



Saw Mill River Audubon  
Online Sanctuary Trail Maintenance  
Workshop

Phil Heidelbergger  
May 19, 2020



# Agenda

- Welcome and introductions
- Virtual classroom instruction
- ~~Hands-on field work outside~~
- Feel free to ask questions
  - Enter question into chat (to Everyone)
  - Raise hand: Select Participants at bottom of screen then select “raise hand” icon
  - Co-host Anne Swaim will help with this
- We will send you these slides and a link to the recording of this workshop

# About Me



- Long term active SMRA member
  - Since 1978!
- SMRA Board Member & Chair of Finance Committee (2006)
- Active on many committees and in sanctuaries
- My wife Ellen works in the SMRA office
  
- Also active in the New York-New Jersey Trail Conference
  - Maintain trail in Fahnestock
  - Weekly *Westchester Trail Tramps* maintenance crew
  - Have taught *Trail Maintenance 101* course
    - Have borrowed a few slides and many ideas from there
  - Chaired committee that just completed re-writing the TC's *Trail Maintenance Manual*

# Thank You for Volunteering!



- Trail Walkers and Maintainers provide a very valuable service
  - Ensure trails are passable and safe
- Especially important during COVID-19 era when our trails are much more heavily used
- Can be a very rewarding and fun experience
- Great way to get outside in a beautiful location and get to know a sanctuary really well

# What Does a Trail Walker Do?



- Let the office know where you want to be a trail walker
  - 914-666-6503
  - [office@sawmillriveraudubon.org](mailto:office@sawmillriveraudubon.org)
- Visits a sanctuary, or trail in a sanctuary, regularly
  - Ideally about once a month
  - At least 4 to 6 times per year
  - Go out after strong storms to check for damage
- Picks up litter
  - Bring a trash bag
- Reports on conditions, especially problems
  - Form at [www.sawmillriveraudubon.org/walker.html](http://www.sawmillriveraudubon.org/walker.html)

# What Does a Trail Maintainer Do?



- Trail Walker +
- Light maintenance
  - Trim vegetation intruding onto trail
  - Clear small blowdowns using a hand saw
    - No chainsaws!
- Possibly painting trail blazes
  - If experienced and properly trained
  - We currently have a few such people
  - If interested, can gain experience and training by volunteering for a blazing work outing
  - Likely outing to Graff

# **Safety First!**

## **Special Precautions During the Coronavirus Pandemic**



- Avoid visiting sanctuary during most busy weekend times
  - Weekday (early) mornings are best
- Bring a mask
- Put it on whenever someone else is near
- Move to the side of the trail, and face outwards
  - Give other walkers the “right of way”

# Safety First!

## General Guidelines



- Make sure someone knows where you are: check-out with someone before leaving and check-in upon return
- Stay hydrated (bring water) and bring a snack if you will be out a long time
- Stop working if tired
- Protect yourself from sun and insects
- Don't confront trail users involved in unauthorized activities
  - More on this later

# Safety First!

## General Guidelines



When using tools:

- Carry tools in a backpack
- Eye or safety glasses
- Work gloves
- Long pants & proper footwear
- Stop working when others are nearby

# Trail Walker Inspections



- Pick up litter: wear gloves and bring a trash bag
- Kick aside small branches on trail
- Report problems to office (using form)
  - Handled by experienced volunteer maintainer or professional sanctuary worker (Danny Ferguson)
  - Note location accurately, send photo if possible (GPS tagged)

# Trail Walker Inspections

## Problems to Look For



- Downed trees blocking trail
- Vegetation obstructing trail
  - 4' wide by 8' high trail corridor
- Persistent wet or muddy areas
  - We have recently addressed several such problem areas
- Damage to boardwalks
- Tripping hazards, e.g., large roots
- Poor trail blazing
  - Faded paint
  - Next blaze should be always be visible
  - Vegetation blocking blaze
  - Need to check both directions! Alternate directions on different trips



# Trail Walker Inspections Reporting



- File report soon after going out
  - Problems
  - Unauthorized usage
  - Feel free to include wildlife or unusual plants seen and people seen

# Unauthorized Usage



- Report unauthorized usage to office promptly
  - Bikes or motorized vehicles
  - Vandalism or Graffiti
  - Unauthorized hunting (Rare): Brinton, Pruyn and Choate have authorized bow hunters in November – December. They stay off trails and are usually there very early morning or late afternoon
  - Dogs off leash, or someone who appears to be a professional dog walker
  - Note license plates if possible

# Unauthorized Usage



- Don't confront trail users involved in unauthorized activities
- Possible exception *if* you feel comfortable doing so:  
***Politely*** ask people to leash their dogs and explain ***why***:
  - They can be a threat to people (and some people feel threatened by them)
  - Dogs running loose reduce wildlife habitat quality. Birds and other wildlife see domestic dogs as predators. Wildlife will leave areas frequented by loose dogs. They can kill ground nesting birds and small animals. Loose dogs are also at risk for injury from coyotes and other wildlife.
  - Thank people if their dog is on a leash!
- If you receive a negative response, let office know with description of dog and person, especially if repeat offender

