



Flooding due to clogged runnel

## Update on Salt Marsh MITIGATION

In 2015 the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and other conservation partners, received Hurricane Sandy Disaster Relief funds to increase the resilience of salt marshes around the state to sea level rise. As with most changes related to “climate change”, the rate of change is occurring faster than the natural systems can adapt. In this case, sea level rise is outpacing the ecological processes that maintain a healthy, functioning salt marsh habitat. One way salt marshes persist over time is by migrating to higher ground as sea levels rise. However, in the Narrow River Watershed, salt marsh migration is severely limited due to development and the steep topography along the upland marsh edge. On the other hand, this is why the Narrow River Land Trust’s Garrison House Acres Preserve at Middlebridge is considered a valuable conservation area as its gentle slopes provide a place where the salt marsh may retreat.

Salt marshes also build their elevation through the slow process of accretion. Sediment that is suspended in tidal waters gets trapped on the marsh by the salt marsh vegetation, and as the vegetation breaks down, it in turn gets

incorporated in the peat layer of the marsh. Unfortunately, in the Narrow River and across the state, sea level is rising faster than the salt marshes can maintain elevation. The result is a vegetative die off due to waterlogging, as the marshes experience frequent flooding and an inability of the water to drain properly. In the salt marshes of the Narrow River, one can see the bare pannes and pools of dead vegetation that have been caused by sea level rise.

There are two climate change adaptation strategies that have been employed to improve marsh health and increase their resilience to sea level rise: a) digging a system of runnels in the marsh to drain off impounded water, and b) raise the elevation of the marsh by the deposition of a thin layer of sediment. In 2015 in the Narrow River, we saw the USFWS deploy the latter method on the marshes south of Middlebridge and at Sedge Island. On the Narrow River Land Trust properties, a team under the supervision of Wenley Ferguson of Save the Bay, used the runnel strategy to drain the pooled water in the marshes. Runnels are about 6” in depth and were dug by hand with shovels.

In the beginning of the work on the NRLT properties, the runnels seemed to be helping. Within a few weeks after draining the water, glasswort began colonizing the bare ground. This pioneer species sends oxygen into the soil through their roots which stabilizes the environment and helps other plants species get established over time. More recently, however, in the last two years, we’ve noticed more pans of dead vegetation and an increase in size of some of the pools. We asked Wenley to come back this summer to take a look and recommend a course of action. While we walked through the marshes, we could see that some of the runnels were still functioning. However, it was also clear that many of the pools were not draining properly. A closer examination showed that many of the runnels were still in place but had become clogged with sediment. The recommended action was to get out there with some shovels and unclog the runnels.

However, even though the NRLT was ready to go, as any other coastal property owner, we were not allowed to proceed without approval and permitting by the RI Coastal Management Council (CRMC). Thankfully under Wenley’s direction, the original group of partners from the 2015 Sandy Relief Fund were already proceeding with a new application with CRMC to follow up on the 2015 work which automatically included the NRLT. So, now we are ready to go, but waiting for the permits in order to proceed. Stay tuned for a call to put on some high boots and gaiters for a wet and muddy workday on the marsh. Let us know if you’d like to volunteer. Write to us at [Office@narrowriverlandtrust.org](mailto:Office@narrowriverlandtrust.org)

*We are extremely grateful for our partners in this endeavor, especially our colleagues at Save the Bay and USFWS.*



Runnel





High fives to the Volunteers!! Russ Godin, Gloria Gaito, Mathew Giso, Michael Greco, and Marcia Izzi.

## Narrow River Clean-Up Day

Narrow River Preservation Association scheduled its annual Narrow River Clean-Up day on September 27th. An earlier inspection of the Narrow River Land Trust salt marsh properties revealed two piles of dock debris and trash washed up and trapped in the salt marsh. Additionally, a large section of dock was also washed up on a US Fish and Wildlife parcel. With the aid of maps and GPS locator pins, the information was passed to NRPA who assigned a group of five volunteers to the task of removing these items on the designated Clean-Up Day.

The intrepid group met at the boat launch between Mitchell Avenue and Pollack Avenue armed with several kayaks, a paddle board and motorboat. The group organized into a “land” and “water” team as the section of dock on the USFWS parcel was only accessible by water. The day was successful as the group was able to remove all of the abandoned docks and associated debris from all three locations. The debris consisted of Styrofoam, rotting wood, rope and other decaying materials. The debris on the NRLT properties was carried out while the Fish and Wildlife debris was floated across river for disposal. Once the debris was moved to a clearly marked and accessible locations, NRPA arranged for the pickup and disposal of the refuse.

## Charitable Donations in 2020

The Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act passed earlier this year introduced a new deduction of up to \$300 per taxpayer (\$600 for those filing jointly) in annual charitable contributions, available to those who take the standard deduction, i.e., those taxpayers who don't itemize their deductions. This is an above the line adjustment to income that reduces taxable income, but the donation must be made by year's end, December 31, 2020.

The CARES Act also allows those who itemize their deductions to deduct much greater amounts of their contributions. Contributions can include appreciated non-cash assets, such as stocks, ETFs and mutual funds. Up to 100% of 2020 adjustable gross income on itemized 2020 tax returns can be deducted. Please check with your financial manager or tax professional if you are interested in donating to NRLT using the itemized deduction.

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Our new Trailhead sign

## “Summer Workday Notes”

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, Rhode Islanders took advantage of South County's conservation properties to get outside and enjoy socially distanced walking and relaxation. Some of our members enjoyed their outdoor time by joining us on Workdays where we focused on improving our trails, removing invasive species, and ensuring NRLT properties with trails could be enjoyed by local residents.

