

# Highstead

To inspire curiosity and build knowledge  
about plants and wooded landscapes  
in order to enhance life,  
preserve nature and  
advance sound stewardship practices.



## To the Members and Friends of Highstead

In past newsletters we've discussed the Wildlands and Woodlands vision. This bold idea seeks to conserve woodlands that provide wood products, wildlands in which nature operates without human intervention, farmlands that yield healthy food, and wisely developed areas that accommodate people in efficient and sustainable ways.

But how does such a vision play out on the ground and across the landscape? What are well managed woods, fields, gardens, and lawns? How do these fit together with wilder spaces, and more developed ones? And what other benefits do these different approaches to conservation stewardship provide such as clean air and water, climate change mitigation, and diverse habitats for species of plants, insects, birds, and mammals?

At Highstead we are striving to put this vision into practice on our own lands and in those surrounding Redding. Here we manage our woods, fields, and lawns and study the changes in our land that our actions and nature bring. We reach out to neighboring landowners to share mutual concerns, insights, and strategies concerning the larger landscape. And we share what we do and learn with visitors, friends, community leaders, and others.

Our plans, insights, and future activities begin in this newsletter and we hope to include you.

**David Foster** is Director  
of the Harvard Forest at  
Harvard University and  
President of the Board of  
Highstead Foundation.





# Landscaping to Improve Land

*Making choices that promote a vibrant environment*

“Incorporating native plants through a science-based approach to gardening can enhance not only the beauty of a backyard, but improve the overall ecological function as well.”

*Geordie Elkins,  
Highstead Operations Director*

At Highstead, we work to manage the landscape in a way that enhances beauty, improves plant and animal habitat, and allows for valuable learning experiences. Through a series of three talks over the course of the year at Highstead, landowners have the opportunity to learn about ecology-based land management from experts in a variety of fields.

By giving landowners the tools to make informed choices about their land, we can help advance sound stewardship and encourage a greater connection between people and the land.

## Gardening for the Greater Good

This spring Highstead hosted the first of the three events focused on ecologically informed land management.

Members, friends, and neighbors attended a talk by Larry Weaner titled, “Natural Landscapes: Meadows, Woods, and Water,” on May 9. Weaner presented a series of case studies on natural gardens that reduce yard maintenance, create native habitat, and enhance the appearance of residential properties. His emphasis on integrating native plant compositions and ecological processes into backyard management offered practical solutions that can be implemented in a variety of residential settings.



## Other Events

### Smart Lawns: Planting sustainable turf that requires less mowing, water, and fertilizer

Thomas Christopher spoke at Highstead Saturday, June 13, about alternative grass species that are less resource intensive than typical grass seed mixes.



### Gardens Filled with Life: Designing with northeastern flora


Saturday, October 10  
10:00 a.m.  
Carolyn Summers will speak about current research that shows the many ways native plants support a vibrant, biodiverse landscape.



## Tips for Your Backyard

Small changes to your backyard maintenance routine can improve the sustainability and beauty of your land. Here are some easy tips to get started:


### Plant native:

 Plants that occur naturally in your area typically provide better habitat than exotic decorative plants.


**Did you know:** A native aster plant supports 105 species of native insects, while an exotic daylily does not support any?

*(Source: Doug Tallamy, University of Delaware)*

### Reduce turf:

 Replacing part of your turf lawn with native meadow plants or other low-maintenance ground cover reduces mowing frequency, and water and fertilizer use.

### Know your landscaper:

 Choose lawn care professionals that are genuinely knowledgeable about naturalistic planting with minimal use of toxic chemicals.



In our increasingly fragmented landscape, it is more important than ever to keep habitat in mind when making land use choices.

Planning for Habitat on a Larger Scale

The Hudson to Housatonic (H2H) Conservation Initiative, led by Highstead and three other partner organizations, shows the region’s residents whose backyards and other lands are close to tributaries and are of high value in terms of biodiversity how to conserve and steward these resources. By focusing on land that is likely to provide the best plant and animal habitat in a world shaped by climate change, H2H is protecting land today that will be critical tomorrow.



