



FALPS Leading the First Day Hike 2026

Our First Edition

Welcome to the first edition of *The Forest Rambler*, a quarterly publication from the Friends of the American Legion and Peoples State Forests (FALPS). Some might consider this to be a quarterly newsletter, but we hope it is more than that. Our State Forests offer us the opportunity to wander about in nature for no particular reason, with the chance that we might stumble upon some new understanding that may lead to the enrichment of our lives. Consider reading this publication like a ramble or a walk in the forest. After all, Walt Landgraf said it best, "I have never taken a walk in the woods and been disappointed."

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The History of FALPS, So Far

FALPS celebrated its 10th anniversary in 2025. Learn how it all started and where it's going.

Honoring the CCC Workers of Camp White

FALPS is seeking funding for a new statue that will honor the workers of the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC).

The History of FALPS, So Far

By Ralph Scarpino, Erik Landgraf, & Jon Sweeton

From the very beginning a little over 100 years ago, American Legion and Peoples State Forests have grown into special places for people to visit. These [forests](#) are among the premiere destinations in the State of Connecticut. Whether you come to picnic, hike their many trails, fish in the Farmington River, or take time out to be in nature, these forests will create lasting memories for you to take home with you. But the real magic happens when you return, and you feel like you have come back to visit an old friend.

This is how these two state forests have fostered so many friendships over the years. And this is why the Friends of American Legion and Peoples State Forests (FALPS) was destined to be.

Ralph Scarpino, the first person to serve as FALPS' president, recalled the early times when FALPS came into being.

Ralph Scarpino

Why and how did FALPS come about? What happened early in its formation? We all wonder—and few of us remember.

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Honoring the CCC Workers of Camp White

by Paul Hart

FALPS would like to put up a bronze statue depicting a CCC worker. Why? Camp White was a Civilian Conservation Corps camp located in Barkhamsted, CT, during the Great Depression in the years before World War II. At any given time, there were about 200 young men living in the barracks at Camp White. In addition to receiving housing, food, clothing and medical care, these men were paid \$30 per month. They received \$5, with the other \$25 sent home to their family. The CCC program was in operation nationwide and was one of the most successful government efforts to help alleviate the hardships of the Depression years.

The CCC "boys" at Camp White were put to work on a wide variety of projects. Some of the projects were in American Legion State Forest near the camp, but most projects were done in Peoples State Forest just across the Farmington River. The Corps was responsible for much of the early development of Peoples State Forest: building roads, hiking trails, campgrounds, buildings, fire ponds, and a lot of forestry improvement work, such as fighting spongy moth infestations.

Camp White was established in 1934 and operated until January 1942, just after the American entry into WWII. That's a period of about eight years and explains why the Corps was able to accomplish so much in Peoples State Forest.

In addition to this work, their presence had a big impact on the local area. The boys helped clean up after the floods of 1936 and 1938. They also conducted searches for lost children.

In later years, an amphitheater was built at Camp White, and the public was invited for the Thursday evening programs that were a welcome diversion from the difficulties of the times.

Friends of American Legion and Peoples State Forests (FALPS) is aware of the significant impact that Camp White and the Corps had on the area. Recently, FALPS learned of the availability of a CCC statue honoring the legacy of this group. It is a 6' tall, 460 lb. statue of a young man leaning on an axe.

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Camp White, a CCC Camp established in 1934



The History of FALPS...Continued from page 1

Here are my recollections of the beginnings of FALPS. My recollections may not be totally accurate, but this is what I recall. Sometime in the early spring of 2015 an email came around indicating there was some thought of trying to form a Friends group for the Peoples and American Legion State Forests. The common understanding was Jim Warner, presently the Manager of that DEEP unit, got into a discussion with Lance Hansen, and an idea was born based upon the success of the Friends of Session Woods State Wildlife Management Area. Jim worked there at the time, and Lance worked for the Wildlife Division in Hartford. The email said: "What do you think? Would you be interested in forming such a group?"

