



ESSEX COUNTY TRAIL ASSOCIATION

Preserve, Maintain, Respect

Fall 2021

A View from the Chair

Dear Friends,

The last few months at ECTA have been very busy! At the end of May all COVID restrictions were lifted in Massachusetts, and we kicked into high gear. We held two separate in-person events on June 5th, National Trails Day, and in addition to our other scheduled events, planned monthly trail programs starting in September. A summary of our recent events and programs is provided by Outreach Coordinator Stacie Capotosto on pages 6 & 7.

We launched our Trail Maintenance GIS project in early September. We're collecting data on trail issues in 5 of our towns — Ipswich, Essex, Hamilton, Topsfield and West Newbury. Wenham recently finished their own GIS project with help from ECTA, and we felt this would be extremely useful in our other towns. When completed, we'll have GPS-located trail issue data in map form that will help us prioritize projects and possibly plan "big picture" solutions for chronic problems in some areas.

The persistent rain this summer presented many challenges for us in maintaining trails. With the rain came the accelerated growth of grass, weeds, and brush — most of which thrived with the moisture and didn't go through the midsummer dormancy we've become accustomed to in the recent drought years. Then there was the mud. Trails everywhere become sodden, muddy, slick, or were completely underwater. Access to trails for recreational users in some areas has been difficult, and access by heavy equipment to wet areas for trail repairs has been delayed. See Trail Management and Maintenance Director Carol Lloyd's report on pages 4 & 5 for more information about trail work and our GIS project.

At ECTA, we focus our efforts on maintaining and repairing trails and preserving trail connections. Trail preservation is time consuming work. It can take months to work out the specifics of a new trail easement on private property, but it's well worth the time. These trail connections are essential to the existence of the extensive network of trails in our area. Because of the generous landowners who protect the trails on their property that connect to adjoining trails, it's possible to go for miles in our area without hitting a dead end. For more on trail easements, see page 3.

To our sponsors, volunteers, members, and event participants, thank you for your ongoing support!

Happy Fall!

Martha Sanders
Chair, Board of Directors



John J. Donovan Reservation

Trail Conditions

By Stacie Capotosto, Outreach Coordinator

The relatively wet summer and fall weather has dampened our enjoyment of the outdoors. We are currently experiencing a warmer than usual end of October, perfect weather to hike, run, and ride while taking in the fall colors. Unfortunately, the ground remains extremely wet. Please continue to be considerate to not leave deep hoof prints and tire tracks behind. We realize that's not possible on some trails. Whenever you're able to, choose dryer trails!

We'd love to hear which trails are driest and which to avoid! Post a Trail User Report on our website with your trail hits or misses to help your fellow trail users. Trail User Reports can be found on our homepage or in the Trails drop down menu.

Thank you for your support this year and enjoy the remainder of 2021. See you on the trails!



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TRIFECTA TRAIL CHALLENGE

Salem Five
The Natural Dog



West Newbury Riding and Driving Club's Solstice Ride in honor of Joe Sandulli

TRAIL EASEMENTS

ECTA is dedicated to the preservation and maintenance of open trails in our 6 towns; Essex, Hamilton, Ipswich, Topsfield, Wenham, and West Newbury. While our maintenance of trails is quite noticeable, preservation of trails — equally important — often is not. We spend countless hours working with individual landowners to protect existing trails, including establishing permanent preservation of the trail connections on private land that form crucial links in the vast network of trails in our area. This preservation is achieved through the creation of trail easements.

A trail easement is a perpetual legal agreement in which the landowner, the Grantor, gives permission for the passive recreational use of a trail on their land to a Grantee, in this case ECTA. This agreement can be non-restrictive and open for all types of use and trail users, or can be for certain specific purposes and under limited circumstances. As Grantee, ECTA often will maintain the trail easement and post signage.

