

# Fort River Birding and Nature Trail: Providing Universal Access

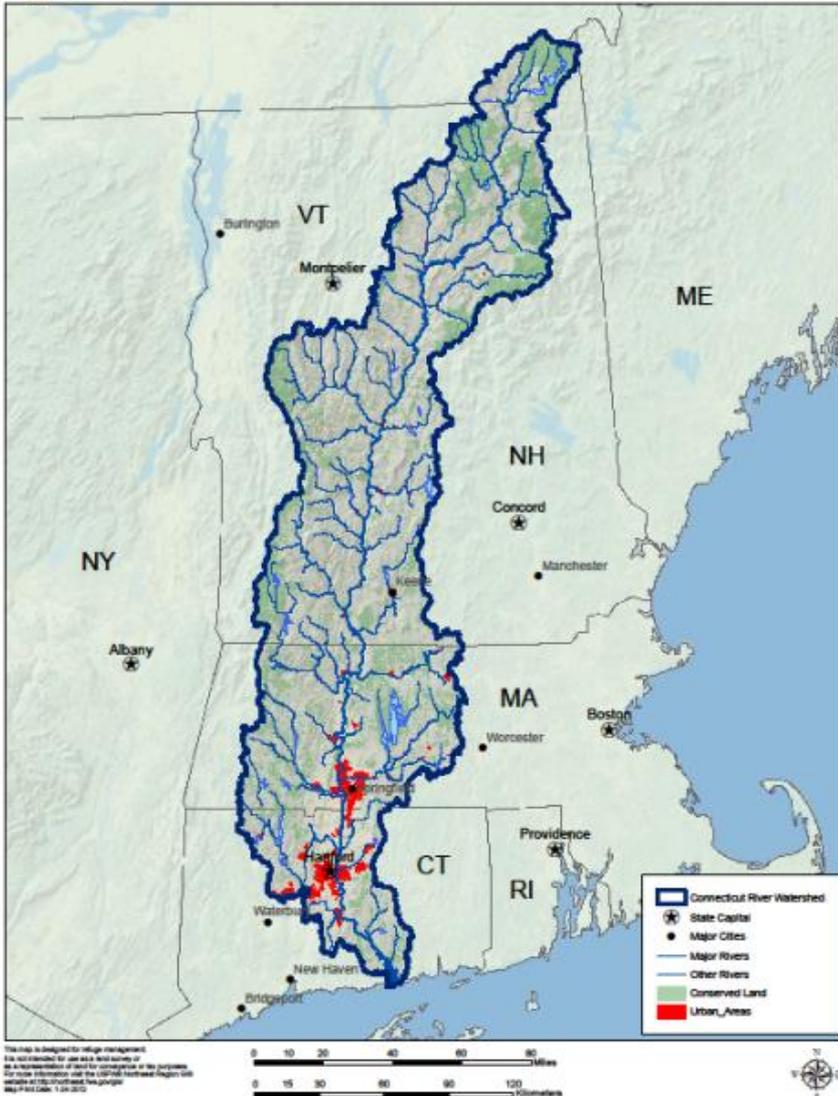
**Andrew French, Project Leader**

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**Silvio O. Conte National Fish and Wildlife Refuge**



# Silvio O. Conte Refuge



- Created to preserve and protect the Connecticut River Watershed.
- 410 miles long, spanning from Canada to Long Island Sound
- 7.2 million acres with 25% in conserved lands
- 2.4 million people who live within the boundary
- It takes working with partners

# Fort River Division

- Protects floodplain forests of the Fort River which houses federally listed dwarf wedgemussels
- Protects grasslands for grassland birds
- Surrounded land is protected for agriculture which helps wildlife and local produce
- Archeology site



# Fort River Birding and Nature Trail



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Universally Accessible - Fort River Birding and Nature Trail

Silvio O. Conte National Fish and Wildlife Refuge



- 1.2 mile universally accessible trail
- Variety of habitats in a 1 mile loop

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service  
Silvio O. Conte National Fish and Wildlife Refuge  
Fort River Birding and Nature Trail  
Map Date: 10/2010



# Fort River Birding and Nature Trail

- Americans with Disability Act (ADA) Compliant
  - 2” lip on edge
  - No cross slope
  - Gradual elevation changes
- Accessible for:
  - Mobility challenges
  - Sight limitations
  - Seniors
  - Families with strollers



Challenge:

How does one build an universally accessible trail on a multi-habitat site without digging?

