

**MIDDLESEX**



**LAND TRUST**

# *The* MIDDLESEX LANDSCAPE

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

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The Middlesex Land Trust, Inc.

Fall 2011

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## **PINE BROOK FALLS PRESERVE JOINS THE SILVIO O. CONTE WILDLIFE REFUGE**

November 9, 2011 marked a first for the Middlesex Land Trust in its 24 year history – we closed on a property, but we didn't buy it. We sold it!

The Pine Brook Falls Preserve now has a new home with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, as part of the expanding Salmon River Division of the Silvio O. Conte National Fish and Wildlife Refuge. This helps both the Middlesex Land Trust and The Nature Conservancy to free up funding for additional conservation work, while also ensuring continued protection of this property for future generations.

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) first approached the Land Trust on partnering with them to purchase Pine Brook Falls in the fall of 2002, with our purchase from TNC occurring in 2007 a few years after they bought the property. TNC retained a conservation easement on the property at that time.

This sale to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service continues the momentum in the Refuge. It is the second parcel added to the Salmon River Division of the Refuge, joining the 290 acre Johnson parcel that USF&W purchased in 2009 from The Nature Conservancy and the Town of Haddam. Consolidating parcels under Fish & Wildlife will allow for more comprehensive professional management of the area in support of specific conservation goals. Already this summer, an assessment of invasive plant species was conducted by a team of specialists.

Our donors can be proud of their role in the Middlesex Land Trust's participation in this collaboration, and in other efforts in the Pine Brook corridor where we still hold over one hundred acres in the Kruger Farm, the Pine Brook Markham, and Pine Brook (Chestnut Hill Rd) Preserves. With your continued support we look forward to more successes along Pine Brook.



Pine Brook below the Falls

The Middlesex Land Trust Inc. is a non-profit 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 CHAIRMAN'S CORNER

As we Americans struggle on the local, state and federal levels with budget shortfalls resulting from increasing demands and lower tax revenues during this economic downturn, it is particularly worthwhile to remember what a bargain open space and preserved landscapes are – on so many levels.

First, preserved open spaces owned by federal, state or local governments generally require little if any government expenditure to maintain their inestimable value to the citizens they serve. Perhaps some signage, minimal trail maintenance and monitoring is in order if the site provides hiking and other passive recreational opportunities. In fact, often these open spaces have little if anything in the way of public “improvements” – as if Mother Nature, left untouched, needed improving! Protecting such landscapes from residential development, which we know costs local governments more in public expenditures than it produces in taxes, particularly given the costs of public education, in and of itself helps to restrain the growth in government expenditures and thus taxes. Trees and stone walls don't require schooling, and only quite limited police and fire protection. Moreover, open spaces held by private non-profits like the Middlesex Land Trust cost governments even less, since dedicated volunteers maintain the trails and signage, and do the monitoring as needed.

In pinched economic times, preserved open spaces also offer wonderful recreational and enrichment opportunities for hiking, exploring, birding, photography, orienteering — the list goes. And the price is right: it's free! MLT preserves are open to the public. The only cost is that of time well spent. Almost all other recreational activities have associated costs, whether you are going to the movies, eating out, hitting a bucket of balls at the driving range or taking in a sporting event.

So preserving open spaces isn't just good for the planet, the environment and your health and well-being — although it is surely that — it's good for your wallet too. Thank you for your continuing support as we seek to expand protected open space in your neck of the woods. The more the MLT succeeds in its mission, the better off we all will be.

Ralph Urban  
Chairman

*Think Globally – Act Locally*

## HURRICANE IRENE AND THE HALLOWEEN STORM

The stewardship folks of the Land Trust have been busy cleaning up from Hurricane Irene's recent path of destruction and the early snowstorm that took down so many trees.

On our diminutive 3-acre Marino Preserve in Middletown off Main Street Extension three downed trees were cut and removed from the 1/4 mile trail loop as well as a whole bunch of garbage left by unthinking people. Despite its proximity to downtown Middletown, the preserve offers a peaceful isolation along tranquil Sumner Creek.

