



President's Message

Every 10 years towns in Connecticut are required to complete a Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD). The plan is based on citizen input through a questionnaire sent to each household. Topics vary from governance and economic and residential development to the value of the rural landscape and open space. Questionnaire results are tabulated and used by the town to formulate policy.

A little over half the town or about 12,500 acres is in open space protection, but with nearly half of town lands being unprotected what does the future hold for these properties? The town is growing little by little. In 1990 there were 986 residential properties in town. Today the figure is approaching 1200 and will likely continue to expand. The question becomes, how will we guide growth into the future—the balance between conservation and development?

Over the past four decades, respondents to the POCD questionnaire have put a high value on protecting our open spaces. It is in the land trust's mission statement to support open space conservation, facilitate scientific study, and promote education regarding our natural resources. We hope these are important values for you as well. With your participation in filling out the POCD, you will be voting for the future of Lyme and the land we live on.



On November 12 we sponsored a tour of the ongoing young forest initiative project at Slawson Preserve, Nehantic State Forest, and a private property which is designed to provide

suitable habitat for New England Cottontail and other wildlife such as the prairie warbler, eastern towhee, indigo bunting, American woodcock, wood turtle, and box turtle.

News from the Preservation Committee

Scott Gravatt, Preservation Chair

Two new easements have added over 45 acres to the total amount of land being conserved in Lyme!

Hilles property on Grassy Hill Road

Just a short distance north of the historic Grassy Hill church and the Grassy Hill Preserve, sits a beautiful antique farm house, overlooking the quiet corner of Grassy Hill Road and Old Grassy Hill Road. The house is surrounded by over 200 acres that have been in Ted Hilles' family for approximately 100 years. Like most of Lyme, the stone walls running throughout the property are evidence of long-ago farming, and Ted still maintains three open fields along Grassy Hill Road. The rest of the property has reverted to forest, primarily made up of maple, poplar and oak. As you look around the intersection of Grassy Hill Road and Old Grassy Hill Road, the Hilles land is what gives the area its rural character.



Hilles Property

Ted Hilles and his wife, Jane, love the Grassy Hill area and are committed to doing their part to keep it undeveloped and picturesque. In the 1990's, Ted began working with the Lyme Land Conservation Trust toward the goal of protecting the land he loves. Over the years, Ted has made several contributions to LLT, both in the form of easements and land donated outright. The most recent gift was a conservation easement placed on 18 acres of forest land, finalized this

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Photos above: Fall 2023 Photos of Distinction by, Rochelle Davis and Jim Arrigoni, Honorable Mention to David Luke

A Perspective on Forest Health

After five decades of observing our landscape, it appears to me to be a singularly unique time from a forest health perspective. Fallen and standing dead hemlock trees testify to the devastating impact of woolly adelgid, a non-native pest that arrived in the 1980s. Other insults are not so evident, such as the absence of chestnut and elm trees that were blighted and ultimately disappeared by introduced fungal pathogens in the early 20th century.

This century, we are off to a tough start. Blanched “skeletons” of standing dead trees stick out from the backdrop of otherwise verdant forest. Depending on location, these are mostly ash killed by introduced emerald ash borer beetle, or oaks that could not tolerate the double whammy of drought and multiple years of defoliation by caterpillars of the introduced spongy moth.

More recently, beech leaf disease is expected to have dire impacts on beech, which (for now) is very common. Perhaps you have noticed the strange mottled light filtering through sickly shriveled leaves and sparse canopy in areas where beech dominates. A good place to witness this is on the red trail at Banningwood Preserve on the upslope hillside as you approach the bench overlooking the bend on Roaring Brook.

These changes create many stewardship implications for the Lyme Land Trust to consider. For starters, we can be assured that with every storm there will be another batch of fallen debris—sometimes quite large—that must be cleared from our many miles of recreational trails (thank you, volunteers!). And given the backlog of standing dead ash and oak, as well as up-and-coming beech mortality, this substantial workload is unlikely to decrease any time soon.