Above-ground!



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# Challenges

- We had to anticipate and address cross slope and elevation changes
- We used shims on sides when they did not align to prevent having a cross slope



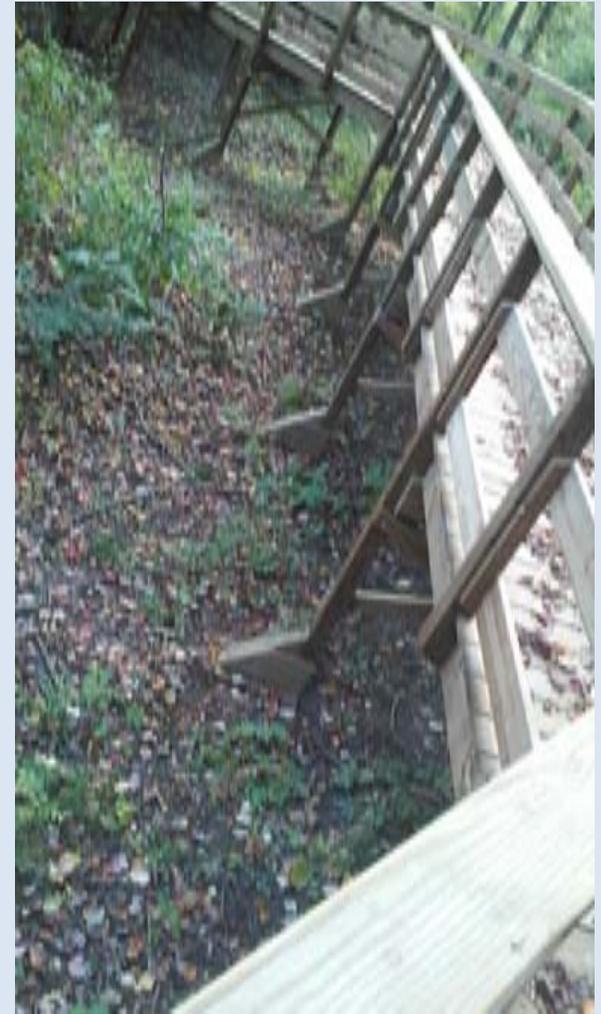
# What was done to address irregularities on the ground surface?

- Above ground boardwalks
- Above ground overlooks
- Above ground bridges



# How to build a boardwalk without digging posts?

- Using 24"x24" pads that rest on the ground.
- Gravity and the weight of the 2" x 12"
- The pads connect the to uprights in two points so only slight rocking.



Pads are different depending on the size and area (boardwalk, bridge or overlook)



# Attention to Details







# Who did all this work?

- Student Conservation Association/AmeriCorps members
- FWS Youth Conservation Corps members
- Eagle scout and boy scout troop
- Community volunteers
- Friends of the Fort River Refuge
- FWS staff





- The community aspect really connect people to the project
- We had many repeat volunteers which lead to other activities
- This connection to the trail was shown at the trail opening where 150 people attended
- We chose to construct the trail this way to create this connection



- From start to finish, the project took 3 years: 18 months of permitting and environmental compliance, followed by 18 months of construction
- One next step is to develop the trail for educational purposes
- While developing an above-ground, universally accessible trail presented numerous challenges, it was the results of these challenges that enhance the trail.

Questions?





# Silvio O. Conte National Fish and Wildlife Refuge



- Universally Accessible - Fort River Birding and Nature Trail
- Elevated Walkway
- Overlook and seating
- Seating
- Kiosk (to be built)
- Parking
- Direction of travel

The Fort River Birding and Nature Trail is a universally accessible 1.1 mile trail that meanders through a variety of habitats, including: grassland and shrubland areas, floodplain and upland forest, as well as wetlands, vernal pools and intermittent streams.

The universal accessibility allows not only individuals with mobility and sight limitations, but also encourages use by seniors and families with young children in strollers. In the future, the Conte Refuge plans to seek funding for interpretive signage with audio features.

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