



## Essex Land Trust Annual Meeting

Over 100 members and supporters attended Essex Land Trust's Annual Meeting held at Essex Meadows on April 27, 2023. The occasion marks the organization's 54th year of operation reflecting the continuing commitment to support the land trust's mission of acquiring, preserving, and managing our preserves to protect the environment and small-town character of the villages of Centerbrook, Essex, and Ivoryton.

Essex Meadows provided the perfect venue for a social hour gathering followed by the annual business meeting held in its Hamilton Hall. President Jeff Croyle provided highlights of activities and accomplishments over the past year. He was followed by Treasurer Deb Carreau who summarized the strong financial results and the very solid condition of the land trust's finances. Preserve Management Director, Leif Owens, listed the many projects

handled by the robust stewardship team. He highlighted the electrification of the Cross Lots barn which created a much-improved workspace and has facilitated the transition from gas powered to battery operated equipment. Vice President Bob Nussbaum presented the board's recognition of two retiring stewards Roger Field and Stuart Warner. Roger and Stuart each have been involved in stewardship activities for 25 years.

The meeting concluded with the approval of Board Classes through 2026 and included the Board's election of three new members, Tom Gezo, Peter Holland, and Kathryn Ryan. A more detailed Annual Report and List of Members and Contributors has been sent out to the land trust membership. An electronic copy can be downloaded from the land trust's website: <https://essexlandtrust.org/annual-report-for-2022/>



**Tom Gezo,  
Programs & Events**

- 24 years Consulting & Leadership roles
- Led the final stages and completion of the land trust's Strategic Plan



**Peter Holland,  
Land Acquisition Support**

- 30 years of Real Estate experience
- Expertise in conservation issues and structuring land sales and acquisitions



**Kathryn Ryan,  
Outreach Lead**

- VRHS Math teacher, Environmental Club Advisor
- The Ryan family have long been involved with the land trust

Annual Meeting ... continued from page 1



Photo credit: Mara Lavitt Photography

# Dark Skies for the Lower Connecticut River

By Misha Semënov-Leiva

**W**e are blessed to enjoy nature's beauty year-round in the Connecticut River Valley. But the valley's beautiful starry nights are at risk of being drowned out by light pollution.

## What is light pollution?

Light pollution by one definition is overly bright, poorly directed, or intrusive outdoor light. It's often wastefully aimed into the sky rather than the areas where it's needed for our safety and security. In fact, the International Dark-Sky Association's research shows that targeted, low-glare lighting deters crime better than does glare from bright floodlights. Excessive lighting can also result in "light trespass" by shining into neighbors' yards and home windows.

## Why is light pollution a problem?

Excessive night lighting can affect our health by disrupting our bodies' rhythms, causing poor sleep, anxiety, headaches, and other health issues. Light pollution also harms wildlife. Along the Connecticut River, high temperature lights (wavelengths on the high-energy, blue end of the spectrum) can disturb the natural movement of fish and disrupt amphibians in adjacent wetlands. Excessive night light can have devastating effects on birds that migrate or hunt at night too, killing millions worldwide as they collide with brightly lit buildings or get confused by bright illumination.

Lighting aimed out over the river also impacts diel vertical migration. Diel migration is the daily cycle of microorganisms in water bodies rising at night to feed on the surface and falling to the bottom during the daytime. This disturbance can increase growth of algae and result in poorer water quality.

## What Can Towns Do?

The Connecticut River Gateway Commission has asked its eight member towns to adopt a new light pollution definition into their zoning standards that specifically includes light directed into the river and its estuaries. It has also developed a new site plan review standard concerning light pollution, applicable to all new structures over 4,000 square feet in the Gateway Zone. In part, the standard reads "Within the Conservation Zone, lighting of properties, including site lighting and the illumination of building facades and other architectural features, shall be the minimum

necessary for health and safety." So far, a majority of the towns, including Essex, have adopted this language into their zoning regulations. While these new standards do not refer to any specific numerical limits on lighting levels, color temperature, or cutoff distance, the Commission encourages towns to go further and adopt a lighting ordinance applicable to all new construction based on the International Dark-Sky Association's model ordinance.