From an ecological standpoint, disturbances such as these promote winners and losers among the other forest inhabitants. Increased sunlight gives other plants an opportunity to establish and grow, including smaller herbs and shrubs, as well as the next generation of trees. But they also might be unwelcome invasive plants. The fallen dead material, while unsightly to some, is a critical component of functional ecosystems. As woody material breaks down, it returns nutrients to soil and provides cover for invertebrates, amphibians, and small mammals that are not always appreciated, but essential to supporting food webs that include more charismatic critters such as snakes, song birds, and raptors. Remember the old adage: there is nothing more alive in a forest than a dead tree!

News from the Preservation Committee

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past December. The land fronts on Grassy Hill Road, but is also adjacent to LLT's Beebe Preserve, a locally popular hiking destination.

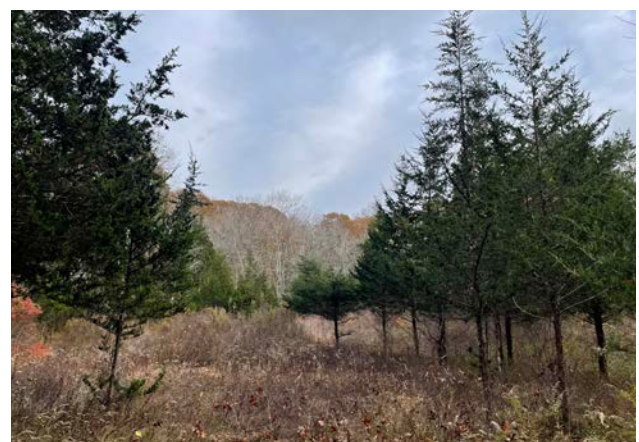
Stand-alone, the Hilles properties add up to over 200 acres of preserved land. But the Hilles lands are also a link, joining other preserved properties into an even larger contiguous block. With the addition of the new 18 acre easement, the preserved LLT and Town land stretching along Grassy Hill Road has grown to approximately 475 acres. But that's just part of the picture. This 475 acres also connects to Hartman Park, the Nehantic State Forest, and the Yale Forest in East Lyme, each of which contain hundreds of acres of land. All in all, having this much land preserved in the northeast corner of Lyme is a major success story!

Wing property on Brush Hill Road

Toward the end of 2023, the Wing family went through the process of putting a conservation easement on 27 acres of their land. The Wings retained the 11 acres immediately around their house, but the remaining land is now preserved in perpetuity by way of the easement.

The 27 acre easement is a great blend of wetlands, reverting pasturelands and mature woodlands. The combination makes for a mosaic of vegetative and habitat types in proximity to other open space parcels. Part of Marco Motta Pond is also included in the easement area. This combination of varied habitat is very beneficial for many species of wildlife, and the property is additionally important because it is located within the “Lyme Forest Block”, which has been recognized as a landscape scale Important Bird Area (IBA) by Audubon Connecticut.

Being a main drainage area for the Roaring Brook watershed, the property is also an important link for the protection of Whalebone Cove, a pristine and unique tidal wetlands system. This donation lies at the heart of the land trust's mission to conserve our natural land and water resources.



Cedar grove on Wing Property

Recent Hikes and Events

Miles to go before we sleep. Join us to share the love and experience the wonder of our preserves on one of our many group walks.



1 Tuesday Treks are casual morning walks with a board or staff member of the Lyme Land Trust. Join us. **2** Walk at Pleasant Valley Preserve on a delightful New Year's day. "Every day I see or hear something that more or less kills me with delight, that leaves me like a needle in the haystack of light." – Mary Oliver **3** We were treated to the beautiful colors of a pleasant autumn Sunday on October 22 on a Tree and Shrub ID Walk with Lyme Land Trust Environmental Director Jim Arrigoni. **4** On February 20, Tyler from the Riverside Reptile Education Center came to the Lyme Public Library, and enthralled a group of all ages who experienced several species of snakes in their fascinating, wonderful and graceful glory. **5** On Monday December 4, the Land Trusts of Lyme and Old Lyme sponsored a fascinating guided tour at the Old Lyme Land Trust's Upper Threemile River Preserve, led by documentary photographer and author Markham Starr. We visited several outstanding examples of ceremonial stonework left behind by the indigenous population that has inhabited New England for at least 12,000 years. This preserve has many stone cairns, unique walls, and serpent effigies. We also saw remnants of the agricultural uses on the land since colonial times: old foundations and stone walls for livestock. We are grateful to Markham Starr for generously sharing his wealth of knowledge and opening our eyes with this intriguing glimpse into indigenous culture and the past. **6** Happy Winter Solstice Evening! December 21, 2023 Celebrating the longest night lit by luminaries at Banningwood Preserve, with Regan Stacey, our Lyme Land Trust partner, who facilitates well being and connection to nature. Regan leads a forest bathing walk monthly on Thursday mornings.