As many of us who lived in the area knew, the forests were special. Walt Landgraf, a local science teacher and prominent advocator of the forests, saw to it that there were many educational programs, hikes, and events that drew good attendance. But there seemed to be a big void after Walt unexpectedly passed away in 2007. Many of us responded positively to the email and thought this might be a good idea.

I believe a display table was set up at the Barkhamsted Earth Day Nature Festival in late April. Many people came by the booth and signed up as interested.

A core group was initiated. An email then came around with a proposed slate of officers and board

members. (I believe it was Paul Hart that was the one who pushed for me to be President—he's to blame!)

There was a meeting in mid-May, and the outcome was that the informal board should meet and begin laying the groundwork for the organization. One thing I remember quite well was that a person in the audience, Jim Lussier, indicated to us, even though he was not on the proposed board, that he would be interested in helping. Jim said he would volunteer to get the needed IRS non-profit, 501(c)(3) application submitted and do other stuff like that (crap). We looked around and we all thought, "Who is this guy?" By the way, Jim became Chair of the Crap Committee (got all the crappy jobs).

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Working on the Henry Buck Trail

Honoring the CCC...Continued from page 2

The statue is offered through the non-profit organization called [CCC Legacy](#), which works to recognize the accomplishments of the CCC nationwide. Currently, there are two CCC statues in Connecticut.

After speaking with CCC Legacy, FALPS determined it would be appropriate to have a CCC statue in Peoples State Forest and has applied for funding to support the costs of installing one.

We hope to have an update in a future newsletter on our efforts to recognize and remember the CCC program and the impact it had on this area.

The History of FALPS... Continued from page 3

We met in mid-June. What an education we got. We needed not only the 501(c)(3), but policies on discrimination, harassment, etc. and filing with the Secretary of State. This was not fun, what do we know? We copied and edited other Friends groups' ideas and pasted together documents. We discussed for several meetings what our mission was and developed a mission statement. We wanted to promote recreation, enhance opportunities, preserve historic culture, and be cognizant of the need to manage timber, wildlife and fisheries. We needed to develop membership criteria, costs, and by-laws, and set up a checking account. We would have had no real money until dues came in, until—here again—Jim Lussier stepped up and donated \$100 for our treasury!

The group was enthusiastic and very dedicated to this work and to the forests. Lance, in particular, was a bundle of energy and did a lot of the legwork. That initial group packaged everything up, got the support of the Friends of State Parks (the umbrella group) and the State DEEP Divisions (Parks, Fisheries, Wildlife, and Forestry). We announced our first membership meeting for mid-September. The board members and officers were nominated, bylaws were presented, and the membership was brought up to date on progress. This was all quite an undertaking, and the effort of the groundwork cannot be downplayed.

We were up and running with a legitimate Friends group by mid-September. We met with each Director and field liaison from Fisheries, Wildlife, Parks and Forestry. We reiterated our belief that we were there to help each Division with its mission. We wanted to be sure that they understood that we believed a healthy, managed forest was key to healthy wildlife populations, fisheries, and recreation potential. We wanted to enhance the visitor experience and provide educational opportunities.

I can look back over 10 years of FALPS and say, "We've done good, perhaps even great!"

The first few years set the stage for continued projects and programs. The work was fun, although sometimes painful, and very creative. These efforts pulled the

growing FALPS community together in a great and positive way. The early projects were especially rewarding and so well received.

