



“All in a Day’s Work” The role of ELT’s Property Stewards

What kind of person would enjoy standing knee-deep in a cold stream picking rocks off the bottom and piling them up in a metal cage? Or spending a spring morning be-goggled and ear-muffled, feeding branches into a roaring wood chipping machine? Or levering a fallen tree off a snow-covered trail on a wintry afternoon?

It’s all in a day’s work for an Essex Land Trust Steward.

While the organization acquires the parks, the stewards take care of them, so the public may enjoy it to its fullest. With over 500 acres of land, there’s plenty to do. Stewards walk their properties on a regular basis, keeping trails clear and well-marked, looking for signs of damage from washouts and tree falls, vandalism and improper use. They co-ordinate larger-scale maintenance projects and suggest new trails. They nature-watch; noting unusual plants and trees, including invasive species; observing and understanding the land around them, its geology and history. And they look out for those hidden gems which give the property its own character.

For some, it’s the perfect job description. “[Despite] the hazards – dagger-bearing vines, poison ivy, fallen tree limbs, bogs and coyotes – what fun to find you responsible for a preserve,” says Brian Willis, steward at **James Glen**.

Few have been at the post longer than Al Macgregor, ELT’s chief steward. The former school teacher has been walking the local trails since the 1980s. “The idea of property caretakers goes back 20 years or more, but it was



Cross Lots Work Party

pretty informal,” he says. “Over just the last few years the Essex Land Trust has really pushed the idea of stewards for each property, to enlist the help of someone who would live near the property and take an active interest in it.”

The response? The ELT today can claim 17 official stewards for its properties, which range from tiny **Stanley Park** or **Farm Hill Estates** to sections of the 300-acre **Canfield/Meadow Woods Nature Preserve**. The team consists of both men and women, young and old, working professionals and retirees. Professions run the gamut; architects, engineers, pilot, photographer, educator, writer. All united by a love of the outdoors and a desire to do a little more.

The work varies from picking up branches after a wind storm to tackling major seasonal maintenance or catastrophic damage, and the nature of the property defines what needs to be done. **Cross Lots** and **Canfield/Meadow Woods**, large heavily-used parks, take the most work, but the tasks are different at each. **Cross Lots**, with its meadows and open, rolling terrain, involves mowing, maintaining the stone walls, clearing brush and picking up fallen branches from its many older trees. **Canfield/Meadow Woods**, heavily forested with ledge outcroppings and wetlands, requires clearing deadfall, repairing erosion damage and the occasional re-routing of paths to protect vernal pools. **Millrace** endures a twice-yearly flooding of the Falls River, which means bridge repairs.

Most trail work can be done by one or two people and the tools of the trade are simple - pruning shears and



Building Millrace Foot Bridge

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clippers, two-handed “loppers,” a hedge trimmer, a weed whacker. An overhead limb cutter and a small chain saw are also handy.

And, when a bigger project looms, a steward can call for a work party. That’s when four, five or six or more stewards get together on a specific day and time to undertake a specific project, chipping brush piles, building a bridge, clearing a major deadfall. Including volunteers, work parties can number in the scores of people, and usually prove as festive as they are work-intensive. “No steward ever has to work alone, you can always call for help,” says Macgregor.

In the end, most stewards will tell you, the job is all about a love of the outdoors, “the pleasure of walking in a quiet peaceful setting,” says Macgregor. “But there’s more to it than just that. As a steward, you’re doing something; you’re getting together, working on a common project, and enjoying the accomplishment when it’s done. The park looks nice, the trails are safe and people can enjoy them more.”

Steve Knauth



Current Land Trust Steward Team

Back row (l to r): Paul Greenberg, Augie Pampel, Stuart Warner, Steve Bancroft, George Rambeau, Fred Szufnarowski, Brian Willis, Jeff Hutchinson

Front row (l to r): John Matthiessen, Al Macgregor, Adrienne Brochu, Steve Knauth, Dee & Bill Grover

Absent: Dana Hill, Nick Fomenko, Keith Rustemeyer, Todd Maynard

Steward Responsibilities

- Walk boundaries periodically;
- Look for dumping, unauthorized cutting, trimming, use by vehicles;
- Check entry and border identification markers;
- Keep trails well-marked and cleared of fallen trees and other debris;
- Note and try to prevent litter, fires, use of motor vehicles or bikes, removal or destruction of plants, pollution in streams or pools;
- Depending on nature of property, arrange for mowing, burning and periodic cleanups;
- Report and arrange to correct exceptional weather damage and blights or insect harm and -damage to bridges, trails or other improvements;
- Establish and mark new trails;
- Develop natural history records and descriptions, providing labels along trails or other informative materials where appropriate;

- Note invasive species (e.g., bittersweet, phragmites, swans, etc.) and consider their removal;
- Recruit neighbor support.

Hikers Can Help Too ...

Hike with a pair of snipers and clear the trail of minor obstacles as you go along, including small sticks, rocks, intrusive vines and overhanging branches. Note and report the following to your Steward:

- Major deadfalls or dangerous-looking trees.
- Trail erosion, water-logged sections.
- Damage to signs, markers.
- Indications of illegal use.
- Unusual wildlife or plant life

And you can always call and volunteer for a work party!

