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**Rising Tide In Niantic River-Grass-roots effort to save the Oswegatchie Hills from land developers has captured the public's imagination.**

A grass-roots movement to preserve the Oswegatchie Hills from land development grows geometrically. The latest example is a proposal that will go before an East Lyme town meeting Monday to borrow up to \$2 million for open-space land acquisitions. Diverse groups with expanding public support are adding to the momentum to keep builders from despoiling this valuable and strikingly beautiful expanse of land along the Niantic River.

The townspeople should consent to this modest bond authorization without hesitation. Compared to what some other communities have invested in open space, this investment is small. But by approving it, East Lyme will have made a good-faith gesture that will encourage other contributions from the state and federal sources and private donors. Local legislators have introduced legislation to authorize a like donation to the cause by the state.

Congressman Rob Simmons is seeking help in Washington. And the umbrella effort by Friends of Oswegatchie Hills Nature Preserve to raise funds and acquire land in the area for public use and preservation grows in membership every day. The number exceeds 400, including George Milne, a prominent retired Pfizer executive who has a home overlooking the Niantic River.

There already has been significant progress in taking land in the Oswegatchie Hills out of circulation. Notably, the East Lyme Land Conservation Trust has acquired 130 acres in a deal with landowners and developers. The Friends group recently acquired another parcel with private donations, and if the bond measure passes Monday, some of the funds will help with those costs and leverage future acquisitions. This is a far cry from the situation even as recent as a decade ago, when a very few were struggling to bring the importance of preserving the land to the attention of the public and the state. But even then, before the cause became a popular one, significant progress took place, and that work provides the foundation for what is going on today.

The legislature approved the creation of a Gateway Commission, made up of representatives from Waterford and East Lyme, to develop policies to protect the Niantic River, and by extension, the hundreds of acres that make up the Oswegatchie Hills. For the land is not only an important natural habitat but a natural filter for rainwater entering the river.

East Lyme has approved increasingly stringent zoning restrictions, which have the community currently engaged in a legal fight with a Middletown developer. Glenn Russo, the determined developer in this struggle, wants to build hundreds of units of housing on the northern stretches of the Oswegatchie Hills. What is new about this latest, grass-roots effort, is that it has gone on the offensive in raising funds and has a vision of buying the land and devoting it to the public's enjoyment. The Friends of Oswegatchie Hills is eyeing more than 400 acres extending from near Pennsylvania Avenue to the Boston Post Road. The effort has stirred the imagination not only of current property owners but former residents, who live in different parts of the country today and still remember the magic of places like "High Rock," Turkey Point and the granite quarries. It seems Mr. Russo's plans have had the unforeseen consequence for him of galvanizing this kind of support.

That battle may last for years. But it only serves to solidify the movement to bring the land along the west ridge of the Oswegatchie Hills into the public domain, where it will be safe from developers like Mr. Russo. The town has a chance to express its resolve to do so by turning out in large numbers at the town meeting at East Lyme High School Monday night and voting in favor of this bond authorization. The meeting begins at 7 p.m..