



Essex Land Trust Joins Effort to Save the 1000 Acres Forest

By Jim Denham

With the recent announcement that the Trust for Public Land has reached an agreement to purchase the 1000 acres known as The Preserve, the Essex Land Trust will be joining other organizations involved with the purchase of this unique property. Of the 1000 acres, 70 are located in Essex and, if the acquisition is successful, will be managed by the Essex Land Trust. This property will make a welcome addition to the approximately 500 acres currently in the Land Trust's care and will open up a major new passive recreation area for residents and the public in general.

The Land Trust will be playing a role in promoting awareness of this initiative and will be participating in the capital campaign for The Preserve. As mentioned in the press release that follows, the purchase price will be in the range of \$10 to \$11 million. While a substantial portion of the funding will need to be generated from public sector sources, there will still be the need for a sizable contribution from communities and private individuals. The Essex Land Trust will do its part by contributing funds from its endowment but will also be conducting a fund raising drive in coming months. In addition, it is hoped that the Town of Essex' Open Space fund will contribute a portion as well. The town's Board of Selectmen will determine the town's contribution, which will still need voter approval.

Open space in Essex contributes to the quality of our community both aesthetically and in terms of overall environmental health. Total protected open space in Essex amounts to only 12% of our land surface, well below the State of Connecticut's goal of 21% by the year 2020. A successful effort to save The Preserve will be a critical contributor to continuing the gradual addition of more open space for the benefit of the entire community.



Preserve looking south from Essex - Credit: Bob Lorenz

Following is the press release issued by the Trust for Public Land on July 31, 2013.

The Trust for Public Land Announces Conservation Opportunity for The Preserve

Its status in flux for fifteen-years, the largest unprotected coastal forest between New York City and Boston may soon provide hiking, bird watching, and recreational opportunities for the public.

New Haven, CT: – The Trust for Public Land announced today that it has reached an agreement with River Sound Development, LLC, to purchase 1,000 acres known as The Preserve – the last large unprotected coastal forest between New York City and Boston – for conservation, recreation, and habitat protection. If the acquisition is successful, the land will be permanently protected from future development and open to the public to enjoy for passive recreational activities such as hiking and wildlife

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viewing. The property, which is rich in natural resources and wildlife, will connect to 500 acres of existing town parkland and miles of existing hiking trails.

Alicia Betty, The Trust for Public Land's Connecticut State Director, said her organization is moving forward with the acquisition and fundraising efforts to raise \$10 - \$11 million in public and private funds by June, 2014, in order to acquire the property and cover stewardship and costs.

"We are thrilled to be able to present this opportunity to the state of Connecticut's land conservation community," Betty said. "We've been able to end 15 years of uncertainty and can now move forward toward protecting this valuable property of regional significance."

"The work of the Trust for Public Land to secure rights to The Preserve represents a major milestone in our efforts to preserve critical lands in this state," said Connecticut Governor Dannel P. Malloy. "We look forward to partnering with the Trust for Public Land and others to make this purchase a reality and protect this property for the future."

Located in Old Saybrook, Essex and Westbrook, CT, The Preserve includes 38 vernal pools and 114 acres of wetlands and more than 3,100 linear feet of watercourses. The dense canopy of forest and the Pequot Swamp Pond act as a refueling stop for many migratory birds, and the many freshwater seeps on the property are home to amphibian species such as the northern dusky salamander, spotted turtles, and box turtles. Bobcats and fisher cats have also been spotted on the property.

In addition to its recreational and habitat resources, The Preserve provides important water quality benefits to residents. Surface waters on the property drain to 3

different watersheds: the Oyster River, Mud River and Trout Brook, as they make their way to Long Island Sound. The protection of The Preserve will ensure that stormwater on the site is recharged to local aquifers. An aquifer protection area is located just east of the Preserve and supplies an average of 200,000 gallons per day of drinking water to Old Saybrook and surrounding communities.

The Preserve is located in the area designated by FEMA's Hurricane Sandy Impact Analysis as having experienced "high impact" from the Superstorm Sandy. Coastal forests like The Preserve have been losing ground for some time as saltwater gradually moves inland as a result of rising tides and sea levels. The Preserve acts as a sponge for stormwater, releasing it slowly into the tributaries and rivers that lead to the Connecticut River and Long Island Sound, protecting downstream property owners from flooding.

"This is an immensely positive development, and I commend The Trust for Public Land for their leadership in preserving and protecting this priceless natural resource. As Attorney General, I was proud to fight on behalf of hundreds of Old Saybrook residents and environmental advocates seeking to protect The Preserve from ecologically devastating development. Once lost, forests and habitats such as The Preserve can never be recovered. This is a great day for Old Saybrook, Long Island Sound and Connecticut's environment," said U.S. Senator Richard Blumenthal.

"This property is the last of its kind--an intact thousand acre maritime forest, the source waters of three separate watersheds," said Philip Miller, Representative for the 36th district. "It is said that water will be to the twenty-first century what oil was to the twentieth. This will help assure a bright future for this region of Connecticut."

