

January 2017 Field Notes

A Forest Interrupted

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Most of Greenwich Land Trust's meadows and fields could be considered "forests interrupted." The succession of plant communities in the Northeast naturally build over time towards characteristic forests with only disturbances such as storms, fire, grazing or floods resetting the ecological clock to meadow and shrubland. Although forests are rich and vital habitat, open meadows are rare in Connecticut and are crucial for many species of flora and fauna. For this reason, Greenwich Land Trust maintains the meadows on our preserves with periodic mowing.

The timing and frequency of mowing depends on many factors. Many properties are mowed at the end of fall after late blooming flowers have set seed and ground-nesting birds have moved on. An ideal time to mow meadows is in early spring, allowing dead vegetation to provide winter shelter for wildlife, but spring mowing is impossible on some of our wetter preserves during "mud season." Some preserves are mowed frequently within the season to target the lifecycles of invasive plants and restore the native plant community.

This year at our Lapham Preserve, we combined mowing strategies, leaving half of the meadow standing for winter habitat while "resetting the clock" on a shrubby field that had been allowed to grow wild for 3 years straight. The diversity of plant species and landscape structure on the preserve will provide terrific resources to wildlife year-round.



Native Joe Pye and Goldenrods at the Lapham Preserve maintained with annual mowing. A shrubland area mowed with areas of winter cover left standing.