



Talking Trash

By Jim Denham

In general, Essex is not one of those communities where trash in public places is a problem. Along the length of our Connecticut River shoreline, however, it is another matter. The amount of debris that accumulates along our shores is nothing short of amazing. Unfortunately, there seems to be a never-ending supply of debris along the river banks.



The Connecticut River's steady flow towards its mouth brings with it logs, branches and other organic material that are swept into the river by storms, high tides and occasional flooding. It also brings with it an incredible array of items that have clearly been carelessly allowed to be swept away or dumped outright into the river.

For the past two years the Essex Land Trust has tried to do its part by focusing on cleaning up Essex's Great Meadow.

This past Fall, on a bright and sunny Saturday morning, 65 volunteers dedicated three hours to gathering all kinds of trash including, significant quantities of Styrofoam, bottles, cans, car tires and more.

This effort is part of an annual program sponsored by the Connecticut River Watershed Council. Called the **Source to Sea Cleanup**, each September communities along the 410-mile length of the Connecticut River dedicate themselves to cleaning up their shoreline. This past year, 2,227 volunteers collected a total haul of 45 tons, which included electrical appliances, furniture, automotive parts, and mattresses, among many other items.

The list of debris collected on the Essex Great Meadow is shown in the accompanying chart.

Besides being unsightly, trash in our water bodies has a damaging effect on the environment particularly impacting wildlife and vegetation. One measure of this impact is the decomposition rate of common debris or how long it takes to happen. The chart on the following page illustrates how long items last in our environment, i.e., 200 years for aluminum cans and 450 years for plastic bottles.

Item	Quantity
Glass Bottles (5 gallon buckets)	5
Plastic Bottles (30 gallon bags)	27
Plastic Items (5 gallon buckets)	3
Styrofoam (30 gallon bags)	35
Tires (number)	19
Wood (pounds)	275
Metal Items (number)	10
Other Items: 6'x3' plastic tub, 50 gallon plastic and metal drums, 30 gallon plastic drum, 2'x4' plastic float, fiberglass kayak, hunting tent, large float/raft, LP gas container (20lb), plastic sled	



The Connecticut River has come a long way from the 1950s when it was called the “best landscaped sewer in the country.” The passage of the Clean Water Act and the ban on DDT in 1972 have done much to help the river recover to a Class B status, meaning that it is safe for all purposes excluding drinking. Turning to the future, our challenge is to build on the progress achieved by ensuring a cleaner and healthier river, one that would harken back

to the days when the Algonquians gave it its name, the “**quinetucket**,” which means the place of the long tidal river.

The Land Trust intends to repeat the Great Meadow clean up this coming September. The date has already been set: Saturday, September 27 at 9 am. So, mark your calendars!



Local Businesses Support ELT's Property Stewardship

By Steve Knauth

Since its inception in 1968, the Essex Land Trust has grown from a single holding on Middle Cove to include 17 properties throughout our three villages, totaling some 500 acres and nearly 40 trails. New acquisitions such as those at Great Meadow signal continued growth for the organization.



Bartlett Tree chainsaw demonstration

But the Land Trust's goals extend beyond just buying up land. "Acquiring open spaces is our primary mission, but in doing so we assume an obligation to care for what we have acquired," says current president Jim Denham. That means blazing trails, keeping them clear and safe for hiking and making improvements.

Member dues and donations contribute importantly to caring for Land Trust properties and an army of member volunteers help with much of the normal, day-to-day work. But, there are times when professional help is needed; it might be in the form of manpower for "heavy lifting," or a piece of specialized equipment. Or maybe it's expertise in a particular field that's called for.

That's when the Land Trust's in-kind volunteers step up to the plate. "Without the support of a number of local businesses, our mission of conservation would be very much harder and more

costly," Denham says. The roster of in-kind helpers includes:

- **Bartlett's Expert Tree Services:** they donate a day a year, crew and equipment, for special projects decided on with the Trust. They've worked at Cross Lots, helped out with Arbor Day activities and donated and planted an oak tree as part of that.
- **Landscape Specialties:** they've worked with the Trust's plantings at Cross Lots, using a front-end loader to dig holes for large trees, and watering for the lower field. They get trees at cost and provide a dumpster to fill with property cleanup debris.
- **Anne Penniman Associates:** has developed the trust's plan for plantings at Cross Lots, using both succession planting of trees, and habitat plantings that are consistent with the trust's Wildlife Habitat Improvement (WHIP) Grant.

Others who've answered the in-kind call with their special talents and tools include **A. J. Shea Construction**, which volunteered the use of a dump truck and **Forbearance Tree Service**, which has helped out at a Cross lots cleanup in coordination with a team from the Lions Club.

