

THE FRIENDS OF GOODWIN FOREST

A BRIEF HISTORY AND SUMMARY OF ACCOMPLISHMENTS

2010-2024

The Friends of Goodwin Forest (FGF) began as an idea in the late fall of 2009 and became official in 2010. With the guidance of then Center Director Steve Broderick, the Connecticut Forest & Park Association agreed to be our fiscal sponsor so we could begin fundraising to improve, enhance, and make people aware of the Conservation Center.

The mission of FGF is to advocate for, enhance and support education, recreation and conservation activities at the historic James L. Goodwin State Forest and Conservation Education Center. Since its inception the Friends have averaged some 2,500 hours of volunteer time annually, for a total value (www.independentsector.org) of well over a million dollars. We have also raised, through membership dues, fundraising events, grants and donations more than \$340,000 to date.

FGF's many accomplishments over the past 15 years include:

The Center Physical Plant

FGF worked closely with the UConn Landscape Architecture Department to create a three-part redesign of the approaches and public entrance to the Center. The first two steps were accomplished and included creating a welcoming and less confusing entrance (surrounded by native plants), building a trailhead directly across the street that leads to all Goodwin State Forest trails, and adding a crosswalk for safety. FGF provided nearly all the skilled and manual labor for these improvements. We worked closely with DEEP and our legislative delegation to help move forward the badly needed removal

of lead painted wooden siding and other exterior repairs. We raised the funds and provided the skilled labor to replace the basement bulkhead which had rotted to the point of being unsafe. We assisted in the creation of a photographic and digital historical museum in the Center's main room, added numerous historical forestry books to the library, and established an outside Little Free Library.

For nearly a decade the Friends raised the funds and paid the salary of a seasonal maintainer so he/she could continue to provide maintenance services during the DEEP mandatory layoff period.

Education

For the past 12 years, the Friends raised funds and paid the salary of a seasonal naturalist so he/she could continue to provide educational programs during the DEEP mandatory layoff period.

During Covid lockdown, we offered educational opportunities online to the general public who were thrilled with the information and excited about visiting the Goodwin Forest.

We have provided numerous scholarships for low income participants in the Master Naturalist, Junior Conservation Ambassador and other programs. We have provided expense and stipend funds for over a dozen expert educators presenting on a variety of diverse topics. We have provided annual funds for bussing students from Willimantic schools and elsewhere who would otherwise not have been able to come to Goodwin for programs.

Master Naturalist Program

The Master Naturalist Program began in 2013 under the guidance of naturalist Juan Sanchez. It has grown in popularity and is recommended by DEEP to their seasonal hires. To date, more than

230 people have participated in this course. It began as a two-part program that has evolved into one year-long course. Master naturalist graduates fulfill their volunteer hours offering numerous programs across the state and have become involved in many citizen science projects.

Trails

Friends of Goodwin sought and received multiple grants from external organizations for trail improvement projects. Using these funds, the trails crews were able to purchase materials and equipment to help them maintain and upgrade trails, build numerous boardwalks, rebuild bridges, and add over four miles of new trails. On our own, the Friends built, to DEEP standards, some 17 informational kiosks at key trail junctures that include detailed maps, GPS location coordinates and other information. We designed, paid for and installed dozens of routered and plastic signs to improve navigation. Visitors frequently comment that the Goodwin Forest trails are perhaps the best maintained and easiest to navigate trails in the state. FGF volunteers built a kiosk on the Airline Trail that marks a connector trail, which we also built (using grant funds) between the AT and the Goodwin Trails System. The linking trail includes a 150 foot boardwalk through a wetland, with a 12 ft x 12 ft platform that can be used to gather groups for naturalist guided wetland walks.

Annual Trail Run

The 10K/30K Goodwin Forest Trail Run began in 2014 and now hosts close to 250 runners annually. The event was initiated to bring more awareness to the trail system at the Goodwin Forest and has attracted people literally from all over the world to participate. The run has netted over \$20,000 to date to further the Center's mission.

Gardens

In 2008 the 1.5 acre Native Plant Wildlife Gardens were abandoned and overrun with invasive plants. By 2012 they had been fully restored and expanded to include dozens of native plant combinations, each permanently labeled using an engraving machine the Friends purchased via a grant from The Last Green Valley. Volunteers created a new Children's Discovery Trail designed to increase young people's interest in the outdoors and hone their observation powers. We built some 300 square feet of raised propagation beds and held annual native plant sales which have raised thousands of dollars in funds for the Center. We received multiple grants from the Master Gardener Association and formed a partnership with the Native Plant Trust to educate the public about native wildflower gardens. We offered many garden themed programs, guided tours, trained over 100 master gardener interns, and provided outreach opportunities for multiple civic organizations and schools.

Online presence

We established and continue to manage a website and engage with multiple social media platforms, enabling the Friends to promote the Goodwin Center and provide the public with easily accessible information about the Center, forest activities, and other events.