



ELT's Primary Mission: Land Acquisition

By Steve Knauth

Acquiring open space is one of the primary missions of the Essex Land Trust. And it's certainly fulfilled that mission over the years, with a roster of 18 properties that total today around 500 acres. There's more coming.

The Land Trust currently has five more properties that are "about to close," according to board member Paul Greenberg, who heads up the Acquisitions Committee. These pending open space acquisitions will add to existing land on Great Meadow and expand holdings along the Falls River in Ivoryton below Comstock Field. The Land Trust will also soon gain a parcel in The Preserve, the 1,000-acre open space that extends from Essex south into Old Saybrook. There's also a property in Centerbrook and a small holding in Essex which the trust hopes to acquire "in the near future," says Greenberg. "All in all, 2014 has been one of the most active in many years" he says. "Our newly acquired properties will greatly enhance and enrich the quality of life in the Town of Essex."

The most exciting acquisition could well be the 70 acres in the Essex section of the Preserve. Everything is in place for the Preserve to close, according to Greenberg. Sufficient funds have been raised and the remaining tasks are for the lawyers to finalize all of the documents and schedule the closing. This should happen within the next month or two.

Regarding several parcels coming up in Ivoryton, the largest is more than 18 acres, and had the potential someday to be linked to The Millrace and to the Vumbaco property on the other end, which is on the Westbrook border.



Paul Greenberg (r), Acquisitions Committee Chair, with board member Mike Carlucci on a property visit

Another acquisition will link up with the trust's Windswept Ridge property. And a tiny, .27-acre space on North Main St. in Essex will be opened as a pocket park. This property is a donation from Ina Bomze who purchased the derelict house and had it demolished.

Adding new properties, whether through gift or purchase, is an on-going task, and the Land Trust has to consider a host of attributes when it's contemplating an open space acquisition. One important factor is the protection and preservation of land along

water courses such as the Falls River and the Connecticut River. Falls River Preserve and Osage Trails are good examples. Also worth protecting are properties which have environmental assets such as ponds, vernal pools, wetlands and rare and endangered species. A good example is the Essex portion of the Preserve, which has several of these pools and small ponds. Beauty plays a part, too; varied terrain, viewsapes and the potential for interesting trails are important considerations.

Joining up open spaces is another goal, and the trust seeks out potential properties that are next to existing open space to create "corridors" of contiguous properties. These linked spaces provide more habitat for a greater diversity of wildlife and more acreage for hiking trails. The Bushy Hill-Platt Property is an example.

Another important quest is acquiring land along the town's major transportation corridors which goes a long way in maintaining the town's semi-rural character. Eagle Ridge in Essex is one such property bordering Route 9, and there are many others along Rt 153 and Rt 154 that we would

continued on page 2

Primary Mission ... continued from page 1

like to acquire if the opportunity presents itself. Seeking out these potential properties is an on-going process. The trust is always looking for land that comes up for sale, and sometimes is pro-active, inquiring about properties not yet on the market. Gifts and donations from the community are also vital and, in the past, have provided the trust and the town with some of its most popular parks, including Cross Lots (Harriet Cheney) and Osage Trails (Diz Callender). The Land Trust also can acquire open space from the town when subdivisions require open space to be set aside as part of the approved plan.



A family enjoying a leisurely stroll across one of the bridges at the Land Trust's Millrace Preserve

Obviously the acquisition of all these properties costs a lot of money, but the Land Trust is in the enviable position of being well-supported by the community, says Greenberg. The trust pays for its properties using money from public fund-raising, state grants, Town of Essex contributions and money from its investments and endowment funds. These funds are the results of significant gifts provided by members of the Essex community.

An exciting acquisition that we are currently working on is the 45 acre Johnson Farm in Ivoryton. The Land Trust currently owns the development rights and would like to purchase the farm for the residual value and open it up to the public.

“The basic goal of the Land Trust is to acquire open space in order to protect the environment, preserve the small town character of Essex and to provide the community with passive recreational and educational opportunities,” says Greenberg. “We have a very special relationship with our Town government and the community, and we have been very successful in doing that.”

President's Message

As we begin a new year, I would like to take the opportunity to express my thanks to all those who play a role in what the Essex Land Trust is and what it does. The “poster children” for the Land Trust are the 18 properties frequented by many and enjoyed by all. Our properties are what we see and admire about the Land Trust. However, what makes the Land Trust what it is are other factors.

- Our members and donors provide the financial means and the motivation to focus on our fundamental mission: to protect the environment, to preserve the small town character of Essex and to provide the community with passive recreational and educational opportunities. Our membership is the heart and soul of what the Land Trust is and what it accomplishes.
- Our stewards and their volunteer teams care for and maintain numerous trails, clear fallen trees, repair bridges, plant native vegetation, and help oversee the overall condition of the approximately 900 acres with which we are involved.
- Our committees (Membership, Programs, Volunteers, Communications, Finance, Development, Acquisitions), each led by a Board member, are the engines driving the Land Trust. Largely invisible, this hard working team dedicates countless hours in support of our mission. We are always looking for volunteers to help these committees so please let us know if you can help.

