

Activating W1XPO for the Northeast HamXposition

By: Conrad Trautmann, N2YCH

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The Northeast HamXposition took place in Marlboro, Massachusetts on August 22nd to the 25th. Not having made it to Dayton/Xenia this year, I was told by others that this was a great event that I shouldn't miss. I was not disappointed.

Shawn Warren, KC1NQE, Peter Cimino, K1PCN and I, Conrad Trautmann, N2YCH, did a joint presentation about the evolution of the Connecticut Parks on the Air activators group on Saturday afternoon. Given that we were presenting about POTA, we were asked by the organizers to activate some parks over the weekend of the event using the official call sign of the The Federation of Eastern Massachusetts Amateur Radio Associations (FEMARA), W1XPO, who runs the HamXposition. Activating a park is always fun to do, but it's even more fun when you are using a special event call sign. Everyone wants to try and get you, which usually means a good pile up.

Peter and I traveled to the Xpo on Friday and got an early start to get some parks in before the events began at the show. Peter had a few good ones mapped out, our first being Bigelow Hollow State Park, US-1648 in Union, CT. Shawn had been there before and gave us some good advice on where to set up. Peter operates on SSB and I primarily operate on digital, so we'd be giving our hunters a few different modes to try and get us.

Here's a view of the site we selected to operate from with Bigelow Pond in the distance. The park is wooded with forest right up to the bank of the pond. There is not much open space so we set up among the trees.



Peter went to the right, I set up at a table to the left. Peter set up on 40m SSB with a homebrew EFHW and a Yaesu ft-891 at 40w. He was able to log 42 in about 50 minutes as it was still early in the morning and 40m was open.



You can see my VHF/UHF handheld in the photo that Peter and I use to coordinate which bands we will operate on. Sometimes when you're all set up, the band will be dead or the surroundings won't lend themselves to good signals on the frequencies you intend to operate on. So we've learned to pivot quickly and swap bands to get the QSO's in that we need. On this day, I operated on 20 meters while Peter took 40 meters. Since this was our first park of the day, 40 meters was still hopping and I also had good luck. All of the red on my laptop screen above are hunters calling in.

Our next stop was the Quacumquasit Wildlife Management Area, US-11562, in East Brookfield, MA. We learned that as "out-of-staters" many of the Massachusetts state parks required a fee to get in. This one did not.

Peter and I both set up and while he had a very good activation, my logging software decided to stop working. I could not figure out why until I got to the hotel that evening, but it was a bit frustrating to get all set up and not be able to activate.



That was our final activation for Friday, but we had plans to activate on the way home as well. On our return trip to Connecticut, we made one last stop in Sturbridge, Massachusetts to activate Wells State Park, US-2462, pictured below.

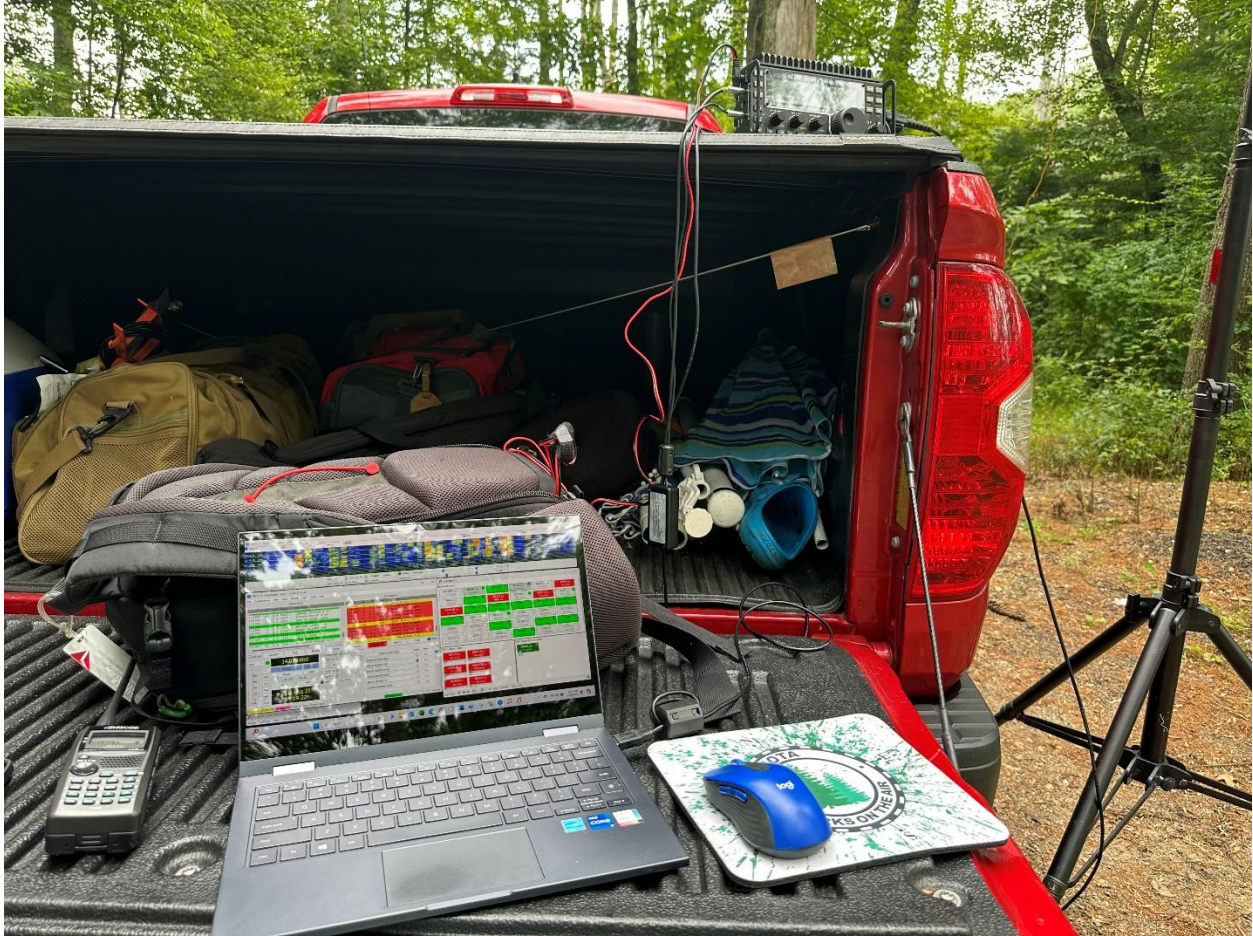


Peter hiked along a trail to find a spot to activate...that's him on the air. He carries a small foldable park table. In the picture is his set up with his EFHW going up into a tree.





And I took the easy way out and used the tailgate of Peter's truck to set up on.



Another pile up...that's my KX3 up on top running QRP power and I used a Buddipole vertical antenna tuned to 20 meters.

While we thought we'd get some nice weather, about 20 minutes into our activation the sky clouded up and it began to rain. We took that as our message to wrap up and make our way home.

I'll conclude by commending the parks on the air site designers and developers for the nice feature of being able to upload a log as a special event call sign, but also give credit to the operator for activating the park, too. I just put W1XPO as the "STATION_CALLSIGN" in my log and my call sign as the "OPERATOR" and when the owner of W1XPO uploads the log, the POTA site is smart enough to know that I was the operator and populates my page with the QSO's as well. It's great for clubs that want to teach new operators how to run on HF.

Until next year, POTA ON!