Building Update

Kristina White

We are so excited to share the news that we are officially in the office and stewardship building. Jim and I moved in at the beginning of January. To say it is a game-changer is an understatement. The ability to have regular discussions face to face, to have meetings with board members at a moment's notice, and for our community to stop in with questions has made the 5 years of planning and building all worthwhile.

With Spring arriving the stewardship area will begin filling up with equipment that has been scattered throughout Lyme. Work parties will begin to meet and we will finally have everything under one roof.

The next phase of our plan at 12-1 Town Street is to create a space around the building that is both educational while utilizing best practices in native planting and landscaping. We are working with Mike Baczeswki of New England Pollinator Gardens and Refugia Design. They are working with us to create a functional landscape that is ecologically beneficial, beautiful, and resilient. There will be phases to this plan with the first already planted last Fall—a berm of evergreen species that separates our backyard from our neighbors.

This Spring and Summer projects will include enlarging and reshaping the driveway, leveling the front area and planting native grasses, creating a rain garden next to the building, and creating a quiet space at the Knoll which is across the driveway from the building.

We plan on having an open house this Spring once the dust settles to welcome all of you to our new space. In the meantime, if you see a car parked in front of the building, stop by and say hello!

On Turtle Time

Regan Stacey

It was a cold and blustery afternoon in January, not the typical day for a beach walk. The floods had come and shifted the sands again. I was down along Long Island Sound, rounding the bend up the Connecticut River, walking past bits of detritus washed up from the storms—plastic golf balls, bottles, cans, coffee cups, and massive piles of leaves, when I came across an unusual looking rock. It was oval and black. Closer inspection revealed a distinct pattern with ridges down its back, a perfection that was almost otherworldly. *Is that...a turtle?* I bent down to move it a bit. I picked it up and could feel the weight of a body inside. This was not another shell washed up on shore, this was full of turtle. I gently reached in to touch the nose and it responded with a tighter inward scrunch. It was alive and this was no ordinary turtle. This was a diamondback terrapin—a species of special concern under Connecticut's Endangered Species Act—a female juvenile about two years old that fit perfectly in the palm of my hand.

Too cold to move, I had a feeling she wouldn't live for long if I left her here overnight. I quickly hopped on my phone to find a turtle rehabilitation center. Turtle Haven. Angelina asked me to bring the turtle in and confirmed she wouldn't make it through the night with the cold coming in.

I carried her back to the car, trying to warm her up between my hands, which was difficult to do given the winds and cold that day. I took turns with my 11-year-old son, sharing in the care of this wondrous creature. Can I tell you she felt like a cold stone, the kind that sucks the warmth out of your hand faster than you can make it? After a while,

I could feel a small leg stretch here or there, the way a baby might when it stretches.

By the time we arrived at the hospital, I pulled her out from under my coat and all four limbs, tail and head, were extended from her shell, alert and looking around, content to remain in my hand.

As I handed her off to Angelina, she confirmed there were no injuries and it looked like the turtle was in good shape, all things considered.

I looked again at her, patiently resting in Angelina's hand—no hurry, no trouble. She looked back at me with her perfectly round dark eyes, and in that moment, I fell into an abyss of deep time and wisdom beyond anything I would ever know. Some say they get that feeling when they look into the eye of a whale and it changes them forever.

Angelina will care for her over winter and release her in spring at that same location. I'm hoping I'll be able to join her. I can feel the joy in my heart already.

Update: The turtle will be released in May. Stay tuned!

If you'd like to learn more about the Northern diamondback terrapin turtle, the only species of turtle in North America that spends its life in brackish water, please visit the [DEEP page here](#). The turtle has a remarkable history of resilience, given all it has endured.



