

LANDMARK

The newsletter of the Northern Connecticut Land Trust



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Land Protection on the Uptick

From a Hartford Courant article by Tom Condon

At nearly 50 square miles, Guilford is one of the largest towns in the state, and one of the most attractive. That's in part due to a willingness to preserve key pieces of land, starting with a large and lovely town green.

Residents of the shoreline community continued the tradition two weeks ago when they voted overwhelmingly (2,645 to 486) to buy a 624-acre parcel along the East River that includes tidal marshes, fields and forests. It is one of the largest pieces of undeveloped land in the shoreline area.

Guilfordites voted to spend \$15.5 million, all their own money except for a \$3 million federal grant, in a down economy, to pay for the open land.

That is a remarkable statement by the townspeople. What is more encouraging is that they are not alone. Of late, residents of many towns have begun to see the value in keeping farms and fields intact rather than turning them into large-lot subdivisions. In recent months:

- Residents of Windsor Locks voted emphatically to preserve a pristine 224-acre wood called the Waterworks Brook parcel in the southern part of town.
- Middletown officials bought the development rights to a 34-acre farm owned by 90-year-old Adolph Schiemann, who continues to work the land and live in the circa-1750 farmhouse. Middletown also joined with Middlefield to buy a 50-acre farm that straddles both towns.
- Middlefield also bought the former Powder Ridge Ski Area.
- Suffield bought two farms totaling 132 acres, using nearly \$400,000 of its own money and state grants totaling nearly \$1 million.
- Residents of Simsbury, Ashford, Pomfret, Union, Glastonbury, New Hartford, Salem, Granby and other communities have preserved or are in the process of preserving farms or open space.

Though there is no statewide registry of open space acquisitions — and there should be — it feels like there's an uptick, especially in farm preservation. A number of activists agree.

"There is tremendous momentum for farmland preservation," said Jiff Martin of the Working Lands Alliance, a farmland advocacy group.

She said towns and farmers are responding to unprecedented levels of federal and state funding, and that the slowdown in the real estate market offers a great opportunity to invest in farmland.

"Town officials see that protected farms continue to pay taxes, provide free environmental benefits and pose no stewardship costs ... while maintaining an exciting business sector that attracts tourism and maintains community character. Town leaders that are planning for the future realize now is the time to protect farms, before this window of opportunity closes forever."

A lot of factors are at play in these preservation efforts. People see their towns being overrun with development and losing character. The Windsor Locks acquisition was the last large wooded area in town, for example, and many people didn't want to lose it. The amazing growth and popularity of farmers markets in the past few years suggests strong support for local agriculture.

There is also an emerging economic argument. Towns used to routinely allow every new residential subdivision, on the theory that they would generate needed tax revenue. But more recently, they've been doing the math. They often conclude that the cost of the roads, sewers, police, schools and other services will surpass the tax revenue from the new houses (I've heard a home builders group contest the point).

The Windsor Locks purchase, from a water company, was made possible by an innovative state tax credit program under which an owner who sells open space at less than market value receives a 50 percent tax credit for the difference.

One of the most successful funding efforts — one of the state's major smart growth laws — is the Community Investment Act, passed in 2005. That law created a fund, from real estate recording fees, which has produced tens of millions of dollars for farmland preservation and programs, open space acquisition, affordable housing and historic preservation.

The program has been a major success. It is funding

virtually the entire historic preservation effort. It's given state agencies the flexibility to invest in a number of smart growth initiatives. It's also making a big difference in farmland acquisition. Martin said the state Department of Agriculture has 50 farms in the pipeline, thanks to the additional staff and survey costs paid for by the law.

Recognizing that times are hard and that state officials have difficult choices to make, Gov. M. Jodi Rell ought to leave this fund alone. Mrs. Rell has indicated she wants \$12 million from the fund in each of the next two years. In a sluggish economy, that could be the entire fund. The state has a finite and dwindling amount of open land. Scenic and ecologically significant parcels, such as the Guilford land, should be saved. But if we don't acquire them in the very near future, they will be lost.

