



Spring
2021

CHATHAM CONSERVATION FOUNDATION BULLETIN

*The Chatham Conservation Foundation preserves land for the benefit of
the people, plants, animals and ecosystems of Chatham.*

Frost Fish Creek: A Salt Marsh of Chatham

*by Gerry Stahl
Chair of CCF Salt Marsh Task Force*



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Chatham is rich in salt marshes and CCF is committed to preserving them and where necessary restoring their healthy functioning. Salt marshes are wonderful natural environments for people, plants, animals, birds, fish and shellfish. They could also provide Chatham’s most effective means for combatting both the causes and the effects of climate change.

Salt marshes act as multi-layered flood-protection systems by regulating river drainage and groundwater flow, helping to stabilize coastlines. They filter water, removing nitrates from lawn run-off that contribute to algal blooms and drinking-water degradation. Crucially, they also store quantities of carbon in their sediments, representing the largest sink for CO₂ among all terrestrial ecosystems—several fold better than even trees in tropical forests.

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Recent analysis of wetlands in the United States suggest that there is immense potential for gains in terms of nitrate removal and water-quality improvements from targeted, modest investments in expanding wetlands. Wetland expansion and conservation aimed at locking carbon in wetland sediments can be used as an effective, natural climate-change mitigation strategy.

About half of CCF's land parcels are around salt marshes. CCF has established a Salt Marsh Task Force to study the health of Chatham's wetlands. The initial focus is on Frost Fish Creek. CCF's most popular and scenic walking trail runs through there. You can view a video of it at: <https://www.chathamconservationfoundation.org/trailguide>. Occasionally, we lead group walks on the trail.

Our next project at Frost Fish Creek is to install improved signage and plant tags along the trail to help walkers recognize native trees, shrubs and plants. This project is generously supported by an anonymous donation.

In 2019, we collaborated with APCC to conduct initial studies of the land and water in the Frost Fish area. This led to a recommendation to conduct more detailed water quality and hydraulic studies to assess the consequences of tidal restriction removal. A grant proposal to fund this has been approved by Chatham's Community Preservation Committee (CPC) and the Town. It is awaiting final approval at Town Meeting in June. Please support this to help us maintain Chatham's salt marshes to best serve the environment and the Chatham community.