

# Land Trust Preserves Open Space & Farms

## By Margot Callahan

The Northern Connecticut Land Trust wants you! And maybe the family farm.

They'd like you as one of their growing list of members, for starters. Maybe as a volunteer.

If you own a farm you'd like to keep in agricultural production, or some other nice open space you would like to preserve, the Land Trust can help with that too.

"Our mission, our aim," says Culver Modisette, of Stafford, president of the Northern Connecticut Land Trust, "is to protect agricultural land and open space of all kinds."

At present, the Land Trust owns several farms, and one of its committees, its "farm committee," works on keeping the farms in production. Currently the trust has two working farms, in Somers and in Ellington, producing silage corn and hay, and it's in negotiations over a third, he said.

The Land Trust currently holds 390 acres outright, Modisette said, in nearly a dozen and a half properties in eight towns. These are currently worth over \$1.9 million. "And we have no debt, at the moment," he says. "And a nice cash balance."

Right now the organization is all volunteers, but Modisette thinks there will come a time when they will need a paid executive director, part or full time.

Last year the Land Trust received an award from the Land Trust Service Bureau for having the greatest percentage increase in its land holdings for the year.

## Northern Connecticut Trust Honored For Its Land Holdings, Cataloging Efforts

During the same period the trust was also awarded the "Outstanding Stewardship Award" by the Land Trust Service Bureau for its cataloging of flora and fauna on its McCann Family Farm property in Somers. The catalog, compiled by Jerry Stage and George Grant, lists more than 300 plants and 88 species of birds, a number of them endangered.

In January the Land Trust received a 13.6 acre parcel in East Windsor that contains a rare black spruce bog. Such bogs, says Don Smith, a past Land Trust president and currently land acquisition chairman, haven't evolved much since the glacier days, and are more usually seen 200 to 400 miles north of this area. Because they are very acidic, little beside black spruce grows in them.

Last year the trust added the 56-acre Swann Farm in Ellington to its holdings, with the help of grants of \$182,500 from the State of Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection and \$120,000 from the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving. This farm, which has no residents, is leased to a farmer who's producing silage corn, said Smith.

Like Somers, Smith says, Ellington is a town rich in prime farmland, and almost none of it is protected. "Drive along Route 83," he says, "and see all the big developments going in."

The town really needs to preserve its

agricultural heritage, he adds.

Approximately 500 acres are protected, he says, and the addition of the 56-acre Swann farm increased Ellington's protected acreage by 10 percent.

"The area has extremely rich, river-bottom soil, among the best in the country," said Smith.

"If we can protect and preserve open space and agricultural land that we keep in production, that's what we're all about," says Modisette.

"We're taking a hard look at Ellington and East Windsor," he says. Enfield, he adds, has only a small area of farmland in its southeast corner.

The Northern Connecticut Land Trust was formed in 1987, incorporating a former Enfield/Ellington/East Windsor/Somers Four Town Land Trust, later adding Stafford (to become the Five Town Land Trust), and, in 1997, merging with the Vernon Land Trust.

Smith, who was one of the organizers, says they soon decided the name "Six Town Land Trust" was silly. After a contest to come up with a new name, they settled on Northern Connecticut Land Trust — "so we didn't have to keep on changing the name" as additional towns joined.

The 15 members of the Northern Connecticut Land Trust's board of directors include representatives of six member towns: Somers, Ellington, Vernon, Enfield, Stafford, and East Windsor. The trust also holds properties in Bolton and Andover, and is looking