The Preserve was the subject of development proposals dating back to 1998, including plans to build more than 200 homes and an 18-hole golf course. These plans met with strong opposition and lawsuits from conservation groups and residents. Over the years, multiple attempts were made to acquire the land for conservation, but an agreement was never reached and efforts to develop the property continued.

"Old Saybrook looks forward to working with The Trust for Public Land towards a successful closing on this property, a closing that economically and environmentally favors The Town of Old Saybrook and the region," said



Preserve looking from the Oyster River - Credit: Bob Lorenz

Canfield/Meadow Woods Viewscape

By Steve Knauth

A group of Land Trust members aided and supported by a team of volunteers, including local high school students and a troop of Boy Scouts from Deerfield, Mass., have created a little gem in the highlands of Essex. It's the trust's first-ever viewscape, an area on Book Hill cleared of trees where a six-foot high viewing platform affords a wide, sweeping look at Long Island Sound from the middle of Canfield Meadow Woods Nature Preserve.



Platform under construction

Standing on the wooden structure, the Connecticut River flows past Calves Island and down to the Baldwin Bridge; on the Sound, the New London ferry is plainly seen rounding Orient Point; the tower on Plum Island stands out like a sentinel. It's a view not seen from this spot in a hundred years, since the days when farms and open meadows dominated a denuded landscape.

An Oct. 5 dedication will be the culmination of the two-year project, which was accomplished in several stages,

says Bob Nussbaum, who conceived of the viewscape in discussions with Paul Greenberg. They knew there were potentially wonderful views from Essex's highest point (312 feet); it was a matter of finding the best spot to work from.

Things got started when the Trust was approached by a local Eagle Scout who wanted to do a project and could organize a troop of scouts to help him. "We decided to use this offer to get the ball rolling," Bob recalls. Volunteers, some with surveying and GPS experience, combed Canfield Meadow Woods, climbing trees and checking potential sight lines at different times of the year. In the end, they chose an area looking south and southeast over Essex village, not far from the preserve's Book Hill entrance.

Land needed to be cleared of underbrush and some trees had to be cut down. The Trust team worked with input

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Carl Fortuna, Old Saybrook First Selectman. "This property has been at the center of attention, good and bad, for 20 years. It is now time for a resolution. We are optimistic that enough private and public funds can be raised to purchase the property and preserve the Preserve in its natural state. The Town will work cooperatively with all parties in this effort, including the DEEP. Most importantly, I will work for and listen to Old Saybrook's residents as they decide the future of this parcel."

Many entities and conservation organizations have come together over the years to defend this natural asset for Connecticut and to create this opportunity. The collaboration will continue and will be essential to a successful outcome next year. These entities include: the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (CT DEEP), the Towns of Old Saybrook, Essex, and Westbrook, the Old Saybrook Land Trust, the Essex Land Trust, The Connecticut Fund for the Environment / Save the Sound, The Alliance for Sound Area Planning, Audubon Connecticut, and The Nature Conservancy.

Suellen McCuin, a resident of Essex, neighbor of the Preserve and member of the Alliance for Sound Area Planning, stated, "I am so happy to know that this incredible piece of nature will now be forever available for our family, others in the community and future generations to hike, explore and seek solace. It is also great news that so many will continue to benefit from the now protected pristine waters that fill our local public and private wells. We are inextricably linked to this forest. As Franklin D. Roosevelt once said, 'Forests are the lungs of our land.'"

Founded in 1972, The Trust for Public Land is the leading nonprofit working to conserve land for people. Operating from more than 30 offices nationwide, The Trust for Public Land has protected more than three million acres from the inner city to the wilderness and helped generate more than \$34 billion in public funds for conservation. Nearly ten million people live within a ten-minute walk of a Trust for Public Land park, garden, or natural area, and millions more visit these sites every year. Learn more at [tpl.org](http://www.tpl.org) (<http://www.tpl.org/>).

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from arborists and forestry experts on proper tree cutting and clearing methods, seeking to minimize cutting and maximize new habitat. Bartlett Tree Experts took down the few biggest trees, and the scouts and high school students cleared felled trees and underbrush and made a trail.

Come join the dedication of the Canfield Viewing Platform October 5 at 10 am. The planned Canfield hike will terminate at the summit. Refreshments will be provided. Rain date is October 6 at 2 pm.

The viewing platform was Bob's idea, and he made the plan and donated the materials for it in the memory of his late wife, Ann, a dedicated Essex Land Trust member. He managed construction and helped hand-carry the materials up the hill to the site. The structure – a set of sturdy stairs and a viewing area with a railing – adds six feet of height to the viewscape, and the sight lines run over the top of the Congregational church, across Thatchbed Island down to the flashing marker off Calves Island and beyond. The viewscape and accompanying

viewing platform are located in the Essex section of Canfield Meadow Woods, on the Green Trail that begins at the Book Hill Woods entrance. Look for it just south of the Book Hill geodetic marker.

