

The MIDDLESEX LANDSCAPE

Serving the towns of Durham, Middlefield, Middletown, Cromwell, Portland and East Hampton

Cobalt Landing - A History

The opening of the Cobalt Landing car-top boat launch renews the historic public access to the Connecticut River at the border of Portland and East Hampton. The 'Oakum Dock' was originally a point of transshipment of various locally produced maritime products, including timbers, ropes, sails, ironware and sealants. Oakum was the original ship-plank caulking compound. The landing was occupied from the earliest days of the local ship building industry until recent history as an active commercial location. Throughout the second half of the 19th century the property was used as a steamboat landing; a regular stop for merchants, travelers, and the emerging tourist trade.

After the turn of the century the landing fell into disuse and was more or less abandoned as river access. The landing afterwards became a convenient repository for boulders, brush and other bulky debris. During this period, the public right-of-way was maintained by fishermen and other visitors, including the US Geological Survey, which established a geodetic survey station on the

property during the 1940s. The property became overgrown and inaccessible, and was essentially ignored until it was donated to the Middlesex Land Trust circa 1992.



Canoeists and kayakers approach Cobalt Landing

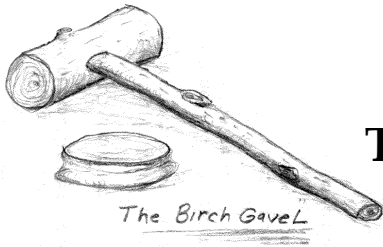
The public right-of-way to the river was never lost, merely obscured for a time. The original quay, consisting of brownstone blocks and wooden pilings, was revealed and re-established as the "put-in" for canoes, kayaks, and other small boats that can be hand-launched from this location. After years of consultation, access to the property was reopened during the summer of 2001, with the removal of accumulated resinous brush, flood debris and hornet habitat.

It is the intention and desire of the Middlesex Land Trust that the Cobalt Landing Preserve hereafter be enjoyed by the general public as a point of riverfront access for boating, bird watching and general recreation. Cobalt Landing is destined to provide more enjoyment for more people, relative to its size, than any other open space property in the near vicinity.

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The *Chairman's Corner*

This has certainly been a different year – these last few months have had many of us rethinking our priorities. I wish each of our members and their families the happiest of holidays and a new year filled with wonder and opportunity.

Keeping focused on land trust activities and goals after September 11, 2001 was difficult. How important is protecting open space compared to the loss of 5000 lives? Will our members defer renewing their land trust membership to donate to the September 11th fund? Will we be inundated with questions about including the land trust in wills? Will members rethink the importance of spending time with family and enjoying nature?

We are concerned that some of our members may have overlooked their membership renewals because our notices went out after September 11. We hope this newsletter reminds them send in their renewals.

On the other hand, I am excited to report that we had more people involved in land trust activities this fall than ever before. Thanks to Doug Bonoff for his work on the Cobalt Landing canoe launch. Some twenty people helped dedicate the site in October. (Doug has put in countless hours at that location and deserves our gratitude). Thanks also to hike leader John LeShane. Forty people attended the Mica Ledges hike in October, and twenty-five attended the Airline Trail hike in September. We have also marked one new trail on the Sellew Property, which runs parallel to the Airline Trail. A dozen people helped with a jointly sponsored MLT/Mattabesec Audubon Society clean up of the Highland Pond property.

Board members spent much time discussing a \$92 tax abatement in East Hampton. After exploratory drilling for a public water supply on the Oakum Dock property was denied, the Middlesex Land Trust and East Hampton were in disagreement over the tax payment. For those of you who have not followed the issue, state statutes provided enabling legislation, which allows municipalities to grant tax abatements to non-profit organizations. East Hampton adopted the ordinance in 1977. The adoption allowed the Town Council to approve or deny the abatement, but the statute only allows it to be denied if forms are not on file proving non-profit status, or title on the property has not clearly passed. We will continue to work with the town to resolve this issue.

New properties added to our list since we published our last newsletter include a 17½ acre parcel at Chatham Hill Subdivision in Portland, and a 24½ acre parcel at Meadowwood Subdivision in East Hampton.

We have also, with the help of a grant from Northeast Utilities, purchased the domain name middlesexlandtrust.org and will be rebuilding our web site.

Finally, we again had a booth at the Portland Fair, shared between our friends and colleagues, Meshomasic Hiking Club, The Nature Conservancy and Mattabesec Audubon Society. We hope you had a chance to see us and visit the booth.

Alan

P.S. Upcoming MLT activities include two hikes and a work party (see page 4 for details), and – this late-breaking news – a program on Family Lands that will take place at the Youth Center in Middlefield in the afternoon on Sunday, January 27, 2002 (please contact me for more information, 267-2799). Hope to see you there!