On the 39-acre Harris Preserve, we reopened the entrance off of Wilcox Road which had grown in from lack of pedestrian use. The neighbors, however, have been keeping the interior trails open on this grassland preserve which has been undergoing a slow metamorphosis into an old field cedar forest - making it a great place to stroll and bird watch.

That same day, we visited the Kelley and Okumsett Preserves in Portland to unblock the entry trail off Middle Haddam Road. Just before the great granite conduit where Great Hill Pond Brook flows under the Airline Railroad bed, we cleared a large fallen tree. We also cleared the whole trail of hemlocks killed by the wooly adelgid infestation and downed by one of the recent storms. While a total of only 8 acres, the two preserves create a wonderful one-mile corridor along the brook and up to the Cote Lane cul de sac. From the north end of Okumsett, the spectacular 20-foot high Glens Falls can be viewed just off the preserve.

At our 40-acre Highland Pond Preserve, we have been doing a multitude of projects. The 40-foot bridge span that we finished this Summer has been painted with a redwood stain making it noticeable and very attractive. The dam has been cleared (again) of beaver debris and the pile of wood awaits our next campfire to enjoy and get rid of at the same time. Lastly, the trail has all been cleared and snipped. The Great Hickory loop trail offers the tree hugger a visit to the third largest bitternut hickory in Connecticut. Any members who are interested in volunteering are invited to join us on our work parties

## STEWARDSHIP COMMITTEE NEEDS VOLUNTEERS

With 60 preserves and over 800 acres, our stewardship volunteers have discovered that keeping up with all the required preserve work is a tough but rewarding job. The Middlesex Land Trust is looking for a 'few good men and women' that would like to get sweaty and play in the woods, making and maintaining trails, marking boundaries, building bridges, controlling erosion, and any number of other sundry fun things to do. We call them work parties but we try to think of them as 'play parties' and a chance to bond with nature for 3-4 hours at a time. All that is required is a little energy and willingness to take a walk in the woods and do a little work at the same time.

If you think that this might be your cup of tea, contact John LeShane at (860) 342-0658 or Doug Bonoff at (860) 267-6867. Or drop an email to [info@middlesex-landtrust.org](mailto:info@middlesex-landtrust.org) and let us know that you are willing to help.

## A GREAT IDEA FOR A PRESERVE HIKE.

With the recent completion of the Airline Trail from the Cranberry Bog on Smith Street easterly to downtown East Hampton, we now have a great new hike to one of our favorite preserves. The Middlesex Land Trust in cooperation with the Meshomasic Hiking Club will be offering this hike next summer. Here's what we'll do: On a mild midsummer Friday, we will drive to the historic and scenic East Hampton Center and park at the municipal lot right beside Main Street Pizza. Gathering there, the troop of hikers will then head towards Route 66 but turn immediately onto Walnut Street. One more turn onto the next side street will bring us to the new trailhead on the left, less than a quarter mile from the parking lot.

Walking a half a mile through a large earthen cut to the cranberry bog and continuing past it, we will enjoy a babbling brook on the left and a lily-filled pond on the right. There you will also find a nice picnic table for rest and reflection. Soon after we will reach the orange trail on our right, the easternmost entrance to the land trust's 40-acre Sellev

## A GREAT IDEA CONTINUED

Preserve. Ascending a short steep slope we surmount the hardest section of an otherwise gently hilly trail system. A side trail there will take us out to the top of the 20-foot high wall created by the blasted out 1870 rail bed that formed a manmade gorge which now (140 years later) appears quite natural.

Back to the main trail, a one mile loop will take us around the preserve on an old "highway," passing small brooks and through a crooked laurel forest to a primitive campsite, then past a large vernal pool and finally, to the edge of a great slope. This looks down onto a private pond before descending to a brook with cascades. Once back onto the rail trail an extended walk could be taken to the Rappallo Viaduct where the raised bed looks down onto a beaver pond. If we are really feeling energetic and want to hike almost 10 total miles, we could continue to the Great Lyman Viaduct with its commanding views 135 feet above the Dickerson Creek valley. Expecting we will be hungry from all the exertion, however, we plan to turn immediately to the left and walk the mile and a half back to town where we will gorge ourselves on a well-earned thick crust pizza and beer! Look for it in the spring newsletter!

