



# FIELD, MARSH, BROOK, POND, FLOODPLAIN FOREST

*Native flora and fauna thrive in the Wood Parcel*



Marsh photo courtesy of Jim Woodworth

The marsh spreading out before you is a small remnant of vast wetlands supported by Beaver Brook that existed in Native American times. These wetlands are both wooded swamps and grassy marshes. Over many years, these wetlands were gradually drained and filled for farming and residential developments for housing and roads.

In 1726 the upstream portion of Beaver Brook was diverted to flow into the Wethersfield Cove and renamed Folly Brook. This diversion greatly reduced the flow of Beaver Brook.

In 1952 the construction of the sewer line buried beneath your feet required a small berm which then formed the pond behind you. The construction of Route 3 and I91 in the late 1950s and 60s required Beaver Brook to be piped under the highways. These highways cut the brook and marsh off from the rest of the Great Meadows.

One can imagine the effects of draining, diverting, paving and pollution on the once abundant fish population. Yet a diversity of



native plants and animals continues to thrive in these wetlands. Also bounded by the highways is the area of farmland along Elm Street known as the "Great Plain," an area slightly higher so it floods only during great floods.

The rich environment of the Wood parcel encompasses the cattails and grasses of the marsh, the shallow waters of the pond, the meandering brook, the shrubs along the water's edge, the floodplain forest on slightly higher ground, and the farm fields on the Great Plain.

For the Wangunk people, the animals, plants, and trees in this diverse habitat provided food, shelter, clothing, and medicine. Like the stone arrowheads and tools recovered on the site, the native plants and animals are living "artifacts" of Wangunk life.

To the Wangunk, no plant in the marsh was more useful than the broadleaved cattail (A). They wove cattail reeds together to make mats for exterior and interior coverings over wigwams. They ate the first green shoots, the rhizomes (or roots), and the flowers and seeds. Ducks eat the seeds and muskrat and geese eat the rhizomes. The marsh wren, swamp sparrow, and Virginia rail hide their nests among the reeds.