Multiple Partners Collaborate to Reclaim Floodplain Forest

Jim Arrigoni

Hikers on the red trail at Banningwood Preserve may have noticed some dramatic changes in the vegetation along the low-lying forest flanking Roaring Brook east of the entrance road and parking lot. A 2.6-acre area that was densely clad in shoulder-high, invasive Japanese barberry shrubs was reclaimed in 2023, and awaits re-vegetation by native species in the seasons ahead. In addition to the LLT Stewardship Committee, many partners have been essential to the success of this ambitious restoration project.

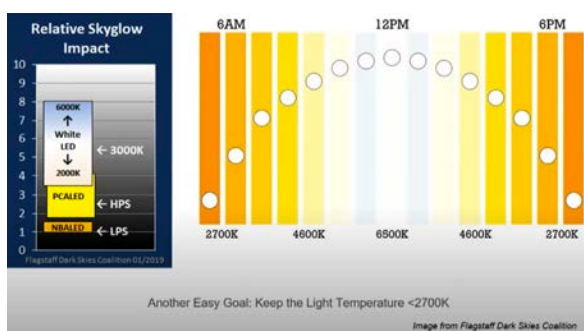
Working with the team at All Habitat Services, an environmental consulting firm specializing in ecological restoration and invasive species management, invasive plants were treated with a low concentration of foliar herbicide in spring and summer of 2023. Astute observers may have noted how precisely they were able to target individual invasive plants, while avoiding impacts to desirable native species like Spicebush and Winterberry.

After the effects of the herbicide became apparent, local equipment operator and meticulous “habitat manicurist” Tom Bischoff used a custom machine to macerate the dead material, making way for follow-up treatments and the next restoration stages. Currently, the understory is starkly different—one can actually walk through the area that before was an absolutely impenetrable thicket, and the area represents a “blank canvass” for the establishment of native plant species. For this, we will implement several strategies.

During the colder months, locally collected seeds of native, perennial wildflower species such as Joe Pye Weed, New York Ironweed, Boneset, and White Snakeroot were cast throughout the area. In the months ahead, we will be planting larger specimens of understory shrubs such as Black Elderberry, Highbush Blueberry, and various dogwood species. Fortuitously, a local Boy Scout is involved in the process of planning a component of this work for his Eagle Scout project. In addition to this community support, we are grateful for the support of donors who contributed to make this type of restoration work possible.



Presentations



On January 24 at Hadlyme Hall, Alan Sheiness and Misha Semenov-Leiva presented: A World Without Dark Skies: How Light Pollution is Impacting Humans and Ecosystems, and What You Can Do



On October 4, 2024, Juliana Barrett presented the extremely important Role of Riparian Barriers in Your Local Landscape.



Wild Lyme Project Kick-off

The Lyme Land Trust is excited to announce a new education and stewardship project, and we want YOU to be involved! Using the online community science platform, *iNaturalist*, we are seeking to better understand the species of plants, animals, fungi and other living things inhabiting Lyme preserves. In the process, we hope anyone sharing our interest in local biological diversity will contribute their own observations, and in so doing, become better acquainted with the non-human neighbors that share our landscape.

What is iNaturalist?

Think of iNaturalist as a virtual natural history museum, but instead of archiving preserved specimens verifying the occurrence of a species at a precise location and time, iNaturalist “specimens” take the form of observations: digital photographs or sound recordings connected with a known location and time. Specimen observations such as these are fundamental data for many of the biological sciences, particularly the discipline of ecology, which seeks to understand the distribution and abundance of living things.

The beauty and power of iNaturalist are that by using the smartphone app, YOU can make similar contributions to science! Even better, no specialized expertise or biological training is required—when submitting photographs, the iNaturalist app uses artificial intelligence to offer suggestions to identify your observation. Furthermore, your observations will be visible to other people in the iNaturalist community, and your proposed identification may either be verified, or another identification may be proposed and debated by the community. In this way, a level of quality

control is built into the system. But don’t be nervous! A recent article in the New York Times dubbed iNaturalist “the most civilized place on the internet!”

Why?

LLT has two objectives for this project. First, we wish to compile inventories of the species inhabiting preserves. Knowing what exists, and where and when different species make use of different habitats is critical information for responsibly stewarding preserves.

