



Newsletter – 3rd Quarter 2023

A Message from the President.

May you live in interesting times. No one is sure of the origin of this statement, but it definitely applies to what is happening in the Hills currently. Several articles have appeared in *The Day*, most recently on September 29th. If you haven't read them, you can find them on the Friends' website (OswHills.org). When you cut through all the rhetoric, it boils down to this: 130 acres at the heart of the Oswegatchie Hills Nature Preserve are at risk because the East Lyme Land Trust used the acreage as collateral in order to purchase another property, Hathaway Farms.

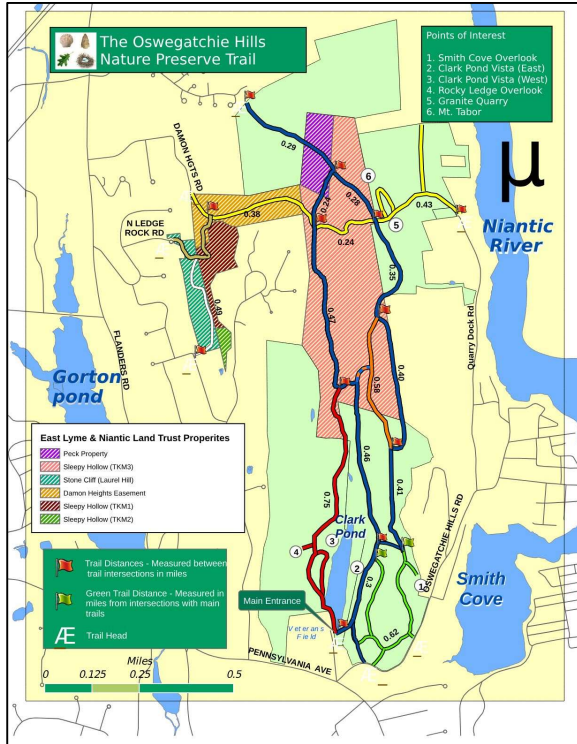
If the Land Trust were to default on the mortgage, there is a possibility that this acreage could be sold, and an essential part of the preserve could be lost. Trails would terminate at the edge of the property. It would be impossible to access the "lunar landscape" or even have a loop trail system to hike. Fragile ecosystems like the pitch pine stand could be severely damaged or even destroyed. The maps on the next page show what is at stake. The X's on the map show where the trails would end.

According to the Land Trust, Hathaway Farms is critical to the aquifer that supplies water to the town of East Lyme. The Board of the Friends understands this. After all we want safe water to drink. The problem lies with the way in which the situation unfolded. The Friends were never notified by the Land Trust that it was about to take this action. We only learned about it "after the fact." We did take action by writing a letter to the Attorney General (AG), asking whether or not it was legal to use land held by a land trust for collateral. Apparently it is, provided there are no restrictions on the deed. The AG's office has not issued a ruling; rather it is waiting to see the outcome of the proposal by the Board of Selectmen, to have the town purchase all the properties.

Two years ago, the Land Trust sought support from the town and the public to raise the funds needed to purchase the Hathaway property, but negotiations with the town stalled. That brought us to where we are today. As I stated at the public hearing on September 27th, we are obviously not happy with what has transpired, but at the end of the day, the mission of the Friends is to protect the Oswegatchie Hills Nature Preserve. We need you to vote YES on October 17th so that the entire preserve is completely protected for all of us who enjoy it today and for generations to come.

Kris Lambert

The Nature Preserve May be in Jeopardy



We may lose a central parcel of the preserve – see shaded sections in map on the left, which are owned by the East Lyme Land Trust (Property B). If lost, this would require the closure of multiple trails, denying hikers access to many of the beautiful views, and obliterating the established loop trail system.

We believe that if the town of East Lyme owns the entire Nature Preserve then all of the land is protected in perpetuity. This provides an opportunity to ensure that this property is never subjected to this kind of action again and will be available to future generations to enjoy.

East Lyme Residents:

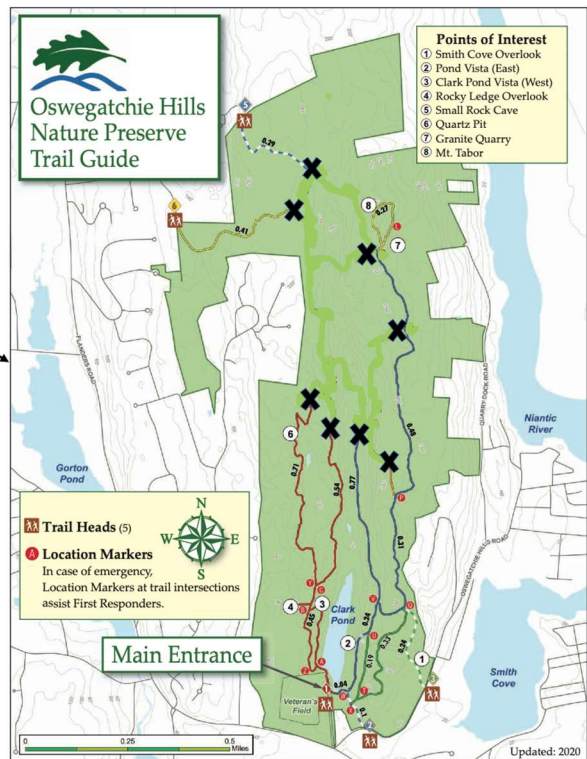
To save the Oswegatchie Hill Nature Preserve vote YES on the October 17th referendum.

