



Newsletter

Spring 2026

MUMCHEAG CREEK PRESERVE

Issue No. 88



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Founded in 1959 by Henry Beetle Hough
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Time for Pine



Holz hausen wood pile. *Photo by Adam Moore*

Surely, the star-shaped wedge would do it. Made of heavy steel, it has a sharp point at one end and ridges that broaden into a star shape at the striking surface. I'd used it to split the toughest, knotted stumps of oak, when standard wedges and repeated blows from the maul did not suffice. The piece I aimed to split looked simple enough. It was eighteen inches in diameter, a perfect cylinder, with no obvious knots or branches. With this wedge, it ought to pop right open after a couple sturdy blows.

Pitch pine, however, does not split like oak. I had already flailed away at another piece of pitch pine with the splitting maul alone, failing even to make a crack. With this fresh piece, I positioned the wedge, then tapped it into place. Then I struck it with the blunt edge of the maul. The wedge sank into the wood, just a bit. I struck again; it sank a bit further. Again I struck; again it sank. I kept striking, it kept sinking. Eventually, I realized that I was again flailing away fruitlessly at a stubborn piece of pitch pine. The pitch pine did not split, would not crack, and happily swallowed the wedge.

Fortunately, Tom Robinson, a friend and a kind, former Board member, pitied me. He

rescued me by loaning me his wood splitter. His hydraulic, log-splitting machine promised to make short work of these sturdy pieces of pitch pine. With a powerful chain saw, I bucked the logs into small, manageable cylinders. My wife, Melissa, fired up the wood splitter. She loaded a log onto the splitter, and pulled the lever forward, and clove the piece cleanly in two. Before long, the firewood piled up.

Firewood? Yet isn't this pine that I was splitting? What New Englander burns pine for firewood? Doesn't the resin in pine wood coat the chimney with creosote?

Yes, I was splitting the pitch pine for firewood. And yes, most people on the island don't burn pine or other softwoods for firewood. They typically burn oak, or other hardwoods. Indeed, oak is denser than pine, and therefore, has a higher BTU (British Thermal Unit) content. (The British Thermal Unit is the amount of energy it takes to heat one gallon of water one degree Fahrenheit.) The objection to burning pine, however, is not really about the BTU content—it is about the fear of creosote.

I looked into this, and the truth is that burning pine or other softwoods does not



Pine logs. Photo by Adam Moore

create a higher risk of creosote formation. It is burning wood that is green—not properly dried—that puts creosote in the chimney and risks a chimney fire. All pine and other woods should be dried to a moisture content of 20% to be used as firewood.

Due to the outbreak of the southern pine beetle, the island is now absolutely swimming in dead pine. If we can dry the pine to 20%, the island is now absolutely swimming in pine firewood.

I resolved to try this myself, first. As Melissa splits, I stack. I am stacking the split pine into a holz hausen, which is essentially a dome-shaped wood pile. If the holz hausen does a good job of drying the pine firewood to 20% moisture content, we will start

making holz hausen in the woods, here and there, from some of the thousands of dead pine trees in our woodlands.

Once dried, we can sell it and we can give it to people in need. We could even create a “wood bank,” which is the firewood version of a food bank. As islanders, we may prefer to burn oak, but we have been blessed with pine—thousands of cords of dying pine. We should overcome our taboo, give thanks for the wood, and find a place at our hearth for pine.



Squibnocket Pond Reservation South by Jack Yuen

Artist Jack Yuen has painted the latest in the series of original, Martha's Vineyard landscape paintings commissioned by Sheriff's Meadow Foundation. This newest painting is a fall view of Squibnocket Pond Reservation. An exquisite rendition of a spectacular property, the painting will hang in the new, Sheriff's Meadow office at 78 Campbell Road in West Tisbury. An image of a portion of this painting will be used in the ongoing poster series, and we expect that a poster will be created and made available to donors in the fall.