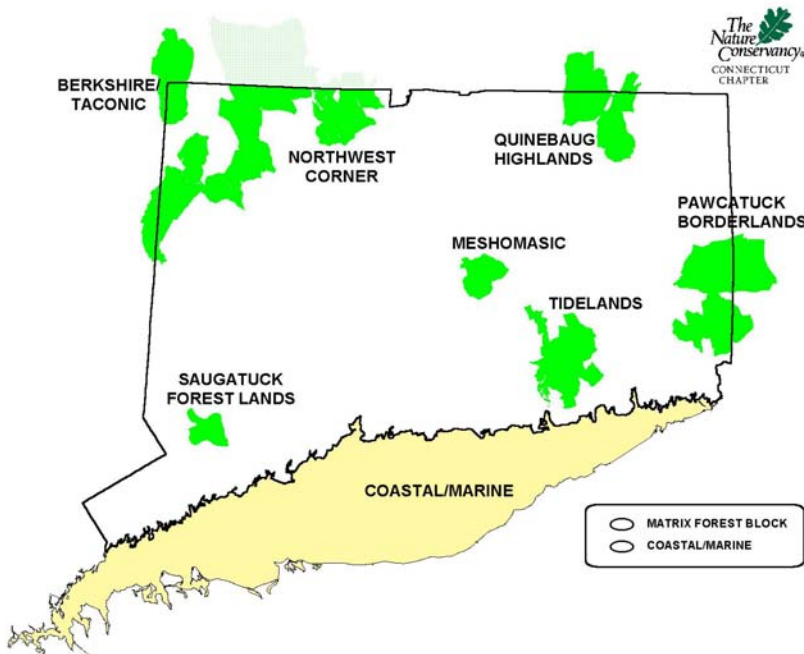


Meshomasic...a Last Great Place

I want to take this opportunity to tell members about one of Connecticut's *Last Great Places*, a program of The Nature Conservancy. Middlesex Land Trust members have long known that protecting open space in northern Middlesex County is important to their quality of life and natural heritage. But are members aware that these efforts are contributing to biodiversity on a regional, and thereby national and international scale?

The Nature Conservancy is a private, non-profit conservation organization committed to protecting plants, animals and natural communities that represent the diversity of life on earth. The Conservancy protects this *biodiversity* by protecting the lands and waters needed for the survival of a wide variety of species. Founded in 1951, the Conservancy has protected over 12 million acres of ecologically important lands and waters internationally, with nearly 30,000 of those acres right here in Connecticut.

The Conservancy makes hard choices every day about which areas are most important to protect to fulfill its mission. Its conservation biologists, in analyzing and comparing natural features within an ecological region



stretching from southern Maine to northern Virginia, identified several large contiguous forests of a minimum of 15,000 acres, a size scientists believe can sustain healthy populations of native plants and animals and recover effectively from natural disturbances such as hurricanes. With minimal fragmenting features, such as major roads or utilities, these areas are expected to support species particularly dependent upon forest interior, such as migrating songbirds, or species that have large home range and forest requirements, such as bobcat, fisher and black bear. Six of these large contiguous forest areas overlap within Connecticut and one occurs in central Connecticut – including portions of Portland and East Hampton here in northern Middlesex County – the Meshomasic Forest Landscape, one of Connecticut's Last Great Places.

The Meshomasic Forest Landscape, a project of The Nature Conservancy, spans seven towns in three counties from Portland's Great Hill Pond to Manchester's Case Mountain. Among the important natural features of the area are Meshomasic State Forest, New England's oldest state forest, Gay City State Park, Meshomasic (an Indian word meaning the place of many snakes) and Kongsicut Mountain as well as the watersheds of the Connecticut River, Wangunk Meadows and the Salmon River. The Shenipsit Trail, Connecticut Forest and Park Association's blue blaze trail, runs through the heart of this area providing a passive recreational opportunity for people to experience and appreciate the depths of the forest.

From nesting, forage and cover for wildlife to water quantity and quality in watersheds, scenic vistas and recreational opportunities to local home grown forest and farm products, Meshomasic harbors many ecological values and traditional land uses important to the community and biodiversity on an ecoregional scale. Sustaining these values and traditional uses is a particular challenge because the Meshomasic Forest Landscape is in a rapidly growing area with a high demand for residential housing and infrastructure. The Conservancy hopes to promote land conservation and good stewardship practices, while discouraging incompatible subdivision and development within sensitive areas. Land protection measures, such as outright purchase and conservation easements, are two of many conservation options available to landowners who wish to conserve their lands for future generations. The Conservancy works with public and private partners, including towns, state and federal agencies, land trusts and other organizations and individuals, to protect this Last Great Place. As members of the Middlesex Land Trust, your support, awareness and community involvement helps tremendously. Thank you.

For more information about this program, please contact Katherine Doak Winslow, Meshomasic Conservation Program Manager, at 860/344-0716 ext. 316 or kdoak@tnc.org.

Upcoming MLT Activities



Mica Ledges/Mt. Pisgah in Durham, Sunday, January 13, 2002. Meet at 10 AM at the Durham Town Hall. This 6 mile trek over two of Durham's most notable hills will feature dramatic views from the summits of the surrounding countryside. Bring a beverage and lunch/snack. Contact John LeShane at 342-0658 for more information.



Central Meshomasic-Kongscut to the old Ten Curves Highway in Cobalt, Sunday, February 24, 2002. Meet at 8:30 AM at the commuter parking lot, junction of Rtes 16 and 66 in Cobalt. This will be a strenuous 8 mile hike/bushwhack in the oldest state forest in New England. Proper dress, including hiking boots, and good condition necessary. Bring a beverage and lunch/snack. Contact John LeShane at 342-0658 for more information.



Work Party in East Hampton (site to be determined), Saturday, March 23, 2002. Meet at 9 AM at the junction of Rtes 16 and 66 near Cobalt. Bring tools for clearing a trail. Contact John LeShane at 342-0658 for more information.

The Middlesex Landscape Contributors:

Editor/Layout/Design: Jane Brawerman and Joyce Powzyk
Articles: Alan Hurst, Doug Bonoff, Katherine Doak Winslow
Photograph: Tom Wells

The Middlesex Land Trust Membership Application

Name(s) _____
Address _____

Phone _____

- This is an address change
- Annual Membership..... \$10
 Sustaining Membership.....\$35
 Patron Membership.....\$100
 Life Membership\$1000
- I would like to learn more about donating land or conservation easements.
- I would like to donate time.
- Stewardship Fund \$ _____

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