

Coalition formed to protect Oswegatchie Hills parcel slated for development

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East Lyme — The Connecticut Fund for the Environment, Friends of the Oswegatchie Hills Nature Preserve and Save the River-Save the Hills announced Monday that they have launched the Save Oswegatchie Hills Coalition to protect 236 undeveloped acres of forest, wetland and Niantic River shoreline adjoining the Oswegatchie Hills Nature Preserve.

The creation of the coalition formalizes the groups' partnership and provides an opportunity for organizations and citizens across the state to join the fight, the groups said in a news release.

The southeastern Connecticut parcel drains to the Niantic River, a coastal estuary feeding into Long Island Sound. Despite shallow soils, steep ravines, and legally-protected vernal pools and wetlands throughout the terrain, the privately owned property has attracted numerous development proposals, which the groups have opposed. The current owner of the 236-acre parcel, Landmark Development, has proposed high-density housing on the top ridge of the rocky landscape.

Oswegatchie Hills, which is one of the few remaining large stretches of undeveloped and unprotected coastal waterfront land in the state, has been classified as open space and conservation land in the Town of East Lyme's Plan of Conservation and Development since 1968, the news release said. Concerned citizens formed the Friends and Save the River-Save the Hills organizations soon after proposals for a golf course community and high-density housing surfaced in 1999. The Friends group and the town now coordinates stewardship of the Oswegatchie Hills Nature Preserve, a 457-acre parcel adjacent to the Landmark property.

The coalition would like to add the 236 acres to the nature preserve.

The most recent proposal from Landmark would place 840 housing units and more than 1,700 parking spaces on 36 acres of land. In March 2015, the Connecticut Fund for the Environment formally challenged the development proposal and became an intervener in the ongoing litigation brought against the Town of East Lyme.

The coalition is planning outreach efforts including community presentations, emails and newsletters. A Save Oswegatchie Hills Coalition section on the Connecticut Fund for the Environment's website, <http://www.ctenvironment.org/> where conservation supporters can receive regular updates, is also planned.