We're frequently asked about the liability implications to landowners in granting an easement. Fortunately, the State of Massachusetts offers protection from liability for landowners who allow public access to trails on their land through Chapter 21, Section 17C in Mass General Laws. This protection from liability is essential in preserving trails on private land. Also known as the Mass Recreational Use Statute, the law says in part: *Any person...who lawfully permits the public to use such land for recreational purposes...shall not be liable for personal injuries or property damage sustained by such members of the public, including without limitation a minor, while on said land in the absence of willful, wanton, or reckless conduct by such person.*

ECTA currently has 30 trail easements on private land. The gratitude that we feel toward the generous landowners who have agreed to preserve their trails in this way is immense. Simply put, our extensive trail system would not exist without these easements. For those have already created this generous legacy, thank you. For those of you who have an unprotected trail on your land, please consider preserving it with a trail easement. Please contact us for more information about the trail easement process.



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Photo by Hydren Portraiture

TRAIL MAINTENANCE FALL 2021

By Carol Lloyd,
Director of Trail Maintenance

2021 currently stands as the 4th wettest year in terms of the most rainfall. And the trails show it! Trails that are usually dry this time of year are filled with mud and puddles. This changed the nature of our 2021 trail maintenance. As a result, this year we've done an unprecedented amount of mowing. Every summer there is usually a dry spell where everything dies back. That didn't happen this year. Everything kept growing and we had to mow trails multiple times. We also had to cut brush back on many trails that were being encroached upon. To keep up with all this, we worked with Myles Cheston of Trees Unlimited to hire an intern, Kara Glynos. She worked with Trees Unlimited on a lot of our clearing and mowing. Kara was terrific. She arrived on her motorcycle the first day and worked hard all summer. Hopefully we can do that again next year!

Every year we pick a major project to complete. It could be resurfacing a trail, installing a culvert, or redoing a new bridge. This year the project we picked — resurfacing a well-used and eroded trail in Bradley Palmer — is on hold because the ground is too wet to bring repair material to the trail. We are still hoping to be able to complete it by year end.





An exciting project we are working on now involves locating and collecting data on the issues on the public trails in 5 of our 6 towns, Wenham having been done already. In September, the Community Center for GIS trained a team of ECTA volunteers to use a data collection application that is downloaded to a smartphone. When data collection is completed, CCGIS will overlay the data on town wide maps, then estimated costs for repair of each trail issue will be added. Large maps of each town will be printed with this information to be used as working documents, allowing us to more easily prioritize projects. We'll have the same maps in digital form, allowing us to continuously update them to indicate what work has been done, so the information will be kept current.

In addition, we will receive “Map Books” of each town that will have the trail data overlaid with the assessor’s data so that land-owners can be identified for each trail segment. We have 13 volunteers who have been trained and are out there now collecting the data. We look forward to having this project completed in the Spring and to sharing our finished products with everyone!

ECTA EVENTS

AFTER MORE THAN A YEAR OF CANCELLED AND VIRTUAL EVENTS, WE WERE EAGER TO GET TOGETHER IN PERSON IN 2021!

We started off in May with our 7th annual **Spring for the Trails Half Marathon** virtually and our 2nd annual **TrifECTA Trail Challenge**. We celebrated **National Trails Day** in June by kicking off our free member programs with a guided **Bird Walk** at Castle Neck River Reservation and by holding our 4th annual **Ride in Memory of Patrick Keough**. What a beautiful weekend and a much needed chance to gather together! It was wonderful to see all our old friends at our 26th annual **Equine Tack and Paraphernalia Sale** at the Topsfield Fairgrounds in August. September was exciting with the much enjoyed guided **Mushroom Walk** at Vineyard Hill Reservation, followed by our first in-person trail race in over a year, the 17th annual **Run for the Trails**. Our first ever **Poker Bike Ride** in Willowdale in October was a lot of fun! We finished up the month with a **guided tour of the Edible Avenue site** on the Newburyport Rail Trail.

Registration for our annual day after Thanksgiving 5k and Kids Fun Run, Thank for the Trails, is now open.

Go to www.ectaonline.org and click on Events for more info.

Stay tuned for more programs before year's end!



Photo by Jennie Merrill





Essex County Trail Association
P.O. Box 358
Hamilton, MA 01936



Visit our website:
ectaonline.org
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