This past year has been one of the busiest years on record. Driven primarily by the effort to acquire and protect the 1000-acre Preserve, board members have been engaged in fundraising and supported the negotiations to complete this transaction. Simultaneously, progress on several additional acquisitions have been taking place, details of which are provided in the lead article of this Essex Woods & Waters edition.

Last but certainly not least, I would like to highlight the impact of a major legacy gift made to the Essex Land Trust by the estate of Elizabeth “Diz” Callender. The accompanying article on the subject of Legacy Giving provides details of Diz’s generosity.

On behalf of the Essex Land Trust Board, I take this opportunity to express appreciation for the commitment and support shown by our membership.

Jim Denham, President

Legacy Giving: A Way that Gives Forever

By Bob Nussbaum and Paul Marden

In 1998, the late Elizabeth “Diz” Callender made a gift of the Osage Trails Preserve to the Essex Land Trust. She took great pride in her restoration of this beautiful property along the Falls River, named after the ship that was burned there during the War of 1812. When Diz passed away in May, she did something else that will have an impact for generations. She made a bequest of \$200,000 to provide income for the maintenance of the Osage Preserve. She understood the value of stewardship.

Other donors who valued the conservation work of the Land Trust have made similar bequests in the past. Last year, the late Estelle I. Zahn made a bequest of \$20,000. Mrs. Zahn’s husband was the late Valentine Zahn, Treasurer of the Land Trust in 1970. And when Harriet Cheney Downing donated our popular Cross Lots property she made a bequest that provided funding for its maintenance.

A bequest to the Essex Land Trust is a way of perpetuating your support for the quality of life in our town and its three villages. It is a gift that costs you nothing now. It may also be a way for you to make a major gift that would not be possible today. Bequests may support the general purposes of the Land Trust, land acquisition or a favored initiative such as maintaining a specific property. A bequest also may be made in honor of or in memory of someone dear.

You can be a benefactor, big or small, using a few simple planning techniques.

- Make a simple bequest to Essex Land Trust. A bequest in your will is a gift of specific property or cash, “off the top” of your estate assets.
- Make a gift of a portion of the residue of your estate. The residue is what is left of your estate assets after payment of debts, expenses and bequests.
- Name Essex Land Trust to receive a portion of designated assets. Your estate might include “beneficiary designated assets” which pass directly to the beneficiaries on a beneficiary designation. These

assets include life insurance policies, IRA accounts, and, “payable on death” or “transfer on death” accounts.



Elizabeth “Diz” Callender made a major bequest that will have a lasting impact on the Osage Preserve

This year, the Land Trust is establishing a Legacy Circle to acknowledge people who have made a bequest to the Land Trust in the past, or who have indicated that they have included the Land Trust in their will or trust or as a life insurance or retirement plan beneficiary. “I had the opportunity to listen to Diz Callender in her living room, looking out over Osage, talking about how much open space meant to her,” said Bob Nussbaum, Land Trust Vice President. “Diz’ generosity gave me the inspiration to make my own legacy bequest. I hope readers will consider a legacy bequest as a way of supporting their belief in the importance of preserving our open spaces.”

The Essex Land Trust suggests discussing your charitable plans with your attorney, accountant or financial advisor regarding your specific situation and choices. If you are thinking of a legacy gift to the Essex Land Trust or would like information about how to name Essex Land Trust in your plan, a representative of our organization would be pleased to meet with you to discuss gifting opportunities. If you have already included the Essex Land Trust in your estate plan and would like to be acknowledged in the Legacy Circle, please let us know.



The Conservator’s Rock, located at the Cross Lots Preserve, honors those who have made significant financial contributions to the Essex Land Trust

ELT Briefs

Alternative Energy 101

Are you interested but confused by all the talk about “green energy”? Should you install a solar panel to power your home? How efficient are heat pumps? Is it smart to invest in home-generated wind power? Mark Herter, a Senior Associate at



Centerbrook Architects, chairs the firm’s Sustainability Committee, which oversees the integration of green building design in all of the firm’s projects. In a recently held Essex Land Trust program, Mark provided answers to these questions and many others. Mark’s presentation covered two broad areas: assessing current energy demand including identifying actions to reduce energy demand and an evaluation of renewable energy options from photovoltaics and wind power to biomass systems. A copy of Mark’s highly informative presentation is available on the Essex Land Trust website: www.essexlandtrust.org/01_new.html.