## What steps can I take?

Solving the problem is up to each of us. Thankfully, the best solutions also save money. Only use lighting as needed. Avoid outdoor lights above 2500K in color temperature. Motion detectors can improve safety around your home without constant illumination. You can light your yard for safety and security without lighting the sky, too. Aim your lighting to where you walk and to where it will best add to your home's security. Shielded, full cutoff light fixtures can direct light more efficiently to where it is necessary without spilling out to adjacent properties and the river.

The International Dark-Sky Association is a recognized authority on light pollution and provides information on responsible night lighting, including a listing of approved fixtures and retail outlets that sell them. Check out their website: [www.darksky.org](http://www.darksky.org)



Skyglow map from [www.lightpollutionmap.info/](http://www.lightpollutionmap.info/)

*Editor's note: Misha Semënov-Leiva holds multiple credentials (ALA, LEED AP BD+C, CPHC) and is Senior Architect & Sustainability Coordinator at Centerbrook Architects and Planners, Adjunct Professor at University of Hartford, Department of Architecture, a Lecturer in the School of Architecture at Yale University. He is also a member of the Connecticut River Gateway Commission.*

# Volunteer Spotlight: George Wendell - Trail Monitor Extraordinaire

By Tom Soboleski

Essex Land Trust recently formalized a new position, trail monitor. The idea is to regularly walk the trails looking for obstructions or potential hazards and report them. The creation of this position was modeled on a steward who has been performing its duties for years as the unsung hero of Canfield Meadow Woods: George Wendell.

With 300+ acres, George's routine is vital input for keeping Canfield in tip top shape. Soon after being assigned there about eight years ago, George said, "It came to my attention that really what it needs is a constant survey of the trails to identify downed trees." Keeping the trails clear of obstacles is one of the primary functions of stewards and George has created his own unique routes to ensure he keeps abreast of Canfield's conditions. "I divided the trail system into four routes," he said, "and decided to do them at least once a month or preferably twice a month."

George is the scout and spotter and sends detailed reports after every one of his rounds to the other two stewards who are part of Canfield's maintenance trio. Each trail obstruction, or even potential one, is photographed and described by limb diameter and location. A typical report from George is quite specific: "Descending northward from Eagle Rock on the Eagle Rock Trail and about 20 yards before the junction with the Eagle Ridge (Parking Lot) Trail, a 6" diameter dead tree snapped off and has fallen on the trail with the top of its trunk also snapped off and lying on the trail closer to the junction."

George Wendell's love of the outdoors goes back decades. In the 1980's, George was the founding steward of the Watson-Symington Preserve in New Canaan, a 46-acre forest that was adjacent to his own property. At the time, George was working in the New York office of Danske



Bank, an international Danish bank, where he spent many years as a lawyer navigating the complexities of banking laws and derivatives. Prior to that he served a two-year stint with the Peace Corp in Venezuela from 1969-71.

The vistas in Venezuela were stunning, George said, and were his inspiration to begin hiking. When he retired and moved to Essex in 2012, he joined ELT shortly thereafter. After serving two years as a steward for Windswept Ridge he was assigned to join Roger Field to oversee Canfield.

George says Canfield's varied terrain has a story to pass down. "You can tell where farmers used to keep their cattle by the stone fences. Those are fascinating. There are so many different vistas in Canfield." Some of those vistas are being tarnished by the microscopic worms, or nematodes, that are blighting the groves of beech trees. "It's the scariest"

thing George worries about. Scientists all over the Northeast are in search of a solution to this attack.

