



# BCT Stewardship Journal: March 2026

## Katie's Thoughts from the Trail Vernal Pools!

Vernal pools are unique wetland habitats found in a variety of temperate landscapes such as deciduous forests, meadows, floodplains, and sandplains. These temporary wetlands typically form in the spring as snow melts and rainfall fills shallow depressions in the landscape. Most pools dry up completely by late summer (described as “ephemeral”) while others retain varying amounts of water year-round. Preserving vernal pools is crucial due to the many species that depend on them for survival.

Why are vernal pools so important? Since vernal pools are temporary wetlands, they do not support fish. Due to this factor alone, several amphibian and macroinvertebrate species use these pools for breeding and larval development. In fact, many specialized species, known as “obligate” species (or species that do not breed successfully in water that supports fish), depend on these pools for survival. In New England, some of these obligate species include fairy shrimp, spotted salamanders, and wood frogs.

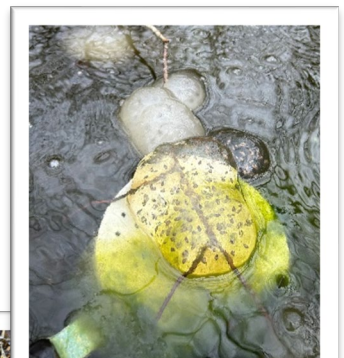
These pools are remarkably productive. Obligate species breed in large numbers, and can produce thousands of larvae each year. After metamorphosis, tiny frogs and salamanders make their way into the surrounding uplands, significantly contributing to the biomass and food web of the rest of the surrounding ecosystems.

Most of these critical habitats are protected under the Massachusetts Wetlands Protection Act and Brewster has taken current protections a step further and placed a 300ft wetland buffer around vernal pools to acknowledge the migration of obligate species. These protections, however, only safeguard *certified* pools. Finding and certifying pools is the first step in their protection, and BCT is making an effort to do just that! Every April we go out and conduct surveys of potential pools located on BCT land and when status is confirmed, we submit certification requests to the state. With each certification, we are making a huge impact to ensure the longevity of these conservation hotspots.

For more information on Vernal Pools in Massachusetts and their certification, check out [Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program \(NHESP's\) Vernal Pool Page](#) or the [Vernal Pool Association Website](#).



*Vernal Pool along BCT's Vernal Pool Trail*



*Spring peeper, spotted salamander, and spotted salamander egg masses all found in or near BCT Vernal Pools*