# Trail Maintainer Tools



- For cutting back vegetation



Hand Pruners



Loppers  
can handle  
larger branches



Electric Hedge Trimmer  
can be used if vegetation  
is particularly thick  
Example: Lower Loop at Haas

# Trail Maintainer Tools



- Hand saws for clearing small blowdowns and branches: no chainsaws!
- They can get dull after a few years (replace blade or buy a new one)



Folding Saw  
Fits in  
backpack



Pruning Saw  
Needs case or holster  
unless you  
carry it the whole time



Bow Saw  
Needs case unless you  
carry it the whole time

# Trimming Vegetation

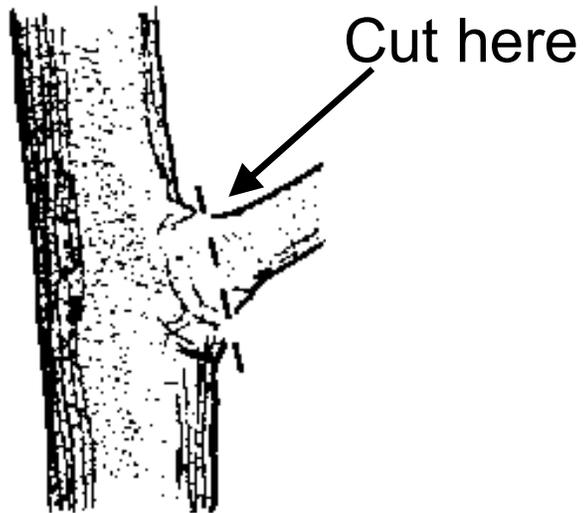


- Trim branches obstructing view of blazes
- Trail Corridor: at least 4' wide by 8' tall trail
  - Keep vegetation out of the corridor

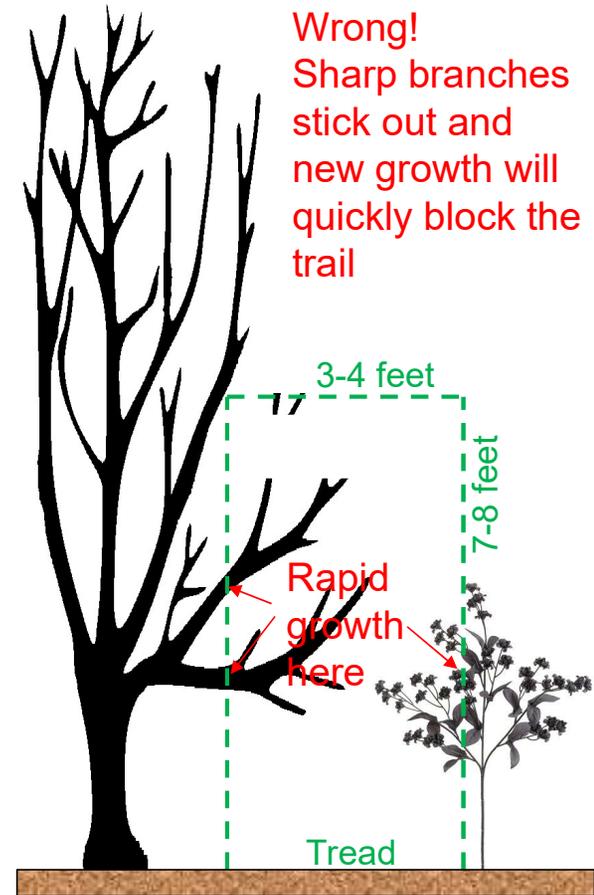
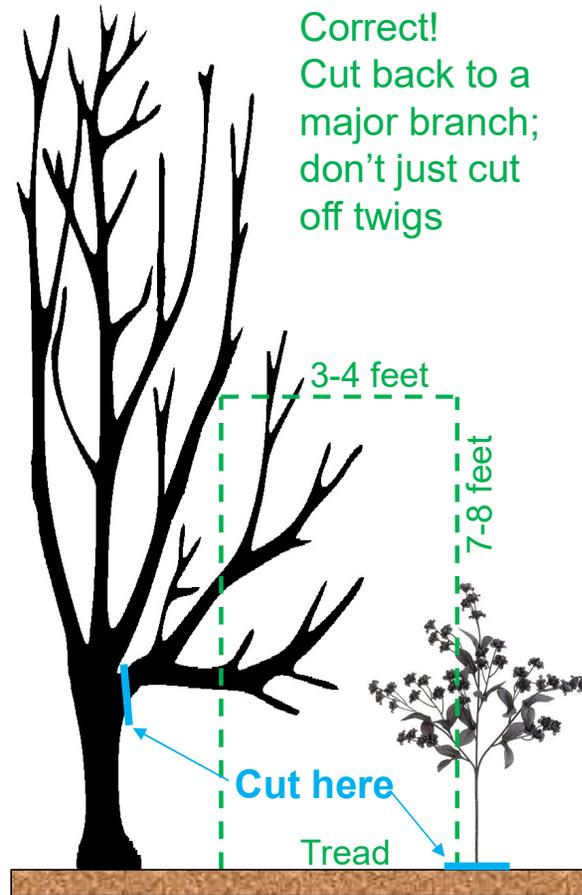
# Trimming Vegetation



