



Kitchen Table Conservation: How to Start Saving the World

By Russell Brenneman

Editor's Note: The following article is an abridged version of an Essex Land Trust sponsored chat given at the Essex Library on May 25, 2011. The full text version is available on the Essex Land Trust Website.

Several years ago I was asked to write the chapter on Connecticut in a book whose title is Twentieth-Century New England Land Conservation. Its editor and contributor, Charles J. W. Foster, is a former dean of the Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies. After he had considered the offerings of the six writers from each of the New England states Dr. Foster chose a subtitle: A History of Civic Engagement. For that common quality was shared by the efforts over the years of all land conservation in the region.

For my Connecticut chapter I chose the title: "A Story of Land-Saving Actions." You Essex land savers have an honored place in that story. Today I delivered copy of the book to your library as a gift from the Cabot foundation. The book, which was published by Harvard Forest, is available from the Connecticut Forest and Park Association.

When I saw your truly smashing website it got me thinking of all the things we didn't have or didn't even exist back in 1968 and how wonderful it is, for the most part, that we have them now. So many changes!

Among the things we didn't have back in 1968, when Essex Land Trust was founded, were almost any land trusts like this one. You are one of the first half-dozen community based, community organized, community funded, volunteer-operated land trusts in this state and that means anywhere. Of course, large, long established and successful land saving charitable organizations existed at that time. One thinks of The Nature Conservancy and the Trustees of Reservations in Massachusetts right away. But all of these had special interests and missions. Small parcels that are important to their community but not significant otherwise are of no interest to these large, well-heeled and professionally staffed organizations. What of communities that wanted to save a

bit of a river, a natural area or a beautiful vista that were significance only to the people who lived there?

To fit that need Connecticut invented the land trust that takes its place along all the other things we Nutmeggers have thought up, like the cotton gin, the can opener and the sewing machine. So, you in Essex can take your place in the company of other distinguished inventors! And the whole country can thank you for it. A few years ago there were something like 1,500 land trusts in the U.S. and eight percent of them are in Connecticut.

Kitchen table conservation has always led the way toward sane use of our resources and fixing things up. The first example that comes to mind of is a meeting in Simsbury in 1895 at the home of a local minister. A small group of citizens was concerned about what was happening to Connecticut's forests, which were being destroyed by fires and mindless harvesting. They set in motion actions that not only saved the forest but created the park and forest system that we enjoy today. They founded the Connecticut Forest and Park Association, which probably was the first organization of its kind in the U.S. Another Connecticut kitchen table invention.

Another kitchen table I got involved with personally was in Lyme. A small group of men met literally around Pat Jewett's kitchen table to try to do something about the coastal wetlands. At that time in 1968 Connecticut had lost through draining, filling or channeling roughly half of the tidal wetlands that had existed at the turn of the century. Many of the projects were quite small but collectively their consequences were catastrophic. Somewhat said it was like being nibbled to death



by ducks. There was little understanding of the vital role such wetlands play in protecting uplands and providing a myriad of what we call today ecological services. Claimed rights of upland owners reigned supreme. These guys around the kitchen table called themselves the Save the Wetlands Committee. When they asked me to undertake a study of the legal aspects of wetland protection, I remember thinking of that Margaret Mead quotation: She is supposed to have said that we should never doubt that a small group of thoughtful people could change the world, adding: "It's the only thing that ever had." Whether she actually said that or didn't, the truth of that statement has been proved over and over again in the conservation movement. In any event, this particular "small group" ultimately succeeded in protecting the remaining tidal wetlands of our state forever when they got the tidal wetlands act passed by the legislature in 1969.



And so it is with your land trust. I was astonished when I opened your website and discovered how many significant preserves you had acquired. My recollection of the earliest days is that right after you were organized nobody knew exactly what you would be doing. There was thought of some kind of education activity in the schools. I had the distinct feeling that you thought it would be a good idea to have a trust because this seemed to be the thing to do but no real notion of where to go from there. But you thought that opportunities might come. The important thing was to be ready – as ready you were...and are! It gives me a lift to see my friend Earl Canfield's name on one of your largest preserves. You certainly are doing all the right things.

This conversation would be incomplete if we did not spend some time sharing whatever concerns we have going forward. I would like to start by sharing some of mine.

Environmental protection in Connecticut is under siege in Hartford right now on two fronts, the budget and proposed changes in the laws and regulations that have protected us for generations. We should be very sympathetic toward a governor and lawmakers who are wrestling with a deficit that was not of their making. However, we must be adamant in insisting that

environmental agencies not bear a disproportionate share of cutbacks. We should remind our lawmakers that we are not talking about just numbers but about programs.

