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Dog park update

By MARJORIE NEEDHAM

More than 10 Middlebury residents responded to the question, "Do you want a dog park here?" in last month's issue. The majority favored a dog park, but two responded "No," and we encountered one resident while at the transfer station who uttered a forceful "No" and asked, "Who is going to provide the insurance? Who is going to deal with the poop?" We responded that this project is still in the formative stage, and a number of details need to be worked out.

We have since spoken with First Selectwoman Jennifer Mahr, who said she checked with the town's insurer and was told no additional insurance was necessary. She said the town is looking into the cost of converting the Schoolhouse Park for use as a dog park with adequate fencing, gates and an area for small dogs.

Matters such as forming a dog park committee, what legal form that committee will take, and what its relationship with the town will be have not yet been determined. However, Beverly Dassonville, who originally proposed a dog park, will meet with a Middlebury Land Trust official so they can pull together into one list their individual lists of donors and potential volunteers. They also will likely meet with Mahr to discuss what the town will need done. It is our understanding previously donated funds will go towards the new dog park project.

As mentioned in the October issue, once the details have been worked out, the project still will have to get approvals from applicable town boards and commissions before it can move forward.

If you haven't yet shared your thoughts on a dog park, please feel free to send an email to mbisubmit@gmail.com with "Dog Park" as the subject, or mail us a note at Middlebury Bee-Intelligencer, P.O. Box 10, Middlebury, CT 06762. If you can be a dog park volunteer, please send an email to the same email with "Dog Park Volunteer" as the subject. Thank you!

Help community cats

By MARJORIE NEEDHAM

A potential Middlebury dog park will meet the needs of the town's dogs, but dogs aren't the only critters deserving of our care. Groups of homeless cats here in Middlebury need our help. The American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals refers to what many call "feral" cats as "community" cats, and that's the term we will use here.

In a lengthy article on its website, aspca.org, the ASPCA describes community cats as "outdoor, unowned, free-roaming cats" that can be "friendly, feral, adults, kittens, healthy, sick, altered and/or unaltered." They frequently have no caretaker – no one to feed them, provide shelter or be sure they are vaccinated.

We are aware of two locations in town with populations that can be labeled community cats, and several town residents are interested in taking action to slow and eventually stop the uncontrolled reproduction in these groups. One is considering starting a nonprofit for the purpose of helping the cats.

A few residents have been doing what they can to help with the issue. They have been trapping cats and paying to get them spayed or neutered and given their rabies vaccines. However, the problem is larger than just a few people can manage, so it would be helpful if the cat lovers in town came together to help with what we would suggest is the best program to help the cats.

It is called trap-neuter-release, or TNR. The ASPCA adds an em to make it TNRM, which means trap-neuter-release-monitor. The cats are trapped, neutered, released in their former location once they have recovered from surgery and then a caretaker feeds the cats, monitors them and ensures new cats are trapped and neutered.

So, one might ask, why not just trap and remove the cats rather than returning them? It's because removing all the cats creates the "vacuum effect," and neighboring cats move into the newly vacated territory.

Stating that TNRM is the most humane and efficient way of stabilizing a cat population, the ASPCA says: "By sterilizing at least 75% of cats in a group within a six-month period (and continuing to sterilize at least 75% of the remaining intact cats), TNRM helps stabilize the population of community cats and, over time, reduce the number of cats." There are many benefits to such a program, both for the community and for the health of the cats.

You can help community cats in various ways. One is to become a cat caretaker and TNRM community cats in your neighborhood. This involves managing one or more groups of cats in a community – providing food, water and shelter, spaying/neutering and overseeing their general wellbeing. Since caretakers keep an eye out for these cats, the caretaker is most frequently someone who lives nearby.

You also could help by assisting community cat caretakers who are doing TNRM. Their job involves feeding, trapping, transportation to and from the veterinarian, temporary housing for cats after surgery, and fostering and socializing kittens for the purpose of finding them good homes. Your help with even one of these tasks would be invaluable.

In groups this reporter worked with in the past, some folks offered transportation to and from the vet, others offered a place for cats to recover after their surgeries and others fostered and socialized the cats. For those unable to help with these tasks, there always is a need for funds to pay for food, litter and medicine. There is a way for every cat lover to help out.

There are reasons not to publicly discuss the locations of cat colonies. Unfortunately, not everyone cares about cats. For the cats' safety it is best to keep discussions about the cats among those of us who care about the cats.

If you are concerned about this issue and would like to help the cats, please send an email to mbisubmit@gmail.com with "Community Cats" as the subject. We will see that your information is shared with those working to help out with this issue. You can use the same email and subject to let us know if there are additional groups of community cats in town. Thank you for caring.

Adopt a Rescue Pet



FORREST

Forrest is an 8-year-old male shepherd mix who is good with people and dogs. He has anxiety and is looking for a home with somebody there part time. He is stressing at the shelter. Call or text 203-560-5056 or apply at www.brasscityrescue.org.



SHORTY & JUANITA

These bonded cats, Shorty (male orange tabby 3-1/2) and Juanita (female calico, 2-1/2) are looking for a home together! They've been waiting for one since March. Do you have room? Apply at WhiskersPetRescue.org.

Fall leaves hide dangers



DEAR PAWS CORNER: I wanted to share a scary event that happened a few days ago. My chocolate Lab Terry was romping around in the leaf piles that my son had raked together when she suddenly yelped and limped back toward me. Her front paw was cut and bleeding.