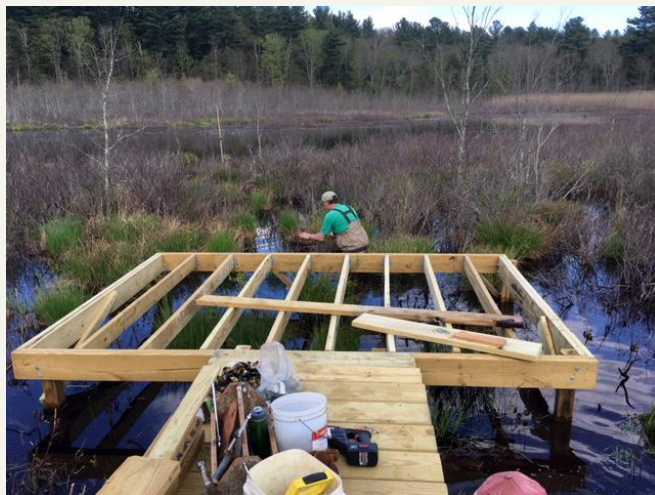
Ralph Scarpino

One thing Ralph left out of his recollections was the significant role that he played as the first president of FALPS. If you ask any member who knew and worked alongside him, they will tell you he was the right person at the right time to navigate FALPS through its initial years.

Ralph had a steady hand in guiding the immense effort it took to get the organization started. He knew how to listen and how to speak, and how to steer the organization through a tremendous number of ideas and suggestions and keep it on track. Ralph also brought to FALPS his vast experience as a CT DEEP Forester along with his many professional connections. All of this proved to be invaluable.

But perhaps Ralph's most important contribution was his dedicated and friendly personality, which elevated everyone's enthusiasm and respect for our wonderful forests. This was essential in making FALPS a reality. Thanks again, Ralph, for all you have done, and enjoy your retirement in New Hampshire!

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Building the Viewing Platform on Beaver Brook Pond

History of FALPS...Continued from page 4

And where is FALPS now, and where is it headed? President Erik Landgraf, Ralph Scarpino's successor, is probably the best person to say.

Erik Landgraf

FALPS is an amazing Friends group. As a Friends group, we can assist Peoples and American Legion State Forest staff to better influence the experience of visitors to the area. We also organize hikes, educational programs, fun activities for children and adults and implement projects which we welcome and encourage FALPS' members to participate in.

In 2025, FALPS celebrated its [10th year anniversary](#). Looking back, we've come to realize how effective our organization has been and what we have been able to do. Below are some examples of some of our bigger accomplishments.

As a new organization, we wanted to start out with a big project. This resulted in putting in a [240' boardwalk](#) out into Beaver Brook Meadow, which includes a viewing area with benches and informational signs. We held the grand opening in July of 2018. This project helped to introduce the public to FALPS and gave them a chance to participate.

In 2020, we established the renovation of the pollinator garden. As all projects go, challenges awaited. COVID hit that year, so we were limited to five people per work party. To meet these challenges, two volunteer work parties were held each day. This was an important opportunity for FALPS volunteers to get outside and be in nature and participate in rebuilding this special pollinator garden. The garden now awaits all to enjoy it, whether it be for its beauty or educational purposes. The pollinator garden is located on the right side of the main entrance to Matthies Grove.

Over the years, Ralph Scarpino and I discussed the possibility of rerouting the Agnes Bowen Trail off Beaver Brook Road by running it through a swampy area near Beaver Brook Meadow. On an August day in 2021, we took the first walk through this wetland and realized the trail could make it through.

On an October morning, construction began on what would turn out to be an 840' boardwalk that

meandered through the wetlands. Once finished, this boardwalk would allow people to experience an environment not normally negotiable by foot. We [opened the boardwalk](#) in May of 2022.

As a Friends' group, we are also willing to work with other organizations on projects we cannot do on our own. A great example of this opportunity came in 2024 when a new trail idea came forward in Riverton. This new walking trail is located at the end of School Street, which is lined with historical homes along the Farmington River. A committee was formed, which included the Hartland Historical Society, the Barkhamsted Historical Society, and the Farmington River Coordinating Committee. Historical signs were placed along the trail referencing the industrial period along the Farmington River. This trail, "Hidden in Plain Sight", has been dedicated in honor of David K. Leff, an author, poet, and advocate for the environment.

