

To the Editor:

There has been some confusion recently about the status of the Woodbridge Land Trust's Chestnut Orchard at the Fitzgerald tract. An enthusiastic group of town dog owners has proposed locating a dog park in the Chestnut Orchard. I'm writing in an effort to provide the relevant facts in hope of clarifying the current status of the Orchard and the role of the Woodbridge Land Trust.

Woodbridge's Chestnut Orchard project is part of a serious scientific undertaking by The American Chestnut Foundation (TACF). A century ago, more than 4 billion American Chestnut trees were wiped out by a blight fungus. The chestnut blight has been called the greatest ecological disaster to strike the world's forests in all of history. The foundation is working to develop a blight resistant chestnut tree via scientific research and breeding, and to restore the tree to its native forests along the eastern United States. Experimental orchards like ours are a crucial part of this research.

Begun over a decade ago, the Woodbridge orchard is an ongoing collaboration between the Town, who owns the land, the Land Trust, who purchased and owns the fencing and maintains the area, and TACF, who visits the orchard on a regular basis, owns the trees and harvests the nuts each year. The agreements between the Town, Land Trust and TACF reflect not only a commitment to the project, but an understanding of its value. The nuts from the remaining trees will be harvested and replanted for at least the next 5 years.

The Land Trust strives to maintain cooperative relationships with municipal officials and community groups to arrive at the best possible use of our public lands. When the proposal for a dog park arose, Land Trust board members contacted the scientists at the Chestnut Foundation to ask whether a dog park can be compatible with a chestnut orchard. Kendra Collins, the TACF's New England Regional Science Coordinator has communicated to the Trust her concerns for the safety of the dogs, who can sustain serious injury from the trees' spiked burs. In addition, Ms. Collins is aware of one orchard in Pennsylvania that was also used as a dog park. Unfortunately, the dog urine killed the trees.

Woodbridge is well known for its support of education and the scientific community. The close proximity of the chestnut orchard to Beecher Road School has provided a unique educational opportunity for our children to study plant science and ecology as part of the science curriculum. The Land Trust is equally and fully committed to supporting this worthy scientific endeavor and would not wish to cut it short, especially since it has just begun to bear fruit, so to speak.

Sincerely yours,



Bryan Pines
President, Woodbridge Land Trust