing, commercial or industrial activities, and farming, according to the Northeast Wilderness Trust.

Susan Masino, a Trinity College professor and basic neuroscientist who specializes in brain health and serves as OGFN's coordinator for Hartford County, studies the connections between forests and brain health as a research fellow at Harvard Forest. In a recent article in Frontiers in Forests and Global Change, Susan and her coauthors argue that growing existing forests intact to their ecological potential, an approach called "proforestation," maximizes carbon sequestration and enhances biodiversity. Those benefits are the tip of the iceberg, they say. In addition to improving water and air quality and providing flood and erosion control, proforestation supports public health benefits, such as helping people who suffer from anxiety, depression, and chronic pain.

Joan describes her alliance with Bob, Susan, and others in the OGFN as "just like a forest"—enhanced by variety. This group is spreading the word on the benefits of old growth and striving to defend these places, and each brings a unique perspective to the OGFN. Bob, who has an engineering background, is an expert in measuring trees. Joan's perspective is one of a biologist, and her books are accessible reads for the general public. Susan continues to study the potential health benefits that forests can provide. "A forest can increase structural integrity and improve functional activity in areas important for executive function, mental health, and emotional processing," she says.

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>
> **Star Childs**

Joan is quick to recognize wood as a valuable renewable resource and is in favor of some areas being treated as cropland in order to maximize wood fiber extraction. And she recognizes the need for thoughtful forestry approaches to promote old-growth characteristics. But, at the same time, OGFN is focused on the importance of protecting old growth, which has been declining on this continent since European settlers first arrived.

Because old growth is so scarce, OGFN works to facilitate and protect future old growth, trees that will reach their senior years long after those who worked to preserve them are gone. Susan worked with the Town of Simsbury to have the 42-acre Belden Forest designated as the first Connecticut forest in the OGFN. A memorandum was co-signed with the Town, and Belden Forest will be officially designated in a ceremony on October 25th.

The leaves will be falling from the trees, but the bare branches will witness a burgeoning new era of promise as the humans below celebrate the forest's preservation.

Katherine Hauswirth writes primarily about nature and contemplation. Visit her at First Person Naturalist or read her The Book of Noticing: Collections and Connections on the Trail.

Visit Connecticut Old Growth

Forest ecologist Harry White, OGFN County Coordinator for Litchfield County, recommends the following locations to explore old growth. The DEEP hosts a web page for the Campbell Falls location:

- Ballyhack Preserve, Cornwall. Easy hike through a 200-year-old forest. Trailhead is located near the intersection of Route 125 and Dibble Hill Road.
- Gold's Pines, Housatonic State Forest, West Cornwall. Natural Area Preserve featuring Connecticut's oldest white pine stand and the state's tallest tree—a nearly 145-foot-tall Eastern white pine. Trailhead is located off Route 128.
- Campbell Falls State Park Reserve, Norfolk Natural area without facilities. Follow Route 272 north from Norfolk center. Take a left onto Old Spaulding Road. Park is on the right.