



Updates from the Trail: April 2022

A Story of Hope

On a cold January day in 1995, a long white truck rolled into Yellowstone National Park carrying a curious cargo: eight gray wolves from Jasper National Park in Alberta, Canada. This was the first time in 70 years that wolves roamed Yellowstone after the last pack was killed in the 1920s. Scientists were astonished at the changes witnessed in the years that followed.

Elk began avoiding open fields and meadows, allowing plants that had been overgrazed a chance to grow up again. The growth of plants brought back more pollinators, songbirds, and migratory birds as there was now enough food for them. Bald eagles returned to feed on the wolf kills, and even bear populations grew as the available berries and carcasses provided more food to scavenge.

With wolves controlling elk populations, aspen and willow trees lining the banks of rivers and streams were no longer overgrazed and were able

to establish, preventing erosion and stabilizing streambanks. This also led to an expansion of beaver populations, as they rely on trees like willows and aspens. More beaver dams created more ponds that sheltered fish and amphibians, which raised the surrounding water table helping mitigate drought stress on the community. The effects that the reintroduction of wolves had on the ecosystem were dramatic and could be felt through all corners of the food web.

This is a story that has stuck with me since I read about it in an Ecology course nearly a decade ago. Restoration of our natural resources has far-reaching and cascading effects. It can benefit everything from enhancing recreational opportunities, to cleaning our drinking water.

You don't need a group of wolves and a National Park to find these stories, the Cape is hot bed for restoration projects too. [The Coonamessett River Restoration in Falmouth](#) has restored nearly a mile of river and over 40 acres of riparian wetlands, with another 20 acres currently underway. Harwich Conservation Trust is working to restore 50 acres of former cranberry bog with the [Cold Brook Preserve Restoration Project](#). The first phase of the [Herring River Restoration in Wellfleet](#) will restore tidal flow to 570 acres of severely degraded wetlands.

Restoration projects like these are no small task. Together, they represent decades of effort from dozens of organizations and millions of dollars of funding from a variety of sources. At the heart of each of these massive undertakings are passionate, hopeful people determined to create a brighter future.

On April 26th, BCT received final approval from the Conservation Commission to begin their own restoration project. The Trust will be working with Keith Johnson of Billingsgate Land Management to control invasive plants within the field and wetland border at the Eddy Sisters property, to create high-quality habitat for at-risk pollinators and other insects. Although this project is small comparatively, it will serve as a showcase for the importance of native plants as pillars of our ecosystems.

News about the health of our natural resources is too often [full of doom and gloom](#), but it's stories like these show that there is hope. Repairing the ecological relationships in our landscapes can happen anywhere—in far off wilderness areas, the old cranberry bog down the street, or in your own backyard. All it takes is a whole lot of work, and a little bit of hope.



Vince tills a section of the Eddy Sisters field in preparation for a cover crop seeding, while Jon mows another section to prepare to smother the area using black plastic tarp. Both methods are used to control weeds to prepare the site for a native wildflower seeding this fall. (4/12/2022)