

Summary 09/15/2010
Lower Connecticut River and Coastal Region Land Trust Exchange
7 P.M.
CRERPA Office
455 Boston Post Road
Old Saybrook, CT

Attendees:

Bob Gorman – Chester Land Trust
Sarah Keaney – Old Saybrook Land Trust
Mark R. Leas – Westbrook Land Conservation Trust
Kristen Elliot Leas – Westbrook Land Conservation Trust
Cindy Sullivan – Haddam Land Trust
Gail Reynolds – Haddam Land Trust
Wini Olson – Essex Land Trust
Melvin Woody – Ct River Land Trust
John Kennedy – Deep River Land Trust
Chris Clayton – Old Lyme Land Trust
Matt Elgart – Lyme Land Conservation Trust
David Brown – Middlesex Land Trust
Stanford Brainerd - Lynde Point Land Trust
Sharon Marino – U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Juliana Barrett – CT Sea Grant Program
Margot Burns – CRERPA
Moureen Heidtmann – East Hampton Inland Wetlands Commission

For the September meeting the Lower Connecticut River and Coastal Region Land Trust Exchange (LTE) was visited by Sharon Marino of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Southern New England – New York Bight Coastal Program and the Rhode Island Conservation Stewardship Collaborative, and Juliana Barrett, Ph.D., Assistant Educator in Residence, CT Sea Grant College Program, Department of Extension, University of Connecticut. Sharon discussed the Rhode Island Conservation Stewardship Collaborative and the current work of the Coastal Program in Connecticut including highlights of some specific examples of priority projects and identified possible partnership opportunities. Dr. Barrett discussed her current efforts for supporting habitat based management plans for land trusts in Connecticut.

Sharon expressed to the group that the lower Ct River and coastal region is a high priority area for the Fish and Wildlife Service and the mission of the Service is to identify, restore, and protect important habitat for their trust resources, important to both people and wildlife. They can provide technical expertise and in some cases funding for protection, conservation, and restoration. They don't own land but can work with partners to work on projects such as control of invasive species through early response, migratory fish passage, surveying of and monitoring of endangered species, and can provide technical assistance for working through grant application procedures and requirements. Projects they have worked on in the region that they have provided funding and technical expertise for include a habitat based management plan for the Old Lyme Conservation Trust Watch Rock property with the CT River Coastal Conservation District and the East River Management Plan for 400 acres in Guilford.

Discussion concerning the importance of the Lower CT River region to the New England Cottontail, a candidate to be included on the list of endangered species associated with the Endangered Species Act followed. CT is one of the specie's last strong holds. The rabbit likes low shrubs and viney brambled growth. The Service is at the point of trying to figure out where the rabbits are, and if you have good habitat they will come and collect pellets or trap to take blood samples. You have to collect samples during the winter after it snows so the fecal pellets are not in a degraded state. They can do the work themselves or in partnership with your land trust.

Sharon spoke of funding sources that can provide assistance:

- NAWCA grants – The North American Wetlands Conservation Act ([Act, or NAWCA](#)) for restoration, and acquisition. Small grants program (\$75,000) - needs match. Oct. 28, 2010 deadline. .
- National Coastal Conservation Program – Dave Kozak, CT DEP. <http://www.ct.gov/DEP/cwp/view.asp?A=2705&Q=397032>
David has visited the group to discuss the program and information can be found on the LTE website.
- Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program – <http://www.fws.gov/northeast/partners/> , <http://www.fws.gov/northeast/mckinney/management.html> . This program can help with habitat restoration, stewardship, and on the ground technical assistance. The Ct contact is located at the Stewart B. McKinney National Wildlife Refuge in Westbrook. This is not just a coastal program.

The Rhode Island Stewardship Collaborative (<http://www.riscsc.org/>) brings together large conservation land owners to tackle landscape scale issues. The organization promotes stewardship, collaboration, cooperation, training, and development standards, and has the ability to quickly reach the conservation community of the State concerning threats such as invasive species and legal and legislative initiatives, and works on high priority projects that will benefit the State as a whole. The organization is privately funded and works on a challenge match donation model. The Collaborative is currently working on an invasive species awareness program, developing protocol for doing base line biological inventories, and legislative and policy initiatives. A question was raised concerning universal standards for data collection between TNC, LTA, and other land trusts which led into the work of Juliana.

Juliana Barrett discussed her current efforts for supporting habitat based management plans for land trusts in Connecticut. The information can be found on UConn's Center for Land Use Education and Research website (CLEAR - <http://clear.uconn.edu/>) in concert with Jim Murphy's work, formerly with the CT DEP preserved natural area program. Her work focuses on making habitat management planning accessible to the layman as well as the professional, and gives a framework that allows for the plans to be as simple or complex as the land trust desires for a particular property. She encourages land trusts to think about what they want their properties to be like in 20 or 50 years and to look at the big picture first before tackling any one item that needs to be addressed. Habitat management plans can act as a guide for an organization in reaching its conservation goals for a particular property, help plan for future threats such as invasive species and climate change, and provide documentation for future funding and grant request.

Discussion followed which focused on how regional education and conservations programs and community outreach can accomplish, through economy and magnitude of scale, an increase in the rate and type of on the ground conservation. It was expressed that education of the community concerning conservation issues can lead to increased community support in terms of future funding for individual land trusts. The educational process teaches communities what they have and fosters community relationships. The different types of projects discussed were protection of the New England Cotton Tail and endangered species, invasive species, education of targeted landowners with wetlands concerning riparian buffers (buffers in a bag - Chesapeake Bay - <http://midatlanticconservation.org/conservationprojects.htm>), http://www.gazette.net/stories/031308/midnew51103_32368.shtml), and the August 2010 bat meeting held in Chester. Also, issues of regional significance: the preserve in Old Saybrook, Essex and Westbrook and the Marina Village project in the Floral Park area of Old Saybrook were discussed.

It was decided that the representatives of each land trust would talk to their boards to see if there was interest in participating in a regional project that would include the land trusts of the LTE and Sharon Marino of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Southern New England – New York Bight Coastal Program to participate and develop a program to identify LTE land trust parcels that contain habitat for the New England Cotton Tail, field testing for its presence, possible funding opportunities for acquisition and stewardship for the rabbits protection, and a possible community outreach program for the protection and conservation of this endangered species.

Other items - information was handed out regarding the Yale Conservation Finance Camp Course taken by Margot Burns over the summer and it was decided that Emery Gluck, Cockaponset CT DEP Forester and Rob Rocks, CT DEP Middlesex County Forester, will be invited to the November meeting to discuss their landscape scale planning initiatives and services they can provide to the land trusts.