Jack Yuen grew up on Martha's Vineyard and graduated from the Martha's Vineyard Regional High School in 2015 and later graduated from the Rhode Island School of Design. One may learn more about Jack, and view some of his work, by visiting his website at jackyuenart.com.

Species Spotlight: Dwarf Prairie Willow - *Salix occidentalis*

By Kristen Geagan, Director of Stewardship



Dwarf Prairie Willow Bush. Photo by SMF Staff



Dwarf Prairie Willow Bush in bloom. Photo by Kristen Geagan

The dwarf prairie willow (*Salix occidentalis*) is distinct from other willows that are native to the island due to its growth habit. Dwarf prairie willow grows as a short shrub that spreads horizontally, forming low clumps. As is common for the *Salix* family, the dwarf willow is one of the earliest angiosperms (flowering plants) to bloom in spring. It is a dioecious plant (meaning

"two houses"), with individual plants producing either male or female flowers.

The flowers first emerge as fuzzy buds known as "pussy willows." They eventually mature into more typical catkins. The plants in this family contain salicylic acid, which is an active ingredient in aspirin and acne medications. Historically, willow was used for medicinal purposes, as well as for making baskets and other crafts. You can see dwarf prairie willow growing in the fields at both Nat's Farm and Quansoo Farm.

The willow genus is complex and it can be very hard to distinguish one species of willow from another. There are herbarium records of nine native species, including *S. occidentalis*, from Dukes County and six non-native species. I'd wager that 99% of the willows we see around the island are the invasive grey willows, *Salix cinerea*. Grey willow is native to Europe and western Asia and has

invaded much of eastern North America. It is a small tree with vertically ridged bark, "pussy willow" catkins, and it grows in wet locations around ponds and streams. This species is on the prohibited plant list in our state, which means it is illegal to sell, plant or transplant. Please be aware that cuttings of grey willows can grow if discarded in suitable habitat. Don't put cuttings in your yard or compost bin!



Dwarf Prairie Willow. Photo by Kristen Geagan



Dwarf Prairie Willow. Photo by Kristen Geagan



Forestry Update



Wasque Reservation. Photo by Adam Moore

Woods work continues in the pine forests island-wide. This work is driven by two factors. The first is the need to reduce the wildfire hazard that exists in many island forests, notably the dense, pitch pine forests and the scrub oak thickets. The second is the work associated with the southern pine beetle. Some of the beetle work involves thinning a forest in anticipation of an outbreak, while some of the work involves dealing with the safety hazards, and possibly wildfire hazards, associated with the aftermath of an outbreak.

West Chop Woods

At West Chop Woods, the southern pine beetle has killed most of the mature pitch pines on this Vineyard Haven property, and will likely kill all the remaining living pine trees over the summer and fall of 2026. On Christmas Eve of 2025, we closed West Chop Woods to the public due to the safety

risk posed by scores of dead trees beside the trails. This spring, we hired Cape Cod Firewood to use a mechanized tree shear to safely fell the many large, dead trees that line the trails. Once these have been cut, the property can be reopened to the public. When time permits, Sheriff's Meadow will skid out the larger logs for sawing into lumber. With the smaller logs, we hope to bring in a firewood-processing machine to buck and split the logs into firewood in a cost-effective manner.

Caroline Tuthill Preserve

At Caroline Tuthill Preserve, we have marked a 25-acre area for continued thinning of the pine stand. We will conduct this work beginning in the fall of 2026. By that time, however, the beetle outbreaks already underway at this property could cause us to modify the approved Forest Cutting Plan somewhat. For example, if the beetles kill

many of this property's pine trees, we may shift to cutting the safety hazards beside the trails, while leaving others standing dead as wildlife habitat.

Wasque Reservation

At Wasque Reservation, Sheriff's Meadow Foundation staff worked for the Trustees of Reservations to thin a 28-acre pine forest at this property. This work is funded by a Habitat Management Grant from Mass-Wildlife.

We anticipate other forestry work to take place wherever dense pine forests may be found. These properties include the King Point and Armour properties beside the Edgartown Great Pond, Dark Woods (near Jernegan Pond), Mumcheag Creek Preserve and the Enos Lots on Chappaquiddick, and potentially other properties.

