

The Natural Observer

News from the Governor Dick Environmental Center



Winter 2020-2021



photo courtesy of Linda Rose

Stewardship Forest Activity

Governor Dick Park is a Stewardship Forest, committed to keeping its forestland healthy. As per our Forest Management Plan, work is in progress in the northern area of the Park adjoining route 117 close to trails 5 and 10. A total of 61 acres (excluding trail buffers of 50 feet on either side of the trails) is receiving the attention of the Park's forester, Barry Rose.

There are four objectives to this forestry work. These objectives are mandated by the State and are outlined in the Park's Forest Management Plan:

- Initiate the establishment of oak regeneration by removing competing trees, allowing the remaining trees to receive more sunlight and have more growing space to become vigorous and healthy trees, producing more acorns. Removing trees allows more sunlight to reach the forest floor and encourages oak seedling growth. Understory trees of black birch, red maple, sassafras, and black gum up to 12 inches in diameter will also be mowed or cut.
- Fence the area to protect regenerating seedlings from deer browsing.
- Plant conifers and shade tolerant tree and shrub species within the fence, creating a diversity of tree and shrub species.
- Snags and den trees will remain, and woody debris will create wildlife habitat.

It is difficult to imagine what the future, healthy forest will look like. The Maine Forest Service and the Maine State Implementation Committee of the Sustainable Forestry Initiative has created a helpful booklet entitled, "What Will My Woods Look Like? Before and After Timber Harvesting." You can download the booklet at:

https://www.maine.gov/dacf/mfs/projects/what_will_my_woods_look_like/index.html

Wildlife and bird species will benefit from this work. While a dense, mature forest is pleasing to the human eye, many mammals and birds prefer "second-growth," a forest which is growing again after a wildfire, wind storm, or timber harvest. There will be more opportunities for shelter, feeding, and nesting in the forest that is regenerating. There is much research completed on this and can be accessed online.





Until the forestry work is completed, please use caution when you are on trail 5. Watch for trucks and equipment.



From our Trails Correspondent

The Trails Task Force was created in June to support the Park’s trails with the goal of improving communication among the various user groups, identifying and fixing trouble spots (wet, eroded, hazardous) and developing naturally beautiful and sustainable trails for everyone to enjoy.

In our first 6 months we have completed:

1. **A user survey** – We wanted to learn more about who is using the Park. What are the favorite trails, favorite season, and favorite activities? We wanted to know how best to share information and updates about the Park. From the initial responses, the Environmental Center has increased the number of Facebook posts, we have added more trail signs, and the Park’s website has a “Trails Alerts” page. The seasonal newsletter continues sharing information on events, planned work and new faces.
2. **A priority list** - The Task Force has identified and prioritized trails and sections of trails in the Park that need some TLC.
3. **A workday** - October 10th was our first Task Force work day. With a group of **70** ambitious volunteers, we completed the following projects in a matter of **3** hours:

~ On Trail 4, the steep section was rerouted into one that twists and turns through the trees from the

Interpretative Trail to the old tower house foundation. This improved trail is one of the more popular routes today.


~ On Trail 15 the volunteers shifted the trail away from a few persistently wet areas. By moving the trail away from “mud pits” we can encourage travelers to stay on the established trail, preventing damage to the bordering foliage and widening of the tread way.

~ On Trail 13 we shifted the trail a few yards “uphill” of muddy areas to prevent damage and create a more appealing trail.

Thank you to all the volunteers from SAMBA and the Governor Dick volunteers for making these improvements possible.

We are planning for spring! The cold weather and snow keeps us from doing much trail work, but we are using this time to plan for improvements to Trail 9 in the spring of 2021, similar to the work done on trail 4. Known for its steep incline and rocky, unstable footing, we will adjust the existing trail to follow the natural elevation of the hill and add switchbacks to eliminate the current eroded and stony gully the trail has become.

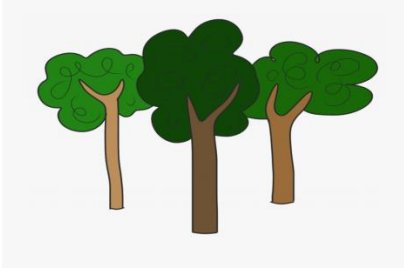
Naturalization with the addition of native plants in spring will improve and stabilize the work.