Second, we aim to foster increased awareness of and appreciation for the unique and interesting species living in Lyme preserves, and beyond. Putting a name to a plant that one is curious about can be a critical step toward better understanding of its characteristics, and perhaps also caring more about its welfare.

How to get involved?

It’s easy! Download the iNaturalist app on your smartphone and create a profile before you can submit observations. Join the Wild Lyme Project to stay up-to-date on new observations. This Project includes links to publicly accessible preserves in Lyme that are owned or managed by LLT and our partners at the Town of Lyme and The Nature Conservancy.

Keep an eye on the the LLT website; throughout the year, LLT will be hosting iNaturalist training workshops to hone your skills in making good identification. Also, we’ll be offering presentations and field trips with biologists and other experts who will share their knowledge about different groups of living things such as amphibians, wildflowers, insects, and more.

Imagining Lyme 2023 Peoples’ Vision award Winners, Bryn Souza and Kristina White



Bryn Souza



Kristina White

THE LYME LAND TRUST NEWSLETTER

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Photo by Joe Standart.

Delicious food, local brew, and blues music are waiting for our riders when they come back after enjoying a ride through the hills of Lyme and surrounding towns.

For more information: tourdelyme.org

Trail 54

Announcing Trail 54! A new trail completes a loop so that one can remain within natural surroundings in Mount Archer Woods and Eno Preserve, and it connects most of the white trail loop for the Jewett Preserve! An orange trail has been added to the trail system so that users can bypass most of the walk along Mt Archer Rd. In addition a portion of the white trail has been extended in Mount Archer Woods to shorten the roadside walk to and from the white trail in Jewett Preserve.

Updated maps and brochures are posted on the Lyme Land Trust Preserves page.

A big thank you to the many wonderful volunteers who gave their time and skills to create this trail, which was created in

coordination by the Town of Lyme and the Lyme Land Trust. We are very appreciative of the many generous people who support the stewardship of Lyme's precious open space for the benefit of the public.

This is the 54th trail of the Lyme Trails. Remember the Trail 52 challenge in 2020-21 to walk all 52 of the Lyme trails? You can still do that. Just add one more trail. Trail 53 is the dark sky above us, hence the Trail 53 Astronomy Observatory.



The Tree Collective and other volunteers helped clear Trail 54



Lyme Land Trust

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Events Calendar

All events subject to change. Dates and times will be posted on the Land Trust website, and may be announced by press release, email, and Facebook page. Contact: education@lymelandtrust.org (unless noted otherwise below).

The Amazing Conservation Success Story of Eastern Bluebirds **Tuesday, April 16, 6:30 pm**

Denison Pequotsepis Nature Center presents a program about bluebird recovery from a decline decades ago. Learn what you need to know to join the Bluebird box project sponsored by the Lyme Land Trust and Lyme Pollinator Pathway.

Wild Lyme Project Series: Using the iNaturalist App

Throughout the year, LLT will be hosting iNaturalist app training workshops and offering presentations and field trips with biologists and other experts to hone your skills in identifying and recording the biodiversity of our preserves to iNaturalist. Be a top contributor.

Spring Ephemeral Walk with Bryan Connelly, botanist horticulturist

Sunday, April 28, = 2-4 pm

Pleasant Valley Preserve. Learn to identify the fleeting first native wildflowers to emerge in our woods.

Reptiles in Lyme Talk with Jim Arrigoni, LLT Environmental Director

Thursday, May 23, 7 pm

Learn about our native turtles and snakes.

Our Annual Meeting

Friday, June 17, 6 pm

We are delighted to have author Patrick J. Lynch as presenter at the Lyme Land Trust Annual Meeting. Patrick has just launched his eleventh book, a *Field Guide to the Connecticut River*.

CT Trails Day-Intro to Forest Bathing with Regan Stacey, forest bathing guide

Saturday, June 1, 10:00-11:30 am

Curious about forest bathing? Come dip your toes into this Japanese-inspired practice of "taking in the forest atmosphere." Slow down, awaken your senses, and enjoy the wonders of nature as you deeply relax in the forest.

Periodical: Join a walk or visit the Trail 53 Astronomy Observatory to observe our nighttime sky. Check the website for details.