



Newsletter – 4th Quarter 2022

A Message from the President

In this issue of the newsletter there is a great piece highlighting the 15th anniversary of the Oswegatchie Hills Nature Preserve. Written by Liz Paganetti, our energetic and very talented Communications Chair, it provides a wonderful overview of what has transpired since the preserve was formally dedicated in 2007.

The article reminded me of something I said in the past. “It takes a whole team of dedicated volunteers, to ensure that the preserve will be here for many generations to come.” In addition to our super-dedicated, longtime volunteers, Mike Dunn, Paul Whitehouse and Raechel Killen, many others have given, and continue to give, their time, talent, and treasure to make the preserve what it is today. With Thanksgiving around the corner, it seemed an appropriate time to say “thank you.” So here goes:

Thank you to:

- All members of the Board, both past and present. People like Marvin Schutt, Bob and Denise Garofalo, and Judy Layden, who stepped forward at the very beginning to save the Hills, had a vision. We would not be celebrating any anniversary if they had not worked hard to achieve it. Current members remain equally dedicated to protecting the Hills from development or any other threat to the preserve that may arise.
- The entire Stewardship Committee. These hard-working volunteers ensure that trails are maintained, remove fallen trees and branches, haul heavy planks to repair bridges, and help to lead hikes on CT Trails Day or at other times. Some of them are not even board members, like Paul Parulis and Ralph Bates who conduct an annual inspection of the town-owned Darrow Pond property for which we hold the conservation easement.
- Other volunteers, like Penny and Ray Heller, who simply show up to help transplant pitch pines, rake leaves, and plant, then weed gardens.
- Our “sister” organization across the river, Save the River-Save the Hills, and Save the Sound who provides our legal counsel. Together with these two organizations, we form a coalition determined to “save the hills.”
- All donors, both past and present. Your generous gifts in the beginning made the 420-acre preserve that opened in 2007 possible. Your ongoing support has made possible the acquisition of additional acreage and, of course, the conservation and maintenance projects that make Oswegatchie Hills Nature Preserve such a special place.

Again, thank you all. It does, indeed, take a whole team.

Kris Lambert

Save Oswegatchie Hills Coalition Update

Our Save Oswegatchie Hills Coalition continues to raise awareness and support for protecting the 236 acres of coastal forest that adjoins the Town of East Lyme's Oswegatchie Hills Nature Preserve. The coalition reaches out to like-minded conservation, environmental organizations and community groups and to individuals. It hosts hikes, puts up displays, social media posts and participates in state-wide events such as the Connecticut Land Conservation Council's annual conference, advocating to protect the remaining Oswegatchie Hills.

In November, The Friends led a handful of Save the Sound staff on a brisk hike of OHNP and tour of the Greg Decker Pitch Pine Park. Some members of the Friends and STR-STH Board were able to join the group at the post-hike warmup at Niantic Public House. See some photos below:



Save the Sound staffers Kathy Czepiel, lands communications, Skyla Wilson, executive assistant, Amanda James, member communications & events, and Denise Stranko, vice president of programs. (Laura McMillan, communications director, joined later.)



Save the Sound staffers at the OHNP Main Entrance with FOHNP president, Kris Lambert, stewardship chair, Greg Decker and Suzanne Thompson, Save Oswegatchie Hills Outreach Coordinator.



After the hike Kathy, Skyla, Amanda, and Laura joined with Jim Paganetti, STR-STH PumpOut program coordinator, Greg Decker, Paul Whitehouse, Liz Paganetti, Petie Reed, Suzanne Thompson & Deb Moshier-Dunn, STR-STH, and Mike Dunn at the Niantic Public House.

“Diversity in the Oswegatchie Hills” Project



Become an iNaturalist
join the
‘Diversity in the Oswegatchie Hills’ project!

Simply download the iNaturalist app to post your photos or see what others have observed. A Belted Kingfisher was recently observed in the Hills and the photo uploaded by FOHNP member and iNaturalist project administrator, Al Burchsted. iNaturalist is a joint initiative of the California Academy of Sciences and the National Geographic Society. It's an easy-to-use platform to connect us all, to learn and share information about the Hills diverse ecosystem.



