

The MIDDLESEX LANDSCAPE

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

Volume 17, No. 3

The Middlesex Land Trust, Inc.

Fall 2005

Boy Scouts Improve Sellew Preserve Public Access

The Middlesex Land Trust has hosted two projects for Eagle Scout candidates from Troop 8 in East Hampton at our Sellew Preserve recently. Our sincere thanks go out to the scouts for assisting us in our efforts to improve the preserve for public access.

During the summer months of 2005, scout David Bailey implemented his Eagle Project at the end of Dogwood Drive. The cul-de-sac landing at the entrance to the preserve was formerly subject to dumping of brush and debris, and retained large puddles during wet weather. After acquiring donations of equipment and materials, David cleared the debris, graded the landing to restore the original drainage channels, and laid crushed stone. His project also included building and installing a signboard to identify the property.

Scout Alex Long has renewed efforts to build a bridge across Flat Brook, connecting the Sellew Preserve with the Airline Trail linear park. The bridge will be constructed as a sub-span truss with

old utility poles and steel cable. Troop 8 members will assist Alex with the bridge construction during the winter months, and the bridge should be ready for use by late Spring 2006.



The new Sellew Preserve signboard, constructed and installed by Eagle Scout candidate David Bailey from East Hampton.



We Have a Letterbox!

We have a letterbox? Yes, we do. What is that? Well, it's a pastime, a hobby, a treasure hunt and a way to enjoy the outdoors. And yes, it's also a box. It's hidden at our Bay Road property in East Hampton.

Here's how it works. Linda Hincks and her children placed a small Tupperware box at the preserve filled with your treasure: a notebook, pencil, stamp and ink pad. They wrote detailed instructions on how to follow in their footsteps, so others can find the hidden treasure. You in turn will need a notebook and a stamp. You may also want your own inkpad and pen or pencil. Now we exchange treasure. You place a copy of your stamp in the book provided and leave us a nice message, and then a copy of our stamp goes in your book.

Then, you can go out and collect more! Our box is one of 123 listed in Middlesex County alone. Keep an eye on our website for more information about future boxes placed on our parcels.

The MLT letterbox was placed in late September, and since then about one person or group has visited it every weekend. None of the visitors have been MLT members and all of them have been very complimentary of our preserve. It's a nice little property, especially in the fall when you can see Lake Pocotopaug through the thinning leaves. Come see for yourself.

(Continued on page 4)

The Middlesex Land Trust, Inc. is a nonprofit organization whose mission is to preserve open space in northern Middlesex County (Durham, Middlefield, Middletown, Cromwell, Portland and East Hampton).

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The Chairpersons' Corner

Dear MLT Members:

Once again it seems we have witnessed the awesome power of mother nature. We are told it has been the busiest hurricane season on record, with a greater number of large storms, of greater intensity, than experienced since recordkeeping began. The alphabet has been exhausted naming them, so we have now resorted to the Greek alphabet for new names. A major U.S. city was nearly fully inundated with water, and suffered major damage, with substantial loss of life. For the first time, the general public as a whole has been made aware of what meteorologists, climatologists, wetlands specialists and others in the scientific community have been saying for years, namely that intensive coastal development with its concomitant loss of wetlands, is setting us up for repeated disasters – ecological, economic and human.

Despite the losses and the suffering, perhaps this is an opportunity – an opportunity to have a meaningful public discourse at all levels, including within and outside of government, about the environmental and societal consequences of development that is driven almost exclusively by human wants and desires and the almighty dollar. Turning that barrier island into beachfront housing, damming or draining that cleansing coastal wetland buffer, indeed, building an entire city below sea level, have their consequences, and if you favor the protection of private developed property, the consequences are not pretty. The environmental degradation that ensues, while perhaps not immediately apparent, will, eventually and inevitably, exact payback.

Your Middlesex Land Trust is all about protecting these environmentally sensitive resources – wetlands, watersheds, ridgelines and other habitat – and the biological diversity that comes with them. While the aesthetic benefits of protecting these lands are easily apparent to the public at large, the economic and lifestyle benefits are sometimes less so. But Mother Nature is speaking to us all, and we all need to listen. Your MLT and its supporters are listening. Our job is to encourage others to join as “active listeners,” and turn that listening into land protection.