Volunteers Needed: The Land Trust continues to rely on its members and the community to contribute with their most valuable asset, time. We have many tasks including helping plan events, sitting on committees, hospitality and greeting at events, trail maintenance, office assistance, and mailings. Please contact Judy Saunders at 860-581-8108 or judith.saunders@comcast.net if you would like to volunteer.

Latest News on the 1000-Acre Forest, The Preserve

As of year-end, the campaign to purchase the Preserve is reaching its final stages. Contracts will be signed early in the New Year. The Essex community has played an important role in funding this initiative

In total, the fundraising generated by or attributable to Essex based donors approximates \$1.3 million.

with both the public and private sectors making substantial contributions. The Town of Essex voted to contribute \$200,000 towards the purchase while the Trust for Public Land and the Essex Land Trust were successful in obtaining a grant for \$471,250 from the State of Connecticut Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition Program. Additionally, fundraising from Essex individuals and organizations has surpassed \$600,000, of which approximately \$200,000 is attributable to Essex Meadows residents. In total, the fundraising generated by or attributable to Essex based donors approximates \$1.3 million.

Planning is already underway on siting access points in Essex, which will be along Ingham Hill Road. The Land Trust already has estimates for construction of parking and property signage and will begin to act once all contractual obligations have been met. Those who can’t wait to see the Preserve and would like to see an impressive Birds-Eye view insert the following onto your browser: The Preserve Aerial Perspective.



Check out aerial view of the Preserve in video produced by Bob Czepiel



By Steve Knauth

The Essex Land Trust has grown over the years to care for 18 properties totaling around 500 acres. Thatchbed Island is not the first one that comes to mind.

It's never been a scenic wonder, a tourist attraction or economically important. But this humble Connecticut River pendant bar was the first piece of property in Essex to be valued for its environmental importance, the first to be saved from development and the first to be taken over by a town-based land trust.

Essex was entering a new stage in its history in 1946. Once home to shipbuilding, the harbor now needed marinas to attract recreational boaters and one of the properties eyed for development was the little used, largely ignored "Thatch Beds" or Thatch Bed Island. Literally a backwater at that time, local watermen such as Oliver LaPlace fished and hunted the reeds and shallows, which attracted and harbored a variety of waterfowl and both fresh and salt-water fish.

It wasn't the first time the site had attracted developers' attention. In the 1930s, there was a plan to dredge Middle Cove and build a road around it. World War II put an end to it. But this was 1946, and former state governor Abraham Ribicoff, along with other investors, announced plans to erect a full-scale marina on the island, complete with buildings, piers and floating docks. The cove would be dredged, the spoils dumped on the island.

That's when local residents took notice; according to a report in the Deep River New Era, Essex yachtsman Walter Rowe purchased six acres at the north end of the island "to protect the natural beauty of the beds" and keep them "free of ad billboards." (Many Essex families owned small portions of the island at the time.) The marina project was abandoned.

Still, with an increasing number of pleasure and commercial craft using Essex the harbor in the 1950s and 60s came more dredging projects. Though protected from development, spoils from the cove and river continued to be dumped on "the Thatch Beds." It wasn't until 1965 that the Connecticut Water Commission stepped in to halt the dumping. Spoils were flowing back into the river



Looking North from Thatchbed Island with Great Meadow in the upper part of the picture

during floods and freshets, the commission claimed. Two years later, the land was designated as an endangered property in a state proposal for a Connecticut River Land Trust and, in 1970, it was among the first tidal marshes to come under the protection of the state's Public Act 695: Wetlands Bill, and was thus fully protected from development.

Meanwhile, in 1969, Rowe donated his six acres on "the Thatch Beds" to the Essex Conservation Trust, which evolved into the present Essex Land Trust. The Junior Wildlife Association of Essex organized a clean up of the island.

Today, the 8-acre brackish, vegetated wetland is part of the 135-acre South Cove, an important stop for migratory birds, a nursery for fish and wild fowl and home to a family of Osprey. For several years now, the Land Trust has been broadcasting a live video stream of our adopted Ozzie and Harriet as they return annually to raise future generations of Osprey.

Once largely ignored, Thatchbed Island is today a vital part of the Connecticut River tidelands called by the Nature Conservancy one of the "Last Great Places" in the Western Hemisphere.

Thanks to the Essex Historical Society for the use of their files in researching this article.

Coming Events – Mark Your Calendar!



Hike of the Month: Saturday, January 3, 9 am: Canfield Preserve, park at the Book Hill Woods Road entrance

**Wednesday, January 14 - Black Bears in Connecticut 7pm
Essex Library, 33 West Avenue**

Felicia Ortner, who's been involved in bear research in Connecticut for 25 years, will describe the resurgence of this remarkable survivor that once was extinct in our state and is now rapidly increasing, numbering in the many hundreds of individuals. With recent bear sightings in some of our neighboring towns, we should soon expect them to appear in Essex. Snow date: January 21, same time and place.