Because it looked significant, I took her to the veterinarian to get checked out, where she got stitches and an inflatable collar to prevent her from licking the injured area while it heals. We looked through the leaf pile later and found a garden tool that had been forgotten during cleanup!

The vet also found three ticks on Terry, but fortunately they weren't attached. I hope you'll publish my story so your readers will know to put safety first before letting their dog play in the fall leaf piles! – Karen G., Lebanon, New Hampshire

DEAR KAREN: Thank you for sharing your story. Most dogs absolutely love romping in leaf piles, and if a few precautions are taken, they can play safely and have a great time.

Before raking leaves into piles, walk through the area and pick up any trash or sharp debris. Keep your garden tools together, and when putting them away, check whether any are missing.

Make sure your pet is adequately protected against flea and tick infestation before letting them play in the leaves. Ticks especially love to hide out under leaves in the grass, waiting to hitch a ride on the first warm-blooded creature that passes by. Use a tick repellent on yourself if you plan to hang out in the yard with your dog. And, of course, do a thorough check of your dog's coat for ticks after playtime and before they come into the house.

Send your tips, comments or questions to ask@ pawscorner.com.

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DEEP aquatic invasives grants

(HARTFORD) –The Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) is now accepting proposals for the Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) Grant Program for the 2026-2027 grant cycle. Applications will be accepted through December 10, 2026. Please visit the DEEP AIS Grant Program website for details on how to apply for grants.

Invasive species are a serious threat to freshwater ecosystems and outdoor recreation. They can negatively affect native plants and animals, and the dense mats formed by invasive aquatic plants can seriously disrupt outdoor recreation such as boating, fishing, and swimming. These species often are costly and challenging to eliminate once established, necessitating intensive control and education efforts to prevent further spread. The rapid spread of northern hydrilla, an aggressive invasive aquatic plant first discovered in the Connecticut River in 2016, provides a clear example of the risks and challenges posed by invasive species. In just 10 years, hydrilla has rapidly spread within the river from Agawam, Massachusetts, downstream to within a few miles of Long Island Sound, as well as to 12 other water bodies. Hydrilla spreads easily through fragmentation, with plant fragments transported by currents, watercraft, and waterfowl to new areas, where the plant can become widely established in just one or two growing seasons. Once established, hydrilla is extremely difficult and costly to manage, often requiring multi-year herbicide treatment programs with annual costs commonly reaching hundreds of thousands of dollars.

In 2019, the Connecticut General Assembly created dedicated funding to address AIS via Public Act 19-190, which established an AIS Stamp and associated fee that applies to all registered boats using Connecticut inland waters. Funds derived from the AIS Stamp are distributed via a competitive AIS Grant Program, funding selected projects proposed by municipalities, state agencies, and non-profit organizations to address the impacts of AIS on inland water bodies in Connecticut. DEEP has awarded approximately $2.4 million to 80 projects during the first six years of the AIS Grant Program. During the 2025-2026 grant cycle, DEEP received 33 proposals requesting nearly $1.4 million in aggregate, and was able to award $450,000 in aggregate to support 10 projects.

AIS STAMP CHANGES REMINDER

DEEP reminds boaters that due to the Connecticut General Assembly's 2023 passage of Public Act 23-154, the AIS Stamp fee no longer is collected by the Connecticut Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) at the time of vessel registration but instead is collected by DEEP via the Online Sportsmen Licensing System. Effective October 1, 2024, Connecticut residents or non-residents operating a vessel on Connecticut's inland waters must purchase a $7 Individual AIS Stamp or a $20 Vessel AIS Decal which must be permanently affixed to a vessel (AIS Decal may be subject to an additional processing fee).

Both the Individual AIS Stamp and the Vessel AIS Decal can be purchased via the Online Sportsmen Licensing System and are valid until the end of the calendar year in which they are purchased. Individuals operating a vessel on Connecticut's inland waters without a stamp or decal are subject to a fine of $85.

For more information on the changes to the AIS Stamp and instructions on how to purchase the Individual AIS Stamp or Vessel AIS Decal, please visit the DEEP AIS Stamp Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) website.

"Aquatic invasive species pose a serious threat to the health of our freshwater ecosystems and create an economic burden for the communities and organizations working to manage them," said DEEP Acting Commissioner Emma Cimino. "Funding for the AIS Grant Program comes from boaters, anglers, and other outdoor enthusiasts who purchase AIS stamps, demonstrating how Connecticut's robust outdoor recreation economy directly supports the protection of our natural resources. These grants will support critical work to control and research aquatic invasive species, helping to protect our waterways and preserve the many ecological, recreational, and economic benefits they provide to residents, visitors, and local communities."

DEEP urges all boaters to practice the Clean-Drain-Dry approach to help prevent the spread of AIS. This requires boaters to remove vegetation, thoroughly drain all water, and allowing the vessel and equipment to dry before launching in a new water body. Carefully inspecting boats and trailers for AIS before and after every launch significantly reduces the chances for spreading AIS. It's Connecticut law that no person shall transport a vessel or any trailer used to transport such vessel in Connecticut without first inspecting such vessel for the presence of vegetation and aquatic invasive species and properly removing and disposing of any such vegetation and aquatic invasive species that are visible and identifiable. Any person who violates these provisions shall be fined up to $100 for each violation.

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