Equally seriously, we should absolutely insist that our legislators hold the line on keeping in place the laws and regulations that have cleaned up our rivers and air, protected our wetlands and prevented destructive public projects for decades. A juggernaut of lobbying is making the environment the scapegoat for a stalled economy and the loss of jobs. Get rid of these laws, legislators are being told, and the economy would grow again. If they do not hear other voices right now these laws are very much at risk. While she sometimes disappoints us, you are very fortunate to have Eileen Daily in the Senate and Philip Miller in the House but they need allies and help as they strive to convince their cohorts that a sustainable environment actuality is the cornerstone of a sound and growing economy.

We all are fortunate in Governor Malloy's new commissioner of the newly reorganized Department of Energy and Environmental Protection. In Dan Esty he could not have chosen a better person to develop comprehensive strategies to integrate for the first time energy, environment and economic well being. Get to know him, and you will be pleased. So one "tree" we all can plant is to make sure we elect the right people, let them know where we stand and give them the support that they need.

My other concerns are more general. One is making sure that we pass on to succeeding generations the traditions of generosity and volunteerism and "civic engagement" that have characterized prior generations of Americans. We seem to have become incredibly busy at the same time that we have also become more focused more on our personal well being than on the well being of our communities. As you land trust people know, organizations like this do not run themselves or prosper on their own. As I work more generally with non-profits I wonder about how we find the resources and people to keep them thriving.

I am concerned about the war between the artificial world of screens and the real world outside and whether for many young people one is winning out over the other. As we become culturally disconnected from the natural world we become indifferent to what is happening to it. As Earl Canfield would be pleased to hear me say, the opportunities you land trust people and others have created are out there to be enjoyed, to support our health and to provide opportunities for family recreation away from the isolating screens. You might want to look at a wonderful website called WalkCT for ideas and become acquainted with the No Child Left Inside initiative of DEEP.

As your founders showed us years ago, saving the world starts close at hand in our own communities, with generous, hopeful acts of stewardship.

ELT Since Falls River: A Brief and Biased Perspective

By Chet Arnold

Editor's Note: Chet joined the Essex Land Trust Board in 1993 and "retired" in 2011 after a tenure of 18 years. He was Vice President on two occasions and President for 3 years. He has been on the Finance and Acquisition Committees, the latter of which he was chair for a number of years. On retiring, Chet agreed to give his perspective on his past association with the Land Trust.

On the evening of October 14, 1998, the Essex Land Trust took a significant step up the evolutionary ladder of land protection. At a town meeting that night, the main agenda item was a vote on whether the Town should contribute a large sum of money (\$125,000) toward ELT's purchase of the Heinemann/Hallisey property (what is now the eastern half of the Falls River Preserve). Town Hall was packed with over 200 people, according to the papers the following day. The motion was read, and ELT was allowed to say a few words about the importance of preserving the property. Then the comment period began. After only one or two quick comments, someone shouted out (and I paraphrase) "We're all on board here -- just call the question!" That suggestion was met with a rumble of agreement, and followed in a few seconds by a roar of "Yeas" as the motion was unanimously passed.

At that moment, the Essex Land Trust, and the Town of Essex with it, entered into a new era of proactive, well-planned land protection that continues to this day.

Following quickly on the heels of what we now call the "Falls River I" purchase were a number of other acquisitions. These include, in rough chronological order: Osage Trails, Tiley-Pratt Pond, Falls River II, Windswept Ridge, James Glen, Fern Ledge, Mill Race, Jean's Island, Platt/Bushy Hill, Heron Pond, and the Johnson Farm conservation easement. Many of these transactions, following the blueprint of the 1998 Falls River purchase, were founded on a partnership between the Land Trust, the Town, the State, and the citizens of Essex.

Also during this time period, ELT had adopted a Falls River Initiative and developed a more systematic analysis of acquisition priorities. The Trust had also been a major contributor to the development and adoption of the Essex Open Space Plan. Thus, while both the Trust and the Town have been opportunistic about open space acquisition, it's fair to say that most of our land preservation in recent years has been informed and guided by an open space planning framework put into place in the last decade.

Why this surge of activity, and why at this particular

point in time? One factor is the accelerating conversion of our landscape. By the late 1990's it was growing clear that protecting land in its natural state was an increasingly urgent issue for the health of our environment, economy and community. According to the satellite-based research of the UConn Center for Land Use Education and Research, between 1985 and 2006 our state gained about 150 square miles (miles!) of developed land, and about half again as much of the lawns that come with development. In Essex during this period, we gained about 364 acres of developed land and 150 more of turf grass. As development progresses, the ability to design and place it so that important natural and cultural resources are not destroyed or compromised is key. And the surest way to protect these resources, of course, is to permanently take them out of the development equation.

