# RESTORATION STORIES FROM AROUND THE STATE

**Salt marsh replanted in Stratford**

At Great Meadows Marsh, part of the Stewart B. McKinney National Wildlife Refuge, 44 acres of salt marsh and other important coastal habitat were restored. Construction began in October 2021, and close to 200,000 native coastal plants and shrubs have been added to the site by 32 “Salt Marsh Stewards” from Stratford and Bunnell high schools—with the help of crew leaders and over 150 volunteers. A new creek brought the natural flow of salt water in and out with the tides; grassy mounds were created to provide elevated homes for nesting saltmarsh sparrows; and two ADA-accessible viewing platforms were built.

— *Sharon Bruce, senior communications manager, Audubon Connecticut*

**Thriving oyster beds in Fairfield**

Ash Creek estuary is the site of a large and productive natural shellfish bed. In 1998, MSX disease, caused by a microscopic parasite, decimated the oyster population in Ash Creek and across much of Long Island Sound. Since then, the Fairfield Shellfish Commission has been committed to oyster habitat restoration through annual shell planting, and it has involved the community. Every September more than 700 Fairfield 7th grade school students plant shell. Most recently, Copps Island Oysters donated and planted 250 bushels of shell. Today, there are millions of oysters and a thriving oyster reef. Spat collectors there are covered, proving that restoration is succeeding! Ash Creek is our shellfish nursery.

—*Bruce Kueffner, chairman, Fairfield Shellfish Commission*

**In with the chestnuts, out with the deer in Westport**

The conservation team at Earthplace in Westport is constructing small deer exclosures throughout the forests to promote regeneration in the face of beech decline: beech leaf disease is killing off mature trees, creating large patches of sunlight on the forest floor. The overpopulation of deer in Westport is making it impossible for tasty native tree seedlings to fill those patches, clearing the way for unpalatable invasive plant species. To keep the hungry deer at bay and prevent establishment of invasive plants, deer exclosures were erected and American and hybrid chestnut seedlings donated by the Connecticut Chapter of the American Chestnut Foundation were planted inside. In 10 to 15 years, these deer exclosures will be removed and all that will remain will be young, healthy forest.

— *Nikki Spiller, director of the Harbor Watch program at Earthplace*

### Better way for hikers in Barkhamsted

The Jessie Gerard Trail in Peoples State Forest in Barkhamsted offers some of the best views of the Farmington River Valley. But heavy use, erosion and trail widening have taken a toll. Since 2023, the Connecticut Forest and Park Association's Connecticut Woodlands Conservation Corps has worked to restore it. Over four seasons, CWCC crews installed 49 stone steps, water bars, grade dips, and a 10-foot stone-edged causeway. This August, the project wrapped up with a new 17-step stone staircase, replacing a failing wood crib step. Trail Manager Erik Landgraf, the Friends of American Legion and Peoples State Forest and the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection partnered on the work. The trail is now durable and well-drained, built to withstand a changing climate and be enjoyed for decades.

— *Meaghan Strange, communications coordinator, Connecticut Forest and Park Association*

### Eco Park in West Haven

For years, an overgrown tangle of invasive weeds and trees grew along one of the busiest stretches of West Haven's boardwalk—a highly visible section of coastline within the 40-acre conservation easement stewarded by the Land Trust of West Haven. After repeated coastal storms brought down trees and further destabilized the area, what had once been an overlooked eyesore became an environmental concern and a public safety liability for the city. But the Land Trust saw an opportunity that led to a project that transformed that space into Eco Park, spanning a 1.5-acre strip of public shoreline. Its mission is twofold: restore and maintain the area's ecological balance and engage and educate the public about the shoreline's ecosystem and why restoration efforts are important.

— *Marilyn Wilkes, president, Land Trust of West Haven*

### Living shoreline in Old Saybrook

The living shoreline at the Katherine Hepburn Preserve, Fenwick Borough, Old Saybrook was finished in 2021. The project restored the dune, Crab Creek, and a salt marsh and involved the installation of nine rock sills. The project was a collaboration of the Lynde Point Land Trust of community members who manage the site, with The Borough of Fenwick, GZA GeoEnvironmental, SumCo Eco-Contracting, Connecticut Sea Grant, the Connecticut River Conservancy, the state Department of Energy and Environmental Protection, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Connecticut Institute for Resilience and Climate Adaptation. It was one of the first living shoreline projects in the state and received an award from the Connecticut Green Building Council in 2022.

— *Madeline Kolleger, Mitchell College assistant professor of marine and environmental science, who worked on the project as a graduate student*

Editor's note: These restoration stories were submitted to *Wrack Lines* in response to a request to readers in the previous issue.