Bartlett's Dan Estey has been working with the Land Trust for about a year. Last winter, he gave his own



Forbearance Tree Service



Landscape Specialties Dumpster

time to conduct a chainsaw safety demo for the stewards. “I enjoy working with the Land Trust, they are doing something worthwhile,” says Estey, who’s lived in the area for 30 years. Making this kind of commitment, he says, Bartlett’s becomes more than just a local business; it becomes woven into the fabric of the community.

The Land Trust is glad to have their support. “We will always consider using contributors if there is a skill match with our project,” says Tom Rutherford, Chief Steward. “And, it’s a nice complement to the Land Trust that these businesses willingly contribute their time and services.” It’s also vital to the Land Trust mission of care and conservation. Says Denham: “We have a stewardship responsibility which is paid for in part by dues and donations. But we could not accomplish what is needed without the generous contributions from our in-kind partners.”

With 17 properties needing regular maintenance and upkeep. The Land Trust is always open to any assistance we can receive from businesses in the area. Please contact Chief Steward Tom Rutheford at 860-767-9474.

Latest on The Preserve

The campaign to save The Preserve is well underway. Public fundraising will be kicking off soon. The Trust for Public Land has been working very closely with officials at the State Government level as well as Town of Old Saybrook elected officials. Site appraisals will be completed by the end of January. Several public walks have taken place with large numbers of residents taking advantage of the opportunity to explore the very special “world’ which is The Preserve.



Hikers on a recent walk in The Preserve

More walks are planned over the next several months. The Essex Land Trust will also be hosting a special presentation on The Preserve on March 12 at 7 pm at the Essex Town Hall. Titled *The Human and Natural History of The Preserve*, Ecologist Judy Preston from the Tidewater Institute and Chris Cryder, Special Projects Coordinator with Save Our Sound will show slides and share their enthusiasm for this mini-wilderness in our midst

and what makes this 1,000 acre forest so special and its protection so essential.

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.



By Steve Knauth

The land at Cross Lots has changed more than once in its long history, starting out as an 1840s farm and homestead, ending as the country house of Pratt-Read & Co. heiress Harriet Cheney Downing, who bequeathed it to the Essex Land Trust (ELT) in the 1980s.

Following the trust’s mission of care and conservation, a host of projects supported by ELT volunteer members and in-kind donations from local businesses have turned Cross Lots into a priceless park to be enjoyed today and for generations to come.

Native flora – grasses and shrubs – have been put in and new trees planted to replace old ones. Leaves are raked, brush collected and trails maintained. Habitat for local fauna encouraged. All these pieces go together to make the 16-acre park, with its wide-open spaces, majestic trees, sturdy stone walls and rolling terrain, a favorite.

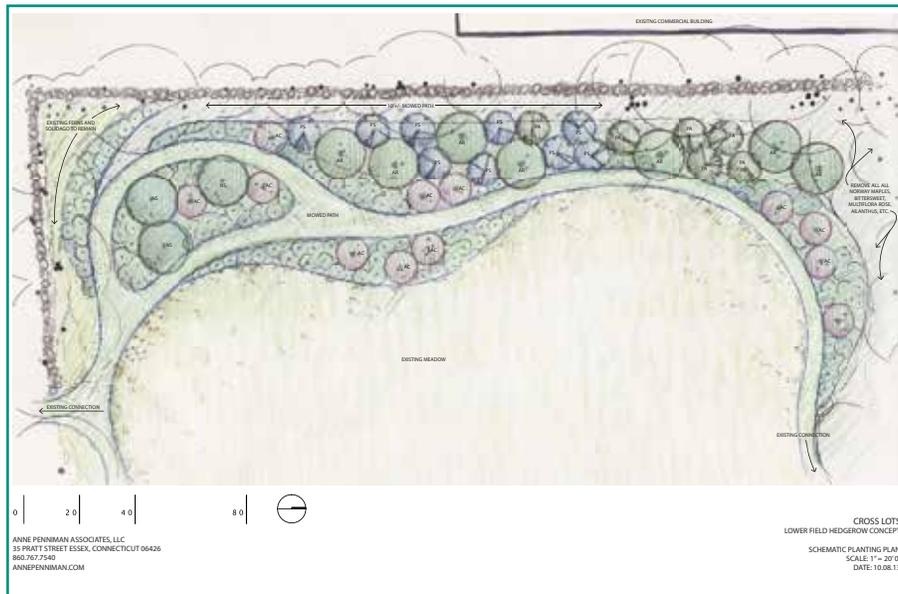
There’s more to come.

