

To enhance and encourage
the public use and awareness
of Sessions Woods



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The Friends of Sessions Woods was established as an all-volunteer organization in 1998 to facilitate projects and programs that enhance the value of Sessions Woods.

Friends of Sessions Woods
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Witch Hazel: The Halloween Plant

Witch hazel is an amazing plant with a unique Connecticut history. Technically classified as a shrub, witch hazel usually grows 10-25 feet tall. The plant is commonly seen throughout the forest understory at Sessions Woods. Witch hazel can be recognized by its alternately arranged, oval leaves with a wavy margin. There are other ways to identify it, too.

In fall, witch hazel is particularly interesting. It is one of, if not the last plant to bloom, usually around Halloween or early November in Connecticut. Look for yellow, spidery flowers among the yellow leaves. By the time it is mid-November, the flowers will be very evident because the leaves will have fallen.

Earlier in the growing season, witch hazel sports witch's hat galls. These red, conical galls are the result of a substance that is injected into the leaf by the witch hazel cone gall aphid and provide room and board for the insect.

Did you know that Connecticut supplies the witch hazel found in many cosmetics and itch-soothing products? The commercial production of witch hazel extract began in the 1860s in Essex, Connecticut. The native Americans introduced Europeans to its many uses.

Presently, the world's largest manufacturer of witch hazel products is American Distilling in East Hampton. Witch hazel harvesters, called "brush cutters" or "bushhogs", gather stems in late fall and early winter to sell to the company. The bark and twigs are chipped and the extract distilled from the chips. Witch hazel is an ingredient in facial astringents, aftershave, deodorants, hemorrhoid wipes, toothpaste, mouthwash, and salves for sunburn and insect bites. It is known for its anti-inflammatory properties.



Witch hazel is even approved by the Food and Drug Administration as an active pharmaceutical ingredient.

Witch hazel is probably most famous for its use as a divining rod or dowser, a bent twig used to locate a source of underground water. Its name is derived from the old English word "wych" from the term "water witch". The Mohegans are noted to be the first to show the settlers how to use witch hazel twigs to find water. Some people believe using dowsing to find water is "witchery", another sign that witch hazel is the perfect "Halloween Plant".

Members Complete Coverts

Two FOSW members recently completed the Coverts Project Seminar at Great Mountain Forest in Falls Village. Each year, Connecticut Forest and Park Association and their partners at the UConn Extension Service and CT DEEP host the 3.5 day training seminar for landowners and advocates of good forest management. FOSW members Craig and Cheryl Hubble, along with 21 other attendees, learned about managing forests for wildlife, silviculture, and land conservation. Cheryl (c-hubble@comcast.net) and Craig are willing to answer questions about the Coverts program, forest management, forestry resources, or how to get in contact with a forester for additional advice.

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On the Trail...

...Beautiful autumn! This is a great time of year to visit the Tree Identification Trail. Maps are available inside the Conservation Center during the week or in the gazebo over the weekend until supplies run out. Some of the highlights of the Tree Identification Trail include several kinds of birch trees (gray, white, yellow, and black), good examples of red and white oaks, and a beautiful hemlock grove.

...It appears to be a banner year for squirrels but not as much for acorns! With less acorns and other natural food items in many areas, there have been several reports of squirrels dining on ripe tomatoes, corn, apples, and pumpkins. Next year, it is likely that squirrel populations will return to a more compatible number!



...Heavy rains over the past couple of months have created extensive damage on the trails at Sessions Woods. The Beaver Marsh Trail has several new areas where the trail road has washed away. Wildlife Division staff are currently addressing the problem.

Sessions Woods Calendar of Events

The Sessions Woods Conservation Education Center's Public Program Series is a cooperative venture between the CT DEEP Wildlife Division and the Friends of Sessions Woods. Please pre-register for these programs by calling 860-424-3011 or laura.rogers-castro@ct.gov. Programs are free unless noted. An adult must accompany children under 12 years old. No pets allowed!

October 27, 2018 (Sat.), 2:00 p.m.

Tree Identification Trail Hike

Fall is a great time to walk the tree identification trail at Sessions Woods! This 0.5-mile spur connecting the two sides of the main trail showcases a diversity of deciduous and coniferous trees. CT DEEP Wildlife Division Natural Resource Educator Laura Rogers-Castro will provide a discussion of Connecticut's native trees and their wildlife value. Participants should wear appropriate shoes for hiking on a woodland trail and bring water as needed. Please meet at the flagpole in front of the Sessions Woods Conservation Education Center.



December 5, 2018 (Wed.), 6:00 p.m.

Eastern Cougars

Eastern cougars historically ranged from Michigan, southern Ontario, eastern Canada, and Maine south to South Carolina and west across Tennessee. Earlier this year, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service declared the eastern cougar subspecies extinct in the United States. Join Wildlife Division Biologist Jason Hawley at the Sessions Woods Conservation Education Center for a presentation on the eastern cougar. Jason will dispel some of the myths associated with cougars in Connecticut and provide an overview of the natural history of this intriguing animal.



Save the Date: Cabin Fever Program

The FOSW will bring back the popular "Cabin Fever" event this January 20 (snow date: January 27) at 1:30 p.m. at Sessions Woods. The featured speaker will be Mary-Beth Kaeser, founder of Horizon Wings Raptor Rehabilitation. Mary-Beth will bring four live avian ambassadors, American crow, peregrine falcon, barn owl, and macaw, and discuss the latest research on the intelligence and adaptability of our feathered friends. Save the date and your appetite! This event will also include the infamous dessert potluck!

What's New at the Sessions Woods Conservation Ed Center?

The Outreach Program of the CT DEEP Wildlife Division, based at Sessions Woods, hosted its first photo contest as part of the Discover Outdoor Connecticut Day events. Photographers could enter images taken in Connecticut within three categories: wildlife, people enjoying the outdoors, and scenic (including flora). There was also a youth category (15 years old

and younger). Many beautiful photos were entered and the winners chosen by a panel of judges and people attending Discover Outdoor Connecticut Day in North Franklin. The Friends of Sessions Woods provided the funding for the prizes (gift cards). Look in the near future for some of the entries in the Art Hallway at the Sessions Woods Conservation Education Center.

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Memberships run annually from July 1 through June 30 of the following year. Each membership receives *Connecticut Wildlife* magazine.

For new members only: Memberships received during the months of January to June are effective through June 30 of the following year.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT!

We gratefully accept your contributions. Fees and contributions are fully tax deductible. My check for \$_____ is enclosed. Please send your check, made payable to Friends of Sessions Woods, to:

Friends of Sessions Woods
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