

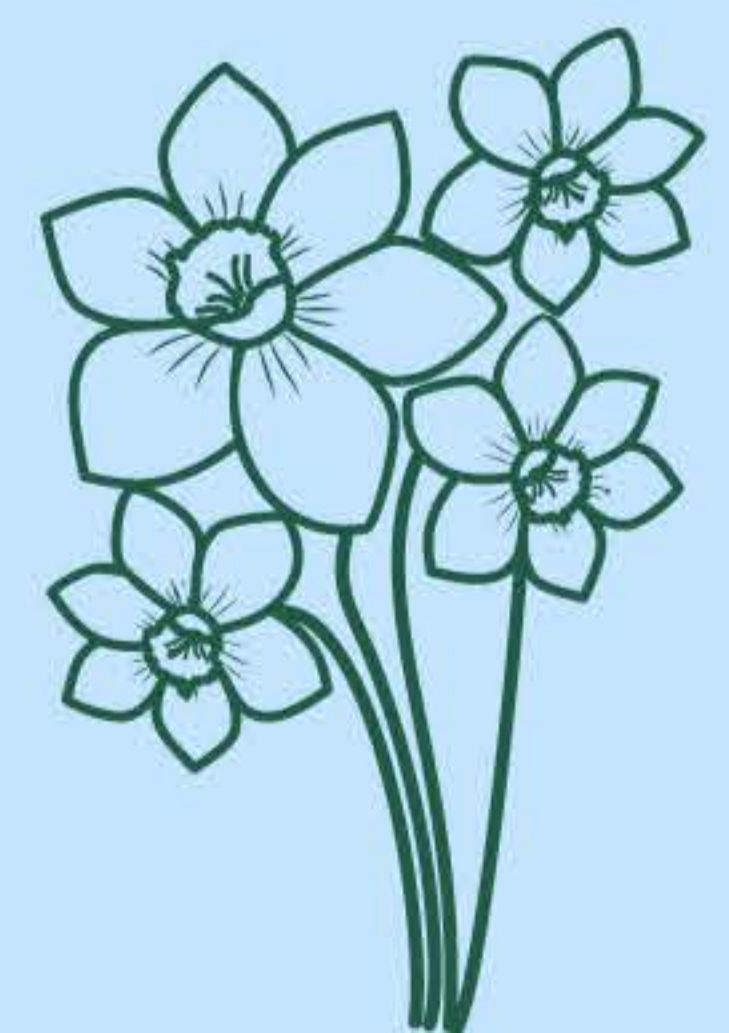
Nantucket Land Bank

Spring 2022 Newsletter



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Phenology Fun: Spring on Nantucket