Mumcheag Creek Preserve Opens



Mumcheag Trailhead. Photo by Peter Rodegast



Poucha Pond. Photo by Adam Moore

Sheriff's Meadow Foundation is pleased to announce that it will open Mumcheag Creek Preserve to the public in the spring of 2026. "Mumcheag Creek Preserve" is the newly-designated name for the property that Sheriff's Meadow Foundation purchased from the Potter and Slater families in 2024.

Mumcheag Creek springs from a wetland near the Mytoi Gardens property of the Trustees of Reservations and flows beneath the Dike Road. From the Dike Road, the creek divides the Mumcheag Creek Preserve land of Sheriff's Meadow Foundation on the west bank from the Trustees of Reservations land on the east bank. The creek broadens, and empties into the waters of Poucha Pond.

In selecting the name, Sheriff's Meadow Foundation needed to find a name that did not use the word "Pimpneymouse." The name "Pimpneymouse Farm" will remain with the farm, which is now owned by members of the Slater Family. The word "Poucha" was appealing, but was rejected because it is already in use in the name of the abutting "Poucha Pond Reservation." As Mumcheag Creek is a local, historic, and geographic name for a feature of the land, "Mumcheag Creek Preserve" was adopted

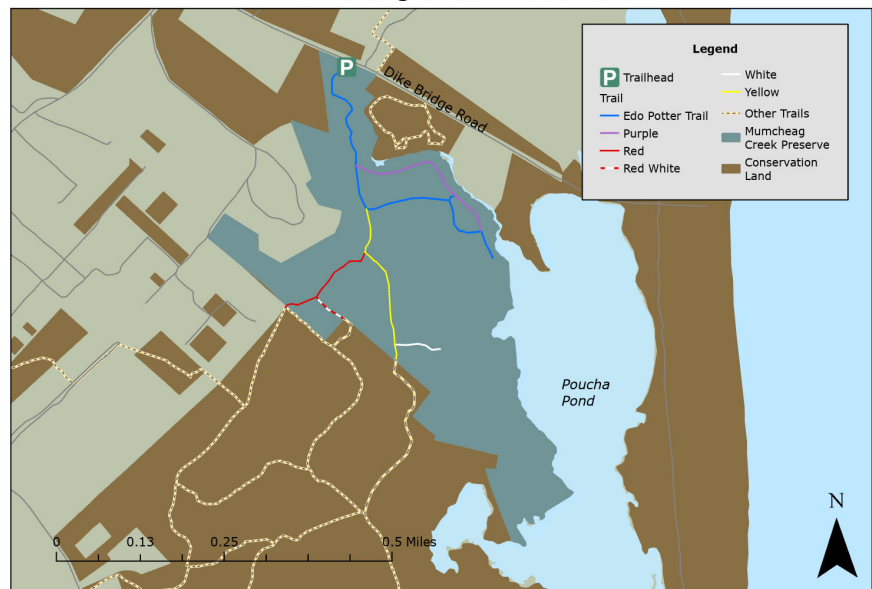
by vote of the Sheriff's Meadow Board of Directors.

Mumcheag Creek Preserve may be accessed via a four-vehicle trailhead on the Dike Road. From this trailhead, one may enjoy a hike over trails and woods roads to grand views of Poucha Pond, of a meadow and of the salt marsh, and of the tree-lined, gentle paths of pastoral Chappaquiddick. Naturally, Mumcheag Creek Preserve connects to

other nearby conservation properties, including Poucha Pond Reservation. A future trail and footbridge will offer a direct connection, over Mumcheag Creek, to the Trustees property next door.

Sheriff's Meadow Foundation is now working on plans for a memorial trail designation for Mumcheag Creek Preserve. We thank all those who gave generously to conserve this beautiful property.