Whitaker Woods Trails Coming Along

From Wes Smith

Plans are underway for the opening of Whitaker Woods hiking trails to the public. Whitaker Woods is the 266 - acre property adjoining the Northern CT Land Trust McCann Family Farm, 84 acres, in Somers. Hikers will have their choice of trails to hike once the property is opened for recreational use. Hikers will be able to park their cars at the McCann Family Farm parking lot off Main Street, route 190, in Somers and hike from the McCann's trails into Whitaker Woods trails. Or for the really ambitious hiker, they could hike from the top of Soap Stone Mountain all the way to McCann's Family Farm parking lot crossing only one paved road.

NCLT board member Wes Smith has lead hikes for the land trust and the Connecticut Forest & Parks Association along the trail from Soapstone Mountain into Whitaker Woods and McCann's Family Farm. He reports that it's a good 4.5 mile hike that's generally all down hill. Most of the trail is marked, but since it crosses three different properties; state, town of Somers and NCLT, there's three different trail markers in use. In the spring the upper portions of the hike, especially on state land, can be wet so water proof hiking boots are a must. Sturdy boots should always be worn while hiking; our properties are wilderness, albeit suburban ones.

Hikers should be aware that they could be sharing Whitaker Woods trails with horses too. The usual courtesies should be given the riders and the horses especially if you are hiking with your dog. Wheeled, motorized & track vehicles are not allowed on most NCLT properties and Whitaker Woods is no exception, except of course for the convenience of work parties. Horses will not be allowed into McCann's Family Farm property under a prior agreement with the family, so riders will have a loop trail to share with the hikers from Soapstone Mountain.

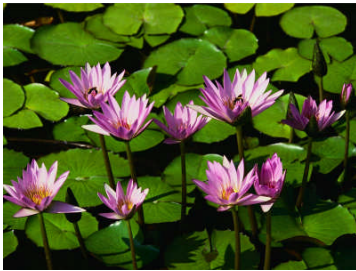
The Whitaker Woods property was a former wood lot and pasture in its day. An old pastures lies near the top of the property, deep in the woods, overgrown now with tall oak and hickory trees but still fenced in by beautifully preserved stone walls. The loop trail passes by these grand old walls. There are lots of abandoned logging roads running across the property, and some of these will be used for trails. Older logging roads only reveal their presence after a light coat of snow has fallen filling in the depressions left by the passage of vehicles long ago.

A stream - Gulf Stream, and a brook - Shady Brook, run through Whitaker Woods and into McCann's Family Farm. Gulf Stream begins its life in the ponds and springs in Shenipset State Forest atop Soapstone Mountain. At 1075 feet, Soapstone Mountain is the 57th highest peak in Connecticut. Shady Brook emerges from a combination of a vernal pools and springs near the southeast corner of the property. Just walk it in late March and you'll have no trouble finding the "headwaters" because the frogs will be singing loud enough for you to find the pools. Look in the pools for the black egg masses forming late in the spring too.

Wildlife sightings in Whitakers include deer and turkeys. Great horned owls have been seen near the pine grove adjoining the pastures. Pileated woodpeckers can be seen and heard too. Redtail hawks and goshawks regularly patrol the property searching for a meal. Blue bird boxes were put up in the pastures last year and all had hatchings, although one box had eleven Chickadee in it! You'll see more wildlife earlier in the day rather than later and spring-time is the busiest time of the year. Bring your binoculars for the best views of the critters.



A Somers Boy Scout, Chad Zawistowski, needed a community project for his Eagle Scout award and came to us seeking a project. We selected a bridge for him to build that would cross over Shady Brook that runs along one of our proposed trails. He designed the bridge, raised the funds for the materials and built the bridge with the aid of his fellow scouts and parents. Chad finished the project during some of the coldest weekends of the winter. And now we have a nice, safe dry way to cross Shady Brook. Thanks Chad.