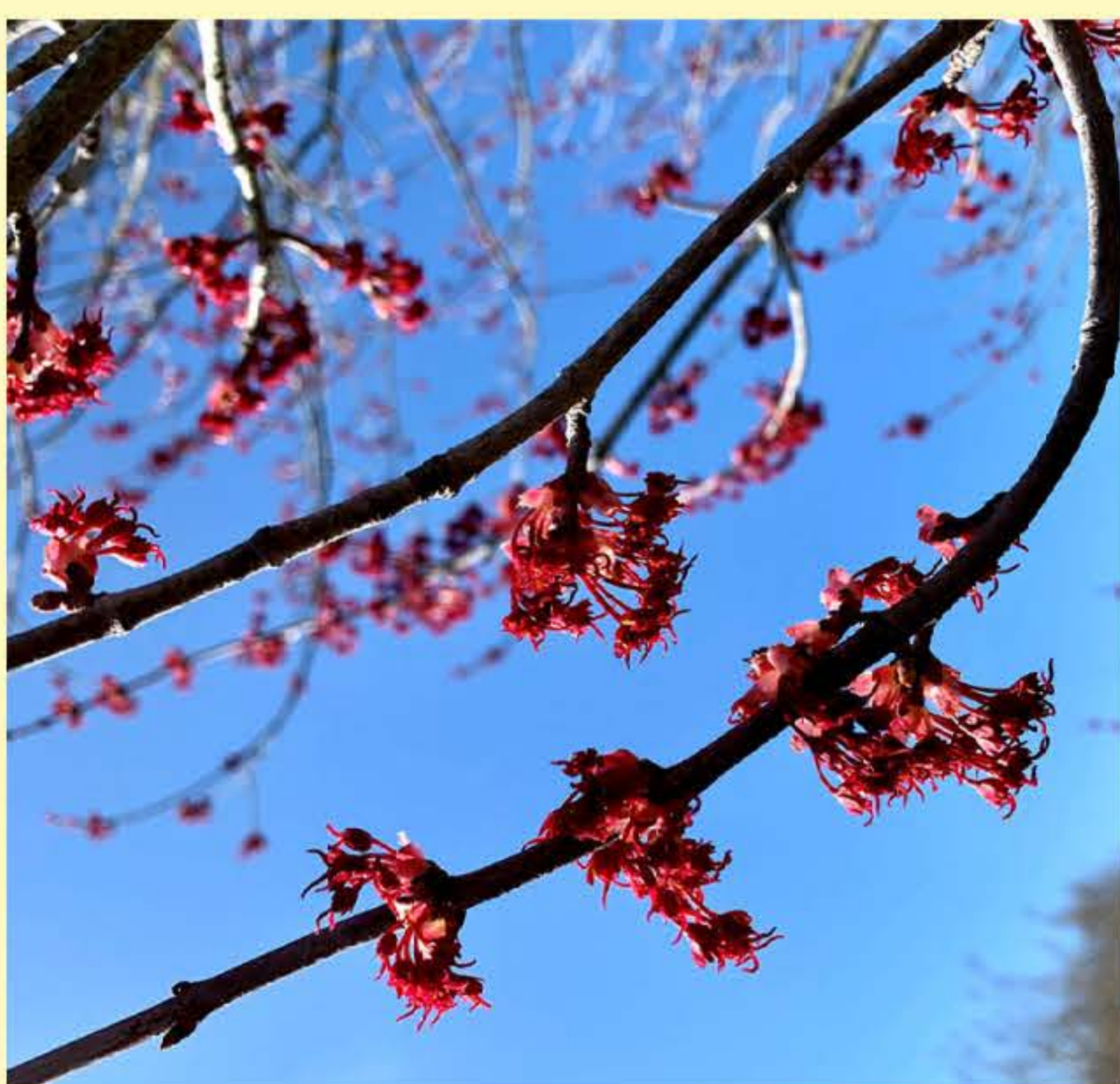
The last couple of months have been bursting with signs that spring is in full swing on Nantucket. But what exactly do we mean when we say, “Spring has sprung”? Signifiers of seasonal change are part of the discipline of phenology, defined as “the study of recurring and cyclic natural phenomena, especially in relation to climate, plant, and animal life.”

Spring is an ideal time to understand the nuances of phenology as we start to notice seasonal markers on our beaches, out on the trails, or in our backyards. One of the first exciting signs of spring is, aptly, the call of spring peepers (*Pseudacris crucifer*)! These small frogs are difficult to see, but they certainly make their presence known with their loud and distinctive calls. Spring peeper cacophony begins in March (hence their name) when the males begin calling from the edges of wetlands in which they breed.

Another sure sign of spring is the arrival of many migratory birds on Nantucket, such as our beloved osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*), as well as several shorebirds including American oyster catchers (*Haematopus palliatus*) and piping plovers (*Charadrius melodus*). These birds spend winters enjoying warmer weather in Florida or South America, before returning to the northeast to nest during the summer months. Keep an eye out for these iconic birds on Nantucket’s great ponds and beaches!



Perhaps some of the clearest evidence of spring is when plants begin to grow leaves and flowers again. Deciduous plants that have been dormant throughout the winter are able to come back to life in the longer days and higher temperatures of spring. Some of the first blooms of the season include red maple (*Acer rubrum*) and trailing arbutus (*Epigaea repens*), which is the state plant of Massachusetts!



Red maple flowers



Trailing arbutus flower



Young black cherry leaves

Such phenological milestones always seem like cause for celebration and alert us that warmer weather is only just around the corner. What are the signs of spring that you look forward to each year? Share your observations with us on Instagram at @nantucketlandbank or on iNaturalist!

Burning with the Land Bank: Prescribed Fire's Role in Habitat Management

Setting fire to nature may seem counterintuitive for a conservation organization. However, fire played a role in natural landscapes long before the idea of prescribed fire came to be. Historically, fire has been an organic process throughout the world, and was also intentionally used by Native Americans to clear land for agriculture, hunting, and settlement areas. As a result of both natural and intentional fires, several habitats have co-evolved to live with fire and consequently depend on this type of disturbance in order to thrive.

In the absence of disturbance, most ecosystems will naturally undergo ecological succession. This means that, over time, landscapes will transition to gradually more complex structures: i.e. from bare rock with lichens to a grassland with perennial herbaceous plants, to a shrubland, and finally into a forest, which is the ultimate successional stage.