Ralph and Diane



MLT Completes Trail Linking Three Preserves

In mid-October, four Land Trust trail builders completed the connection between three of our preserves on the western boundary of Portland, a project long in the planning stages. Starting from the newly-acquired 80 acre Palmer Preserve, we ripped and cut Japanese barberry, the preferred species of abandoned pastures, on our way from the big field off Middle Haddam Road to its junction with the Taylor Brook Preserve on Great Hill Pond Brook and the border with East Hampton. North of the Taylor Brook Preserve, we crossed Middle Haddam Road onto a right-of-way along the brook, passing under the great granite conduit below the old Airline Railroad bed.

Our trail continues upstream along the brook to the 6-acre Okumsett Preserve, obtained several years ago as part of a subdivision set-aside. Here the trail passes beneath a hemlock stand damaged by the Woolly Adelgid blight but still shading the valley with its dark green foliage. From the north edge of the preserve, the majestic Glen Falls can be glimpsed through the foliage, a 20-foot tall cascade on private property.

The planned trail will ascend the slope and circle back to a 20-foot wide right of way and its junction with Cote Lane cul-de-sac. A short road walk to Breezy Corner Road will complete the hike route and return the walker to the Palmer Preserve. On November 19, the Meshomasic Hiking Club christened the trail with a 5-mile hike over the new route, enjoyed by all.



The majestic 20-foot cascade of Glen Falls can be viewed at the north edge of the Okumsett Preserve from our new trail.

2006 MIDDLESEX LAND TRUST MEMBERSHIP FORM

YES—I would like to help protect open space in northern Middlesex County in 2006!

Name(s) _____

Address _____

Phone _____

E-Mail _____

Renewal New membership

Individual Membership..... \$20

Sustaining Membership.....\$35

Patron Membership.....\$100

Guarantor Membership\$250

I would like to give an additional donation for: land acquisition \$_____ land stewardship \$_____

I would like to donate appreciated stock.

I would like to learn more about donating land or conservation easements.

I would like to donate time for stewardship, fundraising or office work: please specify _____

I would like to give a gift membership: Name _____ Address _____

Please make checks payable to: The Middlesex Land Trust, and mail to
deKoven House, 27 Washington Street, Middletown, CT 06457

*The Middlesex Land Trust is a 501(c)(3) organization so your dues & contributions are tax deductible
Don't forget your employer's matching gift form! Thank you for your support!*

Organic Farming Project Update

The growing season is over for this year and it's time to take a look at how the organic garden project on the South Farms Preserve fared. According to local farmer, Dan Schmitz, weather and wildlife took a toll on the crops, planted in two plots at South Farms in Middletown. The deer were very fond of almost everything except for the radishes and one variety of sunflowers, and heavy rain washed out some of the other plantings, including the winter wheat, rye and spelt. Regardless, Mr. Schmitz obtained healthy produce using environmentally friendly methods and is pleased with the outcome.

Mr. Schmitz, who reported to the Board in November, kept a record of the entire season in notes and photographs and will use the information to figure out how best to address challenges for an improved organic garden in the future. In the off-season Mr. Schmitz will assemble research material and create a report on the organic garden.

If anyone has any questions or would like to learn more about this project, please contact the MLT office at 343-7537.

We Have a Letterbox (*cont. from page 1*)

You can find our instructions below, on the MLT website, or at Letterboxing.org.

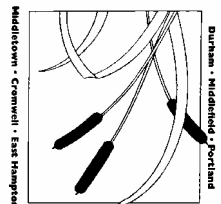
From Rte 66 in East Hampton, turn onto North Main St. This will take you behind Lake Pocotopaug. North Main becomes Lake Drive. When you can no longer see the lake, turn right onto Spellman's Point. Then take the first left onto Bay Rd. Across from a brick house with a two-car garage is a small opening where you will begin.

At the first intersection, go right. The trail is marked with orange blazes. You will pass a natural amphitheater—a lovely place for an impromptu picnic. At the next intersection, go left (away from the road). Find the first orange blaze. On your right is a very large rock. The backside of the rock is leaning on a beech tree. Nearby is a much smaller rock, just the right size for sitting. And under it is the box.

This preserve is just one of many lands held in trust by the Middlesex Land Trust. It is a pleasant size for exploring with kids and dogs and a quiet place for birding. In the spring you can find one or two vernal pools - and the occupying frogs. The walk is made up of mostly gentle ups and downs.

PRINTED ON RECYCLED PAPER

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