**Hike of the Month: Saturday, February 7, 9 am:
Cross Lots Preserve – 40 West Avenue**

**Saturday, February 21 - Winter Raptors Field Trip 12 pm
Meet at Essex Town Hall Parking Lot**

Eagles, Hawks, and Owls: an outing to search for birds of prey that winter in our region. Several types of raptors may be seen, among many other wintering birds. Novice and advanced birdwatchers are welcome. Led by ELT President Jim Denham and Andrew Griswold of CT Audubon. Bring a bag lunch, binoculars, boots, and warm clothes. Two vans are available to seat the first 14 people who sign up. Limited additional space may also be available. To reserve, please call or email Jim Denham at 860-876-0306 or email at info@essexlandtrust.org by February 19. Inclement weather cancels.

Hike of the Month: Saturday, March 7, 9 am: Turtle Creek Preserve, Watrous Point Road, off Route 154

**Wednesday, March 18 - Osprey Nation 7 pm
Essex Town Hall, 29 West Avenue**

A presentation by Dr. Rob Bierregaard, ornithologist, conservation biologist and research associate at the Academy of Natural Sciences at Drexel Univ., and Milan Bull, Senior Director of Science and Conservation at CT Audubon. After a DDT-fueled decline in the 1970's to only a few pairs in CT, this majestic bird has bounced back and is now thriving in our midst. New research, including state of the art satellite tracking and other technology will reveal new secrets of this bird's habits, prey, and migration while outlining the future of this iconic species.

March 28, Saturday - Outdoor Equipment Fair And Safety Seminar 10 am

at Cross Lots Preserve, 40 West Avenue

Come and learn how to work safely and more efficiently in your garden or woodlot. This event will showcase the latest chain saws, trimmers, blowers, tillers, and other tools for the outdoors. We will also demonstrate their safe operation and provide tips on trimming, pruning, and clearing of trees and shrubs. Sponsored by New England Power Equipment Co., a local dealer. ELT Board member Bob Nussbaum will host. Rain will cancel.

Hike of the Month: Saturday, April 4, 9 am: Heron Pond Preserve, Heron Pond Road, off Route 154

**April 21, Tuesday - Butterflies in our Gardens 7pm
Essex Library, 33 West Avenue**

John Himmelman, naturalist, author/artist of 70 books, and co-founder of the Connecticut Butterfly Association will give a talk on butterflies. Did you know that over 100 species of butterflies can be seen in our Connecticut gardens? Hear about their intriguing lives and learn how to attract and identify these often unnoticed but important animals of our region.

**April 30, Thursday ELT Annual Meeting 5:30 pm
Hamilton Hall, Essex Meadows, 30 Bokum Rd.**

Join us for the ELT's festive Cocktail Party and Annual Meeting. Light food will be served. Tickets (\$30) for the cocktail buffet (5:30-6:30) will be available at the door. The business meeting and special presentation that follow are free to all. Members will automatically receive invitations. Non-members are welcome. Parking available, but please carpool if possible.

Hike of the Month: Saturday, May 2, 9 am: Viney Hill Brook Preserve, parking lot at end of Cedar Grove Terrace

**May 16, Saturday - Birding and Nature Walk at Essex Meadows and The Preserve 9 AM,
at Essex Meadows, 20 Bokum Road**

ELT president and birder Jim Denham will lead a 1-2 hour walk through Essex Meadows woods and into the ELT's new "Preserve" property. The timing will coincide with the peak of bird migration and breeding season, so expect to see and hear dozens of species around this very diverse landscape. All levels of knowledge are welcome. Easy to moderate walking on trails. Cookies and refreshments provided at the conclusion of walk, courtesy of Essex Meadows. Bad weather cancels.

Essex Woods & Waters is published in January, May & September. Jim Denham, Publisher - Steve Knauth, Editor - A.C. Proctor (Essex Printing).

Board Members: Jim Denham (President, Communications); Bob Nussbaum (Vice President, Development); Nancy Rambeau (Secretary); Mike Carlucci (Treasurer); Bill Grover (Past President); Paul Greenberg (Land Acquisition); Tom Rutherford (Chief Steward); Kathryn Katz (Membership); Rob Hernandez (Programs & Events); Judy Saunders (Programs & Events, Volunteers).

Essex Land Trust, PO Box 373, Essex, CT 06426

www.essexlandtrust.org

Email: essexlandtrust@comcast.net



Essex Woods & Waters is published with the generous support of Essex Savings Bank and Essex Financial Services.

Essex Printing

Essex Printing Company
Centerbrook, CT 06409
860 767 9087
www.essexprinting.com