

# Essex Land Trust Annual Report – April 12, 2018

**2018 marks the Essex Land Trust's 50th year** in pursuing its mission of preserving and enhancing our community's open space and natural resources for the benefit of future generations. We thank all our members and donors for the sustained support provided over many years. Without this support we would not have been so successful in realizing our vision.

The past year was another successful year for the Essex Land Trust. We are pleased to report the following highlights.

**Finance Report:** 2017 was another active financial year. Our Operational Income for the year was \$ 114,000 with \$ 34,000 coming from dues and the balance from Donations, Grants, and Bequests. Expenses were \$ 109,000 with the largest portion attributable to mowing, tree removal, and treatment for invasives on several of our properties. Other Core expenses were to fund our communications efforts, various programs & activities, and the Membership drive.

We would like to thank all of our Members, Donors and specific grantor organizations: The Community Fund, Community Foundation of Middlesex County, MRB Foundation, Essex Lions Club, Essex Savings Bank Community Investment Program, and The Willow Creek Foundation. Donors also include Corporate Matching gifts from: IBM, GE, Google, and Pfizer

We rely on our investment portfolio to generate income for property maintenance and development, and to provide for the acquisition of open space. At the end of 2017, our investment portfolio was \$ 1,773,000 of which \$ 500,000 is in restricted accounts that provide income for stewardship expenditures at some properties. The balance of funds is retained for future acquisition opportunities and our secured line of credit

As opportunities arise for land acquisition we look to several sources for funds: the ELT Portfolio, private fund raising, State grants and Town Open Space Sinking Fund. The availability of these sources provides good flexibility for funding our land purchases; all of these sources were utilized for our recent acquisitions.

**Acquisitions:** Last year we reported that we were looking for ways to expand and improve access to our under-utilized Windswept Ridge Preserve and also expand our James Glen/Doanes' Woods parcel.

Windswept Ridge started out as a 30-acre property that the Land Trust has owned since 1998. In 2015 we added 6 acres to the north end and in May 2017 we closed on an additional 11 acres of woods and steep rock ledges that extends Windswept Ridge Preserve southward. This is a spectacular new piece of property, and the stewardship team, led by Jeff Croyle is in the process of creating a new series of trails that incorporate these scenic ledges into our trail system. They used a professional trail designer, Ben Collins, to help them create a trail system using trail-building best practices.

In addition, we have finalized our license agreements with Essex Savings Bank and Herb Clark, and we now have access to Windswept Ridge from Route 153. This access point goes through

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the Essex Financial Services parking lot and up a short gravel road which leads to the new Land Trust parking lot. Also, last year we created access to Windswept Ridge from Windsor Lane in Ivoryton. These expansions and improvements make Windswept Ridge an enlarged, beautiful, and easily accessible 46-acre Essex Land Trust Preserve.

Our second major achievement is the expansion of our James Glen/Doanes' Woods Preserve. In January 2004, the Town of Essex gave the Land Trust James Glen, which is a little over 4 acres of open space off Hudson Lane. In August 2016, we purchased an abutting property called Doanes' Woods which is off Navy Lane and is around 18 acres. Last week we closed on another gorgeous abutting property from the Doane family that will be called Woodja Hill, a Native American name. It is off Oxbow Lane and is also around 18 acres. It consists of open meadows, hilly wooded areas and wetlands.

With this new purchase we now have a preserve that goes from Hudson Lane in Essex all the way to the 10.7-acre Lyons Meadow Preserve in Deep River, a beautiful open-space property owned by the Deep River Land Trust. Besides the access from Hudson Lane, we now have entrances off Navy Lane and Meadow Woods Road in Deep River. We will be creating an entrance, a parking lot and trails off of Ox Bow Lane this year. This 40-acre preserve will be a new and very scenic place for Essex residents to use and enjoy.

Here are some of the financial aspects of this purchase. We bought the Woodja Hill property for the appraised value of \$348,000. We received \$50,000 towards the purchase from the Town of Essex Open Space fund. We were also very fortunate to receive a \$167,000 State of Connecticut grant from the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection. The grant was written by our own Bob Nussbaum and Chet Arnold. The remaining \$131,000 will come from Essex Land Trust funds.

**Stewardship:** team as always has been very busy, developing trails and access points, installing signs and kiosks, addressing invasive plants and clearing extensive tree damage brought on by several severe winter storms. An important initiative has been developing and implementing management plans for each of our preserves. All Land Trust properties have assigned stewards, reaching 34 individuals including two at large stewards. It goes without saying that the impressive efforts of these many volunteers are vital to preserving the quality of the Land Trust's 22 properties, representing nearly 650 acres.

**Membership:** Essex Land Trust Membership continued strong. At the end of 2017, you were part of our community of 385 individual and household members. We are very grateful for the support and commitment we receive from the community and encourage all current members to renew their membership as membership dues are an important contributor to the Land Trust's financial well-being. We continue to seek new members by contacting those who are new to our community and inviting potential members among current residents who are neighbors of our preserves.

**Programs & Events:** In 2017, there were 22 events. Four lectures spanned the topics of invasive plants, geologic history of the Lower Ct. River, monarch butterflies and their habitat

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and archeological history of indigenous people of our valley with events in the field to complement these lectures.