Belted Kingfisher

Happy 15th Anniversary!! TA



In 2007 the 420 acre Oswegatchie Hills Nature Preserve was formally dedicated. Many have helped through the years, but three board members, Mike Dunn, Paul Whitehouse and Raechel Killeen have provided guidance and inspiration since the beginning. Here is a 15 year lookback:

Recognitions

2012 – Chosen by the CT Recreation and Parks Assoc. (CRPA) as their 2012 Organization Award winner
2019 – Voted by The Days ‘Best of Readers’ Choice Award for Top 3 ‘Places to Take a Hike’

Preserving & Expanding the Hills

2005 – The Friends of the OHNP began acquisition of parcels working with the Town, State and Federal government, and the Trust for Public Land
2014 – The preserve expanded to 457 acres with the purchase of the Bayreuther property
2016 – Partnered with Save the River-Save the Hills and Save the Sound (formerly ‘CT Fund for the Environment’) to establish the ‘*Save Oswegatchie Hills Coalition*’

Capital Improvements

2012 – Main entrance kiosk installed, and bollards and chains installed at all secondary entrances
2019 – Location markers and maps installed at all intersections to assist hikers and emergency personnel
2019 – Clark Pond Bridge project completed and dedicated
2022 – The ‘Greg Decker Pitch Pine Park’ officially opened and dedicated

Save Oswegatchie Hills

We continue our work to protect and preserve the remaining 236 acres of undeveloped, unprotected Oswegatchie Hills. Since 2001 **four judges**, (Hartford Superior Court Judge Henry Cohn; CT Superior Court Judge Marshall Berger, as well as New Britain Superior Court Judges Eliot Prescott and Barbara Quinn) have all weighed in on **multiple cases** related to the property. Cases involving East Lyme’s zoning, water and sewer, inland wetlands, affordable housing commission and more. We work tirelessly to prevent inappropriate over-development of the adjoining Oswegatchie Hills owned by Landmark Development.

Research

2007 – The ‘Oswegatchie Hills Natural Resource Inventory’ performed by the Environmental Review Team of the Eastern Connecticut Resource Conservation and Development Area, Inc
2011 – Comprehensive ‘Terrestrial Ecology Survey’ published by board member Rich Gallagher
2015 – Audubon Connecticut ‘Forest Bird Assessment Report of Oswegatchie Hills’ completed
2017 & ongoing —Southern pine beetle traps installed and monitored in the Hills
2018 & ongoing – FrogWatch project observations and documentation
2020 & ongoing – Monitoring stations installed to monitor beech leaf disease
2021 & ongoing – iNaturalist project ‘Diversity in the Oswegatchie Hills’ launched by Al Burchsted

Flora & Fauna Support

2008 – Wood duck nesting boxes donated by Wild Birds Unlimited installed in Clark Pond
2012 – Riparian Buffer Project completed in the sloping area from Clark Pond to the ball fields
2012 & 2020 – Beaver Deceivers installed at Clark Pond
2017 – Bluebird nesting boxes made and installed by the scouts
2018 – Rain Garden installed as an extension of the Riparian Buffer Project
2018 – Purple Martin house installed at the entrance of the preserve

Ongoing Stewardship

- Maintaining and grooming **7 miles** of trail system
- Realigning trails to mitigate trail erosion
- Installing and repairing multiple bridges
- Clearing major tree blow downs
- Maintaining trail blazes and providing trail maps
- Leading hikes and providing education
- Removing invasive plants, replacing with natives
- Working with local schools, Scouts, and organizations

Remember Your Year-End Gift

Many of you have reached out to let us know how much the Oswegatchie Hills Nature Preserve means to you. We are grateful for your support.

As a member of the Oswegatchie Hills Nature Preserve you support 457 acres of fragile coastal forests, and our mission of education, research, conservation, and stewardship of this amazing natural resource.

If you value what we do, and have not yet joined, please consider making a tax-deductible gift to support our work. Your support will help keep this unique place for future generations to enjoy.



Photo by Mike Dunn

2nd Annual 'Run for the Hills'



Save the Date
May 21, 2023!

The first trail run was a huge success, everyone had a wonderful time! Runners ranged in age from 8 to 74. Plan to come and join the fun! Registration will open in February 2023.

Look deep into nature, and then you will understand everything better.

~ Albert Einstein

In honor of the 15th anniversary of the Oswegatchie Hills Nature Preserve we are re-publishing a poem **from 2004**. The message "*It's really up to all of us*" is still relevant today! Special thanks to long-time member of the FOHNP, J. F. Lahey

Oswegatchie Hills

If you haven't, you must go see them
Beauty only nature can create
These hills stand there so proudly
... While waiting for their fate

Married to the Niantic River
Since water first came this way
Seamless links to our environment
... From the forest to the bay

These hills carry a Native American name
A name befitting such a place
Somehow escaping dozer, saws and blasting
... This rare and open space

Our great state an original colony
For centuries development has been our choice
How eloquently these hills would defend themselves
... If they only had a voice

Think of a natural place you love
And the strong emotions felt from deep inside
Do you remember saying to yourself
... I'm so glad this place was set aside

While some say nothing lasts forever
In our hearts we know this should
Once gone... then gone forever
Against the odds these hills have stood

It's really up to all of us
This place so deserving of being saved
Won't you help while we're still able...
Before trails and paths are paved

If you care about the future
A cause so easy to embrace
Tell future generations...
You helped preserve this special place

~ J. F. Lahey November 20, 2004