

## Willowdale boardwalk expands trail network

The Essex County Trail Association celebrated completing a new boardwalk Thursday, Dec. 2, which connects the east and west portions of the 2,400-acre Willowdale State Forest.

The boardwalk is part of a larger network of over 450 miles of trails throughout the area and shows the work that the Essex County Trails Association and others have been doing to secure safe access to the extensive trail network along the North Shore.

Willowdale State Forest straddles Ipswich, off Linebrook Road, Boxford and Topsfield and contains 40 miles of trails and is adjacent to Bradley Palmer State Park. Together, these two state-owned parcels total over

3,100 protected acres in Ipswich, Hamilton and Topsfield.

Several trail association volunteers built the 160-foot boardwalk across a wetland area in Willowdale State Forest during October.

Volunteers included representatives from the New England Mountain Bike Association, Bay Circuit Trail Committee, Topsfield Rail Trail Committee and others.

Alex Van Alen, executive director of the Essex County Trail Association, recalled when he completed a walk across Ipswich from Hood Pond to Crane Beach last May, he had to walk across a beaver dam to cross this area.

Mountain bikers, hikers, equestrians and bird watchers

use the trail with new boardwalk.

REI Sports awarded a grant to the trail association in July to support the repair of the damaged boardwalk in an effort to restore this portion of trail.

"This bridge will help increase accessibility and opportunities to enjoy the outdoors. REI has shared aspirations and goals with ECTA — to increase stewardship, conservation and recreation in our natural areas," said Bruce Jurgens, manager of REI's Reading store. "The new boardwalk will allow for safe access across the wetland."

For more information and to see trail maps of all the publicly accessible trails in the area, visit ECTA's web site at: [ectaonline.org](http://ectaonline.org).



Volunteers show off the newly finished boardwalk at Willowdale State Forest.

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