In addition to these events were others that helped participants explore our properties: Bob Russo examined vernal pools in The Preserve, Jim Denham led a nature/bird walk in the Essex Meadow Properties. Phil Miller led our annual kayak trip to North Cove and the mouth of the Falls River after which there was our Concert in the Town Park with the Corinthian Jazz Band. Other hikes explored Turtle Creek Preserve with Phil Miller, The Preserve with Chris Cryder and our new property, Doanes' Woods and James Glen. In collaboration with the Connecticut River Conservancy and the help of many volunteers, we held a Source to Sea Clean up at Great Meadow. Our annual Cross Lots clean up brought many neighborhood users out to help.

Many of these events could not have been as successful without the collaboration of our partners the Essex Garden Club, The Essex Historical Society, The Deep River Historical Society, the Deep River Land Trust and Essex Meadows.

A special note about the 12th annual Land Trust Photo Contest which took place on April 6. Coordinated by ELT volunteer Susan Scott, the contest was sponsored by 5 land trusts: Old Lyme, Lyme, East Haddam, Salem and Essex. There were more than 140 photographers and 340 photos. A great success for this collaborative effort!

**Map Update Project:** With the addition of more preserves and the advances in technology, the Board began a project to upgrade the maps for each of our properties. All properties have been visited and tracked via GPS which will enhance the experience of hikers along with improved trail accuracy. The project will be completed in 2018. Particular thanks to the Community Foundation of Middlesex County for their grant to assist in this project.

**Follow the Falls Initiative:** This past year, we joined Essex Historical Society in the Follow the Falls project, which begins at Falls River Cove and celebrates its natural environment, its industrial history and its place in the history of Essex and will follow the Falls through each of our villages. Three lectures in January were well attended by a total of 470 people.

When Elizabeth “Diz” Callender donated the 8-acre property next to her home on Foxboro Point to the Essex Land Trust in 1998, she was expressing a life-long appreciation for the Town of Essex in which she was born in 1915, raised and lived most of her life. In doing so, by combining her appreciation for the natural world and the history of North Cove, Diz became the inspiration for the Follow the Falls project.

**Looking to the Future:** During 2016, with guidance from the national Land Trust Alliance, we had completed a detailed assessment of four areas: governance, finance, acquisitions and stewardship. Overall, we received a very good evaluation and sound recommendations which we are implementing to ensure that we will continue to be responsible stewards in perpetuity of the land we hold for your benefit.

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In 2017, we began the process of evaluating where we have been and how best to continue to manage and conserve the land in Essex which we hold and have committed to hold on behalf of members and future generations forever. We adopted a new strategic plan under the leadership of Tom Rutherford. Key areas of focus include Organizational Strength and Land Transactions. Based on our first quarter review, we are making excellent progress in reaching our objectives.

**Accreditation:** As a result of above-mentioned organizational efforts over the past 2 years, the Essex Land Trust Board decided that it was in the organization's interest to take a next step, applying for accreditation by the national Land Trust Alliance. We registered to begin the formal process in 2017, with board member Joel Anik taking the lead in overseeing this complex and very detailed initiative.

### Recognitions:

**David Hyde Memorial Award:** Annually ELT provides a scholarship in memory of long-time Board Member, David Hyde, to a student who has demonstrated an interest in conservation. The scholarship supports participation in the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service program sponsored in Connecticut through UConn. The program is highly selective with approximately 24 students each year from throughout the state and includes a week of immersion in all aspects of natural resource management, followed by a mentored project in a related area of interest. The scholarship provided by ELT was unique, the first of its kind in Connecticut, and is held up as a model by the NRCA program to encourage community support for future students.

This year's participant, Tabby Hardgrove, is the third since we established the scholarship. Tabby's community partners were Bob Nussbaum and Chet Arnold. For her project, Tabby completed a very detailed study of the water quality in the Falls River. The following quote from the program coordinator, Abby Beisinger says all:

At the field experience Tabby was recovering from a dislocated knee and wore a knee brace, was stung 4 times by wasps, got over a moth/butterfly phobia during our biodiversity at night insect activity, and had trepidation during her first hike because she "loved nature but had never really been in it before."

At the end of the program, Tabby wrote the following: "Thank you all so much for putting in all this time to help with such an amazing opportunity. It has been absolutely one of the best experiences of my life and it wouldn't be possible without *all of you*."

**Eagle Scout Project:** Once again we are grateful to the Boy Scouts and their Eagle Scout program. And to the Ryan Family whose children have supported ELT in the past. Michael Ryan designed the bridge over the stream that runs through Doanes' Woods and James Glen and led his fellow scouts in its construction.

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**Valley Regional:** Each year on its annual day of service, Valley Regional HS provides teams of students to various organizations throughout the tri-town area. The Land Trust typically receives 5 teams of about 10 people each who perform a variety property maintenance tasks. We are particularly grateful for the assistance these young men and women for their contributions to our stewardship activities.

**Myron Stacks:** The Board elected to honor steward Myron Stacks as a Conservator for life for his outstanding contribution to the stewardship of Essex Land Trust properties.

## **Board Election:**

Annual meeting concluded with the election of the Board of Directors.

1. Barbara Sarrantonio to the Board of Directors for a 3-year term. Former attorney of council and a resident of the village of Ivoryton for a number of years.
2. Re-Elect Michael Carlucci, James Denham, Gudrun LeLash and Thomas Rutherford to new 3-year terms.
3. Confirmed the Board classes as shown below:

<b>2019</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>2021</b>
Geoff Furtney	Joel Anik	Michael Carlucci
Paul Greenberg	Cynthia Field	James Denham
Judith Saunders	Robert Nussbaum	Gudrun LeLash
-	Nancy Rambeau	Tom Rutherford
-	-	Barbara Sarrantonio