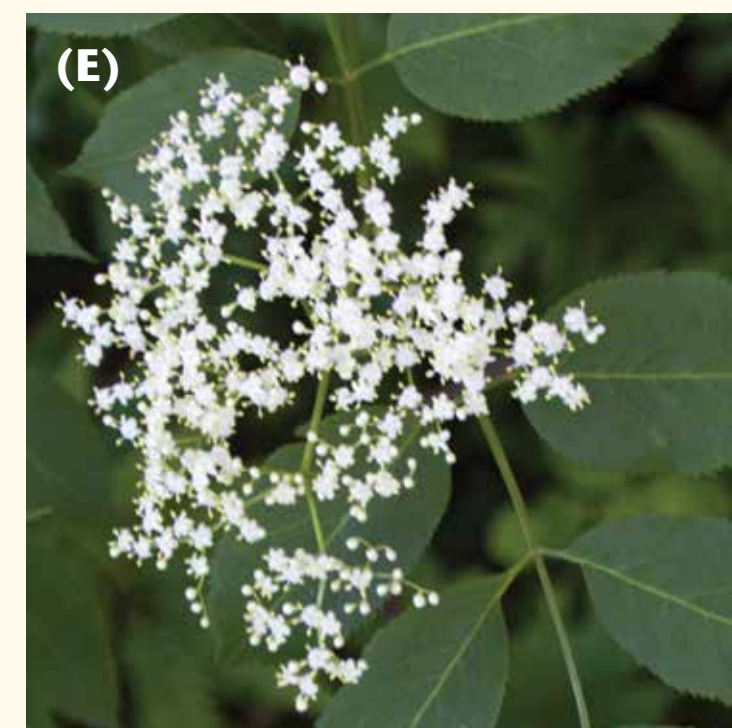
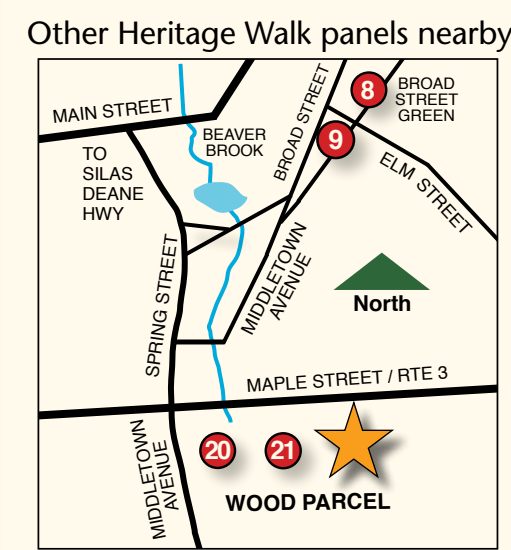
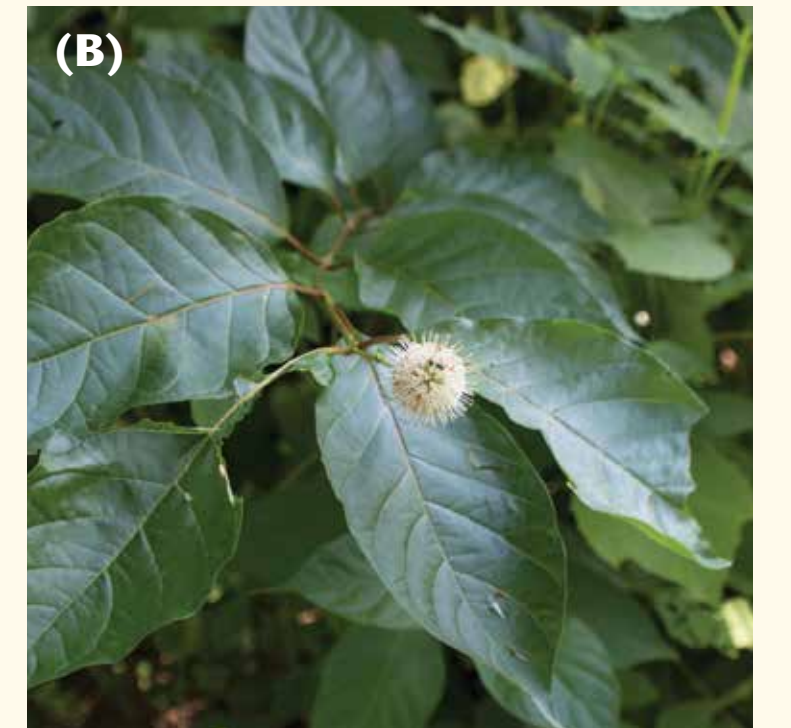
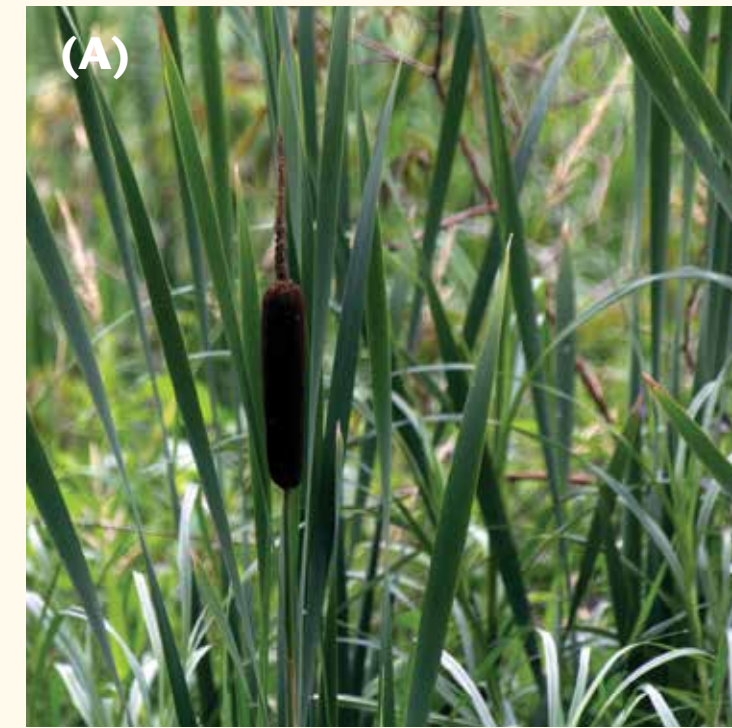
In the edge of the pond behind you, button bush (B) emerges from the shallow waters, displaying shiny leaves and round white flowers and fruit.

Native Americans made medicines from the bark for headaches and other ailments. Deer browse the leaves, and wood ducks (C) raise their chicks in the shelter of the bushes. Turtles sun themselves on the logs, and great blue (D) and green heron fish in the pond's shallow waters. Flowering and fruiting shrubs such as elderberry (E) and silky and gray dogwoods grow near the edge of the brook and pond, and provided fresh fruit for the Wangunk during the summer and

dried fruit for winter use. The straight stems were used as arrow shafts. Elderberry was powerful medicine, and the stems of the plant have a pith that can be easily removed to make whistles. The flowers support pollinators, and the berries provide food for birds and other wildlife. Jewelweed (F) fills in the moist, shady areas, attracts bumblebees, butterflies and hummingbirds. Deer browse the succulent leaves and stems. Native Americans used the sap to relieve the itch of poison ivy.

Trees in the floodplain forest, such as the black walnut (G), provided food for humans and wildlife. Bitternut hickory nuts sustain wildlife. Quaking aspen and other trees and shrubs are gathered by beaver (look for the chewed stumps near the brook!) that strip the bark for winter food. Beaver, in turn, were used by the Wangunks for food and clothing.

The Great Meadows, including the Wood Parcel, is designated an Important Bird Area (IBA) by Audubon Connecticut. Birds abound in all the habitats of swamp, brook, pond and forest. Many migrate through in spring and fall; some, such as the Baltimore oriole (H) and wood duck, breed in the summer; some are year-round residents. Over 100 species have been observed by birders at the Wood parcel "hotspot" as recorded in [www.eBird.com](http://www.eBird.com). Keep your eyes and ears open!



Photos courtesy of Jim Woodworth



This project was developed through a partnership between the Town of Wethersfield, Wethersfield Historical Society, the Webb-Deane-Stevens Museum, the Wethersfield Tourism Commission and interested residents. This project was also assisted by grants from Connecticut Humanities and the Hartford Foundation For Public Giving.