Hiking/Walking/Paddling thru 2009 with the NCLT



Sunday March 22nd

Explore Bald Mountain in Somers

Enjoy exploring parts of Bald Mountain with leader Albie Grant. This bushwhacking excursion will visit parts of the Galbraith and the Bridges parcels, two properties owned by the land trust. Since these two lack marked, maintained trails this is a good opportunity to see them. Meet at 9:00 a.m. at the Somers Town Hall parking lot. Contact Albie Grant (860) 623-5487

Saturday March 28th

18th Annual Scantic Spring Splash

Down river canoe and kayak race. Largest in Connecticut. Registration at 9:00 a.m. at Powder Hollow Barn, South Maple St. Race is 5 mile course. Novice course 2.5 miles. Participate or observe, lots of fun. **Contact:** Mike Dynia (860) 745-9986 or visit: www.scanticspringsplash.com.

Sunday March 29th

Andrew Kenneth Webster Preserve

Explore the boundaries of the Andrew Kenneth Webster Preserve. This scenic, open space property abuts Rails-To-Trails and Valley Falls Park in Vernon. Some bushwhacking and climbing with a total distance of 3 miles. See vista of Railroad Valley, several large, vernal pools, trail constructions, and more. Meet at Valley Fall parking lot on Valley Falls Rd. From exit 66 on I-84, take Tunnel Rd. south about 0.6 miles, turn left on Valley Falls Rd. for 1.2 miles, turn right into parking lot. 2:00 p.m. Rain or shine. No dogs.

L: George Arthur [860-871-0137](tel:860-871-0137), trailsarthur2@comcast.net. **CL:** Joe King.

Saturday April 4th

Sunset/Moonlight Hike, Skyline Scenic Area

Join members of the Northern Connecticut Land Trust on Saturday, April 4th for a leisurely hike up the Ledge Trail of the Skyline Scenic Area to view the sunset over the CT River Valley. With the right conditions the view can be spectacular! Then hike northward on Minnechaug Mountain and back to the cars by an alternate route. Total distance: 3 to 4 miles. Bring flashlights.

Meet for the hike *promptly* at 6:15 PM EDT in the parking lot behind the Somers Town Hall. Hikers are welcome to join the leaders for pizza before the hike. Those wishing to dine should arrive at 5:00. Heavy rain or a view obstructing low overcast cancels the hike. For more information contact the leader, Jerry Stage, at (860) 870-4255 or JerryStage@aol.com.

Sunday May 3rd at 7:30 AM

Canoe/Kayak Birdwatching, Trip on the Scantic

As spring unfolds, enjoy the beauty and serenity of the Scantic River and its surroundings on a leisurely canoe/kayak trip starting from Mill Pond and going north. Casual bird watching will be encouraged so be sure to bring your binoculars. Meet at 8:30 a.m. at Mill Pond in Somerville. Bring your own canoe or kayak and PFD for all. This is an ideal family activity; however, all children under the age of 16 must be accompanied by an adult. Inclement weather cancels. This trip is sponsored by the **SCANTIC RIVER WATERSHED ASSOCIATION**-on the web at Scanticriverwatershed.org. For more information call Jan Collins (860)749-2701.

Saturday June 6th

National Trails Day, Vernon, CT

Trail Construction Walk Meet 10 AM Sponsored by the Vernon Parks and Recreation Dept. Join CFPA Trail managers on a scenic 3 mile walk along the Shenipsit Trail in Valley Falls Park and adjoining CT DEP Belding WMA property. Enjoy the scenery and see 18 trail constructions, including the "silly stairway" made to harden popular trails. Meet at Valley Falls Park From I-84 exit 66, go west on the connector road, turn left (south) for ½ mile on Tunnel Road, turn left (east) on Valley Falls Rd. for 1 mile. Park on the right. Children welcome, no dogs. Bring optional lunch for end of hike. Rain or Shine. **Contact Information:** George Arthur, (860) 871-0137, trailsarthur2@comcast.net, or Joe King.

Sunday June 7th
National Trails Day
9:00 a.m.-12 Noon

Soapstone Mountain to McCann Family Farm-Somers, CT

Hikers will start with a chance to climb the observation tower in the Shenipsit State Forest. On a clear day the view can include Western MA, southern VT, NY, and Mt. Monadnock, NH. The hike will continue down the mountain along trails maintained by CFPA, the Town of Somers and Northern CT Land Trust. For those who do not wish to hike the entire 5 miles, they can hike half way and be shuttled back to the parking lot. The hike will then continue on to the recently acquired 272 Whitaker property by the NCLT. Rain or shine. Bring plenty of water, snack, and wear sturdy shoes. Optional pizza afterwards.

