

Merrimack Conservation Chronicle

Autumn 2026

Protecting natural spaces, enriching our community.

Welcome back to the Conservation Chronicle, Merrimack's Conservation Commission quarterly newsletter!

Autumn has a way of reminding us that *change* is always underway. The kids are back in school, cooler air is settling in, leaves are falling, and we're heading into the busy holiday season. It felt fitting to make "change" the quiet thread running through this issue. Change can be a challenge, a shift in routine, in thinking, in how we understand something familiar. But it can also be quietly rewarding, opening our eyes to something we hadn't noticed before. That's true for the seasons, for our land, and it's true for our forests too.

We hope this newsletter finds you well, and we're grateful, as always, to have you along with us this season.

Embrace the Mess



As it cools down, it's tempting to give your yard an aggressive tidy-up before winter. But that instinct can sometimes do more harm than good. Cutting back perennials and clearing garden debris dismantles overwintering sites for native bees, fireflies, and butterflies, while removing seed heads strips away a

crucial winter food source for local birds. Fallen leaves and plant debris act as a natural blanket, keeping soil from drying out and protecting the beneficial microbes living underneath. The area beneath trees is especially important: known as a "soft landing," it's where moths and caterpillars overwinter in the leaf litter, making next year's pollinators possible.

The good news? Embracing the mess is easier, and cheaper, than a full cleanup. Leaves left on the lawn can smother grass, but native garden beds welcome them, so consider raking fallen leaves off the lawn and into your beds instead of bagging them. Left in place, that organic matter breaks down naturally into mulch, suppressing weeds and feeding the soil as it decomposes, leaving free, natural mulch and one less chore on your fall to-do list. So this year, perhaps leave the stems standing and the leaves where they land. Your local bees, birds, and butterflies will thank you come spring.



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What's Happening



Sklar Riverfront Park trail workdays are coming on the following dates for trail cleanup from 1:00-3:00. If you would like to volunteer, please see the Town of Merrimack's [Volunteer Agreement](#) and sign up at the Community Development.

- 10/11
- 11/8

Also, be sure to check out the recently cleared trails at Sklar, ready for fall hikes!

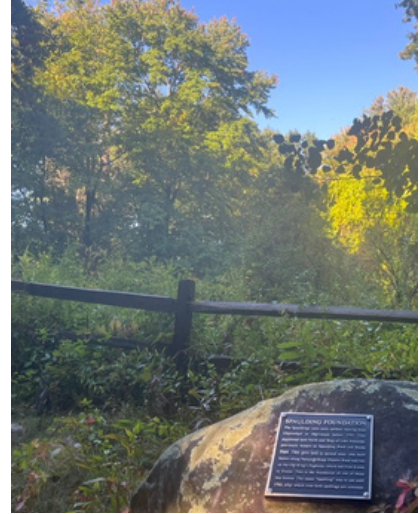


A new bridge on the Blodgett Bridge Trail in Horse Hill Nature Preserve was built on September 12. Mountain biker and Troop 22 Scout, James Riley of Amherst, replaced the old bridge for his Eagle project. Thanks James, it looks great! Grab your hiking shoes and go check it out for yourselves.

The Spaulding Foundation at Horse Hill Nature Preserve

Deep into Horse Hill Nature Preserve, there lies a stone structure slowly being overtaken by nature. It looks like it doesn't belong in the middle of the woods, and yet it is older than most of the trees surrounding it. If stones won't stand out to you, the sunshine will. Because while trees surround the structure, they are not in the structure. Instead, the sun breaks through this patch of forest and allows various shrubs, flowers, and climbers to grow where they could not otherwise.

This structure is called the Spaulding Foundation, and you can find it on the Loop Trail in the southeastern portion of Horse Hill Nature Preserve. The Spaulding family (spelt "Spalding" at the time) came to North America (Virginia, specifically) in 1619 and settled in Merrimack in the mid-1700s. As their family grew, they built several homes throughout Merrimack, many of which are (or were) built on Peaslee Road.



But this article is not about the history of the Spaulding Foundation; instead, it is about the ecology. The stone foundation prevents many trees from growing on the property, but it is obviously not maintained as a trail would be. This gives this patch of land a unique look compared to its surroundings.

The lack of canopy allows the sun to shine down nearly uninterrupted in the late morning, rewarding hikers with a beautiful, albeit brief, view of glowing green leaves and vines. Some of these greens come from invasive plants, including an infestation of multiflora rose. But before you get any ideas about removing these invasives as a good deed, remember that some plants on this property are direct descendants of those planted by the Spaulding family. Personally, I would love to go in there and remove the invasives, but I'm too nervous about stomping on and accidentally removing some of those scion plants. Some of those flowers' families have been in Merrimack longer than your family. To them, you're as much an invasive as that multiflora rose in the corner.



Conservation Updates: Silviculture in Action

If you've walked or biked through the recently harvested section of Field's Farm, you may have noticed disturbed soil, piles of brush, and a few standing dead and mature trees left untouched and wondered why. This work is a form of silviculture, the practice of managing forests to improve their long-term health rather than simply removing timber. The disturbed ground gives pine seeds the bare soil contact they need to germinate this spring, while the brush left behind shields the soil from drying out, buffers temperature swings, and provides shelter for small wildlife. Trees that appear "skipped" weren't overlooked: standing dead snags were deliberately retained for cavity-nesting birds and bats, and mature mast trees like oak and beech were kept in place to keep producing acorns and nuts for deer, turkey, and other wildlife for years to come. This kind of active management is important because much of New Hampshire's forest today is all roughly 80 to 100 years old, having grown back after historic farmland was widely abandoned. That uniformity actually limits wildlife diversity, since young, regenerating forest supports a wider range of species than any other forest age class. Selective harvests like this one create the age diversity that natural disturbances (fire, wind, insects) once provided on their own. We know changes to a well-loved property can be distressing, but we want to be clear: every part of this work, from the disturbed soil to the brush piles to the trees left standing, was done with the long-term health of this forest in mind.