



Native Plant Trust Announces Retirement of Executive Director, Debbi Edelstein, Distinguished Advocate for Conservation and New England's Plants

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

(December 8, 2023 – Framingham, Massachusetts) — Native Plant Trust, the nation's first plant conservation organization and the only one solely focused on New England's native plants, announced today that Debbi Edelstein will be retiring as executive director at the end of January after fifteen years of service. The organization is concluding a nationwide search for her successor and is expected to make an announcement shortly. Edelstein has led the 30-person nonprofit since February 2009 and has inspired her team to significant achievements and new initiatives in conservation, ecological horticulture, and education.

Bill Huyett, Chair of the Native Plant Trust Board of Trustees, praised Edelstein's leadership. "Debbi's retirement after fifteen years of distinguished service to Native Plant Trust and to the field as a whole evokes a range of reactions, from appreciation for all she has done for the organization, to regret at losing a multi-talented and determined colleague," Huyett said. "We



are eager to find a new leader who can build on the present momentum and deliver the impact described in the organization’s vision document developed under Debbi’s leadership.”

Edelstein’s many accomplishments reflect her lifelong commitment to making the world a better place. During her tenure, the organization expanded its work to save rare and endangered plants, undertook important restoration projects, developed the first master plan for the 45-acre Garden in the Woods in Framingham, MA, and launched the nation’s first online botany courses a decade ago. She also set a research agenda that resulted in the publication of the Go Botany website, four books, and two major research reports, “The State of New England’s Native Plants” (2015) and “Conserving Plant Diversity in New England” (2022).



In addition, she developed a successful new business model for the native plant nursery in Whately, MA, and expanded seed-processing and storage facilities to support the new Northeast Seed Network, a regional initiative led by Native Plant Trust to create a sustainable source of seed to meet the increased demand for native plants in the restoration and nursery sectors. She is the lead author of Native Plant Trust’s new fifteen-year vision document, which describes the organization’s opportunities—and obligations—in addressing the twin environmental crises of our era, climate change and the loss of biodiversity.

Under her leadership, Native Plant Trust forged ties with national and international plant conservation organizations and was among the first institutions worldwide

to receive Advanced Conservation Practitioner accreditation by London-based Botanic Gardens Conservation International (BGCI), which included an endorsement by an International Advisory Council representing six continents. In recognition of her distinguished leadership, Massachusetts Horticultural Society presented her with a Gold Medal in May 2023.

Her transformation of the organization began early on, when she led a strategic planning process that resulted in a new mission statement focused on “conserving and promoting

New England’s native plants to ensure healthy, biologically diverse landscapes.” That mission aligned core programs and made it possible to harness the staff’s expertise into increasingly effective actions and partnerships. In 2019 the organization changed its name to better reflect its mission and capabilities as a science-focused conservation and ecological horticulture organization. The new name also acknowledged the organization’s roots, as it was founded in 1900 as the Society for the Protection of Native Plants.

“As the organization approaches its 125th anniversary, the time is right to hand over the reins,” Edelstein says. “Native Plant Trust has emerged from the challenges of the pandemic with a clear vision, impressively talented staff, a strong board, and committed supporters. It is well-positioned for continued momentum and success. My time here has flown by, as every day and year brought the pleasure of working with remarkable people to reach milestones in our mission. I want to thank all who have so generously offered ideas, time, and support to the organization and to me personally.”

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ABOUT NATIVE PLANT TRUST

Native Plant Trust is the nation’s first plant conservation organization and the only one solely focused on New England’s native plants. We save native plants in the wild, grow them for gardens and restorations, and educate others on their value and use. From our base in Massachusetts, staff and trained volunteers work throughout New England each year to monitor and protect rare and endangered plants, collect and preserve seeds to ensure biological diversity, detect and control invasive species, conduct research, and offer a range of educational programs.

We welcome visitors from all over the world to Garden in the Woods, our renowned native plant botanic garden in Framingham. We also operate a nursery at Nasami Farm in western Massachusetts and manage six sanctuaries in Maine, New Hampshire, and Vermont that are open to the public. Native Plant Trust is among the first organizations worldwide to receive Advanced Conservation Practitioner accreditation by London-based Botanic Gardens Conservation International (BGCI), which included an endorsement by an International Advisory Council representing six continents. Please visit www.NativePlantTrust.org.