Enter the second factor – the surge of local land trusts, which in recent years have grown rapidly in number, both in Connecticut and around the country. In Essex, an already strong land trust was able to tap a reserve of native talent (of which Essex has more than its fair share) in order to meet the challenges posed not only by the rapidly changing landscape in general, and by the particular obstacles posed by the landscape of Essex.

Essex is sometimes referred to as "semi-rural" in nature, which is an apt enough description – but the reality is that while we retain a lot of natural (but not necessarily protected) landscape, the town is, for the most part, carved up into many small parcels. There are literally less than a handful of undeveloped lots larger than 50 acres in town. Protecting significant open space in a town like Essex, with these many small parcels and high property values, is akin to some fiendish combination of Monopoly and a 1500-piece jigsaw puzzle.

In this setting meaningful land protection becomes extremely challenging, and must involve a lot more than willing sellers and ready capital. Human capital -- creativity, an opportunistic mindset and, quite often, sheer doggedness -- are required. During this new era, the ELT Board has had a continual influx of talented volunteers that have made these deals happen – often, it seems to me,



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almost entirely by force of will. The ELT Board is many things: hard-working, reliable, and creative (and of course, extremely bright and physically attractive), but perhaps the most appropriate adjective of all is effective.

ELT members can take a lot of pride in their

organization over the 44 years of its existence, from the visionary work of the founders and early board members to the current era of proactive land protection that was jump started that October evening in 1998. Here's looking forward to the next phase of ELT.

ELT and Yale Day of Service Collaborate

By Kathryn Katz

In the spring of 2011, at more than 250 sites in 40 states and fourteen countries around the world, members of the Yale community helped to make their neighborhoods a better place by participating in the Yale Day of Service. More than 3,500 people came together to serve food in soup kitchens, tutor school children, clean up parks and beaches, build houses for the homeless, provide support to orphan children and so much more.

The Essex Land Trust, in collaboration with the CT chapter of Yale Alumni, joined the Yale Day of Service events on Saturday, May 14, 2011 at an ELT Spring Spruce Up Project. Bob Nussbaum, ELT President; and Al Macgregor, Chief Steward worked with ELT member and Yale Club of Eastern



Front Row L – R: Megan Lynch; Kathryn Katz, MPH '91; Anne Lacouture Penniman, BA '80; Nick Richardson; Alex Richardson, MBA '83 and Jennifer Tate, M Arch '87. Back Row L –R: Sandra Lynch; George Penniman; and Walker Burns



Secretary/Treasurer, Kathryn Katz to plan this event. The Yale Volunteers assisted in the spring spruce up of our downtown Essex property, Cross Lots, performing such tasks as cutting saplings, clearing of brush, raking, staking young plants, etc.

The Essex Land Trust appreciates the willingness of Yale alumni, family and friends who gave their time and skills to the ELT as they carry on Yale's great tradition of service as part of this important program. This event is an outstanding example of the kind of volunteer efforts which are indispensable to the ELT. Mark your calendar for next year's Yale Day of Service: Saturday, May 12th, 2012!



By Steve Knauth

For sheer tranquility, for just plain peace and quiet, it's hard to beat Turtle Creek. Mother Nature rules in this 93-acre property, tucked away in a sparsely-populated patch of woods along the Saybrook-Essex border, on a point jutting into the Connecticut River, and the noise of civilization barely penetrates.

The flap of a hawk's wings, as it's startled from a perch, a rustling of underbrush as a fox emerges, furtive, onto the trail, the distant drumming of a woodpecker, the call of hovering terns; these are the noises of Turtle Creek.

And, it's all so readily accessible. Located on Watrous Point Rd, off Route 154, this Nature Conservancy property combines easy-walking trails through wooded terrain with lowlands and our region's distinctive tidal marsh. The water component – with access to the Connecticut River and South Cove – makes Turtle Creek a popular kayaking and canoeing destination.



The trail is one large loop, with a loop spur that leads down to the banks of the Connecticut River.

Total hiking distance is perhaps three-quarters of a mile.

Gael Chase of Old Saybrook and her dog, Charlie, have been walking Turtle Creek for a number of years, part of a group of "regulars" who have gotten to know each other on the trails. "We use it a lot, it's a wonderful place, and we're glad to have it," she says.

Besides its trails, Turtle Creek has an interesting history. The bulk of the preserve was donated to the Nature Conservancy by the family of Chester Bowles, the prominent 20th-century politician, statesman and Connecticut governor, who lived there. Deitch's Pond, once an ice pond, dates back to the heyday of the Bowles' tenure. Though largely overgrown, traces of a road are still plainly visible there, along with the footings of a bridge and dam.