“H2H is bringing together a diverse group of conservation organizations across Connecticut and New York,” said Bill Labich, Highstead Regional Conservationist. “ Our partner groups were recently trained at three workshops and are now inviting landowners in their areas to learn how they can protect our drinking water and natural habitat.”

Partner organizations across the H2H focus area will be holding landowner outreach events over the summer to connect with landowners, learn about their concerns, and provide resources on stewardship and land management.

OSI Climate Resiliency Grant for RCPs

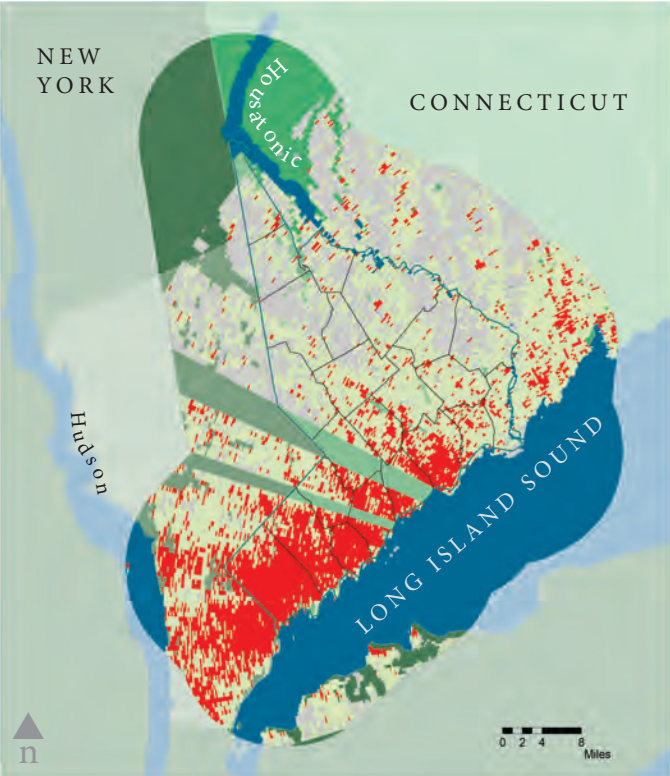
A new grant designed to help Regional Conservation Partnerships (RCPs) in New England with conservation planning was launched this spring. Supported by the Open Space Institute Land Trust’s Resilient Landscapes Initiative, the grant will help RCPs create or update a conservation priorities map focused on climate resiliency. The grant includes building mapping capabilities, leadership training, and project oversight. By identifying and targeting biodiverse focus areas, RCPs will gain a larger regional vision to protect plant and animal habitat for the future.

Connected Corridors for Birds

Mary Buchanan, Highstead Conservation Intern, recently conducted a geographical analysis using mapping technology to study bird habitat in Fairfield County. The study focused on stopover sites for migratory birds, a type of seasonal habitat that is often overlooked.

Migratory birds passing through our areas need shelter and food to rest and refuel on their journey. Results from the study showed that landowners along the coast, even those in developed areas, can play a major role as stopover site stewards. Landowners can improve the quality of their habitat for migratory birds by reducing pesticide use and planting native species with nutrient-rich fruits.

*This map shows the high density of migratory bird stopover sites along the coast of Connecticut and New York.*



High Density Medium Density Low Density

*Original migratory bird data from the datasets accompanying the 2012 Final Report - Radar Analysis of Fall Bird Migration in the Northeastern U.S. by Jeffrey J. Buler and Deanna K. Dawson, which was a project of the University of Delaware and the USGS. Boundary data from CT DEEP. Map by Mary Buchanan, Conservation Intern at Highstead, January 2015.*

*bobolink photo: Mark Johnson*

**i** Learn more: For more information about planting for bird habitat, see *The Audubon Society Guide to Attracting Birds: Creating Natural Habitats for Properties Large and Small* by Stephen W. Kress.