Leaders: Wes Smith, Gayle Manning, Judith Snyder. **Meeting Place:** Soapstone Mountain parking lot off Gulf Rd., Somers, CT. **Information:** Judith Snyder-(860) 749-5411 or e-mail nctia@yahoo.com.

Sunday June 21st

Birds and Flowers on McCann's & the Scantic Riparian Area and More

Hartford Audubon Society and NCLT members are invited to explore the McCann Family Farm and nearby Scantic Riparian Area (SRA), two choice properties of the Northern Connecticut Land Trust in Somers. Habitats on McCann's include two streams, hayfields, fallow fields, pine plantations, vernal pools, wetlands and mixed deciduous forests. The biologically rich wetland of the SRA has an entirely different flora and fauna. If some are interested, we can also visit Soapstone Mountain, a nearby beaver pond and the largest Hemlock in the state. We'll hike at least 2-3 miles. Mud and or shallow puddles will likely be on the SRA trail so bring appropriate footwear.

Meet at 7:30 AM EDT at the Somers Town Hall parking lot (behind the building) on Rte. 190 a short distance east of Rte. 83. Bring a lunch if you wish to stay past noon. Leader: Jerry Stage (860) 870-4255 or JerryStage@aol.com.

Sunday July 5th

Ancient Plants in Somers

Join naturalist Jerry Stage in a natural history / conservation oriented walk on Northern Connecticut Land Trust properties in Somers on July 5, 2009. Properties to be visited include the Scantic Riparian Area, the McCann Family Farm and perhaps the newly acquired Whitaker Woods next to McCann's. In addition to a guided tour of especially beautiful and interesting places, participants will have the opportunity to see and learn about the many species of ferns, club mosses and horsetails that are living representatives of very ancient lineages.

Meet at the Somers' town hall at 9:00 AM. It is on Rte 190 ~0.1 mi east of Rte. 83. The parking lot is behind the building. We will walk a total of 2 to 4 miles and probably take 3 or more hours. Waterproof hiking boots or shoes are a good idea if heavy rains (3-4" or more) precede (Fri. or Sat.) the walk. All are invited to join the leader after the hike for pizza at a nearby restaurant. For more information contact Jerry Stage at 860 870-4255 or JerryStage@aol.com.

Sunday August 2nd

Midsummer Wildflowers in Somers

Sunday, August 2nd join naturalist Jerry Stage to explore two or three very special scenic locations in a quest to find blooming mid summer wild flowers. Sites to be visited include the Scantic Riparian Area (SRA), the McCann Family Farm, the Schlaff Farm and possibly Whitaker Woods, all in Somers, Connecticut.

In addition to a guided tour of pleasant and interesting places, participants will have the opportunity to see and learn about many of species of wildflowers, trees, shrubs and whatever else of natural history/conservation interest might be encountered. The vital role of riparian areas and wetlands to our well being will be stressed as well as the threat from invasive plants. Of particular interest is progress in the biological control of purple loosestrife on the SRA.

Participants should meet at 9:00 AM at the parking lot behind the Somers' town hall off Rte 190 near Rte. 83. Expect to walk about 3 miles and spend about 3 hours. Season specific flower lists will be available. Waterproof hiking boots or shoes are a good idea if heavy rains (3-4" or more) precede (Fri. or Sat.) the hike. All are invited to join the leader after the hike for pizza at a nearby restaurant. Leader: Jerry Stage (860 870-4255) or JerryStage@aol.com.

Sunday September 13th

Late Summer Wildflowers on NCLT Lands

Sunday, September 13th join naturalist Jerry Stage to explore two or three very special scenic locations in a quest to find blooming late summer wild flowers. Sites to be visited include the Scantic Riparian Area (SRA), the McCann Family Farm, the Schlaff Farm and possibly Whitaker Woods, all in Somers, Connecticut. In addition to a guided tour of pleasant and interesting places, participants will have the opportunity to see and learn about many of the hundreds of species of wildflowers, trees,

shrubs and whatever else of natural history /conservation interest might be encountered. The vital role of riparian areas and wetlands to our well-being will be stressed as well as the threat from invasive plants.

