



MANCHESTER ESSEX CONSERVATION TRUST

PRESERVING NATURAL BEAUTY, WILDLIFE, AND RESOURCES AT THE GATEWAY TO CAPE ANN

FALL 2020

A Reflection on Importance of Open Space in this Time of Uncertainty

Quiet, solitary steps on trails began along with the first hints of spring, accompanied by the song of the peepers and glimpses of painted turtles sunning themselves on fallen trees in swollen ponds. These steps continued through the welcome shade of summer with the forest in full leaf and the canopy closed overhead. Now they mingle with the telltale signs of impending autumn with color blushing maple trees that fringe area wetlands. These walks have provided solace since Covid-19 changed everything.

As the seasons change and we continue to maintain social distance, wearing masks and walking off trail to let a fellow traveler pass safely six feet away, the woods provide comfort, distraction, and peace.



Cedar Swamp. Photo: David Young

We often cite the importance of open space in mitigating climate change, protecting our water resources, and maintaining biodiversity. But that less

A Reflection, continues on page 4

MECT Announces a Leadership Change and Search for a New Executive Director

MECT is announcing the resignation of **Michelle Vaillancourt** as Executive Director of the organization. “I have truly enjoyed my time with MECT, but am now stepping aside so that the organization can expand the role of the Executive Director, and make it a full time position,” said Vaillancourt. “I am very pleased that MECT’s Board has made this decision, and am confident that MECT will continue to be successful in its mission.”

Michelle joined MECT in June of 2017, and has played a critical role in the recent success of the organization. “We want to thank her for her dedicated service, which involved significant accomplishments, including the conservation of 110 acres of land in our

two communities,” said Mike Dyer, MECT President. “She leaves the organization in a strong and respected position and the Board wishes her all the best in her future endeavors.”

MECT now seeks a new, full-time Executive Director to implement the programs and manage the operations of the organization. Over the next few months, we will be conducting a search to find the new Executive Director. During this transition period, it is our priority to find the best individual to lead, while still maintaining a stable and effective organization. The job announcement and description is available on our website. We ask for your help in identifying candidates who can help MECT continue along this successful trajectory.

MECT has been providing annual grants for outdoor environmental education programs in Manchester and Essex for many years.

The 2019-2020 school year was no different.

Right: Students studying in the woods during a 2018 Kestrel science program.



Spring 2020 Education Grants Go Virtual

Kestrel Education Adventures, a long time grant recipient and provider of outdoor education programs proved incredibly nimble in the face of distance learning necessitated by the Covid-19 pandemic. Kestrel quickly developed online materials and videos that allowed elementary students in the Manchester Essex Regional School District (MERSD) to engage in environmental education programming despite the challenges of the Spring 2020 semester.

Kestrel instructors adapted their traditional programming for first, second and third grade students so it could be completed by families schooling at home, supported by teachers in Zoom meetings, and in some cases, completed by young students on their own.

The online curriculum included three components: a field video, an indoor lesson plan, and an outdoor lesson plan. The field video was filmed in an “outdoor classroom” highlighting wildlife and plant life that was edited to include voiceovers and text. The result was a 10-15 minute field experience similar to being on an outdoor Kestrel science program. The videos unrolled in the same manner as Kestrel classes, guided by observation, questioning, and solving mysteries, rather than simply presenting facts. They were meant to complement the lesson plans but could also be used by students to learn independently.

The indoor lesson plan was designed for use by families, regardless of their previous level of experience as naturalists. Each plan contained links to a library of photographs Kestrel had taken in previous years with the MERSD students at local field sites, and showed specific habitats and wildlife. The links were designed to support an immersive learning experience and a connection to local wildlife for those families who could not get outdoors themselves.

The outdoor lesson plan was designed for families who were able to get out in the field to conduct outdoor inquiry. These lesson plans combined discussions and projects that could later take place indoors, with detailed plans for conducting investigations outdoors at nearby field sites. Data and activity sheets were included so that families could collect and record information on their field trip.

MECT is grateful to Kestrel for acting quickly to develop an effective online environmental education program for Manchester and Essex elementary school students.

