

RAUSCHER FARM THROUGH THE EYES OF GLORIA PARKINSON: FORESTS CAN CONNECT US DEEPLY TO PLACE



To learn more about Rauscher Farm, visit their [website](#).

Gloria Parkinson's eyes lit up when I asked her about some of her first experiences of nature. "I grew up in Liverpool. In a city. I never actually walked in the woods. I walked in parks. Most people have their first experience with nature in city parks," she explained. "People live in Cities!" Born and raised in Liverpool, England, she was 25 years old when she



visited a private conservation forest in France. One night, the property owner secreted her alone in a blind hide high up in a tree. She described her initial terror as the sun set and darkness fell. "I thought I would certainly get eaten there," she explained. As she proceeded to describe the orchestra of insects and creatures that serenaded her that night, her tone shifted to one of wonder and remembrance. Even though this was many years ago, she recalled in detail a specific beam of moonlight that fell perfectly into the clearing below her hide. Alerted by the cracking of twigs, she watched mesmerized as a doe and fawn sauntered into the moonlit spot below her. Gloria remembers this night and this moment, as the first time that she felt a deep connection to nature unleashed within her. Experienced like this, woodlands can be spaces where to become quiet, listen, observe, and explore, have an almost magical ability to create meaning and connect us to awe.

Decades later and across an ocean, Gloria became very active in a grassroots movement that successfully advocated for the acquisition of a 60-acre property to be preserved as conservation land. Located in the Town of Clinton, Rauscher Farm is home to an eclectic

array of woodlands, wetlands, grasslands, and a diversity of species. When the Town of Clinton bought Rauscher Farm in 2008, overall management of the property fell to the town's Conservation Commission. The hands-on management is provided by an independent subcommittee of the Conversation Commission called the Rauscher Farm Management Subcommittee, of which Gloria is a member. For Gloria, Rauscher Farm can be for others what her forest awakening in French woods so many years ago was for her. It is a local example of ways that forests and open spaces can be educational havens, grounding people in place, and sparking amazement.

Rauscher Farm's role in educating people, particularly young people, is central to their mission. "Forests and open spaces are educational spaces", Gloria explained. She provided several examples of how Rauscher Farm invites people of all ages to "take a second look" when experiencing nature. With Farm-sponsored activities, she emphasizes the interconnectedness of people and nature. One example of this approach is a youth-oriented activity in which Gloria, along with other farm volunteers, helps support participants to identify the age of a tree in the forest by measuring the circumference and doing a bit of math. She'll ask, "If this tree is this age, what was happening at this time in human history?" By intentionally drawing these connections, she can effectively highlight the deep connectedness between people and our natural environment.

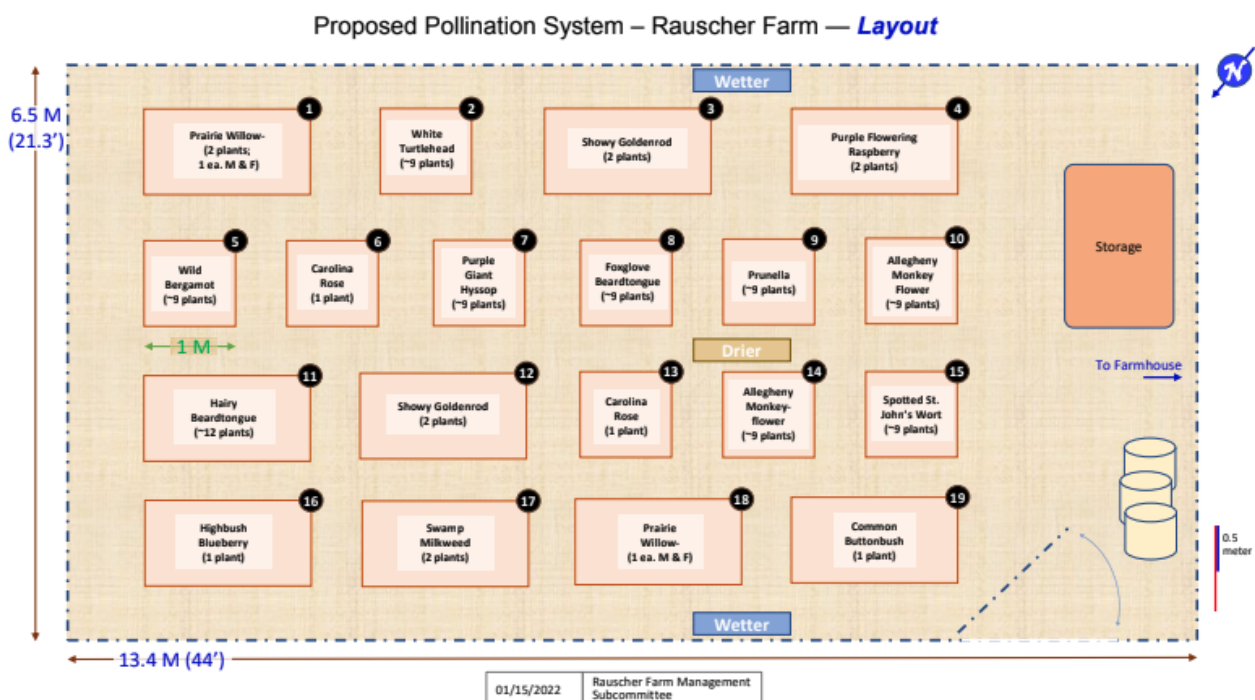
Humans can be forces for ecological health and restoration. The Town of Clinton has a Rauscher Farm Management Plan which emphasizes public access as well as the conservation of land. The Town and Rauscher Farm want to ensure that all people have access, even residents with limited mobility. The large woodland area trail brings people across generations to the forests. Programming invites people to participate including an annual story walk targeted towards families.

Conservation goals include repopulating the woodlands, getting rid of invasive species, supporting young growth to diversify the woodland, and an upcoming pollination system!



DEEP DIVE: Rauscher Farm’s Proposed Pollination System¹

The Rauscher Farm pollination system was designed with input from Professor Robert Gegear, Assistant Professor of Biology at UMASS Dartmouth “to enhance plant-pollinator interactions to benefit both pollinators and plants”. A “pollination system” is not simply a “pollinator garden” because pollination systems must meet specific native planting requirements. The selected native plants accommodate the needs of specific local pollinators. For example, species of long-tongued bumblebees require specific plant designs to thrive. These requirements will be accommodated in the proposed pollination system at Rauscher Farm.



The curated collection of native plants will foster habitat for native bees, butterflies, moths, and other pollinators. A recent Subcommittee report describes how “increased visits from pollinators will in turn benefit native plants by increasing pollination opportunities for the plants. The key to successful support is to provide pollinators with sources of pollen and nectar throughout the growing season, starting April through October” (Rauscher Farm Management Subcommittee, January 2022). An initial phase of the farm’s pollination system is scheduled for 2022.

¹ Information about this project was found through the Town’s open meeting law on the Town of Clinton’s Conversation Commission [Website](#) Rauscher Farm Management Subcommittee on January 15, 2022.

The proposed pollination system not only will provide ecological and resilience benefits, but it will serve as yet another educational tool for Rauscher Farm to connect people in the Town of Clinton and beyond to the natural world and to the inherent potential of people to be integral participants in and caretakers for healthy, thriving, and resilient ecosystems.