See you on the trails!  *Sarah Shirk*



is a great time for being in the forest and “spying” on the lives of its residents, especially if there is snow. You probably won’t see many creatures, but you’ll see their tracks and marks in the snow and you can “read” about their activities. There are almost unlimited resources online to learn about animal tracks and sign. Don’t stay inside when so much is happening outside! Happy tracking!





Laurie Crawford of the Lebanon Valley Conservancy donated 50 dogwood seedlings, 25 serviceberry seedlings, and 25 American hornbeam seedlings. These were planted by volunteers along trail 10 as well as in an area along trail 5. These seedlings are native to this part of Pennsylvania. Tubes were placed around them to protect them from browsing deer. Thank you, Laurie!

WE VOLUNTEERS!

SO much of what is accomplished in the Park is accomplished at the hands of our volunteers. This year we had several people adopt trails, hiking them regularly to pick up trash, clear branches off the paths and trim encroaching vegetation, pull the invasive garlic mustard, keep blazes painted, and report trees down.

Ken Stehman, the adopter of trail 15, logged a total of 72 $\frac{3}{4}$ hours – and the trail shows it!

Ken Martin, adopter of trails 13, 14, and a section of trail 5 logged 36 $\frac{1}{4}$ hours. His challenge was clearing back the vegetation when the weather had turned hot and humid. He got it done!

Altogether for 2020 volunteers contributed 509 $\frac{1}{2}$ hours of work, all done with smiles and fun. None, of them, however, do windows!! 😊

SAMBA volunteers logged 180 hours on Oct. 10 repairing some trails. There were about **70** willing folks to do the work, and with that many hands, the work was completed in less than **3** hours. Amazing! They have put in a lot of time walking through the problem areas, planning the best and the most environmentally sound solutions. If you see flags

along a trail, that is their mark as they consider how to improve a trail section.



to each and every one of you!



We are grateful to Hayden Smith of Mt. Gretna who has completed his Eagle Scout project at Governor Dick Park. The trail leading from the Environmental Center parking lot into the woods was becoming eroded. Hayden and his crew dug up that section of trail, approximately 40 feet (a lot of rock!!), and they placed geocell grids. The cells were then filled with stone. This will give support to the slope and hold up better under the heavy traffic this area experiences.

Thank you, Hayden, and congratulations!

We thank Don Newcomer for his input into this project.

And thanks are due to the donors from SAMBA who contributed financially to Hayden's project as well as donating the use of tools and first aid kit.



photo courtesy of Audrey Wells



Calendar of Events

Check our website for up-to-the-minute additions and changes.

(We will send out a mid-winter update that will list more programs and hikes. We plan the year's calendar in January.)

Please register for our events by calling the office and leaving your name and phone number clearly. You may also send us an e-mail.

January 1, 11:00 a.m. – First Day Hike. 6 miles. Group size is limited. Poor weather and icy footing will cancel this hike.

February 27, 5:45 p.m. – Cabin Fever Moonrise Hike. 2 miles. Group size is limited. Poor weather and icy footing will cancel this hike.

March 13, 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. – Boating Safety Course. Open to anyone age 10 and older who wishes to operate watercraft in PA. By donation. You must be registered because group size is limited.

A THANK YOU goes out to Jon Schach, a local resident (and husband of our very own Sally) for the donation of a crabapple tree. This tree was placed in front of the Environmental Center, replacing the tree that had to be taken down when the outdoor restrooms were installed.

Thank you, Jon!

Spring Souvenir

Create a clay memento of the wonders of the spring forest.

Join Artist-in-Residence Karen Beall and the Environmental Center's Audrey Wells on a journey in the woods in search of wondrous spring flowers and plants. After the hike, create a colorful nature keepsake using clay and glaze. The keepsake will be available for participants to take home after they have been kiln-fired by Beall in her studio.

Mark your calendar for May 8, 2021. Choose to come in the morning at 10:00 to 11:30 a.m. or in the afternoon at 1:00 to 2:30 p.m. This will be held rain or shine and there are limited reservations available. No experience is necessary to participate.

This program is free because of a generous grant from the Mt. Gretna Arts Council.



Contact us:

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