



# Lyme Land Trust

SPRING 2025 NEWSLETTER

## President's Message

Do you know who your neighbors are? To find out, my wife and I placed several outdoor cameras near our house 15 years ago to see who was inhabiting the woodlands. At first, only occasional sightings of deer were noted, along with smaller critters. Bear and bobcat were absent, with coyotes mostly heard only at night. But then, starting about five years ago, what our cameras revealed was unexpected and exciting. Bobcat, coyote, fisher, grey fox, and bear were passing by the house regularly, but almost entirely at night and during dawn and dusk, when most of us are rarely outdoors. All of this is taking place within 200 feet of the house, with these top predators carrying on with their lives undisturbed by human contact.

At the same time, deer numbers have markedly declined due to predation. The forest floor, previously ravaged by an overpopulation of deer, is showing signs of rejuvenation as woody and herbaceous plants that contribute to the diversity of the woodlands are bouncing back. Yes, our forestlands are in jeopardy from invasive pests and diseases, and non-native plants outcompeting natives. Still, the good news is that the understory is recovering, providing the beginnings for a new generation.

The resurgence of native, top predators, once nearly extirpated, signals a returning of balance to the forest ecosystem not seen for centuries. What role has the Land Trust played in this success story? Since 1966, the trust has been instrumental in promoting and conserving wildlife habitat while recognizing the importance of healthy, intact natural systems and the connections between them. With nearly 3250 acres under its protection, the Land Trust continues to advocate for the conservation of key parcels. In addition to habitat protection, land conservation preserves our cultural heritage and history. It defines our feelings of place and fosters rural qualities such as openness and aesthetics, while offering recreation opportunities and spiritual connections with the land. And it is also where the wild ones live. Protecting and expanding upon their habitats is just as important to the trust as connecting people with the land. The Lyme Land Trust will continue to focus on preserving properties that add significant habitat value for all of our neighbors. —Tony Irving

## "We gotta keep the trails open!"

That's the mantra of our Volunteer of the Year, Henry Graulty. He's a fixture in the Lyme ecosystem, working with the Lyme Land Trust, the Town of Lyme Open Space Coordinator, and Friends of Whalebone Cove . . . why he's even an official Connecticut State Forest volunteer!

If you're fortunate enough to join a work party with him, you'll quickly understand why most folks call him a "happy warrior." Henry is a determined battler against invasive plants in our preserves. Japanese knotweed, barberry, bittersweet and Autumn Olive have all felt his wrath. He brings enormous energy and enthusiasm to every job, and he's also interested in the places he works.

For example, he's knowledgeable about the archeology of Hartman Park.

He contributes to any type of mission, but lately he's been called on a great many times to remove trees that have obstructed our trails. Henry is a student of chainsaw handling, having gone through the rigorous and intense "Game of Logging" program, and we've put that skill to good use.

One of the many impressive things about Henry is that he's not even a Lyme resident. He comes up from his home near the water in Niantic, and he's been doing it for almost a decade. We even profiled this gentleman in the Lyme Land Trust Newsletter in the winter of 2016. Congratulations and thank you, Henry Graulty!



Mal Karwoski, Henry and Wendy Hill

### 2025 Winter Photos of distinction above:

*Ice Cold Plunge* by Ally Spurling, *Iced Grasses* by Birgit Musheno, and *Winter Magic on Whalebone Cove* by Athana Catlett

## Jim's Notes from the Field

### Some Thoughts on Biodiversity

The Mission of the Lyme Land Trust is *"to conserve in perpetuity for the public benefit Lyme's natural, scenic and historic land and water resources."* Among the most precious of our natural resources is the diversity of living things—all of the individuals of all of the species of plants, animals, fungi, and microbes—that dwell alongside us and our human neighbors. Scientists refer to this as biological diversity, or biodiversity.

Why does biodiversity matter? Well, it depends on whom you ask. A birdwatcher's day might be made by hearing the song of a Cerulean Warbler that migrated from South America to breed in Eno Preserve. A hunter or an angler might enjoy the protein as well as the ritual of obtaining a meal from their environment in a way they learned from their parents or grandparents and will teach their children. A homeowner might reduce their heating cost by harvesting firewood, but their winter will be much cozier if they

choose an oak instead of a cottonwood. Take a look around your surroundings and consider which plant and wildlife species you recognize, and which ones you do—or don't!—value. What components of biodiversity matter to you, and why?

The preeminent conservation biologist Edward O. Wilson articulated a metaphor in which the environment



Rare Showy Orchid found in one of our preserves

is the theater, species are the actors, and evolution by natural selection is the play. Thanks to the efforts of the Land Trust and several partner organizations and citizens, Lyme is remarkable for its substantial amount of conserved land. Whereas the acreage is impressive, so too are the variety and connectivity among so many distinct ecosystems. For example, the River to Ridgetop clusters of preserves contain uninterrupted gradients between the Eightmile River and local hilltops. Large and unfragmented swaths such as these are scarce in southern New England. In this way, our region can be considered something of a biological Broadway!

