

April 7, 2005

Op-Ed Page, *The Day*, New London, Connecticut

Let's Act Now To Save Oswegatchie Hills

By GEORGE MILNE

For years folks have been talking of making Niantic's 700-acre area of Oswegatchie Hills into a preserve. This past two weeks, plans have been turned into actions, and we have reached a tipping point.

A group called Friends of the Oswegatchie Hills Nature Preserve has moved from promise to action. As part of its land purchase capital campaign, the group has purchased a 65-acre parcel adjacent to the 130 acres already owned by the East Lyme Land Conservation Trust using private donations. Concurrently, as reported in *The Day*, the East Lyme boards of Selectmen and Finance each voted unanimously to approve a \$2 million bonding resolution to buy open space in town. These actions send a very concrete message to our state and federal officials about our seriousness as a town in seeking a matching commitment from each – for a total of \$8 million.

We, as residents of East Lyme, now have the opportunity to tip the balance in the direction of the future, by voting yes for the bond proposal at 7 p.m. on April 11 at the high school. Why yes?

How often in these days do you have the opportunity to support a truly non-partisan effort that brings together principled, forward-looking citizens and politicians from both sides of the aisle to do something that will have a lasting and undiluted benefit?

How often do you get to be part of preserving the largest undeveloped tract of waterfront in Connecticut – creating a place to hike past the granite outcroppings that provided the foundations for the Brooklyn Bridge and along the shore where the Nehantic Indians once lived and fished – to be connected to nature and to history?

How often are you able to open up new access to the water for kayakers who will be able to explore the Niantic River and view its aquatic wildlife and waterfowl?

How often can you preserve the chance for your children and families to continue to boat, swim and picnic along the shore by Turkey Point and to thrill at the sight of an osprey rising from the river with a fish gripped in its talons?

How often do we get the chance to preserve not just a unique tract of land, but also the nearby waterways, by protecting them from the inevitable runoff that would come with development and thereby preserve the fisheries and clamming in the river and the return of Niantic Bay scallops?

How often does one find a tract of land that can join the town from the ballfield in the south to Flanders in the north with a series of trails and perhaps someday a bike path?

How often do you get to leverage your investment at a ratio of 3 to 1 while enhancing the qualities that have long made East Lyme a destination for residents who value quality of life and visitors who value our open spaces and waterfront?

And what do we lose by not acting? There are others with plans for the development of Oswegatchie Hills. This is our time to act as there is no going back and once lost, this opportunity cannot be recovered. This is not something to be put off.

I have had the privilege to work with the Friends of the Oswegatchie Hills Nature Preserve in a modest, unofficial capacity and now as a contributor. Together with the town and legislative leadership, they have a winning combination of creativity, energy and dedication to making East Lyme an even better place to live and visit.

I hope you will support this unique opportunity and your selectmen by voting “yes.”

George Milne lives in East Lyme. He is retired executive vice president of Pfizer Global Research and Development.