- Trim branches close to (but not into) trunk to prevent sharp protrusions that can injure people



## How Far Back to Trim



# Trimming Vegetation Other Examples



Branches intruding onto Trail

Cut here

# Trimming Vegetation

## Other Examples



- Cut ground growing vegetation (often invasives) as close to ground as possible
- Be proactive: Even if it isn't intruding onto the trail now, it soon will be



Cut here

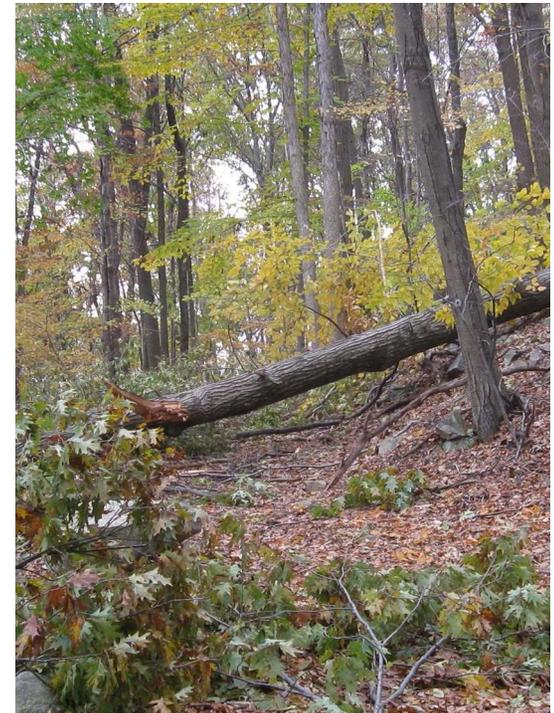
# Clearing Small Blowdowns



- Small means what you are comfortable with
  - Often up to about 8-10 inches in diameter
- May have to trim branches
- Avoid cutting into ground where there may be rocks (could damage saw)
- If saw seizes up, cut from other direction
- No chainsaws

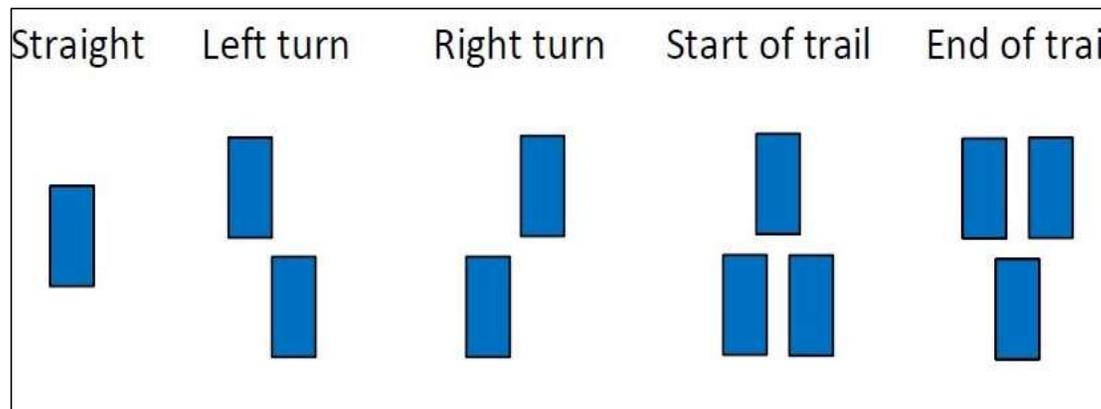


Too big to handle  
Report, noting  
position, take  
picture if possible



# Blazing

- Volunteer for a blazing crew if you've never done it before
- Let the office know if you will be blazing

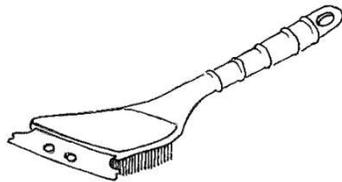


“V” for  
Victory

- Next blaze should always be visible
- Turn blaze if more than  $\sim 45^\circ$  turn
- Confirmation blaze shortly after turn
- Special attention at intersections: blazes near intersection, should be easily visible

# Blazing

- Exterior grade, high gloss latex paint
- 2” wide by 3” tall blazes
- Use ~1” brush (or 2” foam brush)
- Use a scraper or grill brush to smoothen surface before painting



*Grill Brush*

- Paint carefully to avoid drips
- Use brown or gray spray paint to cover mistakes or old blazes
- Special trip, just for blazing
- Blaze one direction at a time
- Trim vegetation blocking view of blazes

# Summary



- We will send you a soft-copy of these slides and link to recording
- Thanks for your help and interest
- Contact the office if you want to volunteer
  - 914-666-6503
  - [office@sawmillriveraudubon.org](mailto:office@sawmillriveraudubon.org)
- Have fun
- Questions?