The grasslands and heathlands that are so characteristic of Nantucket are early successional habitats, meaning that they require disturbance in order to maintain them at that successional stage and prevent transition into a forest. These early successional habitats are valuable in their own right, and provide important habitat for birds, insects, wildflowers, and grasses. Some of the finest examples of sandplain grassland and coastal heathland on Nantucket can be found at Smooth Hummocks and Head of the Plains. On these properties you can observe northern harriers hunting in the shrublands, chain dot geometer caterpillars feasting on huckleberry, and a wide variety of wildflowers which are rare in the state of Massachusetts but abundant on Nantucket. We maintain these habitats with routine mowing, occasional tree removal, and when weather permits, prescribed fire.

Prescribed fire has many benefits for ecosystems like these. It can eliminate competition from woody shrubs, opening the canopy for grassy and herbaceous species that have seeds waiting to germinate in the seed bank. The resulting mosaic of shrublands and grasslands provides fantastic habitat for songbirds, small mammals, insects, pollinators, and birds of prey such as norther harriers. The remaining ash from a fire also acts as a natural fertilizer, helping the plant community to regenerate. Several plant species have specifically been shown to benefit from fire disturbance, including blue eyed grass (*Sisyrinchium fuscatum*) and lowbush blueberry (*Vaccinium angustifolium*).



April 2022 prescribed burn in Head of the Plains



April 2022 Burn Crew

It had been a few years since the Land Bank last completed a prescribed burn, until the perfect weather conditions struck earlier this spring. On Monday, April 25th, a crew of 13 trained wildland firefighters, including Land Bank employees Jeff Pollock, Rico Schraff, Rob Earley, and Tom Geras gathered at Land Bank property in Head of the Plains and accomplished a prescribed burn of approximately 25 acres. The burn was successfully completed, and we are so proud of our burn crew for making sure this undertaking was done with the utmost care and safety. We are excited to reap the benefits of this fire in the years to come. Keep your eyes peeled for extra wildflowers this summer!

★ Staff Spotlight ★

Meet Jeff Pollock

Property Foreman

Jeff has been a dedicated member of the Land Bank field crew for 20 years. During that time his responsibilities have ranged from carpentry to habitat management, to overseeing our prescribed fire program.

Tell us a little about your background!

I grew up in Lakeville, MA on a 50-acre farm, where we harvested corn, baled hay, and raised cows, chickens, goats. I have extended family here on island. My wife and I moved here together with our 2 daughters in 1997. Our son was born after we moved here. I am an avid outdoorsman & sports fan, in particular baseball. As a kid, I dreamt about being a pro baseball player. I coached my girls' softball teams for years. I have 2 granddaughters, 5 months and 2 years old.

What drew you to the Land Bank? When did you start here and what was your first job?

The mission of providing open space for passive recreation drew me. I had been working construction but wanted a change. Back then, the Field Crew was just two guys. I started here in 2002 as a carpenter being trained in land management.

What is the most interesting thing about your work for the Land Bank?

Seeing how our work affects the ecology of the land, adapting to the needs of properties as they shift over time, and applying my own knowledge and expertise to steward these special places as best we can. Some of the certifications I have earned over the years in order to achieve this include GC License, Hoisters License to operate heavy equipment, Class A CDL to tow heavy equipment, Applicators License to treat invasives, First Responder, prescribed fire Crew Boss and Incident Commander and various qualifications that come with extensive wildfire experience.

What are the biggest challenges of your work?

Adapting to how quickly the Land Bank has grown in recent years and trying to manage both large tracts of open space along with settings which require a more detailed landscape and maintenance regime. It helps to have an eye for cutting trails appropriately in larger open areas versus what looks good or is suitable in a dog park, a pocket park, or playground.

Tell us about the controlled burn program and about your travels to other places to help fight wildfires.

I have been a part of controlled burns on island since I started working here in 2002. Prescribed fire is another tool for open space land management, alongside mechanical mowing and harrowing. Prescribed fires clean up woody debris and dead thatch, restoring soil nutrients so that other important plants can thrive. The plants we burn are fire-adaptive, so we are not burning fire-dependent plant communities. In this way, fire patterns result in a mosaic of diverse habitats.