“All the teachers were very receptive. They scheduled times for our program to be a part of their core distance learning curriculum and assigned the materials we crafted to their students during a week in the late spring.”

—JESSICA KAGLE, KESTREL’S FOUNDER AND PROGRAM DIRECTOR

New Trail Signs Posted in the Wilderness Conservation Area

The MECT stewardship crew has been busy posting new trail signs throughout the Wilderness Conservation Area. The myriad of signs posted over the years have been replaced with new green trail signs sporting the MECT logo to guide hikers through the many miles of trails. The effort, spearheaded by Greg Crockett and Steve Lantner, is the first step in replacing all trail and trailhead signs throughout MECT properties.



Greg Crockett, MECT Stewardship Chair posting trail signs in the WCA.

MECT was assisted by Faye Dingle and Audrey Brogna, two Manchester Essex High School students who volunteered their time to help post trail blazes, which are the arrows that mark the way along the trail between the junctions where trail signs are located. The blazes help guide hikers

in places where one might lose the trail when snow or leaves cover the ground. Faye and Audrey worked with Steve Lantner to post blazes and clear branches and saplings to make signage visible along the Cedar Swamp and Baby Rock trails.

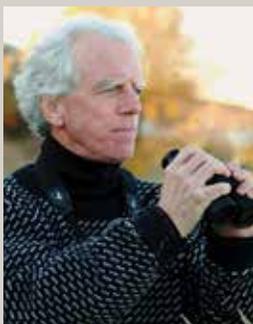
MECT is also working to develop trailhead signs for our properties that include maps with trails identified, as well as some general information about the history and ecology of the reservation being visited. The prototype of our new trailhead sign will soon be installed at the Hooper Trask Pasture.

We look forward to completing our trail sign replacement project to improve navigation throughout MECT's trail system and to share information about MECT properties with our visitors.

A hearty thank you to Faye Dingle and Audrey Brogna for their volunteer efforts!



Steve Lantner, MECT Stewardship Committee member and MERSD students volunteers Faye Dingle and Audrey Brogna.



Join Annual Meeting Online for a Talk by Naturalist Chris Leahy

Members are welcome and encouraged to attend for a brief business meeting followed by a talk by Chris Leahy, who retired from Mass Audubon in the spring of 2017 after a 45-year career as a professional naturalist and conservationist. The business meeting will include a summary of organizational accomplishments over the past year, as well as a proposed bylaw amendment and a slate of trustees and officers for 2021 for the membership to consider.

Chris Leahy's talk will describe results of recent multi-year surveys of local islands by Mass Audubon and Mass Fish &

Wildlife. The Essex County Coastal Birds Islands' Important Bird Area (IBA) comprises more than 50 islands, ranging in size from small rocky "skerries" which are nearly submerged at high tide to the well-wooded 83-acre Great Misery Island. These islands provide nesting and wintering habitat for a variety of interesting bird species, from newly arrived American Oystercatchers to endangered wading birds, and denizens of rocky shores such as Harlequin Duck and Purple Sandpiper. Some also have significant cultural histories.

Please join us at Annual Meeting to reflect on 2020 and look forward to 2021. Login to learn more about the Trust's activities, help guide its initiatives, and possibly discover a project to which you would like to lend your skills.

The MECT Annual meeting is scheduled for Sunday, November 8 at 4:00 pm. As with all gatherings this fall, it will be a virtual affair. We will provide you with details on how to login and join the event prior to the meeting.

MECT Welcomes Two New Board Members

MECT is fortunate to have two new members join our Board of Trustees this year. Both are from Manchester, have a strong commitment to conservation and are avid outdoorsmen. Each brings a unique skill set to our organization.

Michael Carvalho is a seasoned environmental attorney and trial lawyer working primarily on real estate development, stormwater management and associated issues. He is admitted to practice law in state and federal courts in Michigan, the District of Columbia and Georgia, as well as here in Massachusetts. In addition to his law practice, Mike formerly served as Chair of the National Council on Science and the Environment, served as a representative for the United Nations Environment Program for North America in Nairobi, Kenya, and recently participated in an expedition to Antarctica while writing a paper on international environmental law. Locally, Mike is involved in Manchester Scout Troop 3, and also serves on the Board of Salem Sound



Coastwatch. He's an avid scuba diver and enjoys spending time in, on and under the water with his wife and children.