Another big worry for George is forest fires. Eight or so years ago, a fire broke out in Canfield on Easter Sunday. "Fires could be quite devastating," he said, and are "a leading headache." At the same time, he finds it "a continuous source of wonder" to see new growth. "It's a study in how the land can reclaim itself."

Essex Land Trust has an invaluable asset in George Wendell. Through volunteering many hours a month, he is a key contributor in the preservation of our forests and trails that in turn provide innumerable health and social benefits for our citizens. George calls Essex "a hidden jewel for retirees" but a convincing case can be made that Essex has a jewel in George Wendell.

# Caution: Wetland at Work

By Carolyn Field, Essex Inland Wetlands and Watercourses Commission

**B**eneath their natural beauty, wetland areas quietly perform several vital environmental jobs. In addition to their recreational uses, wetland areas help reduce flood damage by acting as natural water storage basins during storms and snow melts. Wetlands help purify streams and rivers and help recharge the water table. Simply put, a healthy wetland ecosystem works to keep clean water flowing from your kitchen faucet and flood waters out of your basement.

Healthy wetlands are those that are intact, diverse in habitat, and protected from human activity. Essex is home to more than a dozen natural, mill, and seasonal ponds, as well as many streams and creeks whose waters make their way into its three rivers and eventually into Long Island Sound. Many of the Essex Land Trust properties contain some of the town's largest and healthiest wetland areas thanks to the land trust's extensive preservation efforts.



Falls River Mill Pond by Carolyn Field

## Protecting Wetlands and Watercourses

Just over fifty years ago the State of Connecticut enacted the Inland Wetlands and Watercourses Act to protect the fragile ecosystems of its inland wetland areas that were being filled and polluted. Wetlands contain some of the most fragile and diverse plant and wildlife communities in Connecticut. The 1972 law led to the establishment of the Essex Inland Wetlands and Watercourses Commission (EIWWC) that is charged with helping to preserve wetlands areas with the town and the vital environmental functions they perform. The EIWWC is made up of five Commission members and two alternates, all of whom are appointed volunteers.

The Commission helps balance the need for property development, the interests of property owners, and preserving and protecting wetland areas. The Commission regulates most proposed activities that take place within wetland areas. While most people are aware that wetlands are legally protected, many do not realize that wetlands and watercourses are bordered by a designated 100-foot Upland Review Area that is also legally protected from disturbances without a permit. The Upland Review Area acts as a buffer to protect wetlands and watercourses.

The Essex Land Trust was recently granted a permit to install a kayak launch at its Falls River Preserve property. "Bob Nussbaum and Leif Owens of the Essex Land Trust worked collaboratively with the Commission to ensure that the wetland along the landing area was protected and that kayakers were best able to make use of the pond," said Michael Furgueson, Chairman of the Essex IWWC. "The Commission works to balance the interests and rights of property owners thoughtfully and professionally in line with our responsibility to ensure that wetlands areas maintain their function and value. The Commission greatly appreciates the land trust's working within our permitting process to help preserve their wetland areas," he added.

## What Activities Are Regulated?

The Essex IWWC regulates activities such as tree or brush removal, filling, excavating and construction in wetlands and in the 100-foot Upland Review Area. These activities can cause soil loss and erosion that can smother adjacent wetland vegetation, fish and aquatic habitats. Wetland areas are legally designated by a soil analysis performed by a certified soil scientist or other professional.

Regulated activities require a permit application to be approved by the Commission. Activities such as outdoor recreation and play, swimming, canoeing, fishing, camping and hiking are not regulated and do not require a permit, provided that they do not significantly disturb the natural character of the inland wetland or watercourse.

## What can you do to help preserve wetlands?

Before you begin a project or an activity in a wetland area or within 100 feet of a wetland area, please call the Essex Land Use office for information on how to apply for a permit. Unsure if your property contains or is near a wetland? Visit [EssexCt.gov](http://EssexCt.gov) website, GIS maps for a map of designated wetlands in the town of Essex.