Help us to better understand our natural resources and be a citizen scientist! The purpose of the Wild Lyme Project (see LLT home page and [www.inaturalist.org/projects/wild-lyme-project](http://www.inaturalist.org/projects/wild-lyme-project)) is to catalog and compare the biodiversity of Lyme's preserves, as well as to engage the public to learn more about the biodiversity supported on conserved land. By working together to protect the theater, we allow for the continuation of the greatest show on Earth!

### Recent Hikes and Events

A wide variety of events happened this Spring. We continued our weekly walks for all ages and our monthly astronomy observing sessions. Our Wild Lyme Project, utilizing iNaturalist, has over 3,000 observations on 27 properties in Lyme, inspiring a series of mini bioblitzes and guided walks. Other programs ranged from meadow making and insect identification to bird habitat in young forests and sugarbush woodlands. We had numerous programs for kids at the library, the Lyme School, and at Banningwood Preserve. We collaborated with other organizations to bring programs as varied as Earth Day, moths and stone walls.

- 1** In April, Jim Arrigoni led a Vernal Pool Walk focusing on amphibians.
- 2** In May, Jim Natale, naturalist and amateur botanist, guided a ramble through Johnston Preserve to identify all types of plants, focusing on spring ephemerals and mosses. Jim, who is an expert identifier on iNaturalist, has logged an amazing 39,409 observations.
- 3** June: Jim Arrigoni and Joe Attwater of CT Audubon investigated the variety of birds at the young forest project in Slawson and Rabbits' Rest Preserves.
- 4** Tori Harris led a family hike to Gillette Castle on New Year's Day!
- 5** Tuesday Trek in Hartman Park
- 6** In May, we collaborated with the Lyme Public Hall to bring Robert Thorson, founder of the Stone Wall Initiative, to talk about the importance of the conservation of historic stone walls.
- 7** The LLT provided a grant in honor of Earth Day for the Lyme School to bring Denison-Pequotsepos Nature Center into the School to provide curriculum-based programs to enhance environmental education for each of the six classes.
- 8** In May, The Educations and Events Committee hosted a day of outdoor exploration in Banningwood Preserve for 4th graders from ISAAC School in New London.
- 9** Alan Sheiness and the Astronomy Cohorts introduced students at Lyme School to the wonders of astronomy at the afterschool Curiosity Shop program run by the PTO.
- 10** In June, Lisa Wahle of the CT Botanical Society led a walk in Brockway Hawthorne Preserve.



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# Tour de Lyme

## **Our 12<sup>th</sup> annual Tour de Lyme was a great success!**

581 riders from all over New England and beyond came to ride the bucolic hills of Lyme. They enjoyed a wonderful ride and returned to food trucks, beer, and the Ramblin' Dan Stevens band singing the blues.

I wish to thank Carol Adams and Bill Donovan, along with the Dahlke family, for hosting the event at their beautiful Ashlawn Farm for the past 11 years. It would not be the regional cycling event it has become if it were not for this fantastic place. We appreciate all that they have done to accommodate over 650 people descending on their private property these many years.

Thank you to the town of Lyme for supporting this event from the beginning. Our fantastic volunteers made the event run like clockwork—your smiles, kindness and enthusiasm were most appreciated and noted by many riders. Public Safety Officer and Fire Chief John Evans ensured that the roads were safe and traffic was controlled throughout the event—a vital aspect. Thank you. Lyme Fire and Lyme Ambulance were fully staffed in case of emergency—fortunately, we had an uneventful day! A big shout out to our local bike shops—Morrisey Cycles, Pedal Power, and Action Sports—who were available at the tent site and rest stops to fix any bike issues. Thank you to Heike Coffee and Warner Swain for the wonderful photos that were taken—the smiles and joy on everyone's faces say it all!

This event is the Lyme Land Trust's major fundraiser and I wish to thank our sponsors for supporting us and our mission to protect open space for the public benefit. Year after year riders come back to ride with new friends and old—it is wonderful to see families come each year and introduce their kids to the joy of riding!

Kristina White



# *Tour de Lyme*

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## Stewardship Committee

### ... more than just trail work!

Keeping Lyme's trail system well-marked and clear is the most public-facing and conspicuous job of stewardship. We take pride in this work with the help of a volunteer corps that contributes so much to our faithful users' enjoyment.

This is but a fraction of stewardship's mandate to meet the needs of the public as well as safeguard our natural and cultural resources.

New property boundaries (including 5 in the past year alone) are marked with signage, which in many cases requires arduous bushwhacking in the understory while using an A-2 survey map and aided by GPS and a compass which are useful tools that ensure accuracy and save time searching for the nub of an iron rod or a tiny hole drilled into a bedrock outcrop.