A hedgerow restoration project will turn an overgrown, invasive thicket into a native, sustainable habitat while screening out a cluster of industrial buildings. Developed by **Anne Penniman Associates**, the Essex landscape specialists, a tangle of Ailanthus and Bittersweet along the west property line will be replaced by a variety of native shrubs and trees, including a Red Maple, White pine, Norway spruce, Winterberry holly, Rosebay rhododendron, Arrowwood and American cranberry.

The plant list was derived from the native plant communities of Connecticut while keeping aesthetics and the human experience in mind. The area will also provide year-round interest to walkers while creating ideal habitat for wildlife foraging and nesting. Before developing the design, an inventory of existing vegetation and conditions was prepared, identifying general conditions of soil moisture and solar aspect, plantings to be removed, plantings to remain and the neighboring buildings to be obscured.

Before the planting begins, all the invasives will be removed and the new planting beds prepared. A 10-foot

‘fire break’ of wood chips (generated from the invasive tree removals) will ease the burden of long-term maintenance and management of encroaching invasives. And a “no-mow” lawn path through the hedgerow will allow strolling through the new planting.



When Anne Penniman

Associates developed new planting ideas for Cross Lots, the first projects included new oak trees at the hilltop and new tupelos at the lower wet meadow. Both are examples of a long-term commitment to habitat based planting design, the company says.

This approach was right in line with the Land Trust’s accent on conservation of its 17 properties, and was embraced by the board, according to Penniman. It is gratifying to work with the Essex Land Trust with their boundless energy and ‘can-do’ approach to these projects, she added.

Coming Events – Mark Your Calendar!



Saturday, Feb 8 - 12 pm

at Essex Town Hall Parking Lot

Winter Raptors Field Trip

Eagles, Hawks, and Owls: an afternoon outing to search for the charismatic birds of prey that winter in our estuarine region. Both novice and advanced birdwatchers are welcome. To reserve a van seat, please call Jim Denham at 860-876-0306 or email info@essexlandtrust.org by February 6. Bad weather cancels.

Wednesday, March 12 - 7 pm

at Essex Town Hall

Lecture: The Preserve

The Human and Natural History of The Preserve: what makes this 1,000-acre forest so special and its protection so essential? Ecologist Judy Preston from the Tidewater Institute and Chris Cryder, Special Projects Coordinator with Save Our Sound will show slides and share their enthusiasm for this mini-wilderness.

Saturday, March 15 - 9 am

at Essex Town Hall Parking Lot

Vernal Pool Walk at The Preserve

Search for breeding frogs, salamanders and other early spring life in some of the dozens of vernal pools that dot this property. Vernal pools are critical contributors to the diversity of our forests. Rain or shine. Bring boots. Co-sponsored by Essex Outdoors.

Saturday, April 5 - 9 am–12 noon

at Essex Town Hall Parking Lot

Essex Land Trust Property Spruce-Up

Join your neighbors in helping maintain our beautiful preserves. Come out for some exercise after a long winter indoors. Help clear streams and trails; pick up brush and rake leaves. Families welcome. Bring rakes, clippers, blowers, etc. Refreshments served. Rain or shine.

Thursday, April 17 - 5:30 pm

at Essex Meadows, 30 Bokum Rd

Essex Land Trust Annual Meeting

Join us for the ELT's festive Cocktail Party and Annual Meeting. Light food will be served. Special guest and presenter will be Steve Gephard, a globally recognized expert on the restoration of salmon, shad, herring and other sea-run fish. Tickets (\$30) for the cocktail buffet (5:30-6:30) will be available at the door.

Saturday, April 19 - 10 am

at Cross Lots Preserve, 40 West Ave

Arbor Day Tree Planting

Come and join Tom Rutherford, ELT's Chief Property Steward as we celebrate Arbor Day by planting trees and shrubs at our Cross Lots Preserve.

Tuesday, May 13 - 7 pm

at Essex Library, 33 West Ave

Lecture: Our Changing Landscapes

A presentation by forester Robert Rocks on "Our Changing Landscape: the past, present and future of Connecticut's forests and fields. He will describe the historical evolution of our landscapes from forests to field, and back to forests.

Saturday, May 17 - 9 am

at Essex Meadows, 30 Bokum Road

Essex Meadows Birding and Trail Walk

ELT President and birder Jim Denham will lead an easy 1-2 hour walk through Essex Meadows' gardens, fields and woods. The timing will coincide with the peak bird migration and breeding season, so expect to see and hear many species. All levels of skill and knowledge are welcome. Bring binoculars. Signs will direct to parking at the facility which is at 30 Bokum Rd. Bad weather cancels.

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