Also known as Hayden Point, the area once belonged to 18th-century shipwright Uriah Hayden, who built the Connecticut warship Oliver Cromwell across the way in Essex during the American Revolution.

Past the ice pond, walking counter-clockwise, the trail works along high ground, winding through tall evergreens and maturing oak trees. To the right, the land falls off and a gully

emerges and becomes a stream bed. Taking a short spur to the right, through a spreading laurel grove, you can see the stream where it joins the wetlands and Turtle Creek.

Farther along the main trail, the older evergreens are being supplanted by young oak trees, birch and beech. The ground rises and a spur to the right leads to the top of a bluff overlooking the Connecticut River. Here, at a junction, two trails lead down to the river's edge. (The left-hand trail is short and steep; the right-hand one is easier, especially for strollers.) A make-shift bridge leads over a shallow, muddy side-creek at the foot of the high ground.

The reward is an idyllic stretch of sandy beach and riverfront, full of driftwood, flotsam and jetsam with shore birds, boats and buoys – and a wonderful view of Essex Harbor from the south.

Dogs love it here. "You come here on a summer's evening, and you might find a group of dogs and their owners, playing around on the beach and in the water," says Chase. "We all know each other, the dogs all seem get along, and it's a great place for them to have fun and interact."

Turtle Creek joins the river here, and the tidal marsh is rich and extensive, its tranquil waters and restful scenery – and the proximity to put-ins on Essex Harbor – attract nature lovers and bird watchers in kayaks and canoes.

Back on the main trail again, it heads north across a paved road to the shores of South Cove. It's another stretch of easy walking, through an old grove of cedar trees, now dying out as the hardwoods take over, and evidence that this was once pasture land. Patches of bright green fern fill the open spaces among the deadfall.

Along this trail, several short spurs lead down to the cove, a quiet resting place for ducks and swans. The path eventually re-crosses the paved road, tops a short rise and descends in leisurely fashion to the parking lot.



Coming Events – Mark Your Calendar!



Sunday October 3rd 1pm Falls River Drive in Ivoryton

Family Canoe/Kayak on Mill Pond

Enjoy the beautiful fall colors that can be seen on this paddle, led by naturalist Phil Miller, along with a possible walk on Jean's Island. Open to paddlers of all ages, but basic experience in paddling is required. This is an **Essex Great Outdoors Pursuit** event, co-sponsored by the Park and Recreation Department. Park at the canoe/kayak landing on Falls River Drive in Ivoryton. Bad weather cancels.

Saturday, October 22nd 7:30am Register at the Ivoryton Library

2nd Annual Run Local/Read Local Race

The 2nd Annual Ivoryton 5k Run/Walk benefiting the Ivoryton Library begins near the library and meanders through beautiful Ivoryton and into the Land Trust's Falls River Preserve. This event is part of the **Essex Great Outdoor Pursuit** in conjunction with the Essex Park and Recreation Department. Prizes will be awarded in many categories. All runners ages 8 and under will be given medals and a pumpkin to paint. Park in designated lots. Rain or shine.

Tuesday November 15th 7:30pm at Essex Library The Connecticut River—A National Treasure

Join Steve Gephard, Connecticut's Department of

Environmental Protection Supervising Fisheries Biologist and a former President/Founder of the East Haddam Land Trust, for his review of significant past and ongoing Connecticut River conservation efforts. He will address the importance of the river, its tributaries, the effort to restore its runs of migratory birds and its overall health.

Saturday November 26th 10am-12pm at Viney Hill Brook Park

Family Turkey Tromp and Plunge

Join Essex Conservation Commission members who will lead groups through the trails of this beautiful 92-acre town park, a hidden gem. The walk will last approximately 45 minutes. At 11am, be part of or just watch the wacky folks plunge into the pond. Participants in the plunge must sign waivers and be over age 18. This event is the last of 2011's **Essex Great Outdoor Pursuit**. The park is accessed off Hillside Drive in Essex. Ample parking is available in the park, near the pond. Rain or shine.

Sunday, January 22, 2012 2pm at Ivoryton Library Industrial History of the Falls River

Bill Grover, longtime town resident, partner emeritus of Centerbrook Architects and former ELT President, will present an illustrated talk on the history of the Falls River as it passes through town. Co-sponsored by the Ivoryton Library. Parking available on nearby streets.

Volunteers Needed: The Land Trust continues to rely on our membership and the community to support our efforts with their most valuable asset, their time. We have many tasks, both short and long-range and which vary from helping plan events, sitting on committees, hospitality and greeting at events, trail maintenance, office assistance, and mailings. Please contact Nancy Rambeau at 860-767-1523 or email nmcram@comcast.net if you would like to become a more active part of our team. Thanks so much.

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