

Nature in the Neighborhood – Jan. 2022

Greening Your New Year's Resolutions

It's that time of year again when we make a list of New Year's resolutions: lose weight, eat healthier, exercise more, stop smoking, maybe learn a new language. As we all know, making the list is easy (just copy last year's); keeping to those resolutions, well that's a different story. Nevertheless, most of us resolution-makers keep on trying, despite the odds.

What I'd like to suggest this year, is for you to consider adding a few "green" resolutions to the list. Ones that aren't too hard to stick to. To get you started, here are a few ideas:

- **Spend more time in nature.** We spend way too much time indoors, especially these last two COVID years, even though study after study confirms that being out in nature improves our overall mental and physical health. As I noted in a previous article, a 2019 scientific report* found that spending just 2 hours a week in nature is associated with good health and wellbeing. So, one resolution to add to the list would be to get outside, either alone or with family and friends. And this particular resolution may help you to keep other resolutions like losing those few pounds you resolved to shed, or learning Italian by listening to language tapes on your headphones while walking the trail. If you're wondering where to go, there's a list of nearby open space on the Conservancy's website, www.swampscottconservancy.org, on the Special Places tab.
- **Participate in events held by local environmental and conservation groups.** The Conservancy has been hosting events for adults and children, such as beach clean-ups and trail maintenance activities. We're in the process of planning exciting new community building activities for the new year that will include further habitat improvement and trail exploration programs. Keep an eye on the Events page of the Conservancy's website, but you can also check out the list of events held by other local environmental nonprofits, like Mass Audubon, the Trustees, and Salem Sound Coast Watch. Make a resolution to sign up for several such activities in the new year. Committing to going to some of these events is not only an easily achievable resolution but also can be a lot of fun.
- **Learn something new about nature.** Add a few environmental books to your reading list this year, whether it be a classic such as Aldo Leopold's *A Sand County Almanac*, or something new and topical, such as Douglas Tallamy's *Bringing Nature Home* or *Nature's Best Hope*. The Conservancy has been holding Zoom presentations on climate change, native plants, wildlife, and other environmental issues affecting nature in our neighborhood and videos of some of these are on the Conservancy's website. And, we'll be having more such educational lectures and presentations in the new year. As one of your green resolutions, you can commit to watching past presentations or attending upcoming ones.

- **Become a Citizen Scientist.** Make a resolution to spend time outdoors, in your own backyard or one of the local conservation areas, observing nature. Use the iNaturalist app to help you identify the plants and animals around you. When you do, *you* become the scientist. This a great way to help children learn about the environment around them, and to get them involved in science. And don't forget to add your observations to the Swampscott Biodiversity Project page: www.inaturalist.org/projects/swampscott-biodiversity.
- **In 2022, get to know your own impact on the environment.** Come up with some personalized resolutions that you and your family can undertake to lessen your “carbon footprint.” The Columbia Climate School website** not only lets you calculate the amount of greenhouse gases you produce as you live your life, but also provides easy ways you can start to shrink your carbon footprint. Consider adding some to your list of New Year's resolutions. While single handedly one person can't solve the environmental problems of the world, when enough people get involved, committing to simple, small changes, can result in big results.
- **Commit to staying abreast of the issues that impact nature in our neighborhood,** and of speaking out and urging local and state leaders to protect the integrity of Swampscott's natural resources and, whenever possible, expanding the town's public open space. You can start by reviewing the town's recently updated *Open Space & Recreation Plan – 2021-2028**** -- in particular the 77 specific objectives the plan recommends for the maintenance, preservation, and expansion of open space in Swampscott. You could commit to getting involved in the implementation of those objectives that you care most about and so help make them a reality.

Unlike turning your back on chocolate, I'm pretty confident greening your resolutions will be so enjoyable, you may actually stick to them. I wish you all well as you work to achieve your 2022 goals.

Happy and Healthy New Year.

*www.nature.com/articles/s41598-019-44097-3#citeas

**news.climate.columbia.edu/2018/12/27/35-ways-reduce-carbon-footprint/

***www.swampscottma.gov/sites/g/files/vyblif1296/f/uploads/2020_ospr_final.pdf