History has a way of losing itself over the years. [The Soapstone Quarry](#) in Peoples State Forest, located off the Walt Landgraf Trail, is a great example of this. A large soapstone boulder lay buried under leaf matter, waiting to be discovered again. With help from archaeologist Dr. Ken Feder, now a retired professor, as well as his summer school students, an archaeological dig was conducted. During this dig, a boulder reappeared with soapstone bowls still embedded.

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Dedicating the Soap Stone Quarry Platform

The History of FALPS... Continued from page 5

After much discussion, it was decided to make a raised L-shaped viewing platform around the site with interpretive signs describing the soapstone bowls and the importance of the Indigenous People who created them. FALPS completed this project and opened it to the public in May of 2025.

Some projects are ongoing, which includes the establishment of a native meadow on the northern end of Matthies Grove. Native wildflower seeds are collected in the fall and germinated over the winter and spring and grown into seedlings. They are then planted in the meadow during early summer by FALPS volunteers. On the fringes of the meadow, native shrubs are being planted to establish thickets that are beneficial to native wildlife. There is also the constant battle with invasive plant species that takes a considerable amount of effort to keep in check. No matter what time of the year, a walk on the perimeter trails around the progressing native meadow will exhibit ever-changing wonders.

Many more projects have been completed along the trails, along with organized hikes, educational programs, and special events. Peoples State Forest turned 100 years old in October of 2024, and with FALPS' hard work (especially Board Member Ginny Apple), it was a wonderful celebration.

With the continued support of DEEP and FALPS members, we will continue our mission to enhance the overall experience of visitors. Peoples and American Legion State Forests are open all year round and are waiting for everyone to explore.

Erik Landgraf

Thanks, Erik, for all your efforts and for your enthusiastic vision of the future.

Thanks also to Ralph, the officers and board members from the past and present, all the FALPS members and volunteers, and of course, Connecticut DEEP. It took many dedicated people to make FALPS the successful organization it is. If this were a book, we might have time to talk about them all. The best we can do is thank them and hope they will continue to bring to FALPS their own special contributions. Those who would like to know more should visit the FALPS website at falps.org.

Looking back at the accomplishments of FALPS, you would think that this organization had been in existence for many more years than the 10th year anniversary indicates. FALPS is an amazing Friends group that has done great things. We can only imagine what the next 10 years will bring, but we have a pretty good idea that it will be great.



Peoples State Forest 100th Anniversary Celebration in 2024

Upcoming Events

FALPS frequently hosts events open to the public, as well as special members-only events. Check our [Facebook page](#) and [website](#) for [event updates](#).

Spring Wildflower Ramble

Saturday, April 25, 2026, from 10 AM to 1 PM EDT

11th Annual Barkhamsted Earth Day Festival

Sunday, April 26, 2026, from 12:30 PM to 5 PM EDT

Early Birds Get the Birds!

Saturday, May 16, 2026, at 7AM EDT



Get good eats and your FALPS hats and tees at the Riverton General Store. Jess and Allie's smiles await you.

FALPS Leadership 2025-2026

Officers

President: Erik Landgraf
Vice President: Don Stein
Treasurer: Paul Hart
Secretary: Jean Miller

Board Members

Faith Antion
 Ginny Apple
 Roger Behrens
 Tim Deschenes-Desmond
 Frank Groneman
 Bob Pulford
 Jon Sweeton
 Jim Warner (FALPS' Park Representative)
 Jennifer Zinck

Helpful Links

[FALPS Website](#)
[Volunteer with FALPS](#)
[Join FALPS or donate](#)

Email us at ctfalps@falps.org

FALPS

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FALPS is classified as a 501 (c) (3) organization under the Internal Revenue Code and further classified as a public charity. Organizations with this status are qualified to receive tax deductible bequests, devices, transfers or gifts.

FALPS' Mission

To enhance, advocate, and encourage use and awareness of the recreation opportunities, cultural heritage, and natural resources of the American Legion and Peoples Forest