Volunteers and Contributors include:

- Clayton Cordsen – an Essex Eagle Scout, and Troop 5 from Deerfield, Mass., who helped get the project going and cleared brush.
- Valley Regional High School – faculty member Ginny King and a team of a dozen students who carried material to the site and cleared an approach trail on Community Service Day.
- Bartlett Tree Experts – provided forestry guidance as well as topping and cutting down the most challenging of the trees on the property.
- Land Trust members – Richard Cordsen, Harry Bird, Mike Carlucci, Paul Greenberg, Dana Hill, Al Macgregor, Mike Noto, Tom Rutherford, Rob

Hernandez and Rennie Schoonmaker.

Work will continue to trim trees to further enhance the view of the river and improve the overall view.



Volunteers from Valley Regional High School's Community Service Day



Initial tree clearing off of the Green trail near Book Hill summit



Tree clearing team picture, after a day's work



By Steve Knauth

I decided to celebrate the first day of fall with a walk in the Bushy Hill Preserve and Platt Property in Ivoryton, jointly maintained by the Essex Conservation Commission and the Essex Land Trust, to visit an old, old friend. Parking under the old apple tree on Bushy Hill Road, I started off down the Blue trail. The two adjoining parcels (totaling about 130 acres) were once farm land and evidence of its agricultural past is all around – there’s the old farm road which I’m walking, the small pond near the trail head that was a water hole for livestock, the stone wall which divided the open fields on either side.

The upper trail is home to several big, old oak trees among the younger maples and laurel bushes. The largest, just off the trail, is the “Wolf” oak, an old sentinel that’s stood there since before the Revolutionary war. These big trees, with their spreading limbs and foliage, were allowed to grow in open fields to provide shade for grazing animals and field workers. The air is clear and cool in the early morning, and the birds are out in force – cardinals, chickadees, robins and are all seen and heard. There’s a treetop commotion involving a squirrel, several Blue Jays and an unidentified songbird. At one point, a red-tailed hawk soars overhead, making a high-pitched keening.

The Blue trail follows a ridgeline between two deepening valleys with four or five small streams running through; this is the Falls River watershed. Turning onto the Red trail, which heads south towards Westbrook, there’s a handsome grove of young beech trees. In the midst of it stands a large, healthy white oak soaring up and up, a fine example of Connecticut’s state tree. The small streams of the watershed join together just inside the border of the Platt Property to become Falls River, which flows from here through Ivoryton, Centerbrook and Essex all the way to North Cove.

And here’s where the old friend is. Just over the Westbrook town line, standing in a beech grove not far from the river is a cottage-sized granite boulder, pocked by lichen and hung with emerald-green moss, left over from the last Ice Age, between 10,000 and 12,000 years ago. Filled with nooks and crannies, caves and see-throughs,



Ice Age Boulder

it’s a giant jungle gym for kids and the stream is shallow and gentle – perfect for little ones to explore. I like to look at the “glacial erratic” and try to imagine all the ice, the glacier receding, the rock emerging ... sitting here for 10,000 years ...

Doubling back on the Green Trail, I took a side trip on the Red trail to rejoin the river and follow it north in back of the Oak Ledge neighborhood. The pools and rock ledges, overhung with evergreens, were dappled with morning light; it was a calendar scene. Re-joining the Blue trail, I took the old farm road that makes up the western loop, through gaps in the old stone walls, into an old cedar grove and out past the picnic tables, which make a nice rest stop.

It was a leisurely hour’s walk through easy-to-moderate terrain. There are a few wet spots, and some tangled roots on the lower sections of the trail, so proper footgear and a hiking stick are a good idea. (Also recommended; the land trust’s pocket nature guides on birds and trees and shrubs.) The Wolf oak and the glacial boulder are alone worth the hike – and now you’ll know where all the water in the Falls River comes from.

Coming Events – Mark Your Calendar!



Saturday, October 5 - 10am at Canfield Woods Nature Preserve Canfield Woods Hike and Dedication of Viewing Platform

Stewards Frank Hall and Dana Hill will lead a family hike on Essex Land Trust's beautiful Canfield Meadow Woods Preserve. Trek to a newly created scenic viewing area engineered as part of an Eagle Scout project. From this vista at the highest point in Essex, folks can see Long Island and more. Park at the Book Hill Woods Road cul-de-sac. Refreshments will be provided. Rain date is October 6 at 2 pm.



Finished platform at Canfield Viewscope

Saturday, October 19 - 7:30am Register at Ivoryton Village Green 4th Annual Run Local / Read Local

This 5k Run/Walk benefits the Ivoryton Library and begins nearby. It meanders through beautiful Ivoryton village and the Land Trust's Falls River Preserve. An Essex Great Outdoors Pursuit event. Prizes awarded in many categories. Runners 8 and under are given medals and pumpkins to paint. Park in designated lots. Come rain or shine.

Saturday, November 23 - 9am - 12pm at Cross Lots, 40 West Ave Cross Lots Raking Extravaganza

Join the last-of-the-season Land Trust outing. We'll make the preserve look beautifully clean for winter. Rake, blow, mulch and bag all those leaves with us! Refreshments served. Park on West Ave. or at Town Hall. Rain date: Sunday, November 24 at 1:30pm.

Volunteers Needed: The Land Trust continues to rely on its membership 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 860-581-8106 or email volunteering@essexlandtrust.org if you would like to become a more active part of our team.

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