For all of the LLT's holdings, it's a duty and a requirement to create and abide by Land Management Plans. These documents include an overview of ecological and historical attributes, a guide to on-the-ground activity, and assessments of challenges and opportunities. Changes in factors such as environmental conditions, technology and economics may require updating existing plans too.

In addition to LLT-owned properties, 10.5% of the land in Lyme (2,314 acres) is designated as Conservation Restriction Easements granted to the Land Trust. These lands remain in private ownership, but due to their specific conservation values, they have additional restrictions on their use and development that are upheld by LLT.

This opens up a whole array of additional responsibilities and opportunities for Stewardship. Establishing and maintaining good, collaborative relations with new and existing easement owners are a high priority. Annual monitoring a combined 119 preserve and easement parcels is an enormous undertaking accomplished with volunteers whom we are training continually.

Overseeing periodic field and meadow mowing over the course of the growing season is another commitment that contributes to the diversity of habitat types in our otherwise forest-dominated landscape.

Rounding out this expansive look at stewardship is to point out strategic partnerships we maintain with local, regional and national organizations. Fishway upkeep with the state DEEP and the Eightmile River Wild and Scenic Coordinating Committee, and co-managing land owned by the Town of Lyme and The Nature Conservancy are just a couple of the important relationships we maintain to preserve and protect Lyme's natural and cultural heritage.

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**1** Drone Photo of Deveaux Landscaping mowing the cedar fields in Pleasant Valley **2** Henry Gaulty clearing the trail in Banningwood Preserve **3** Max Novak, Eagle Scout candidate, and Boy Scout Troop 26 constructed 8 foot bridges and installed them in Banningwood Preserve to reduce the environmental impact to Roaring Brook floodplain habitat and increase safety of trail users. **4** Blueback Herring swimming past the camera at the Moulson Pond Fishway **5** Before and after photos showing the clearing of burning bush around the Jewett Preserve Field, done by a work party consisting of people from The Nature Conservancy, the town and land trust.

## Preservation Committee



Photos of Brush Hill Preserve

**What are the responsibilities of the committee?** When the Lyme Land Trust (LLT) is approached by a landowner regarding a potential conservation easement or property donation, it is incumbent upon the committee to inspect the property and evaluate its features. The committee serves as the initial review body, determining whether the LLT should assume the long-term responsibility of preserving the land—indeed, this responsibility extends in perpetuity, or forever.

Beyond evaluating prospective properties, the committee also continually seeks ways to improve processes. One priority area is ensuring that LLT is adequately prepared to respond when opportunities to acquire critically important properties arise.

The landscape of Lyme is predominantly wooded, with many areas protected through the efforts of the Land Trust, municipal authorities, the state, and organizations such as The Nature Conservancy. Nevertheless, much of the region's natural habitat remains privately owned and may occasionally be placed on the market. In these cases, several key questions must be addressed: Does the property merit permanent preservation? Specifically, does it fulfill defined "conservation values," such as providing essential wildlife habitat or possessing scenic importance? Would acquisition of the property enhance connectivity between existing preserved lands, supporting wildlife corridors or recreational trails? Affirmative answers prompt the Preservation Committee to undertake further analysis before deciding whether LLT should approach the seller. Time constraints often present challenges, as LLT prides itself on thoroughness and deliberation.

In recent months, the Preservation Committee has explored strategies to ensure LLT can act swiftly when critical properties become available, without compromising the integrity of its evaluative process. The committee recognizes its fiduciary obligation to represent donors responsibly. Prior to committing funds for land preservation,

it is essential to confirm that each candidate property meets LLT's high standards. Achieving this level of diligence within limited timeframes, especially concerning properties of significant importance, remains a primary objective. Ideally, sellers will reach out to LLT to discuss possible options; nevertheless, LLT must be equipped to respond effectively in situations requiring prompt action.

### The Brush Hill Preserve

Last year we acquired this 26.4-acre property from Alan and Jeanne Sheiness. This parcel shares a common boundary with Thach Preserve from the road to the beaver pond. This connectivity with Thach creates over 37 acres of open space. The forest is remarkably free of invasive species and features a lush laurel grove, interesting stone structures, stone walls, and a beautiful wetland.

The acquisition was a charitable sale, which is a sale of land (fee title) or a conservation easement (partial interest) to a qualified conservation organization at less than fair market value. This not only makes it more affordable for the conservation buyer but also offers several benefits to a landowner, providing immediate income from the sale, reducing potential capital gains liability, and entitling the seller to a charitable income tax deduction based on the difference between the land's fair market value and its bargain sale price.



# Lyme Land Trust

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## Winter 2025 Photos of Distinction:

Left: *Lighting Lyme* by Meera Rangwala.

Right: *Augur Winter Sunrise*  
by Joan Rivington



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## THE LYME LAND TRUST NEWSLETTER

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