# Planning for Native Habitat

At Highstead we place a strong emphasis on management choices that increase habitat for species of conservation concern, like bobolinks, and increase the overall diversity of our landscape. Our choices are informed by research conducted by Highstead staff, as well as research from outside organizations.



# Living Laboratory

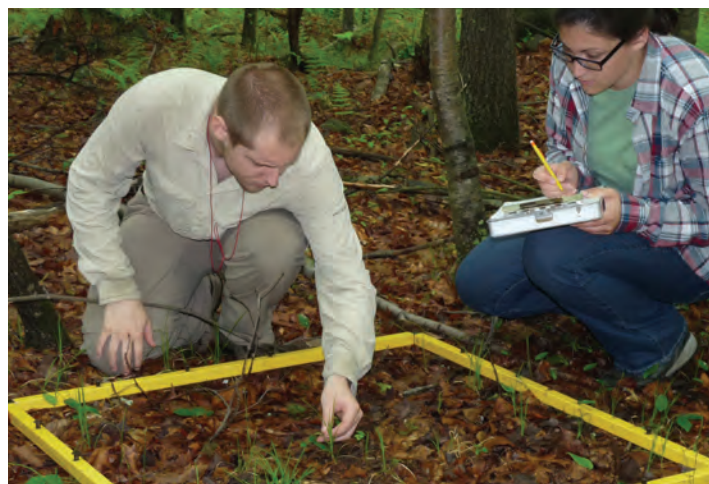
*Finding the right management choices through experimentation*

Highstead's stewardship and management of the landscape is guided by science. Through careful observation, monitoring, and experimentation, we strive to make choices that enhance the natural ecosystem and improve plant and animal habitat.

Highstead staff and interns conduct both long-and short-term research to help us better evaluate, adapt, and improve our stewardship of the land.

## Long-Term Ecological Research

This summer Ed Faison, Highstead Ecologist, will begin resampling Highstead's permanent monitoring plots, which have been monitored for 11 years. Ecology interns Tierney Bocsi, a 2015 graduate of the University of Massachusetts, and Zachary Mann, a 2015 graduate of Unity College in Maine, will help with the sampling.



## What is Long-Term Ecological Research?

Long-term ecological research (LTER) is the systematic, repeated measurement of plants, animals, and other ecological elements in the same location over at least a 10-year span. Initial measurements are compared with subsequent measurements in order to document ecological change.

*Learn more:*

**i** *Want to conduct long-term research on your land? Check out the Wildlands and Woodlands Stewardship Science Manual for Long-Term Forest Monitoring at [wildlandsandwoodlands.org/science-initiatives/stewardship-science](http://wildlandsandwoodlands.org/science-initiatives/stewardship-science).*

“Long-term ecological research is necessary to learn how an ecosystem changes over time,” said Faison. “This kind of detailed data will help us better understand and anticipate the changes our landscape could experience in the future.”

*Ed Faison  
Highstead Ecologist*

## Highstead Launches Invasive Plant Management Internship

As part of our ongoing efforts to understand the rapid changes occurring in our plant communities and to spread knowledge about tested ways to manage exotic species invasions, Highstead has expanded its internship program to include an invasive plant management position.

Christina Puerto, a graduate of Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute and The Conway School of Landscape Design, will spend the summer mapping the occurrence of Japanese Stiltgrass on the Highstead property and analyzing data from our Phragmites removal project.





