



FALL 2020

Vol. 116 No. 1

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE

Sharon Friends of Conservation

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INSIDE:
>PHOTO CONTEST
>RATTLESNAKE HILL MAP

Keeping Sharon Sports Fields Green

by Paul Lauenstein

Sharon Friends of Conservation (SFOC), Sharon Sustainable Coalition (SSC) members and representatives from several Sharon sports organizations all concerned about the risks a proposed plastic turf athletic field posed to our student-athletes, our drinking water, and our environment investigated an alternative of enhancing Sharon's athletic fields through science-based maintenance of natural grass.

On June 18 they toured two of Sharon's athletic fields with Mr. Ian Lacy, the Lead Project Advisor for Tom Irwin Advisors, an advisory/consulting company that develops maintenance programs for natural grass athletic fields based on scientific evaluation of field conditions. Based on his many years of experience developing and implementing proven field maintenance techniques, Mr. Lacy said that a maintenance program customized for each of Sharon's athletic fields based on scientific analysis of its conditions could significantly improve their quality, resiliency and safety at a relatively modest cost. Typical methods include aeration, soil amendments, fertilization and irrigation.

Mr. Lacy used a penetrometer to measure the compaction of the soil in the center of the stadium field at Sharon High School. Applying a pressure of 300 psi, the tool only penetrated the soil to a depth of about an inch. By contrast, at the recently renovated East Elementary School field the tool easily penetrated to a depth of several inches applying a pressure of only 205 psi. In addition to increasing the risk of injury for athletes, highly compacted soil inhibits growth of grass because water and dissolved nutrients cannot easily reach the roots. Mechanical aeration and addition of sand loosens the soil to allow water and nutrients to infiltrate the root zone.

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The Sharon Friends of Conservation trail crew taking a break from socially-distanced construction on a section of boardwalk.

Boardwalks: If You Build Them Will They Come?

by Kurt Buermann

Sharon's trails have always had their share of wet, mooshy spots. In the past they came alive with torrential spring rains. In more recent years the rainfall seems to be lighter but extending over a longer period. The result is that the spots stay mooshier for longer. The remedies for hikers are to create a walk-around, throw sticks or boards into the mud or build a boardwalk. Boardwalks are the best solution. Hikers traversing muddy places tend to churn the mud and plant life into a mucky porridge. The result is aesthetically unpleasing, destructive and all around bad.

This year, Sharon Friends of Conservation identified two places where boardwalks were needed. The first was on the "Loop" trail behind Mann's Pond dam. The required length was a rather ambitious sixty feet. The other boardwalk was on the Beaver Brook Trail just beyond the entrance at Sandy Ridge circle. Here a forty-footer would fill the bill. Some years ago, Danny Rubenstein, for his Eagle Scout project, bridged a muddy place on the Beaver Brook trail. His bridge seemed to span the swampiest area. But this spring and summer the stretch leading to it simply did not dry out.



Keeping Sharon Sports Fields Green

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Mr. Lacy also used a soil probe to withdraw sample soil cores at both the High School field and the field at East Elementary. The soil at the High School field was dry and hard, whereas the soil at East was moist and loose. Mr. Lacy estimates that a well-maintained natural grass field should be able to provide up to 600 hours of use per year. Field usage data provided by the Sharon High School Athletic Director and several youth sports organizations indicate that Sharon's athletic fields are used considerably less than 600 hours per year.

The SFOC and SSC members arranged for a toxicologist to look into the fertilizers, wetting agents, pesticides, herbicides and other products that Tom Irwin Advisors employs to address specific conditions. When these products are professionally applied as directed, the risk to the environment was judged to be minimal.

Tom Irwin Advisors has been retained to analyze two of Sharon's athletic fields and assist the Sharon DPW in implementing a maintenance program based on the analyses. Depending on the results of this pilot program, science-based field maintenance could be implemented at other fields in Sharon.



Ian Lacey uses a soil probe to test Sharon's High School playing field.



Box Turtles are just one of several species of turtle to be found in the woods and waters of Sharon.

