

# The Power of Collaboration: Building Relationships and Fostering Public Support For Science



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## Elements of Successful Relationships

### —Shared Passion—

- Finding common ground
- Collaborating to solve a mutual problem

### —Open Communication—

- Listening to questions and stories
- Sharing knowledge and skills
- Listening to and understanding concerns

### —Trust—

- Putting a face to a name or title
- Working as a team to accomplish shared goals
- Building a foundation for continued collaboration



Volunteers from Orvis use a Weed Wrench to remove invasive privet



Volunteers from Grace Congregational Church pose after a successful work day

### *The Department of Forests, Parks & Recreation has...*

- Worked with **hundreds** of volunteers on non-native invasive plant (NNIP) projects
- Trained citizen scientists to use iNaturalist to map NNIPs
- Protected **thousands** of acres of critical habitat on state land
- Educated current and future land stewards

None of this would be possible without building strong relationships and fostering public support through **shared passion, open communication, and trust.**

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## Establishing an Invasive Plant Program

### —Shared Passion—

- FPR and private landowners are struggling with the same forest health issue: NNIP
- Collaborative efforts towards finding workable solutions

### —Open Communication—

Since 2014, FPR has had dedicated staff, Invasive Plant Coordinator and Strike Team, who:

- provide outreach to communities, the Agency of Natural Resources, and other State Agencies
- **“Spread the word, not the plant”**
- are developing a model that other regions and groups can use for outreach, education, and management

### —Trust—

- Gaining public support for the program and the work staff do on and off state land
- Leading by example— staff actively involved in management and outreach



Strike Team providing outreach to State Foresters



Invasive Plant Coordinator pulling water chestnut with volunteers

## Case Study—Shrewsbury Conservation Commission (SCC)

The SCC is a group of passionate community members that have become involved in non-native invasive plant (NNIP) management at Coolidge State Forest over the past four years (2014-2017)

### —Shared Passion—

- FPR and the SCC want to keep Coolidge State Forest a healthy ecosystem
- FPR has organized NNIP volunteer work days focusing on projects and species that the SCC is interested in such as a non-herbicide treatment for phragmites



SCC volunteers experiment with FPR staff on different ways to remove invasive goutweed

### —Open communication—

FPR and the SCC have developed a symbiotic relationship where FPR provides technical knowledge and the SCC provides eyes on the ground

- FPR teaches ID skills → SCC shares NNIP observations
- FPR teaches treatment techniques → SCC manages NNIP outside of volunteer days
- FPR held an *iNaturalist* mapping training → SCC maps NNIP



SCC volunteers dig invasive Phragmites roots

### —Trust—

- Listening to and discussing concerns about state management practices
- Involving SCC in some management decisions and evaluating outcomes collaboratively
- Advising community on a town wide invasive plant management plan



SCC volunteers and FPR staff celebrate a muddy workday in Coolidge State Forest

## Next Steps: Community & Next Generation Forest Stewards

### —Sense of ownership—

- Looking to build a network of 40+ trained Community Forest Stewards
- Stewards will provide NNIP expertise to their communities throughout the region
- Potential for an exponential transfer of knowledge when the expert is your neighbor

### —Long lasting effect—

- Audience of future forest stewards: middle & high school students
- Help integrate science-based curricula, teaching about NNIP
- Educating students for 3 years of new program, reaching beyond that as they share with peers, family, community



Engaged citizens learning about NNIP identification and control



(Top) Middle school students working with FPR staff to remove NNIP from a Vermont State Park



(Left) Students proud of the restoration work they've completed