

## **VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITY: Charles River Environmental Watch (CREW) Vegetation Monitors**

***The Charles River Conservancy (CRC) is recruiting up to six new volunteers for monthly vegetation monitoring that supports ecological restoration in Cambridge.***

### **Program Background**

2026 will be the CRC's third year of vegetation monitoring at [Hell's Half-Acre](#), a 7.5-acre tract of urban wilderness in Cambridge, MA. Hell's Half Acre (HHA) has four distinct ecological habitats between the Charles River and Greenough Boulevard:

- 2000 feet of riparian corridor
- a larger strip of successional woodland
- an emergent freshwater wetland
- a heavily disturbed roadside area

These ecosystems support many species of native plants and wildlife, including [at least 80 species of birds](#). HHA also provides important community value and recreational amenities, including a walking and jogging path that connects the Charles River parklands south of the Eliot Bridge to the pedestrian pathways along Greenough Boulevard.

However, decades of disturbance and neglect have left the site vulnerable to the harmful impact of [invasive plant species](#). Over the past six years, the CRC and the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) have used a combination of manual removal by volunteers and professional treatment by contractors to reduce the population and limit the spread of invasive plants. This control promotes the re-establishment of native plants, which not only support pollinators but also produce nuts, seeds, and fruits, all of which offer essential food sources for amphibians, mammals, migratory birds, and resident birds.

In 2024, the CRC launched a vegetation monitoring program within the Charles River Environmental Watch (CREW) to track the progress of the HHA restoration project. Over the first two years, our vegetation monitors have been tracking the relative abundance and distribution of native and invasive plants across HHA's four habitats. These findings have proven the effectiveness of our invasive control, which has enabled us to add an active replanting component to the overall project this upcoming spring. As we kick off this exciting new phase, the data collected by our volunteers will be crucial not only for the ongoing management of HHA but also for the potential expansion of our restoration efforts to other parks in the Charles River Basin.

**For year three of monitoring, we are looking for up to six new vegetation monitors with an interest in field data collection, plant ecology, and community science! These volunteers will join our existing CREW members in a new and improved program that promotes camaraderie and peer-to-peer learning all while supporting the ongoing restoration of Hell's Half-Acre.**

## Eligibility

Prospective volunteers must:

- ★ Be at least 18 years old
- ★ Be physically able to monitor and perform minor maintenance of their assigned test plot area
- ★ Have a strong interest in stewardship of urban parks and ecosystems
- ★ Commit to stewarding their test plot(s) once a month for at least eight months
- ★ Complete a background check and fill out a waiver

## 2026 Training and Group Monitoring Dates

**REQUIRED:** *Saturday, April 11*, 10 a.m. – 12 p.m. - Virtual CREW Orientation

**REQUIRED:** *Saturday, May 2*, 10 a.m. – 12 p.m. – On-site Monitor Training

**OPTIONAL:** Additional group monitoring sessions, ~ once monthly throughout the summer

**\*NOTE\*** *We are providing these dates in advance so you can evaluate whether they conflict with your schedule. The required training sessions are a prerequisite to serving as a vegetation monitor, so please only apply for the program if you can commit to attending both sessions!*

## About Data Collection

CREW Vegetation Monitors will collect data on the plants within an assigned test plot in one of the four habitat types found at HHA (riparian habitat, successional woodland, wetland, and road's edge). To maximize the value of this data, test plots are located in areas that have previously undergone active invasive species management or are adjacent to active replanting zones. Members will conduct monthly site visits throughout the season (April-November) to identify all species within their test plots and report relevant attributes including density and distribution. They will then upload this data to the community science platform [Anecdata](#), where fellow volunteers can provide feedback on any uncertain species identification before the CRC compiles the data for ongoing analysis. ***New for 2026: test plots will be larger in size, and each plot will have two monitors assigned to provide built-in support for plant identification or accessibility issues.***

The CRC will provide all monitors with hands-on training and visual guides to plant identification and data entry, plus other useful resources including historic HHA plant inventories. In addition, the CRC will be hosting group monitoring sessions four times throughout the summer to provide additional training/assistance and an in-person space for CREW members to share their results with each other. We hope our monitors see this program as an ideal opportunity to develop and implement scientific and botanical knowledge, support the CRC's goals of promoting biodiversity and data-driven stewardship, forge a deeper connection to their local environment, and meet like-minded community members

## **Responsibilities**

- Attend the required CREW orientation and on-site monitoring training sessions
- Perform monitoring of assigned test plot(s) at least once per month, including native plant species, invasive plant species, and wildlife
  - ◆ We expect all monitors to maintain this monthly commitment and keep open lines of communication with the CRC in the event of extenuating circumstances that prevent them from fulfilling the responsibility
- Document changes in the test plot(s) via photos and written descriptions using an online monitoring form after each visit
- Act as an ambassador to park users when visiting Hell's Half Acre
- Notify CRC staff directly about urgent problems
- Help build a sense of community by participating in online and in-person social opportunities, including collaborative resolution of uncertain plant identifications
- Volunteers may have the opportunity to take on additional responsibilities by informally monitoring or formally watering the CRC's active planting plots

## **How to join the CREW Vegetation Monitoring Program**

To apply to be a member of the CREW Vegetation Monitors, please fill out the application found on our website! CRC staff will be in touch with you to arrange an interview that will help us get to know you better and gauge what site and responsibilities would be best suited for you. All prospective CREW Vegetation Monitoring members also get to attend training sessions and a site orientation. Once those are completed, the CRC will provide members with all the materials needed to monitor your assigned plot and maintain email communication to provide any pertinent news and updates.