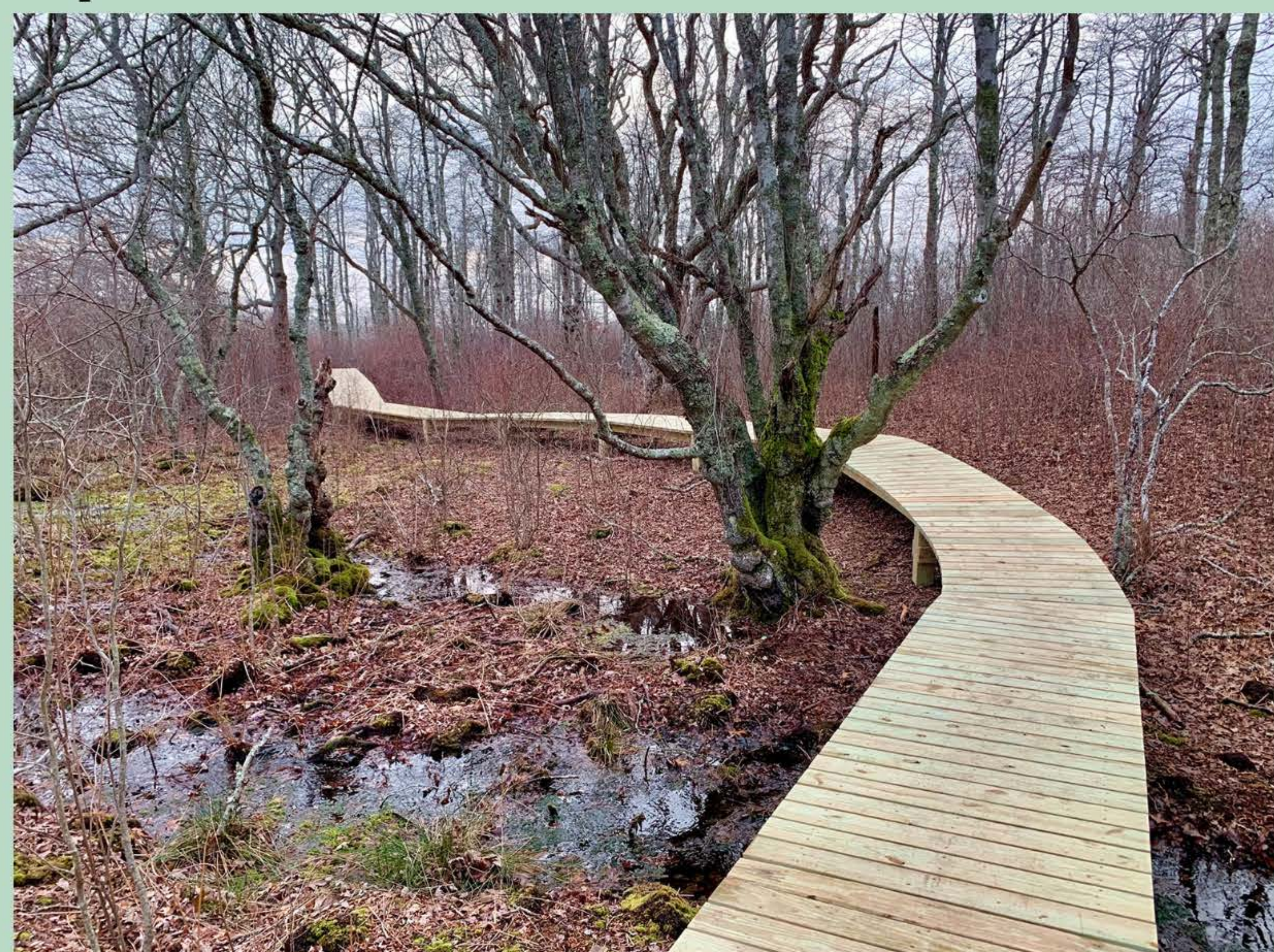
Burns occur on a 3-5 year rotation, usually in the Fall or Spring. We concentrate on Smooth Hummocks and Head of Plains. As Crew Boss, I handle the logistics and plan crew availability. I have worked with and built up a big network of people over the years, allowing me to pull resources from other organizations, both on and off island. Our burn plans are moderate complexity. A lot of it is feel combined with observation, documentation, and rotation.

Recommendations on what to mow or burn are determined through our reporting and input from our Environmental Resources Department. Established fire breaks and dirt roads divide an area into sub-units so you can burn 25 acres at a time. Weather and rotation schedules dictate where and when we burn. We need north winds to blow smoke in the right direction.

