



Newsletter – 4th Quarter 2021

A Message from the President

I am sure that most of you recall the “good news” (at least that’s how we on the Board of the Friends view it) about the recent ruling on Landmark’s appeal of the Zoning Commission’s decision made in 2015. It only took six years of legal wrangling and arguments! Rather than writing the usual president’s column, I invited Roger Reynolds, Senior Legal Counsel for Save the Sound and the attorney representing the Friends for this case, to provide additional insight into the ruling. We want to thank Roger, as well as Chris Kelly, Legal Fellow at Save the Sound, for their outstanding work and perseverance. ~ Kris Lambert

Save Oswegatchie Hills Update – a Legal Victory

We are pleased to finally update you on the long-awaited decision by CT Superior Court/Land Court Judge Marshall Berger on our 2015 case against Landmark Development, LLC.

On October 22, Judge Berger rejected the developer’s challenge to East Lyme Zoning Commission’s decision to re-zone only 36 out of a requested 126 acres and to require the developer to provide all of the environmental information the Commission was requesting before seeking a final decision. The developer was ordered to supply the necessary environmental and other information for the commission to adequately consider a final site plan and rezoning as our three organizations, the Friends of OHNP, Save the River-Save the Hills, and Save the Sound, had requested. Save the Sound has provided legal representation to all three organizations since 2015. The three organizations issued a joint news release on October 25, expressing their pleasure with the outcome [a copy is available on the home page of oswhills.org].

The ruling represents a significant turning point in the decades of efforts to protect the Oswegatchie Hills and the Niantic River estuary. While Judge Berger stated in his decision that it should not be interpreted as a permanent victory for the (East Lyme Zoning) commission or a defeat for the developer, the Judge did rule in our favor on the issues that were before the court and granted our request to remand the matter to the Commission for a full consideration of environmental issues.

It is not our position to speculate what the developer may do next. The options open to him include: a) continuing to try to sell the property to another developer without obtaining necessary zoning or wetlands approvals for specific development plans; b) submitting a plan conforming to the conditionally-approved Preliminary Site Plan on the 36 acres that fall within East Lyme's sewer service district; c) submitting a new plan of development which extends outside the 36 acres, either affordable housing or not; or d) agreeing to a conservation sale of the land to us or others. *[continued page 2]*

... cont'd Save Oswegatchie Hills Update

It has always been our position that preservation is the best use of the remaining undeveloped 236 acres, the northern one-third of the Oswegatchie Hills. We stand firm in our commitment and our goal of seeing this land added to the adjoining Oswegatchie Hills Nature Preserve.

While all of us await the developer's next actions, the Friends' board continues to stay in contact with the Town of East Lyme and to work through our Save Oswegatchie Hills Coalition to achieve our long-term goal. We thank you for your continued support and we will keep you posted as events unfold.

~ Roger Reynolds, Legal Counsel - Save the Sound

Dan Steward – Friend, Advocate, Leader



The Friends would like to pay tribute to Dan Steward, the former and longest-serving First Selectman of the town of Waterford, who died in October. A life-long resident of the town, Dan was a longtime champion of the Oswegatchie Hills and could always be counted on to speak up and out on behalf of our efforts. We extend our sympathy to his wife Kathy and all of his family. He touched many lives and is missed.

(Left – Dan Steward speaking at the 10th anniversary celebration in 2017)

State of CT Green Plan

Recognizing the threat of loss of environmental resources to changes in land use, the General Assembly set a goal of protecting 21 percent of Connecticut's land base by year 2023 for public open space purposes. With a total of 3,205,760 acres in Connecticut, 673,210 acres must be protected in order to meet this goal. To that end the CT Comprehensive Open Space Acquisition Strategy (Green Plan) lays out plans to conserve and protect 673,210 acres (or 21 percent) of Connecticut's land as open space by the year 2023. Ten percent of this open space would be DEEP-owned land (State parks, forests, etc.); the remaining 11 percent is to be acquired by municipalities, private non-profit land conservation organizations, water companies, and/or the federal government. The most recent reports show that an estimated 508,718 acres (75.5 percent) of the total open space goal has already been protected.

Governor Lamont has stated that open spaces enhance our quality of life – allowing us to stay healthy physically and mentally – benefits that have been underscored by the pandemic and the public's need for access to the outdoors. We agree – there has never been a more important time to invest in land conservation!