Sheep Shearing at the Johnson Farm

This past June 13th, Polly and Murwin Johnson hosted one of the Essex Land Trust's most popular events in memory. The weather cooperated after many wet days so the approximately 200 members and non-members, young and old alike, were able to experience the shearing skills of Lara Sullivan, a junior high science teacher who handled the sheep expertly while simultaneously answering questions from the crowd.

Sheep shearing is an ancient tradition, as old as the domestication of animals. The work is done by an experienced "shearer" using either blade shears (like a pair of scissors) or a machine, similar to a barber's clipper. The process usually takes only a matter of minutes, and causes little or no discomfort to the sheep. Indeed, they're



Lara Sullivan with kids and shorn sheep

grateful to shed their coats in the warm spring and summer months. Sheep shearing is a ritual in sheep-raising cultures, and "world cham-

pionships" are held every few years in England, Australia and New Zealand. Closer to home, annual sheep shearing festivals are held in Massachusetts and Vermont, as well.



Polly Johnson at the spinning wheel

On this day, additional activities included wool spinning by Polly Johnson, observing baby chicks under heat lamps and seeing the egg-grading machine in action. Food and drinks were available for a nominal charge and everyone also enjoyed fiddle music provided by Stephen Wnuk.

The Essex Land Trust is currently in the process of acquiring the development rights of the Johnson Farm and this event was intended to highlight the special nature of this property. For more details on the progress in funding this project, please see the accompanying article.

Johnson Farm Funding Update

Funding towards the purchase of the Johnson Farm development rights continues to progress toward the goal of \$200,000. With the anonymous donor's \$15,000 challenge grant successfully achieved at the end of June total funding to date has reached \$156,000. The challenge itself raised \$20,300, more than

exceeding the target of \$15,000 or a combined total of \$35,000. We are still short of our target by \$44,000 but the possibility of hitting the target is clearly in sight. The Essex Land Trust continues to seek further donations to bridge this gap. If you have not donated yet, or would like to contribute, please send your contributions to the Essex Land Trust, P.O. Box 373, Essex, CT 06426.



New Initiative: Corporate Partners Sign On

The Essex Land Trust has recently established a Corporate Partners Membership Program to broaden support for its mission of land conservation and preservation. The new initiative will also increase awareness for passive recreational and educational programs in the community. The Essex Land Trust provides public access to its 15 properties, as well as hosts hikes, kayak trips, talks and educational events throughout the year.

Members in the Corporate Partners Program are provided with program activities for their employees and recognition of their support on the Essex Land Trust's website and newsletter, as well as a plaque of recognition, trail guide and activities calendar.

The Program is off to a successful start with the following members already participating:

Abby's Catering Company
Hilliar's Foreign Motors, Inc
Centerbrook Architects and Planners
Incarnation Center
Clark Group
Kaufman Masonry, LLC
Essex Hardware
Murtha Cullina LLP
Harbor Town Industries, Inc
Richard Gates, Land Surveyor
Hi-Rel Product
The Safety Zone

Businesses interested in joining the Corporate Partners Program may call Suzy Burke at 860-767-0735 or Mike Carlucci at 860-767-2032.

News

We are saddened to inform Land Trust members of the recent passing away of two members who in their individual way made significant contributions to the Land Trust and the Essex community.

Don Malcarne, born and raised in town, was a larger than life person when it came to his knowledge of local history. As unofficial Town Historian, Don was always willing to share his wealth of information. With respect to the Essex Land Trust, Don was a major source of what we know today about many of our properties. He was always willing to do research on properties and did a very nice job on researching all the parcels that now comprise Canfield Meadow Woods. He was also a big help to our 40th anniversary "look back in history" event and provided helpful input to the recently released Essex Land Trust Trail Guide.

Charles Kenyon, a former President of the Land Trust, arrived in Essex in 1969 just as the Land Trust was being formed. As one of its earliest members, he was actively involved in fundraising and was a strong advocate that Essex should develop in a planned manner and thereby avoid some of the negative effects of uncontrolled development. Charlie also was active in the Town of Essex Zoning Commission and, clearly, his efforts and contributions have impacted the quality of the community of which we are all benefactors.

Give the ELT Trail Guide this Christmas!

While the new Land Trust Trail Guide has now been distributed to all members and will continue to be handed out free of charge to all new members, it also can be a great idea to give as a gift this Christmas. The guide is available in retail outlets for \$15.00. By purchasing additional copies of the guide you will be showing your support for both the Land Trust and local shops. It is currently available in the



following outlets: In Essex at Essex Books, Village Provisions, Ct. River Museum, A Pocket Full of Posies, Essex Hardware, Essex and Ivoryton Libraries, and Gather – In Old Saybrook at North Cove Outfitters, Harbor Books and Emerson & Cook Book Company – It is also available at Walgreens in Deep River, Hitchery Books in Chester, The Turning Page in Old Lyme and in Madison at the Audubon Shop and R.J. Julia. For more information on the Trail Guide and its availability, please contact Jim Denham at jgdenham@aol.com.

