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Hockanum River Committee members work for common goal

BY BARBARA ARMENTANO ReminderNews

Now that summer has arrived, the Hockanum River Linear Park Committee is out trimming new growth, cleaning debris from the trails, pulling waste and trash out of the river and containing invasive weeds.



The Hockanum River Linear Park Committee was saddened by the death of botanist Glenn Cornish in May.

About 20 volunteers work on the trails along the river in Manchester three mornings a week all year round, weather permitting, but summer time is the most challenging. Committee members range from mid-50 s to 93 years old. Most of them are retired, and all are interested in preserving the natural beauty of wildlife.

Doug Smith, chairman of the Hockanum River Linear Park Committee, became involved with the Chamber of Commerce Beautification Committee and projects protecting waterways in the 1960s.

Frank Belknap, Hockanum Committee vice chairman and member of the Conservation Commission, does a great deal of trail mowing in the growing season and clears fallen trees in the winter to prevent them from blocking the river. He also does a lot of cutting of knotweed along the trails in summer.

The committee was saddened when Glenn Cornish, the group's experienced botanist, died unexpectedly in May. Recently , he was featured in a ReminderNews article recommending spring plantings of berry bushes for bird and wildlife food and different native bushes to diversify the habitat for color of leaves and fruit. There will be a memorial tree planting on his birthday for family, committee and friends.

Following are some members who work together in the weekly activities:

Ninety-three-year-old John Huntoon is the oldest member of the trails group. He has been hiking since he was a teenager and continued hiking later with his wife, kids and grandkids. Huntoon "blazes" trails with paint marks on trees and posts to help hikers from getting lost.

Jim Hall created and manages the HRLPC Web site (www.hockanumriverwa.org) as well as the Web site of another volunteer organization, Friends of the Office of State Archaeology, Inc. (www.fosa-ct.org). Hall said he gets "particular joy out of cutting down invasive weeds and finds it distressing how much there are." "It's also surprising that there is so much trash along the trails that has to be collected and disposed of," he said.

Member Dick Don leads guided hikes for the East of the River division of the Appalachian Mountain Club and also helps to keep the Hockanum trails free of litter and wild vines.

Ed Wait is a master wood craftsman. He enjoys hiking and building wood duck boxes along the river. He and his wife are among the earliest members of the HRLPC.

Jeff Feldmann of West Hartford enjoys working for the Hockanum River Watershed Association because he wants to show others why this river is important to all the towns that share it. He is a photographer, and his wildlife and scenic landscapes photos are posted on the Web site.

Doug MacGillvary met Smith on one of the river trails and was recruited to join the crew. It was a perfect fit because he loved the outdoors and felt as though he was giving something back. Jim Gregory joined the HRLPC in 1995. He became interested in working with the committee especially building wooden walks.

After earning his engineering degree from Auburn, Roger Morgan came east to work in experimental engineering at Pratt & Whitney. He worked on trails before his retirement and continued working on building bridges, cutting invasives, planting trees, bushes and flowers to make the trails a nice experience for all to enjoy.

Jim Powell lives in East Hartford, enjoys fly fishing and bird watching. He is a master wood duck box maker and does expert wood work on bridges along trails.

Brian Pillion joined the HRLPC in May 2008 after helping with the Bigelow Brook cleanup project as part of Earth Day. He said, "We have a great group to work with because they all care about making this world a better place to live in."