# Arbor Day at Essex Elementary

**A**rbor Day is an annual event celebrated across the world to recognize the role that trees have in our lives. It promotes the planting and caring of trees and was first observed in 1872, in Nebraska, after J. Sterling Morton proposed a resolution to the Nebraska State Board of Agriculture to set aside one day to plant trees. All fifty states celebrate Arbor Day which typically takes place on the last Friday in April.

Since 2012, Essex Land Trust has joined forces with Essex Elementary School in commemorating this occasion. A



time is set aside in late April for the third grade to learn about Arbor Day along which it is joined by EES' fifth grade Green Team. The third graders write poems while the Green Team relates the history of Arbor Day. The event culminates with the planting of a tree on school grounds. Support for this event is provided by the Town's Tree Committee in the person of Tree Warden Augie Pampel, Fred Weber of Fred Weber Landscaping, and Dan Estey

from Bartlett Tree Experts, who hands out tree saplings for all participants to take home and plant. Shown are a selection of the poems written by this year's third graders.



## Trees by Colin

Trees give us food and fruit to live  
Trees give homes to wildlife and people  
Trees give us air to breathe  
Trees give us shade on a hot summer day.  
Trees are part of nature  
Please don't cut down trees.

## Some Trees by Claire

Some trees have leaves like an old man's beard.  
Some trees' leaves are as purple as a plum.  
Some trees' leaves are as spiky as a porcupine.  
Red, orange, yellow, green, and brown  
In the fall it is like a rainbow.  
In the winter the leaves blow away  
And the tree is like a skeleton.

## A Day in the Life of a Tree by Millicent

The tree is waving in the wind saying hi to a friend.  
The tree makes music as it moves in the wind.  
The tree wakes up in the morning  
With birds chirping like a melody.  
When the moon comes up and the  
Crickets start chirping the tree is ready to dance.

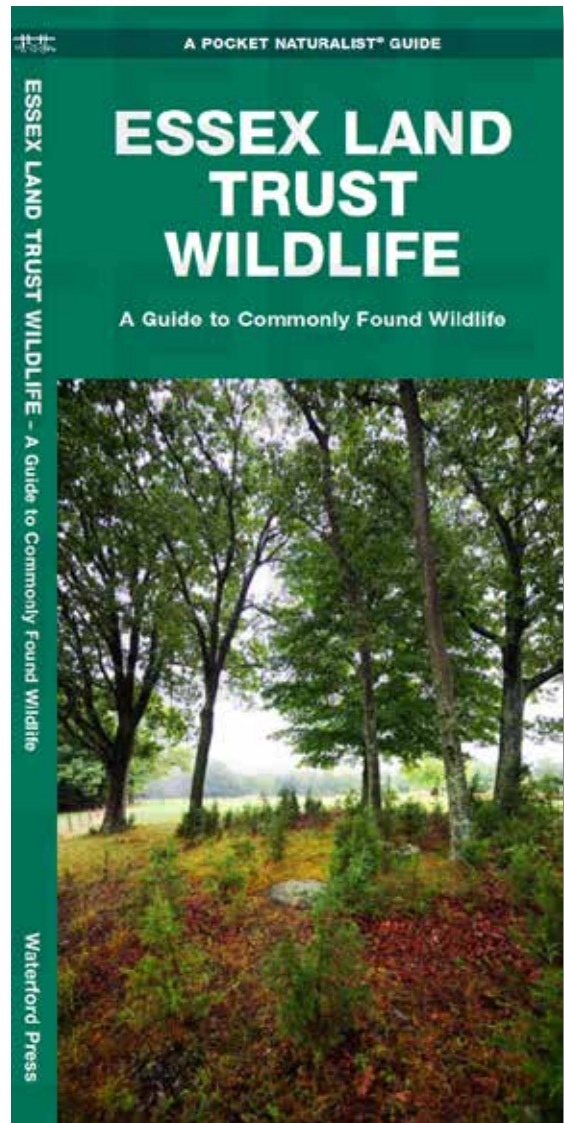
### Membership Campaign Underway

Our annual membership campaign is underway and current members will have received their new membership package which includes a copy of the land trust's annual report but also a free copy of the recently published Essex Land Trust Wildlife Guide. Please renew your membership at as generous a level as possible so that we can continue to meet the challenges of caring for and managing our preserves.

