

MAKING OXFORD BEAUTIFUL



STEVEN VALENTI REPUBLICAN-AMERICAN

Kim Greene of West Haven clears invasive weeds from the side of the road in Oxford Friday.

Volunteers begin Route 67 cleanup

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OXFORD — Japanese Knotweed, barberry and bittersweet vines are invasive weeds taking over native plants along the Little River, spoiling the habitat for wood frogs, salamanders and other freshwater animals.

On Friday afternoon, a group of volunteers armed

with shovels and loppers fought back against the green invaders, toiling in the heat and humidity.

They were laying the groundwork for the Little River Nature Preserve Trail, the first part of a larger Oxford Main Street Project to slow traffic and beautify Route 67.

"It's a concept to change Route 67," Kathleen O'Neil,

chairwoman of the Oxford Main Street Project, told volunteers before the work got underway. "Oxford is a beautiful town, so you're going to be the beginning. Hopefully you won't be the end."

The property is behind the Oxford Baking Co. on Route 67. O'Neil said the trails will connect the greenways and

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bridle trails of surrounding towns, while Oxford businesses benefit from the foot traffic coming from the trails and sidewalks.

Aris Stalis, the architect for the project, said the Little River is a trout stream, so people could go fishing there before stopping at the bakery for a cold drink.

On Friday, representatives of the Housatonic Valley Association, Selectman Scott Flaherty and 12 volunteers from Thule, a Seymour company that makes luggage and bags, gathered to remove the weeds.

Courteny Morehouse, a conservation coordinator for HVA, said the Little River is a tributary to the Housatonic River watershed. HVA saw the Main Street project as an opportunity to remove invasive species and restore the na-

tive habitat, she explained.

"You don't have a healthy stream if you don't have a healthy forest," Morehouse said.

Morehouse told volunteers what an invasive species is, which to remove and warned them to watch out for poison ivy.

"Everyone should wear leather gloves, because there are thorns that will poke through the plastic," she said.

In front of the bakery, shovels and pairs of loppers lay on the grass off the parking lot. Karen Halpert of Morris, an HVA volunteer, stood behind a table of cold drinks under a tent. "This is our refreshment station," she said, adding of hydrating to prevent heat stroke, "the rule of thumb is once at least every half-hour and not just a sin. a drink."

Kevin McCormack, a spokesman for Thule, said his company used to do a lot of projects with HVA and that volunteerism is starting up again after a short hiatus.

"This is our first in a while and I think it will get larger and snowball from here," McCormack said. "We're an outdoor, active lifestyle company, so being outside and giving back to the community really aligns with our values."

Patrick Monahan of Southbury, a volunteer from Thule, used a pair of loppers to cut and pull out Japanese Knotweed along Route 67. After the cutting, he said a large tarp would be laid over the weeds and left for five years to kill its root system.

Some volunteers worked alongside Monahan, while others ripped and dug out the tangles of weeds along the stream behind the bakery.