Participants should meet at 9:00 AM at the parking lot behind the Somers' town hall off Rte 190 near Rte. 83. Expect to walk about 3 miles and spend about 3 hours. Waterproof hiking boots or shoes are a good idea if heavy rains (3-4" or more) precede (Fri. or Sat.) the hike. All are invited to join the leader after the hike for pizza at a nearby restaurant. Leader: Jerry Stage (860 870-4255) or JerryStage@aol.com.

**Sunday October 18th
Fall Foliage Hike**

Join naturalist Jerry Stage on Sunday, October 18, 2009, Somers for a Fall Foliage Hike. Visit several very special scenic locations in a quest to enjoy fine views of fall foliage. Sites to be visited include the McCann Family Farm, the Schlaff Farm and Whitaker Woods and perhaps the Skyline Scenic Area, all in Somers, Connecticut.

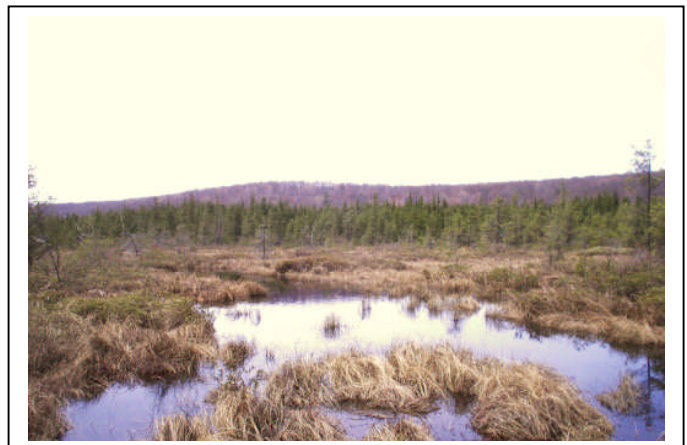
In addition to a guided tour of special places, participants will have the opportunity to see and learn about many species of trees, shrubs and whatever else of natural history/conservation interest might be encountered. The uplands on Whitaker's contain an impressive complex of stone walls.

Participants should meet at 9:00 AM at the parking lot behind the Somers' town hall off Rte 190 near Rte. 83. Expect to walk 5 or so miles and spend 3 or more hours. Waterproof hiking boots or shoes are a good idea. All are invited to join the leader after the hike for pizza at a nearby restaurant. Leader: Jerry Stage (860 870-4255) or JerryStage@aol.com.

**Saturday October 31st
Sunset/Moonlight Hike, Skyline Scenic Area**

Join members of the Northern Connecticut Land Trust on Saturday, October 31st (Halloween) for a leisurely hike up the Ledge Trail of the Skyline Scenic Area to view the sunset over the CT River Valley. With the right conditions the view can be spectacular! Then hike northward on Minnechaug Mountain and back to the cars by an alternate route. Total distance: 3 to 4 miles. Bring flashlights.

Meet for the hike *promptly* at 4:30 PM EDT in the parking lot behind the Somers Town Hall. Hikers are welcome to join the leaders for pizza after the hike. Heavy rain or a view obstructing low overcast cancels the hike. For more information contact the leader, Jerry Stage, at (860) 870-4255 or JerryStage@aol.com.



Two shots, above, of the Atlantic White Cedar forest at the north end of Upper Bolton Lake, Bolton, CT. During a trip on Earth Day 2006, Matt "Twig" Largess, a nationally know arborist from Rhode Island, was totally awestruck by how far north the Atlantic White Cedar stand was from the shoreline, where they are normally found. The stand covers close to 50 acres of cedar swamp, which used to be the old Willimantic Reservoir bordering Vernon, Tolland, and Coventry, and is accessible by canoe or kayak from the boat launch in Vernon on Hatch Hill Road. It makes a beautiful place to paddle and bird-watch in early May, as well as enjoy the cedar views!



LANDMARK: *Newsletter of the*

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If you have a friend interested in joining the Trust and supporting the work of protecting our natural resources, please pass this newsletter on to them. Contributions are tax deductible.

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