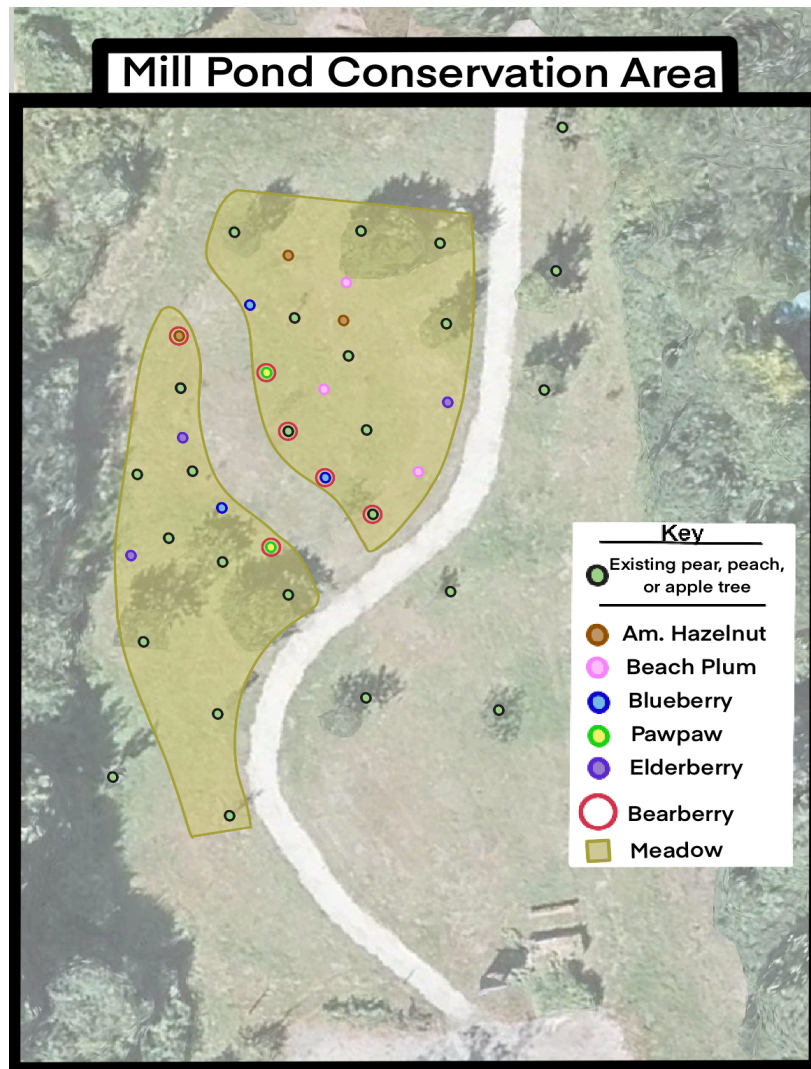


Summer Land Steward Intern Project – Mill Pond: Creating a Local Food Forest



During my tenure as a Land Steward Intern with Westport Land Conservation Trust, I was tasked with completing a project of my own design. After discussion with Ross Moran, we decided that creating a *native food forest* at the Mill Pond property would be a meaningful use of land, time, and resources. In this project, I applied many of the skills I learned at WLCT and through my work in conservation. The project involved tailoring maintenance of the site to encourage a flowering meadow, acquiring and installing native forageable plants, and performing weekly maintenance of both the plantings and the site. The food forest now provides lasting benefits to both the ecology of the land and the Westport community.

Ecology

The plants selected were American hazelnut (*Corylus americana*), highbush blueberry (*Vaccinium corymbosum*), bearberry (*Arctostaphylos sp.*), beach plum (*Prunus maritima*), pawpaw (*Asimina triloba*), and elderberry (*Sambucus sp.*). These species were chosen for their native range in Massachusetts, their suitability to the landscape, and their value as fruit- and nut-producing plants. Plantings were arranged for aesthetic appeal, with design input from Nate McCullin. Bearberry was placed along the bases of the other species, where it will sprawl as it matures.

To simplify land management and increase ecological diversity, the surrounding area was allowed to grow naturally into a meadow. Collectively, these plants provide nectar, pollen, fruits, and nuts that support native wildlife. Their perennial root systems improve soil stability and health through long-term relationships with microbial and fungal communities. The habitat also mimics natural succession, with trees and shrubs filling gaps in a flowering meadow along the forest edge. Over time, the increased plant diversity is expected to attract more insects and wildlife, strengthening the site's overall biodiversity.

Community

This locally accessible native food forest also benefits the Westport community. The site already contained a handicap-accessible planting bed where community members are welcome to plant and harvest at their leisure. The addition of these native species expands access to diverse, seasonal produce while creating opportunities to engage with the landscape and learn about Massachusetts' native edible plants. Many of these species also carry cultural significance, offering another avenue for community education and connection.

As a cost-effective, low-maintenance green space, the food forest fosters community ties and provides an enduring place where people can gather, learn, and create memories for years to come.

Afterword

I would like to thank Nate McCullin for his oversight this summer. His passion for the landscape and its mosaic of plants was a constant source of inspiration, and his emphasis on safe field practices gave me the opportunity to confidently learn new tools while contributing meaningfully to WLCT's public spaces.

I also thank Ross Moran for bringing me onto the WLCT team in the town I've grown up in and loved all my life. His insights into the behind-the-scenes work of land use and management in Westport were enlightening.

Thank you as well to Charlotte Greeson, Aaron Teixeira, and Pam Turick for supporting my professional development throughout the season.

And of course, thank you to the Tuesday Trail Team for the hard work, care, and skill they contributed each week to make WLCT's - and Westport's - lands more beautiful and accessible to all.

Thank you!