The wildlife guide is designed to help identify wildlife in our region and is in line with our mission of educating our community on the value of our natural environment. Becoming familiar with our local natural environment is essential to appreciate and protect our community's biodiversity.

The project was spearheaded by land trust board member Jim Denham with the help of Connecticut Audubon Society's Andy Griswold and the land trust's Science and Technical Advisory Committee (STAC), notably Stephen Gephard, Julianna Barrett, and Chet Arnold. While it is not a comprehensive guide to all possible species of wildlife, the priority was to identify species possibly found in Essex; also, it can be a handy reference for use throughout the State of Connecticut.

The guide will also be available for sale to the public for \$8.95 in several local shops. Next year, we aim to publish a companion guide next year focusing on local flora.



### Essex Savings Bank Community Investment Program Award

The Essex Land Trust has received \$1,977 from Essex Savings Community Investment Program. We thank Essex Saving Bank and the many who cast their ballots in our name. Eighty-four recipient

non-profit organizations shared a total of \$109,722. The program, which is now in its 28th year, has provided \$5.5 million to non-profit organizations to aid them in fulfilling their missions.



# Coming Events – Mark Your Calendar!



## Canoe/Kayak Paddle on Mill Pond with Social to Follow

**Saturday, August 12, 10:30am-12:00pm Falls River Park on Falls River Drive, Ivoryton**

Join ELT for a Canoe/Kayak paddle on Mill Pond which will be led by ELT President and kayaker Jeff Croyle. Participants should register on site and launch their own boats prior to the 10:30am departure. The launch site is being upgraded with dock and cradle for a smooth launch. A social will follow at a neighboring member's home and refreshments will be provided. Bring chairs, blankets, swimming suit, and something to share. Participants must sign a waiver onsite and are solely responsible for providing and use of their own equipment, including pfd. Please register for this event at: <http://bit.ly/3ptu64T>. Registration is recommended to help us plan but it is not required. The event is FREE. Bad weather cancels.

## Astronomy and Dark Skies

**Friday, September 8, 9:30pm-11:30pm, location specified when registering for the event (required)**

We are pleased to be partnering with the Lyme Land Trust who have been kind enough to open their Astronomy and Dark Skies program to Essex Land Trust members. Young or old, experienced, or totally unfamiliar, the Lyme Land Trust's Astronomy team looks forward to exposing you to our uniquely dark skies here in Lyme. While there is no charge, registration is required and is limited to 20 members. Registration: <https://www.lymelandtrust.org/register-for-astronomy-events/> and choose the September 8 session. Please enter ELT after your first name to identify yourself as an ELT Member. Directions to the site and special guidance for those with heavy

astronomy equipment will be provided upon registration. Park in the designated area and walk to the observing field with its amazing panoramic views of the heavens. Dress for temperatures 10-20 degrees lower than forecast for your comfort. No white lights at the field site. More information at: <https://www.lymelandtrust.org/our-dark-skies/>



Photo by Alan Sheiness

## Essex Source to Sea Cleanup

**Saturday, September 23, 9:00am to 12:00pm – Save the Date! Location to be announced.**

Join the Essex Land Trust, Sustainable Essex, and the Connecticut River Conservancy as we gather to collect trash and litter along the roadways and waterways proximal to the Connecticut River. Help the environment by keeping the Connecticut River and our community free of debris.

More details will be on our website and will be sent out via eblast and posted on Facebook closer to the date.

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