Wildlife Sightings

by Paul Lauenstein

This year over 200 wildlife sightings have been added to the collection at sharonfoc.org, bringing the total to almost 1,200 sightings representing approximately 500 species. The impressive abundance and diversity of Sharon's wild plants and animals is a tribute to the foresight and determination of residents such as the late Alice Cheyer, who worked tirelessly to preserve several tracts of natural habitat in Sharon.

The collection of sightings is organized into categories to make it easier to find what you are looking for. For example, there are 7 species of ferns, 23 species of mushrooms, 70 species of butterflies and moths, and over 100 species of birds. A free cell phone app called "Seek" can help you identify wild plants, insects, and other wildlife. If you get a photo of something interesting or beautiful (or both!), please share it with the rest of us by using the sighting submission form at sharonfoc.org.

If you encounter a rare species please consider reporting it. Sharon officially has 22 rare species listed at: <https://www.mass.gov/service-details/rare-species-viewer>. It is important to verify that these rare species have not yet disappeared from Sharon. The State has set up a web site for reporting rare species at: <https://www.mass.gov/how-to/report-rare-species-vernal-pool-observations>

The State also keeps track of animals that have been run over while trying to cross roads. At places where an unusually high number of road kills occur, the State can install passageways under the road for wildlife to cross without being run over. So if you see an animal that has been run over, you can help prevent future road kills by reporting it:

<https://www.linkinglandscapes.info/wildlife-roadkill-database.html>



A black rat snake enjoying the sun

Boardwalks: If You Build Them Will They Come?

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Besides these two boardwalks, Matt Cross has added some “old time” solutions to wet places on Mountain Street’s Elson-Cross trail. (The Cross family lives nearby and has enjoyed and maintained this trail for many years.)

Over the years, Sharon Friends of Conservation has acquired a modicum of boardwalk and bridge building expertise. Heavier pressure treated wood* is used. Every now and then a tree topples across a boardwalk. Structures are “pinned” down to the ground with steel rods. More than one has attempted to float away in high water. Sometimes human hands try to displace the structure. Perhaps trying to gauge just how heavy it is and if can get it home to their yard?

All in all, Sharon friends of Conservation along with Sharon’s Boy Scouts have put in place a surprising number of bridges and boardwalks over the years. We hope that easier access to Sharon’s natural spaces fosters a greater exploration and appreciation of them.

* In the past, pressure treated wood contained arsenic compounds that created health and environmental problems. Arsenic-treated wood was banned around 2003. Pressure treated wood nowadays is deemed safe for use in natural areas. It does contain copper compounds are minimally toxic. The EPA does not object to their use in the landscape. It is preferred that cutting and shaping of treated wood be done off site.



Photo by Daniel E. Levenson

Autumn arrives in Sharon.



John Thomas became Sharon’s new Conservation agent in March of this year.

Sharon Has a New Conservation Agent

by Kurt Buermann

We would like to welcome Sharon’s new Conservation Agent, John Thomas. John came onboard in March. He replaces Greg Meister who retired after 30 plus years tending to the Town’s conservation issues. John brings a wealth of experience to the job. He has eleven years’ experience in permitting and consulting work. He has worked throughout Massachusetts in wetland delineations, wetland mitigation site analysis, environmental compliance inspections, peer review services, botanical surveys, and wildlife studies. John has a good grasp of technology. He is adept at dealing with data programs and GIS mapping programs. John was a member of the Easton Conservation Commission at the time of his hiring by the Sharon Conservation Commission. John has a particular love for trails. Already he has helped facilitate improvements to Sharon’s trail system. Sharon Friends of Conservation looks forward to working with him to maintain and protect the Town’s natural spaces.

Go Fish! Sharon Scout Helps White Sucker Migration

by Kurt Buermann

Every spring, around May, Lake Massapoag’s White Sucker population starts milling in the outlet of Sucker Brook. Their intention is to ascend the stream and reach the marshy pools where they breed. Similar to salmon and trout. To make the upstream swim they must first get through the culverts under Massapoag Avenue. If the lake water level is too low, they are unable to make the jump up from the stream into the culvert. They are prevented from breeding for that year.

