



Photo: M. Burns, Looking South from Devils Hopyard State Park Lookout

Lower Connecticut River Land Trust Annual Report 2023

Supporting the Conservation Needs of the Land Trusts and Communities of the Lower Connecticut River Region

www.lcrlt.org

The Lower Connecticut River Land Trust works to conserve, study, steward, and promote the unique values and scientific significance, natural and working lands, and historic, ecologic, cultural, and scenic resources of the communities of the Lower Connecticut River Valley Region.

2023 Board Members

- * President – Joe Samolis, Middletown
- * Treasurer – Gail Reynolds, Haddam Land Trust
- * Secretary – Melvin Woody, Ct River Gateway Commission
- * David Brown – Middlesex Land Trust
- * Jim Irish – Middlefield
- * Joseph Porcaro – Berlin Land Trust

2023 Permanent Members

- * Jenny Kitsen – Chester Land Trust
- * Gail Reynolds – Haddam Land Trust
- * Jim Denham – Essex Land Trust
- * Jim Arrigoni – Lyme Land Trust
- * David Brown – Middlesex Land Trust
- * Bill Neale – Westbrook Land Trust
- * John Ogren, Anne Termine – Old Saybrook Land Trust
- * Michael Zarfos – Deep River Land Trust
- * David Bingham – Salem Land Trust
- * Joseph Porcaro – Berlin Land Trust
- * Margot Burns – RiverCOG
- * Charlene Janecek – Chester
- * Anthony Salvatore – Cromwell
- * Karl Kilduff – Clinton



Photo: J. Preston, Lord Cove, Lower CT River

- * Angus McDonald – Deep River
- * _____ – Durham
- * Irene Haines – East Haddam
- * David Cox – East Hampton
- * Norm Needleman – Essex
- * Bob McGarry – Haddam
- * Nancy Gorski – Killingworth
- * David Lahm – Lyme
- * Jim Irish – Middlefield
- * Joe Samolis – Middletown
- * Carl Fortuna – Old Saybrook
- * Tim Griswold – Old Lyme
- * Ryan Curley – Portland
- * John Hall – Westbrook
- * Dr. Melvin Woody –CT River Gateway Commission

2023 proved to be a productive year for the Lower Connecticut River Land Trust in both qualifying our mission and acting on it. The website has been an effective communication tool with over 800 unique visitors and 278 visits to our facebook page. The Trail Challenge Initiative was a driver of these numbers, and although not a funding source for our stewardship program, it did help to spread recognition of the organization. With Joseph Samolis as President the land trust moved forward with finding ways to ensure perpetuity and create stewardship funding opportunities for our member land trusts and communities.

The board chose a proactive approach to help ensure the perpetual protection of the region's conservation properties. In consultation with the Connecticut Land Conservation Council and guidance from their Executive Director, Amy Paterson, the LCRLT initiated discussions towards the potential for the land trust to become an entity that can assist communities and land trusts in holding backup conservation easements on their properties. In June, the board voted unanimously to pursue and investigate taking on conservation easements as a service to our regional members. This past July we sent out a formal notification to our member land trusts and communities about the potential of the LCRLT taking on these "backup" or executory interest easement holder for conservation organizations and that our land trusts and communities can reach out to the board if they are interested.



Photo: M. Burns, Clinton Land Trust, Elliott Preserve

A small stewardship grant program was initiated with the funding received from the Guilford Savings Bank or GSB in 2022. Stewardship grants in the amount of \$750.00 were awarded to the East Haddam Land Trust, for protection of a newly planted grove of oak seedlings on their Ayers Preserve, and to the

Town of Essex for the removal of a dangerous tree over hanging the red trail on the Bushy Hill Preserve.

In keeping with the organizations commitment to large landscape scale conservation and the importance of maintaining the health of the region's forest the land trust applied to the US Forest Service *Fiscal Year 2024 Landscape Scale Restoration* grant and focused our annual meeting on the topic. The grant request was for continuation of the 2023 small stewardship grant program initiated by the land trust for the update or creation of new forest management plans for conserved properties of our member land trusts and communities. The request is for \$25,000.00 and requires a 1 to 1 match. If this grant is approved the land trust hopes to provide for 11-15 new plans. The annual meeting held in December featured Tom Worthley, Associate Extension Professor, UConn Cooperative Extension Service and Department of Natural Resources and the Environment presenting on *The State of the Region's Forest and How We Can Help Improve It*.

The 2022 Melvin Woody Lower Connecticut River Conservation recipient was John Hall, Executive Director and Volunteers of the Jonah Center for Earth and Art for their efforts in the fight to combat invasive aquatic species in the floating meadows wetland located between Middletown and Cromwell, but in particular for his effort to coordinate needed volunteer efforts in the 2022 collection of water chestnut from the main stem, coves and tributaries of the River following the devastating release of this very invasive plant from a retention pond in Hartford in 2021.



Photo: I. Preston, Wild Rice, Lower CT River

The land trust will continue to be a member of the Connecticut Land Conservation Council and looks forward to continuing our work with them in 2024 on our “backup” conservation easement program. Projects that will be carried forward for our members and the LCRLT include continued website development; further development of stewardship funding opportunities, updating of the strategic conservation plan, and endowment creation and due diligence funding for the region’s land trusts and communities.