Impact to the Hills



Trail Map with the loss of Parcel "B"

Current Trail Map



Possible impact to trail system if East Lyme Land Trust land (parcel B) is lost

It's Complicated...

We never thought we would be in this situation, but we are....

In efforts to save Hathaway Farms property (114 acres near Lake Pattagansett), as open space and to protect the aquifer, the East Lyme Land Trust purchased the property in September 2022. In addition to Hathaway Farms itself, the Land Trust used parcels that the Land Trust owns in the heart of the nature preserve, as well as 22 acres on Brainard Road near Giants Neck Beach as collateral.

In August of this year, the town of East Lyme Board of Selectmen unanimously approved the purchase of all three properties for \$2.25M, which will protect all three sites in perpetuity. The Finance Department documents show the cost to taxpayers (minus an expected \$400,000 grant from DEEP and \$200,000 already in the town's open space fund), would be \$1.75 million. If bonded over 15 years, that amounts to an additional \$17 per year in taxes for a home appraised at \$400,000.

How we got here:

- September 2021 – The East Lyme Land Trust holds information session to explain importance of acquiring the Hathaway property and to seek public and town support.
- September 2022 – Land Trust takes ownership of Hathaway property, and puts that property plus acreage in the Oswegatchie Hills Nature Preserve and property on Brainard Road up for collateral.
- August 2023 – The East Lyme Board of Selectmen votes to “execute a Purchase and Sale agreement for the purchase of certain property,” i.e. Hathaway Farms, acreage in the Oswegatchie Hills Nature Preserve, and property on Brainard Road.
- September 2023 – Public hearing held. The majority of those speaking were in favor of the proposal to have the town acquire the three properties.
- October 17, 2023 – Town referendum scheduled to vote on proposal to purchase Hathaway Farms, property in Oswegatchie Hills Nature Preserve and property on Brainard Road.

Kris's Statement at the 9-27-23 Public Hearing

Obviously The Friends are not happy with how the Nature Preserve was brought into this situation and we are dismayed that a significant part of the preserve has been put at risk. But that is the reality of the situation. Given the mission of the Friends to *promote and encourage preservation of the Oswegatchie Hills as a nature preserve and to sponsor cooperative fundraising, planning, and public relations efforts, and to undertake such other services and programs as shall be deemed necessary to encourage preservation of the Oswegatchie Hills as open space for the enjoyment and enrichment of the citizens of Connecticut*, the Board of the Friends of the Oswegatchie Hills Nature Preserve endorses the Board of Selectmen's proposal for the town to acquire the properties currently being used as collateral. Additionally, the Board feels that a “no” vote at the referendum could be detrimental to the Nature Preserve.

Autumn is a second spring when every leaf is a flower

~Albert Camus ~

Recent Activities

Troop 7/24's Eagle Scout candidate Mingwen Duan completed his Eagle Scout Project August 12th. His project consisted of installing four sections of split rail fencing adjacent to the kiosk to prevent hikers from creating a shortcut to the bridge. It also included installing two - 2' x 3' large stone pavers in front of the kiosk and installing Caren Linden's memorial bench. As with many projects this summer, this happened throughout a downpour... but everyone continued to work through the deluge! The group photo was taken at the end - with everyone drenched, but smiling! Special thanks to Mingwen and his team for a great job!



Caren Linden's memorial bench was dedicated with family and friends on September 16th



The Clark Pond Bridge, dedicated in 2019, was re-stained this summer. Thanks to Franz Edson, Bruce Kolowsky, Sean Rogers and John Starrett, its beauty is ensured for many more seasons.



Niantic River Watershed Summit



Kris Lambert, Greg Decker and FOHNP and NRW board member, Don Danila

We always say it takes a village and one of our long-standing partners with the Friends is the Niantic River Watershed Committee (NRWC). They facilitate research, education and outreach for the Niantic River watershed and have been busy! On September 12th they held a summit including state and local officials and town employees from East Lyme, Waterford, New London, Montville and Salem, as well as DEEP, Dominion, The Friends, Save the River – Save the Hills, and others.

Don Danila, a board member of both the Friends and the NRW, presented information on the 10 Year Water Quality monitoring study, Dr. Jamie Vaudrey, with the UCONN Department of Marine Sciences, presented plans for upcoming outflow sampling. Eric Thomas of the DEEP water management bureau told attendees the interconnectedness of the watershed requires a coordinated response. He reiterated no one town has more than a 30% claim to the watershed, and it's important for all towns to work together to ensure the water quality of the Niantic River estuary. We are all connected, and so thankful for their work!