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Fish (cont'd from p 3)

Having observed the suckers over several springs, some Sharon residents conceived a way to help them. The fish could just manage a jump of about a foot from the stream surface to the culvert lip. They could not manage anything higher. If the jump distance from the stream surface to the culvert could be halved, the fish could easily access the culvert. (Once in the culvert, the suckers can slither through, even if they don't have enough water to submerge.) A solution seemed to be building a fish step so the fish could attain the culvert in two shorter jumps.

Last summer, Sam Daggett, a Boy Scout in Sharon's troop 95 was looking for an Eagle Scout project. He decided to tackle the sucker's problem. Working with Sharon Friends of Conservation, a box was designed. It had to be very heavy construction to survive the pummeling it would receive when there was high outflow from the culvert. Rebecca Quiñones of Mass Fish and Wildlife encouraged the project but advised that a one-step fish ladder had not, to her knowledge, been tried before.



Photo by Tan Fong

Volunteers install a fish box to assist suckers in their annual migration to breeding wetlands upstream.

She gave advice on the design and positioning of the box and asked to be informed how it worked out. Even if it did succeed she suggested that an optimal solution to the suckers' plight would be the replacement of the culverts themselves with modern, fish-friendly culverts. While this would be far beyond the scope of an Eagle Scout project, she said that Sam and Sharon residents should advocate for such a project.

With the fish step box in now place, it remains to wait for this spring to assess its success. There is a possibility of monitoring it with a remote camera. If Sam's box works out, it might be used in other situations where fish need a boost to reach their spawning grounds.

Sharon Friends of Conservation Photo Contest

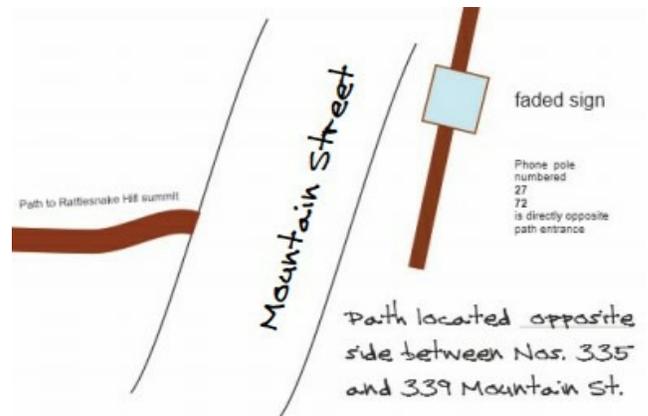
Please enter your best photos of the beauty of Sharon's natural Places. The contest runs a full year through the 4 seasons. Photos must be made in Sharon and by Sharon residents only. Categories:

- People in nature
- Animals in nature
- Nature by itself

Please note that each digital entry must be at least 300 dpi, and each person may enter one picture in each of the three categories. All entries must be received by January 1, 2021. Winners will be notified by email by February 1, 2021 and will be requested to indicate camera used and exposure if known. A framed copy of the winning photo no larger than 16"X20" must be submitted by March 1, 2021. Submission details will be included with award notification. For more and to enter please Visit: www.sharonfoc.org

Visit Rattlesnake Hill

If you haven't made the trek yet, there is an easy way to reach the summit of the hill on the newly preserved Rattlesnake Hill Property. In time, better parking and trail signage will be added to the site. For now, please use the images below and the map on the next page to find your way up to the top. Be sure to take note of the features along the way until better trail markers can be posted.



TRAILTREATMENT

Due to the Covid-10 pandemic Sharon Friends of Conservation has suspended all hikes and events until the threat subsides. However there seem to be many who find solace in walking them. We encourage everyone to use Sharon's trails individually, as house-sharing groups or groups with established negative infection. Do wear or have a mask ready should you come in contact with other Hikers. Otherwise...enjoy!