Albert M. "Mory" Creighton, III is the founder and president of Pinpoint Laser Systems, a local business that designs and manufactures a broad line of high precision, laser-based, measuring and alignment products for industry, utilities and government applications. He also takes an active role in his hometown of Manchester, and serves on the Financial Committee, formally as Chair. Mory has been part of the MECT family for much of his life. He's the son of MECT's founding member Al Creighton, and has explored the Manchester Essex woods over many years with his father and then later with his wife and their own children. He is an avid sailor, and has cruised extensively with his family aboard their Pipe Dream sloop.



We welcome both Mike and Mory to the MECT Board of Trustees!

A Reflection, continued from page 1

tangible benefit of improving quality of life is the one that speaks loudest in these difficult times. How lucky we are to live in an area that has prioritized the protection of natural places, for resource protection as well as for our wellbeing.

MECT decided to keep our trails open in March as the curtains came down on life as we knew it. It was a carefully considered decision, but in the face of so many unknowns, it was not one that we took lightly. We posted signs asking for compliance with distancing protocols to keep us safe, healthy and able to continue to welcome the public on our land. And we hoped that we'd made the right choice.

As the weeks passed we were thanked in messages, voicemails and letters printed in *The Cricket*. Many felt the call of nature for exercise, alone time, or simply a change of scenery. They appreciated the escape offered in the woods. As visitors increased with the warmer

temperatures, there were also those who questioned the wisdom of allowing public access during a global pandemic, but they were few, and as social distancing measures were eased at the state level, there has been a better balance of the use of our trails with public beaches and parks that reopened nearby.

As we settle into this new normal, for however long it lasts, we hold fast to our mission. There is still work to be done to ensure that the wilderness in our communities stays that way. We remain committed to protecting those parcels that will complete the conservation of the Wilderness Conservation Area, as well as other natural landscapes nearby that provide for the ecological health of our community and ourselves.

In hindsight, we are confident that we made the right decision to keep our trails open to the public. But, we will continue to monitor the spread of the virus and the advice of state and local officials. We do look forward to seeing you in the woods, but please, stay six feet away!

GET OUTSIDE

Covid-19 Hikes and Walks Update

As summer turns to fall, we at MECT usually begin plans for our hikes and walks in the Manchester and Essex woods. This year will be different, as we all still need to practice social distancing to stop the spread of the global pandemic. So instead of guided excursions, we have two activities that we hope you will join us for this fall, a family friendly scavenger hunt and a photo contest, both of which are described below.

As you venture out into the woods, please remember that we have instituted social distancing protocols to keep us safe and our trails open. Remain at least six feet apart on all trails and in parking areas. We have relaxed our dog walking protocols to allow dogs off leash, but we continue to require that dog owners have no more than two dogs under voice control. Dog owners and dog walking service providers are allowed a maximum of three dogs per visit, in which case they must be leashed at all times. Also, kindly pick up and remove all waste from MECT property. *Thank you!*

Stay in Touch with MECT on Social Media

Not only do we have a Facebook community page where we share information on events and articles of interest, we've recently launched a presence on Instagram, too!

To mark the occasion, we will be running a *special photo contest* this fall. So get your phones and cameras ready, and stay tuned for more details.

In the meantime, make sure to follow us, share your experiences, and tag us on:



@ManchesterEssexConserv

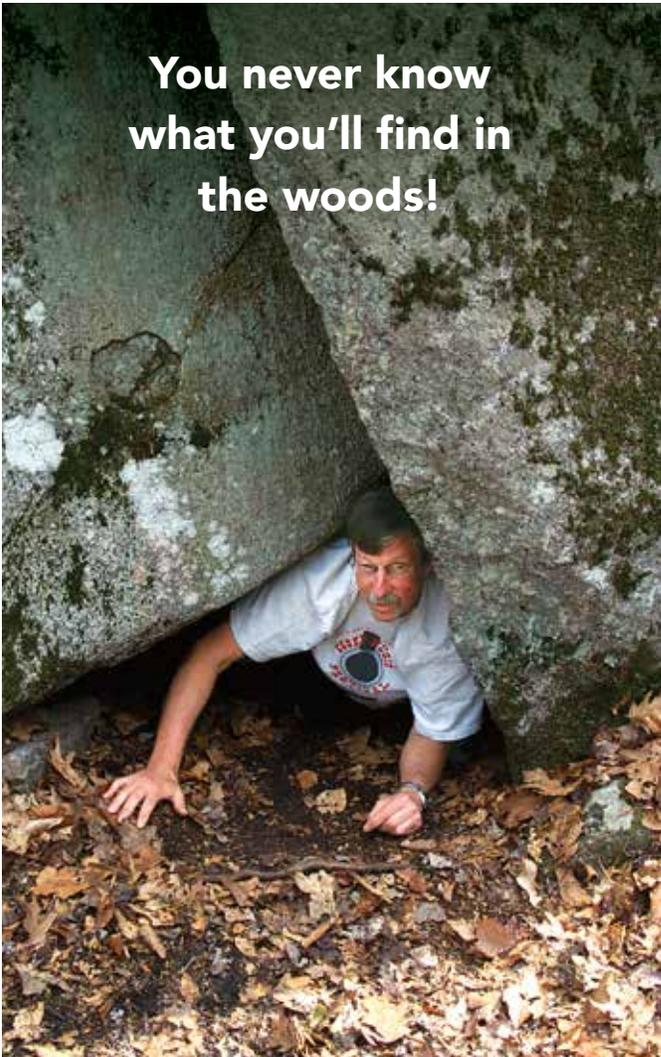


@ManchesterEssexConservTrust

Coming this October: A Scavenger Hunt for Kids of All Ages!

Who is up for some friendly competition? MECT is challenging you to a quest to find multiple locations and landmarks on MECT property throughout the month of October. Clues, such as photographs and GPS coordinates, will be provided to help you find some very special places in the woods. Report back with your discoveries by submitting a photo of your find on our website. This program is designed to last throughout the month of October so you and your family can explore our beautiful fall trails at your own pace. There will be prizes for top entries, and more importantly, bragging rights!

Look for details on our website, social media, and in a dedicated email arriving in your inbox mid-September.



You never know
what you'll find in
the woods!



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Our Annual Appeal to Donors

Protecting land, conserving biodiversity and natural resources, and nurturing young naturalists are three of MECT's most fundamental activities. Your donation to the 2020 Annual Appeal is a contribution to the quality of life MECT helps provide in our beautiful communities. Please reply using the envelope included with this newsletter, or renew at our website, www.mect.org/annual-appeal.

Matching Challenge! Once again, a small group of donors has agreed to fund

a Conservation Leaders' Circle Matching Grant to challenge our donors to stretch their annual support to \$1,000. Can you do it? Your gift of \$1,000 will be matched 100%! And you will become a member of the Conservation Leaders' Circle, a special group of donors who recognize the importance of extraordinary annual operating support to preserve our local communities' green infrastructure and the countless qualities that make Cape Ann the special place that it is.

Your gift, at a level that is right for you, means the world. Thank you!

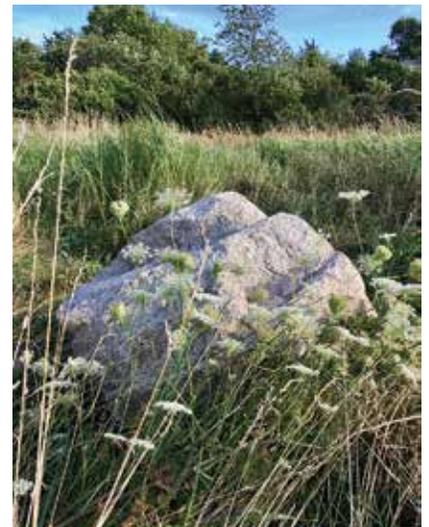


Photo: Heidi Winslow