Haiku in the Hills

Golden leaves drift down
Busy squirrels scamper about
Autumn in the Hills

~ Anonymous



Our Mission:

To acquire the undeveloped land within Oswegatchie Hills and to maintain a public nature preserve for future generations to enjoy.

Our Current Priorities:

1. Effectively manage the Nature Preserve
2. Prepare a plan and form a team to raise the necessary funds as opportunities arise
3. Maintain public awareness and support of the Nature Preserve
4. Develop and promote educational programs
5. Lead the Legal Defense effort to prevent inappropriate development in the Hills.

Diversity in the Oswegatchie Hills Project



iNaturalist is an online social network of people sharing biodiversity information to help each other learn about nature



Al Burchsted

Become an iNaturalist and join the “Diversity in the Oswegatchie Hills” project!

As a complement to the several environmental studies that have been carried out in the Hills, Al Burchsted, retired biology professor, avid birder and dedicated FOHNP member of the stewardship committee, has launched a project in the popular iNaturalist.org platform. iNaturalist.org is one of the world’s most popular nature apps that help to identify the plants and animals around you. iNaturalist is a joint initiative by the California Academy of Sciences and the National Geographic Society and currently has over 1.9 million observers and 85 million observations.

The project entitled ‘Diversity in the Oswegatchie Hills’ will help visitors and members learn more about the diversity of life to be found in the Hills. The project started in October of this year and already has over 200 observations of 151 different species! We welcome you to contribute to our knowledge through your photographs and journal entries, including various organisms (plants, animals, birds, insects, fungi etc).

To post or look at observations, you will have to simply download the app, create an account and login.

Please post your photos on iNaturalist.org and place the observation on the map. They will automatically become part of the project for the Hills. Login often to see what others are finding and read their journal entries

We hope that you become involved in helping The Friends maintain this special corner of the world.

The project encompasses almost the entire area between the Niantic River and Route 161, but the Oswegatchie Hills Nature Preserve is somewhat smaller. We do not suggest that you extend your outings onto private property, but if you observe organisms that are outside of the preserves boundaries yet within the area denoted, please post your observations using the location ‘obscure’ so they can be included within this diversity project.

The screenshot displays the iNaturalist project landing page for 'Diversity in the Oswegatchie Hills'. At the top, there is a banner image of a forest landscape with a text box about the project. Below this, a statistics bar shows 211 observations, 151 species, 101 identifiers, and 30 observers. The 'Recent Observations' section features four thumbnails of nature photos with their respective species names: Wood Frog, Common Witch-Hazel, Luminescent Panellus, and Northern Watersnake. Below that, three columns list 'Most Observations', 'Most Species', and 'Most Observed Species' with user avatars and counts. The 'Project Requirements' section lists criteria for observations, such as 'Taxa: All taxa' and 'Location: Oswegatchie Hills, CT, US'. A 'Journal' section at the bottom right shows a circular progress indicator for 211 observations and a recent journal entry.

Screenshot of the iNaturalist Hills project landing page

Seen in the Hills



Clark Pond

The Eastern CT Conservation District (ECCD) gave away 60 gallon rain barrels (formerly used to import olives from Europe) to 30 lucky Niantic River Watershed residents. The project was funded in part by CT DEEP through a Clean Water Act section 319 NPS program grant.

With many storms and multiple trees down this past season, we have a shout-out to the stewardship team! Special thanks to Paul Parulis and Bruce Kolowsky who did heavy lifting (both literally and figuratively) for keeping the trails open and safe for everyone to enjoy!



Judy Rondeau, above left, from ECCD, coordinated the distribution of this very popular program.



The barrels (from The Great American Rain Barrel Company) even fit into a Mini Cooper!



Before (left) and After (below) Clean Up



Blue Trail (left) before the clean-up

Remember Your Year-End Gift

All the work undertaken to manage and protect our beloved Hills obviously comes with a price tag – for attorney fees (in the form of an annual donation of \$10,000 to Save the Sound), for tools and supplies, and for the cost of printing and postage. We could not do it without your support! Please consider a year-end donation using the enclosed envelope or go to oswhills.org to donate online.

If you have already sent a gift, thank you!