For trail maps or information visit:
<http://www.sharonfoc.org/sharons-hiking-trails>



New boardwalk on the Mann's Pond Loop trail



Massapoag trail near Belcher Street

Join the Sharon Friends of Conservation or Renew Your Membership



Name: _____

Address: _____

New Member

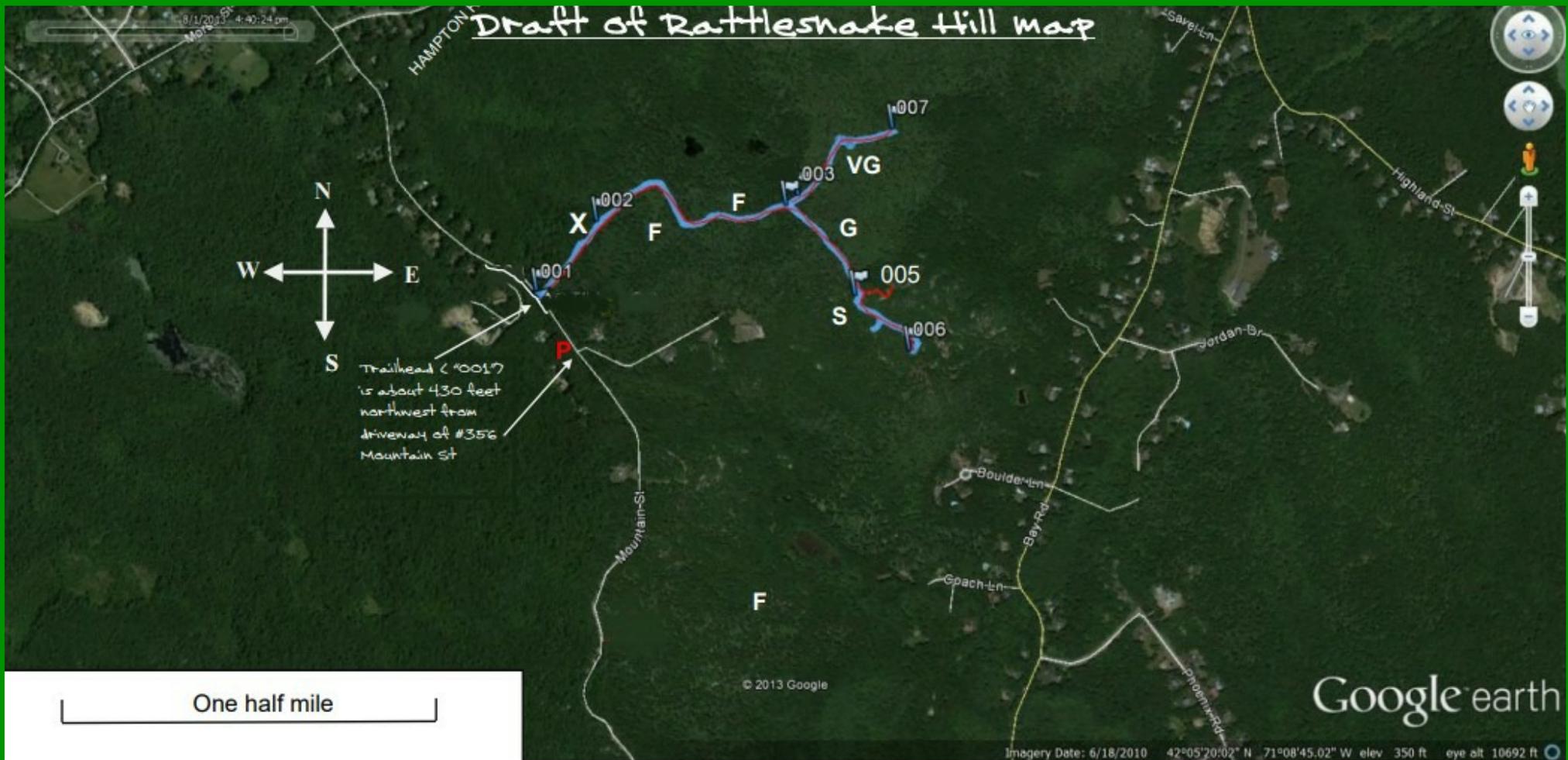
Renewal

Check one. Dues are \$25 per year.