I've traveled all over the country (Georgia, Virginia, Florida, Colorado, Alaska, Washington, Montana, Oregon, Idaho, Wyoming, Nevada ...) fighting wildfires for the last 20 years. Early on, I decided that if this is going to be part of my job, I need to know everything there is to know. During my initial fire fighter certification training, I met an instructor who assembles wildfire crews. With one prescribed fire season under my belt, I asked him to assign me to a wildfire crew. Over the years of being a 'Wildlander', I have built up qualifications and moved up the chain to become a Crew Boss and Sawyer Qualified. For instance, I am the leader of initial attack hand crews, also known as "Ground Pounders". There is a powerful brotherhood to this type of complex work. Part of the draw is the adrenaline, but the primary pull is to contribute, to be actively helping in these crisis scenarios.

What has changed in terms of your job since you started working for the Land Bank?

There is a lot more land to manage, a lot of connected open spaces, which requires a ton of planning and coordination between our field crew and our Environmental Resources Department, especially where habitat mitigation comes into play. It's also important to communicate our activities with our Administration and the Commission. After 20 years of working here, I have



gained a lot of experience and more responsibility, handling everything from carpentry to prescribed burns, from daily and long-term maintenance to the complexities of responsible land management. Our year-round crew of 4 typically grows to about 8 during the summer season as we have a lot more work to do to keep our inland and coastal properties in good condition, safe, and clean for the public to enjoy.

What is your favorite Land Bank property and why?

I love the Stump Pond/Beechwood Farm area because of its diversity and topography. That area is very peaceful and meditative. It is perfectly suited to mountain biking, hiking, and bird watching.

Tell us something else maybe few would know about you.

I am super shy and humble, and I definitely try to avoid the spotlight. I love to BBQ. I love to hike and be in the mountains. Kayak fishing is a huge passion. Here, I fish the harbors from my kayak but off island I fish streams, river, and lakes.