Mumcheag Creek Preserve





Summer Benefit at Flat Point Farm

Monday, July 20, 2026 from 6:00 to 9:30 pm

Please join Sheriff's Meadow Foundation and our gracious hosts, Arnie Fischer and Eleanor Neubert, for the 2026 Annual Summer Benefit at beautiful Flat Point Farm in West Tisbury.

Set within a pastoral landscape beside Pear Tree Cove, with sweeping views toward Tisbury Great Pond, Flat Point Farm offers a stunning setting to gather in celebration of land conservation. During the evening, guests will have the opportunity to walk the landscape and watch the summer sun set over the water, while reconnecting with friends and fellow supporters of Sheriff's Meadow Foundation and learning more about our work.

The cocktail reception will begin at 6pm, with dinner to follow at 7:30pm. Guests will enjoy a dinner prepared by Buckley's Gourmet Catering and there will be brief remarks from Board Chair Susannah Bristol and President Adam Moore.

The Summer Benefit is our most important fundraising event of the year and provides essential support for our work. We hope you'll consider sponsoring at the highest level that's meaningful for you. Sponsorship details are included below and available on our website.

Contact Advancement Coordinator Catherine Hall at hall@sheriffsmeadow.org with any questions regarding the Summer Benefit. Thank you!



Flat Point Farm. Photo by Stephen Chapman

2026 Summer Benefit Sponsorship Levels

Cedar Tree Society - \$50,000

- 16 Summer Benefit reservations.
- Private guided walk at a special Sheriff's Meadow property.

Beetlebung Tree Society - \$30,000

- 12 Summer Benefit reservations.
- Private guided walk at a special Sheriff's Meadow property.

Cherry Tree Society - \$18,000

- 10 Summer Benefit reservations.
- Private guided walk at a special Sheriff's Meadow property.

Beech Tree Society - \$12,000

- 8 Summer Benefit reservations.
- Private guided walk at a special Sheriff's Meadow property.

Sassafras Tree Society - \$6,000

- 6 Summer Benefit reservations.

Holly Tree Society - \$3,000

- 4 Summer Benefit reservations.

Oak Tree Society - \$1,500

- 2 Summer Benefit reservations.

Sheriff's Meadow Foundation will gratefully acknowledge all of its sponsors in Foundation publications, materials, and in print advertisements. Please note that each reservation has a non-deductible value of \$125. Sponsors giving through donor-advised funds are asked to contact Advancement Coordinator Catherine Hall for guidance regarding the reservation benefits at hall@sheriffsmeadow.org.



A MARTHA'S VINEYARD LAND TRUST

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Upcoming Guided Public Walks



For more information and to register, please scan the QR code.

Brookside Ridge Preserve, Chilmark
Saturday, May 16, 2026
10:00 am-12:00 pm

Join Sheriff's Meadow for a guided hike through Brookside Ridge Preserve. This wooded preserve offers loop walks through groves and over glacial ridges, and it acts as a hub for many trail connections to other conservation lands and ancient ways. The hike will be roughly 2 miles and will traverse some rugged and steep terrain. **Advance registration is required.**

Quansoo Farm, Chilmark
Saturday, June 13, 2026
10:00 am-12:00 pm

Discover Quansoo Farm and the historic Hancock Mitchell House on a guided tour led by SMF staff. Along the way, explore the ecology and rich history of this 146-acre preserve. **Advance registration is required.**



For July and August walk information and to register, please scan the QR code.

Cedar Tree Neck Sanctuary, W. Tisbury
Tuesday, July 14, 2026
9:00 am-11:00 am

Join SMF staff for a guided walk over the wooded hills, bubbling brooks, and rocky shores of our largest property. Prepare for a strenuous hike over rugged terrain. **Advance registration is required.**

Huckleberry Barrens, Edgartown
Tuesday, August 18, 2026
9:00 am-11:00 am

Join SMF staff for a walk on the loop trail that explores barrens of huckleberry, thickets of scrub oak, and groves of cedars and bayberries on the Katama Plain. The trailhead is located on the right. **Advance registration is required.**