Telephone: _____ **E-mail:** _____

Would you like to volunteer? Special skills? _____

*Send to SFOC, 45 Furnace St., Sharon, MA 02067 or join/renew online at www.sharonfoc.org/support/membership.html
Please note: Sharon Friends of Conservation does **not** share or make your membership information available to anyone.*



NOTES

Parking: "P"

There are a few places to pull off between # 356 and the trail head. Choose carefully to avoid rocks or steep shoulders. Start of trail is a disused dirt road. There may be a **black utility pole** on the side of the street near & opposite the trail entrance. There trail has **wheel ruts**. These may be somewhat obscured by low vegetation. As per note on map, pace off about 400+ feet from mailbox at # 356.

Between 001 and 002 you will come upon a discarded sofa and a propane tank atop a boulder.

At the fork (003) take the right path. A few orange dots on the rocks indicate this route to the summit

007-- This is not the way to James Bond's hideout! It may be a path to Bay road. We are investigating. A number of other paths wend through this area.

001--start on Mountain St

X intersection with old concrete foundation

002--rocky place

003--fork

005-- summit

006-- private property (house)

007 path to ? As far as we went. Path continues.

Blueberries & huckleberries:

S = scarce

F = fair

G = good

VG = very good

BLUEBIRDS 2020

by Kurt Buermann photos by Paul Lauenstein



The Sharon Friends of Conservation bluebird program began in 2006. With 6 houses. In 2020 there are 30 houses with more to be added next year. Soon after putting up our first six houses we were advised that they should be regularly monitored to increase the chances of successful nestings. So a group of volunteer monitors was recruited for the nesting season. They visit the houses once a week or more. They check to see if nests are started, then if eggs are laid, if they've hatched and the progress of the young birds. They look for hazards and threats to the young families. These can be damage to the bluebird box, incursions of parasites and wasp nests in the houses. Monitors also take note of conditions such as weather and food sources (insects). In one case, snakes were spotted near the houses so baffles were installed on the mounting poles. Monitoring has proven to be very rewarding. Looking after and learning about bluebirds is a doorway to learning about a much larger natural community. For example, bluebirds actually do not get along with other bluebird neighbors. When locating bluebird houses it is advisable to separate them by a hundred or so feet. Oddly, though, bluebirds and tree swallows do make good neighbors so the trick is to set up a pair of houses maybe 20 feet apart and then set up another pair separated by a hundred feet or so. Tree swallows, highly acrobatic, and like little fighter planes, actually help defend the pair of houses. A bluebird neighbor gains security from this arrangement. Monitors find not only bluebirds occupying the houses. Wrens, chickadees and (alas!) house

sparrow is a deadly threat to the bluebird family. They will kill the parents and young. Monitors try to remove house sparrow nests before they can gain a foothold in the area. Fortunately, house sparrows tend to frequent areas where there are buildings and a human presence. Boxes are sited as far away from civilization as possible. The bluebirds' tree swallow neighbors can also serve as a deterrent, swooping down on and harrassing the house sparrows.

In the past several years our bluebird monitors have been doing a superb job. They show amazing zeal for recording data and looking out after their charges. If you are interested in becoming a bluebird monitor please visit: www.sharonfoc.org/need-bluebird-help/ For more about bluebirds: www.sialis.org



Sharon Friends of Conservation
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Sharon Friends of Conservation was started in 1986 "to promote, encourage and foster the preservation, care and maintenance of all public lands, waters and wildlife in the Town of Sharon in order to further the recreation and enjoyment of the town's residents." It is a non-profit, 501(c) (3) organization.

We welcome all contributions this newsletter and we are eager for more, especially those of young people. Please write about a conservation issue of importance to you, We also welcome artwork, stories, and poetry.

SFOC Newsletter
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