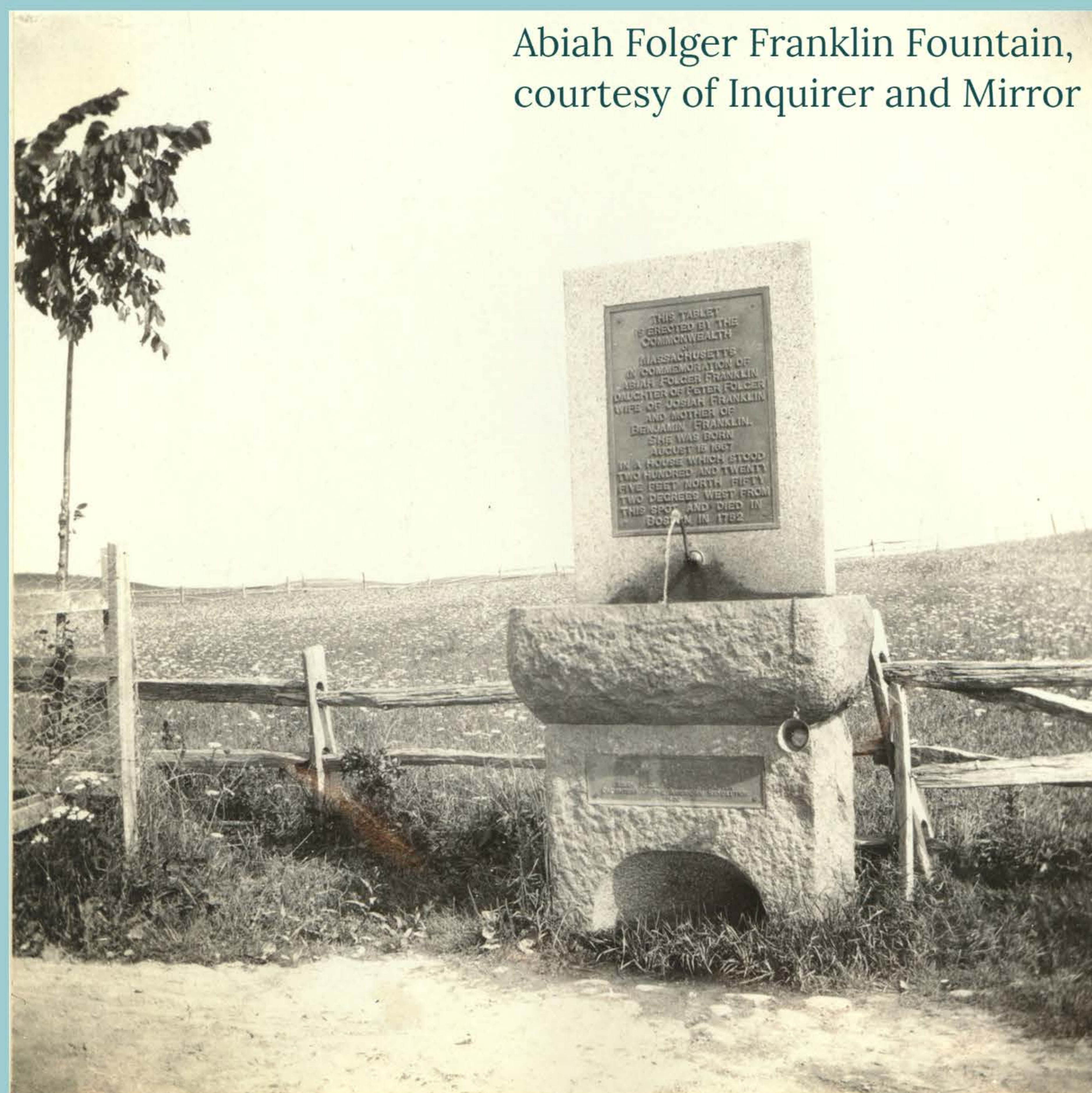


Property Spotlight

Peter Folger Homestead

The Land Bank purchased the larger parcel of the tract known as the Peter Folger Homestead from the owners of Sea Pony Farm, a beloved therapeutic equestrian center, in 2016. The remaining portion was purchased from the Nantucket Historical Association in late 2021. Visitors can enjoy the bucolic trail systems via a wending network of grass paths and boardwalks, with the easterly entrance at the corner of West Chester Street Extension and Crooked Lane, and the westerly entrance at 3 Wannacomet Road.

Peter Folger was born in Norwich, England and came to America in 1635, landing on Nantucket circa 1662 after settling elsewhere. The original Proprietors induced him to leave Martha's Vineyard by setting off a house lot and plot in "Roger's Field" on the North Shore where he established his family homestead. Peter was indispensable to the island, making his mark as a teacher, translator of the local Wampanoag language, blacksmith, weaver, miller, surveyor, and clerk of the town and court. He and his wife Mary had 9 children. Abiah Folger Franklin, Benjamin Franklin's mother, was the youngest. Visitors will notice two monuments which pay tribute to the rich heritage left by Peter Folger and his heirs. The Folger-Franklin Memorial boulder and bench, installed in 1959 at 3 Wannacomet Road, memorializes the prominent legacy of Peter Folger. Those driving along Madaket Road have doubtless noticed the Abiah Folger Franklin Fountain and Boulder overlooking the meadows and pastures.



Abiah Folger Franklin Fountain, courtesy of Inquirer and Mirror

This area passed from the heirs of Peter Folger to other gentlemen farmers who continued to cultivate the land and raise livestock, according to "41 Crooked Lane, Nantucket – A House History", prepared by Betsy Tyler for the Nantucket Preservation Trust. Rachael Folger, a direct descendent of Peter's, married Benjamin Gardner who ran the farm along with his son. The Benny B. Gardner Farm gained recognition from the Nantucket Agricultural Society for its "prize-winning pumpkins, carrots, red corn, and had an impressive herd of cattle". In the late 1860's, the farm came into the hands of James Thompson who fell on hard times. The property was purchased at auction by William Henry Harrison Smith in 1871. He in turn sold it in 1907 to Mary E. Crosby who named the property Franklin Valley Farm. Mary was the granddaughter and daughter of businessmen who had known success in whale oil, wood, and coal industries. She herself was the then rare breed of independent woman, managing her own business ventures, including selling hay and grain presumably harvested from her farm. After Mary sold the property, parts of it were ultimately subdivided into residential lots but, fortunately, the larger portion of it has remained undeveloped and, thus, of great interest to the Land Bank in its mission to acquire and maintain pastoral open space for passive recreation.



Folger-Franklin Memorial Boulder



Recently completed Land Bank boardwalks

The prior owner, wanting to ensure public access to this unique landscape, conveyed 20± acres to the Land Bank in 2016. The adjacent parcel conveyed by the Nantucket Historical Association is slightly less than an acre and provides seamless connectivity to the larger trail system from the west, as well as space for parking. The Land Bank has maintained the pre-existing trails, and our fantastic field crew recently installed a network of boardwalks to give the public the opportunity to enjoy this lush, protected wetland. Stop by on the next sunny day to explore this property's rich history and updated trail system yourself!