



CRISTY KELDER

Sam Griffin, front, 15, helps Joshua Hornick from the apple orchard behind Applewood at Amherst in South Amherst Tuesday.

Home-schoolers help out in town

Pathfinder Center students get crash course in conservation efforts

By STEVE PFARRER
Staff Writer

AMHERST — Hauling discarded tires out of the woods, clearing away downed tree branches, and cleaning up littered trails are not part of the curriculum for most high-school-aged students.

But some home-schooled students in Amherst are getting a crash course in outdoor work, courtesy of the town's Conservation Department. The department is using the students' volunteer efforts to help tackle a backlog of maintenance jobs.

"(The students) have been a big help," said Conservation Director Peter Westover. "We've been able to count on the help of a core group, about four to eight students, once a week, most weeks since the fall."

Late Tuesday morning, Jacob Miller-Mack, 16, and Sam Griffin, 15, were helping Amherst's land manager, Nicholas Anzuoni, gather up piles of branches behind the Applewood retirement community. The limbs had fallen from trees in an old apple orchard earlier this winter and were being piled for burning.

Miller-Mack and Griffin, both of Amherst, are pursuing home-schooling with the help of the Pathfinder Learning Center in Amherst, a resource center for parents who teach their children at home and for the students themselves.

"I love being outside, and I don't mind doing hard work," said Miller-Mack. "I think this is something worthwhile to do."

Miller-Mack, who doesn't have previous experience doing trail work, said he's looking into working this summer for the Student Conservation Association, a national organization that links young people with work sites in national parks and forests and other areas across the country.

The Pathfinder Center and the Conservation Department teamed up last fall after a student expressed concern about trail degradation, according to Joshua Hornick, co-director of the learning center.

Hornick said that right after that, Pathfinder Co-Director Ken Danford took the student up to the Hitchcock Center for the Environment, which in turn got in touch with the Conservation Department. "Some students started helping out regularly after that," he said.

Hornick, who was helping with Tuesday's cleanup — Danford usually drives the students to the work sites and helps out himself — added that the students doing the conservation work do it of their own accord.

"We encourage kids to do community service work, but this was still their idea," he said.

The students' assistance has been

gladly accepted by Anzuoni and Westover, the Conservation Department's only two full-time employees, who are responsible for overseeing the town's extensive conservation lands and 600 miles of trails.

"This isn't the most exciting job, but it's still hard work that has to be done," Anzuoni said Tuesday as he watched Griffin and Miller-Mack haul heavy branches to the piles of deadwood.

Anzuoni said he first started working with the Pathfinder students last fall, when they and other volunteers helped extend the Robert Frost Trail from Sunnyside into Wendell.

More recently, the students, along with a student group from the University of Massachusetts, carted 125 old truck and car tires from land in North Amherst. The tires were taken to the town landfill for disposal, which cost \$1,200 in tipping fees, Anzuoni said.

"It was a huge job," he said. Griffin, who started home-schooling last fall, said the outdoor work was "something different" that seemed interesting. "It's something I might pursue," he said.

Anzuoni said the Applewood orchard, which has now actually been planted to the town, may eventually be planted with new trees.