

## Friends of Goodwin Forest 5 year plan

Over the past 13 years, the Friends of Goodwin Forest has created and enhanced the Goodwin Forest trail systems, restored the Richard Haley Native Plant and Wildlife Gardens, created a propagation program and native plant sale, established the Goodwin Master Naturalist program, created an online presence (website/social media), pushed for restoration of the Goodwin house, supplemented the part-time naturalist position to offer more educational opportunities in the winter months, and instituted an annual blue-blazed trail run.

In discussing our goals for the next five years, we've identified three major areas of concern:

### **Staffing -**

Currently, the Center has one part-time Program Director who is a contractor, not a DEEP employee. The needs and demands on her time far exceed what can be accomplished part time. In addition, there are three part-time seasonal positions: maintainer, naturalist and horticulturist. These hires are not paid commensurately with their expertise and as a result, we have consistent turnover and difficulty attracting quality candidates. Since our creation (13 years) the Center has had three directors, 5 naturalists, three horticulturists, and four maintainers. Lack of consistency makes it hard to establish program continuity and meaningful relationships with volunteers. This coupled with Covid issues have caused members events to disappear and the FGF newsletter to all but disappear.

The Goodwin Center is the only Division of State Parks and Public Outreach facility that lies within a State Forest. The rich forestry history at Goodwin (formerly James L. Goodwin's Pine Acres Farm) coupled with the presence of DEEP Division of Forestry staff onsite, creates a unique opportunity for the Center to be a statewide and even regional leader in forestry education. We foresee a day when the Goodwin Center will be for forestry much like what Sessions Woods has become for wildlife, with a true visitor's center, properly staffed, that brings alive the history of forest management and forest fire control in Connecticut while teaching a variety of audiences about carbon sequestration and other contemporary forestry issues.

### **ACTION ITEMS:**

1. TOP PRIORITY: To support CFPA in the ***"83 is not enough campaign,"*** designed to increase the OPM mandated Division staffing cap and to advocate for a full-time DEEP director at the Goodwin Conservation Center.
2. To work with both the Division of State Parks and Public Outreach and the Division of Forestry to create family forestry days, regular forestry program series with leading regional experts, and other programming that raises Goodwin's profile in this arena.
3. To work towards the day when a true, modern visitor center can be built and staffed at the Center.

## **Volunteers -**

With current minimal staffing, volunteers have been essential to the Center's success. We began our group in 2010 with about 17 volunteers. Our consistent, active volunteer base today is close to 50, with many additional groups that come to Goodwin for special workdays. Covid dampened growth but we are optimistic we can once again attract more people to join our efforts (It is never hard to get people to fall in love with the Goodwin Center and Forest). FGF volunteers are knowledgeable and self-motivated but not allowed to access to buildings without a DEEP employee on site. This is difficult when all the staff operates on part-time schedules.

Volunteer programs are only successful when staff actively participates in recruiting, supporting and affirming volunteers and their accomplishments.

### **ACTION ITEMS:**

1. To work with staff to return to a schedule of regular open houses and other events that recognize and thank existing volunteers, attract new ones and build a sense of community and camaraderie.
2. To help locate qualified seasonal staff who recognize the importance of and support the activities of volunteers.
3. With help from staff, to revive the regular FGF newsletter.
4. To evolve the native plant sale to an activity wholly operated by FGF, and to continue to grow this, the trail run and other FGF activities that generate needed resources for the Center.

## **Membership-**

The Friends of Goodwin Forest came about as a result of volunteers needing funds to purchase supplies for the gardens and a federal grant that had been funded but wasn't allowed to be executed due to how it would appear during the budget woes of 2009. The group has grown from the initial 17 to over 200. Again, Covid 19 slowed momentum. The past few years, membership has been stagnant. Since our foundation, the Conservation center has had three directors, at least 5 naturalists, three horticulturists, and four maintainers. Lack of consistency makes it hard to establish continuity and meaningful relationships with both members and volunteers. Members events have disappeared and the newsletter has all but disappeared.

Our focus here will be on staffing, social events and communication. We will also be offering hybrid (Zoom/in-person) meetings to appeal to a broader membership base.

**Other**

Aside from staffing, volunteers and members, the committee determined that the friends should offer more educational opportunities in the form of guest lecturers. We will be putting a series together to begin mid-2023. (This will also be reliant upon a DEEP staff member being present to open buildings and supervise.)

Identify financial resources to build an educational center near Pine Acres Pond that can demonstrate alternative energies/sustainability as well as provide space for lecture series, environmental education and research.

Construct a boathouse