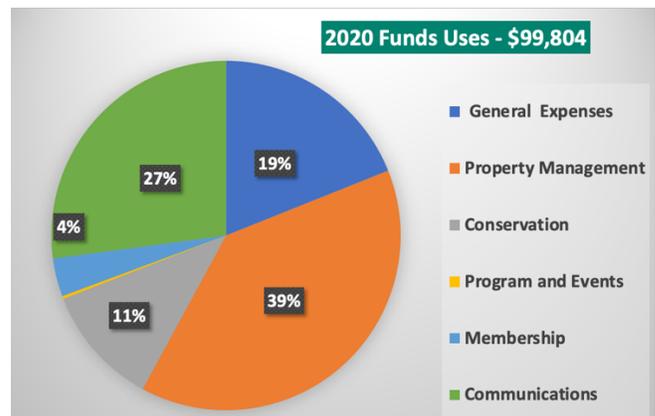
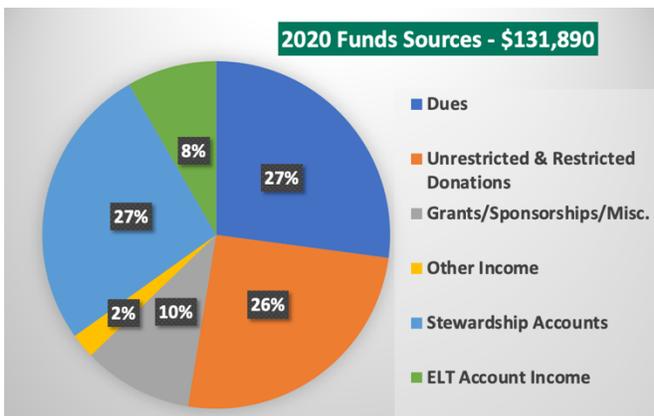


# Essex Land Trust Annual Report for 2020

## Another Year of Caring for Our World Here at Home

The Essex Land Trust completed its 52<sup>nd</sup> year of ongoing operations in 2020. The year was significantly impacted by the unprecedented Covid-19 pandemic. Events were curtailed or cancelled as the country was required to quarantine and limit gatherings. The opportunity to be outdoors was one of the few sanctioned activities, which resulted in a significant increase of visitors to land trust preserves.

**Membership & Finances:** One result of the pandemic has been the single largest increase in new members in recent memory. Total membership by year-end 2020 reached 450, including 24 corporate supporters. Donations and dues from the 42 new members were over \$6,000, an important addition to the land trust's resources and its ability to maintain its 650 acres of land. We thank all members, donors and corporate sponsors for their support without which we could not carry out our mission. Total revenue for the year came in ahead of a tight expense budget, thereby allowing the land trust to start off the new fiscal year with a positive cash balance. Communications expenses in 2020 were higher than usual due to the one-time printing costs of the land trust's *Trail Guide* and the *Thatchbed Island and Its Ospreys* publication.



**Updated Mission, Vision and Values:** During the year, the Board of Directors completed the process of reviewing its Strategic Plan and agreed on the following updated statements:

The Essex Land Trust acquires, preserves and manages its open space to protect the environment and small-town character of the villages of Centerbrook, Essex, and Ivoryton for current and future generations and to provide our community with recreational and educational opportunities through strategic acquisitions and responsible stewardship of properties with significant environmental value.

Our vision is to provide the Essex community with a network of permanently protected preserves that provides ample opportunities for our residents of all ages to enjoy the beauty of nature while protecting our waterways and supporting healthy wildlife habitats.

The Essex Land Trust pursues its mission with an emphasis on connecting the community and the environment to support the wide variety of interests and diversity of the people of Essex. We value the commitment of our volunteers, the historic heritage of our properties and partnerships with our community, organizations and landowners. We act ethically with transparency, integrity, and respect based on the highest professional standards and in a fiscally responsible way.

**Acquisitions:** The Land Trust did not acquire any land this past year but is always on the lookout for new opportunities to obtain open space. The Acquisitions Committee meets regularly to evaluate potential preserves in line with the priority of protecting significant ecosystems, adding to existing preserves and building corridors that contribute to biodiversity.

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**Programs:** Most events were cancelled due to the Covid 19 pandemic. A scaled back Annual Meeting was held belatedly in September to comply with bylaws. Property cleanups at Cross Lots and Osage Trails were carried out with participants wearing face masks and maintaining social distancing.

During 2020, the land trust published and distributed to all members its *Thatchbed Island and Its Ospreys* publication, a description of the island with particular focus on the restoration of native Osprey. It featured a detailed description of Osprey's annual cycle as seen through photos taken by the land trust OspreyCam.

**Volunteers** are vital to the land trust's operations and preserve maintenance. Including board members, stewards and other individuals, we estimate that volunteers contribute more than 3,000 hours of their time annually. By expanding the volunteer community and creating opportunities for engagement, a number of projects were carried out: clean ups and invasive clearing events at Cross Lots, Osage Trails, Canfield Meadow Woods, Windswept Ridge and Tiley Pratt; garden volunteers continue their good work at the Cross Lots Pollinator Garden and Diz Callender's Perennial Garden at Osage Trails; and supported the Pollinator Garden at the Essex Historical Society's Pratt House.

**Stewardship** is a major focus of land trust resources and could not be carried out without the more than 30 property stewards who have taken on this responsibility. Over the past year, the stewardship team:

- 👤 Built and distributed 10 new benches across multiple preserves
- 👤 Created a new seating area at Osage Trails
- 👤 Continued efforts to revitalize the dogwood field at Cross Lots by eradicating the anthracnose that prevented any blooms in 2019
- 👤 Appointed a bird steward working across preserves to assess and place appropriate bird housing
- 👤 Completed installation of a new bridge at The Millrace and while clearing some vegetation
- 👤 Created new trails at the Platt Preserve, connected to Bushy Hill Preserve
- 👤 Funded ongoing efforts to control invasive Phragmites on Great Meadow and Falls River Cove
- 👤 Established a Science and Technical Advisory Committee (STAC) composed of experts to consult with stewards on various conservation and environmental issues
- 👤 Developed a Stewardship Steering Committee to provide ongoing support and direction to stewards



The new Millrace Bridge, completed in 2020

Finally, in light of the progress achieved in combating the Covid 19 pandemic, the land trust is looking forward to resuming a more active calendar of events in 2021 including a South Cove kayak trip, an early summer concert and other property related events.