**SATURDAY JUNE 13TH** The Walmsley Woods Preserve is characterized by a mature forest of maple and oak trees. As many forested areas in the watershed, a large number of bittersweet vines have taken up residence. Volunteers cut nearly 100 bittersweet vines and removed over 200 lbs. of illegally dumped refuse.

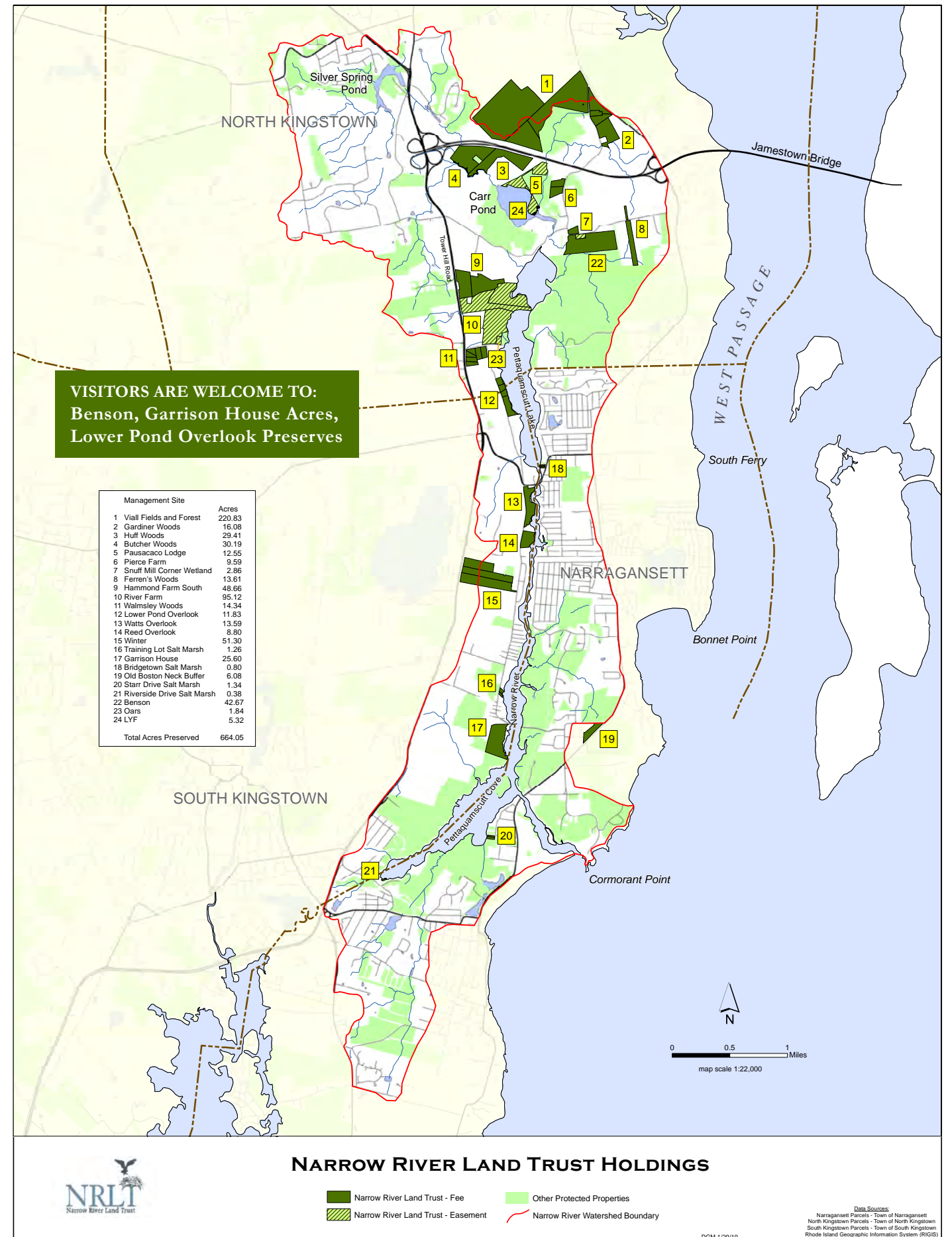
**SATURDAY JULY 11TH** The Lower Pond Overlook Preserve is split between North and South Kingstown. This property is characterized by a steep hill that is draped in a mature forest of beech, oak and locust. Volunteers pulled Japanese Knotweed along Walmsley Lane. Bittersweet vines and briars were also cut and removed.

**SATURDAY AUGUST 8TH** The Benson Preserve a forested property in North Kingstown abuts the Nature Conservancy's King Preserve and is traversed by a number of well-trafficked trails. We widened the trails where Bull Briar had spread under the trees killed by gypsy moth. Volunteers removed knotweed along Snuff Mill Road and Japanese Barberry from the forest floor.

**SUNDAY SEPTEMBER 27TH** Watts & Reed Overlook Preserves are NRLT-owned salt marshes off Middlebridge Road in South Kingstown. NRPA and NRLT volunteers worked in tandem to clean up stranded pieces of dock and other debris on these two properties as well as an USFWS salt marsh.

Workdays in 2021 will be on the second Saturdays of the month from 9am to 12. Save the dates Saturday May 8 \*Saturday June 12 \*Saturday July 10 \*Saturday August 14th \*Saturday September 11th

*A big thank you to our volunteers who threw themselves into the work with heart and hands.*





# Thank Goodness for Conservation Land in 2020

*Thank you for your support*



Garrison House Acres Preserve



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