HMCA Activities Update

by Diana Todd

for sharing at the November 2020 meeting of the HPC

A summary of what HMCA has been doing in the interval since the last report in early September 2020.

* Research
  + Bird Banding: Eric Slayton continued the bird-banding project which he started in spring 2020. He invited volunteers to assist him with the project, which went on daily for most of September and October. Many people participated.
  + Pieter Van Loon reported that no Emerald Ash Borers were found in the trap that had been deployed in the conservation area. The ash that had been intentionally stressed to act as a lure also did not show any evidence that the pest has arrived here yet. Pieter will be re-checking the distressed tree next year.
  + Vernal Pool monitoring: David Erickson of Halifax will be monitoring a small vernal pool near White’s Loop as part of a multi-year state-wide volunteer monitoring program being coordinated by the Vermont Center for Ecostudies. He has installed a thermometer along with a small sign explaining the project.
  + Jesslyn Mullett, a Junior High teacher at Marlboro Elementary School, has been making plans to start a multi-year research project with her science class. She has identified three 10m x 10m study plots near the east leg of White’s Loop, and selected several trees for long-term monitoring to estimate carbon sequestration. HMCA Directors assisted her in understanding the Facility Use Agreement application process. She submitted the application to the Town Clerk in mid-October.
  + New Hampshire Audubon determined that Hogback would be an ideal location for a MOTUS antenna, part of a New England-wide network of 50 antennas that will be used to study bird migration. HMCA Directors attended an online briefing about the project, and helped NH Audubon get in touch with representatives from Molly Stark State Park, National Grid, and the Town of Marlboro. The State will not allow the group to mount the antenna on the fire tower. Mounting the antenna on the National Grid antenna would be too expensive; a professional antenna climber would be needed to install and maintain it. Mary Sargent, Zoning Administrator for the town of Marlboro, reported that antennas are not permitted in the Conservation Priority District, which encompasses the Hogback Mountain Conservation Area. However, antennas are permitted in the Commercial District. NH Audubon contacted Ed Metcalfe and Mike Clough, and they are working together to have the antenna mounted on the Distillery building. The Museum will be the host of the antenna.
* Invasives
  + A small group of HMCA Directors checked three sites in the southern portion of the conservation area where tree-sized invasive buckthorns had been removed in previous years. Small seedlings were found at all three locations, and a few mid-size plants were found at one location. All were uprooted. It will be important to continue to monitor these sites to prevent re-infestation from the seed bank that built up in the soil over the years. They also checked a site along Route 9 where a bittersweet vine had been found and cut down this summer.
  + HMCA has formed an ad hoc Invasives management committee to develop a plan for dealing with invasives on Hogback. They are meeting monthly, and intend to present a proposal at the April HMCA Board meeting.
* Trails
  + A large blowdown blocking the east leg of White’s Loop was cleared.
  + A section of the Cross Mountain Trail was rerouted after an enormous oak was uprooted and came down directly over the trail, taking surrounding trees with it.
  + Evidence was found that someone had created a campfire just off White’s Loop. The site was cleaned so that it wouldn’t inspire copy-cats.
  + Graffiti was discovered on the lift operator’s shack on the Tower Trail. We have plans to paint it over, when the weather cooperates.
  + Trails seem to be getting a lot of use, but there are few signs of abuse or overuse.