**Highstead**

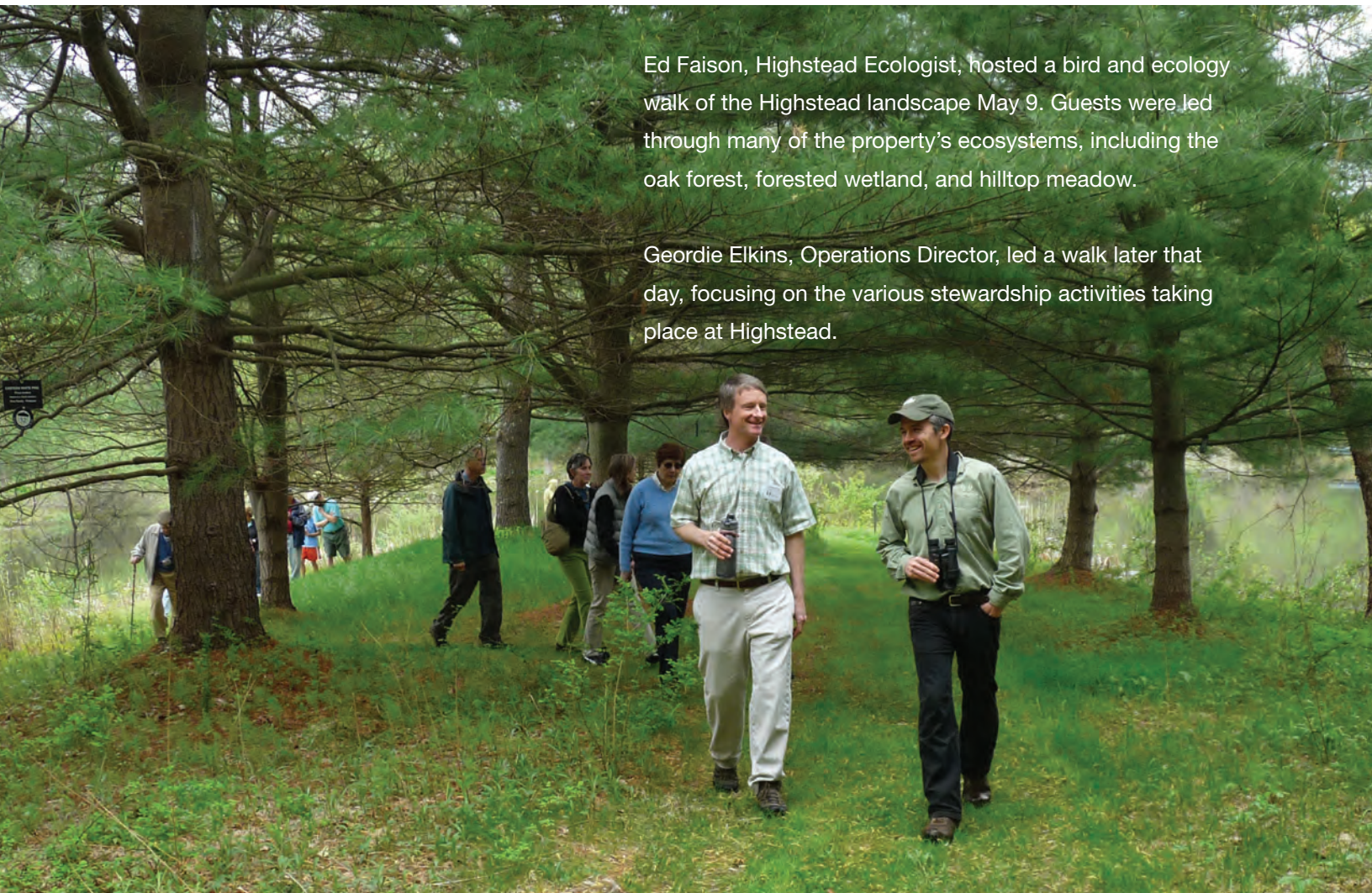
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# Exploring Ecology and Stewardship at Highstead

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Ed Faison, Highstead Ecologist, hosted a bird and ecology walk of the Highstead landscape May 9. Guests were led through many of the property's ecosystems, including the oak forest, forested wetland, and hilltop meadow.

Geordie Elkins, Operations Director, led a walk later that day, focusing on the various stewardship activities taking place at Highstead.