On the Trail

Essex Land Trust's Properties and their Stewards - Canfield Meadow Woods

Editor's note: On the Trail will be a regular feature in Essex Woods & Waters and will profile the Land Trust's properties and the dedicated stewards who care for their woods, meadows and islands.

With its thick woodland and many ledges, Canfield/Meadow Woods' wetlands and rolling terrain, is one of the most complex properties in the Land Trust portfolio. As steward on behalf of the Essex Land Trust, Dana Hill has gotten to know its 300 acres pretty well. I met with the Essex resident, a former land surveyor and civil engineer for a Sunday hike.

"I've known [chief steward] Al Macgregor for 30 years, and he's the one who got me working on small projects for the Land Trust, years ago," says Hill. "I enjoyed helping out, and thought I should get more actively involved." Involved is right. There are 17 trails – more than six miles' worth – to take care of, and there's always something to do. He points to a typical project, just completed with Macgregor's help, where steps and a gravel trail bed have replaced a washed-out section of trail. Farther on, we come to a new walkway protecting a large vernal pool in a natural bowl at the foot of a massive ledge outcropping.

Dead fall – broken tree limbs, fallen trees – is another constant problem in a park of this size, says Hill. He points to the limb of an oak tree, shattered by lightning, which plunged into the ground like a spear next to the trail. "I dug it out and levered it to the side with a big branch," Hill explains. For help, Hill counts on two allies in particular, Macgregor (and Mr. Echo, his trusty chain saw) and Land Trust member and volunteer Frank Hall. "Frank is always a willing partner in any upkeep project," says Hill.

We're following the Orange Trail, past tulip and poplar trees and an old Wolf tree, left over from when the land was pasture. "It's incredible to think that this was farm country," says Hill. But the criss-crossing stone walls are a reminder that these were farmers' fields. We reach the "cave rock" on the Black Trail, where we rest – just as others have before us. "You just get the feeling that people have used this as a shelter," says Hill, whose



Trees and stone come together at Canfield Meadow Woods

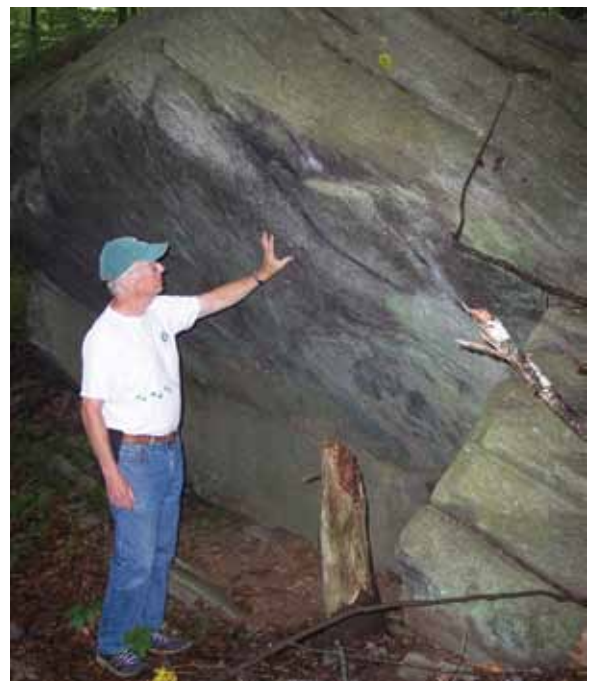
fascination with Native Americans goes back to his youth. "Here, you can see what almost look like stains on the rock from the smoke of their fires."

We walk on, turning onto the Purple Trail and up to The Gap, thinking about people from a bygone age. We both remark on how quiet the park is. Only the whistle of the distant steam train intrudes. Hill enjoys his role as Steward, walking the boundaries, keeping the trails clear, organizing needed projects. "You say, 'okay, let's think a second, how can we solve this problem?' It keeps your mind active."

In the end, it's all about the land and its hikers, says Hill. "People use Canfield/Meadow Woods a lot, especially in the spring and fall,"

he says. "I get a kick out of seeing families out here with their kids, seeing the dog walkers, and knowing they're out enjoying what we've done."

Steve Knauth



Dana Hill at the Cave Rock

Coming Events - Mark Your Calendar!

Sunday, October 17th

10 am – 12 pm

Heron Pond Preserve Walk

Enjoy the natural beauty of these gorgeous forested hills, valley and streams with Phil Miller. Park on Heron Pond Road off Route 154.

The “Essex in the Days of Native Americans” presentation by Erik Becker originally planned for November 11th is being postponed to a yet to be determined later date. For further information on the Land Trust’s programs and events, please contact Peggy Tuttle at abhftc@aol.com or 767-7916.

The 2010 programs and events are currently under development and will be shared with members by year-end.



Essex Land Trust

*Caring for Our World
Here at Home*

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Did you know that the Essex Land Trust website has a host of information concerning the Land Trust? There is information on properties, upcoming events, a photo gallery of recent programs, useful links and many other topics. So be sure to add the Essex Land Trust website to your favorites or bookmarks:

www.essexlandtrust.org



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