### THE BRIDGE AT HIGHLAND POND

The 50-foot long donated telephone poles lay on the ground just off Bell Street for a full year as the Stewardship Committee deliberated on how to move them the 1/4 mile to the brook crossing. When Doctor Gordon owned the property in the 60's there was a bridge over the stream, but it had long since rotted away.

Two years ago the old trolley line beside the pond became the home of the rerouted Mattabasset Blue Trail, and was also named the New England National Scenic Trail, further increasing the need for a new bridge. So the Stewardship Committee made a plan and took action. In the early Spring, the committee concluded that heavy equipment was going to be needed. With Arthur Johnson, the stewardship committee's 'jack of all trades' oper-

ating the back hoe, we hauled the poles down the abandoned rail bed and with a combination of finesse and brute force – dropped them into place.



It was quite an undertaking, and the jockeying into place of these substantial supporting beams was quite a success. Hand rails and decking were installed later in the summer, and then a coat of redwood stain in the early fall finished the project.

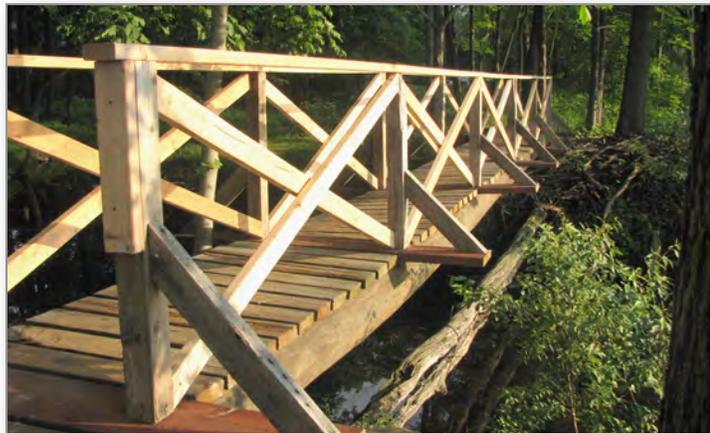


Visitors can now take a nice one-mile walk around the pond on the orange-blazed trail. The pond is home to beaver and a family of mute swans as

**THE BRIDGE** CONTINUED

well as the ducks and geese that regularly fly in and out throughout the year. As reported by the neighbors, there is also a huge three-foot snapping turtle lurking in the weedy waters.

About three years we also discovered that we have the third largest bitternut hickory in the state on the south side of the pond. Next fall we are planning to have an end-of-the-work-party-year campfire, to be called the "Beaverbranch Boilup," (we burn up the accumulated beaver sticks while boiling water for tea, a Newfoundland custom). Look for it in the newsletter and come join us!



Save The Date!

**Connecticut Land Conservation Council**

2012 Annual Land Conservation Conference

**March 24, 2012 -**

Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT  
9AM-4PM

A full day of workshops and networking for those involved in land conservation.



**2011 Middlesex Land Trust Donation Form**

Yes—I would like to help protect open space in northern Middlesex County in 2011!

I would like to:

give a donation in the amount of \$ \_\_\_\_\_

give an additional donation for:

Land Acquisition \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Stewardship \$ \_\_\_\_\_

donate appreciated stock

learn more about donating land or conservation easements

Donate time for  stewardship,  fundraising or  office work:

Name(s) \_\_\_\_\_

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Please make checks payable to The Middlesex Land Trust,  
Mail to:

The Middlesex Land Trust,  
deKoven House  
27 Washington Street  
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*The Middlesex Land Trust is a 501(c)(3) organization so your dues & contributions are tax deductible*

## DONATIONS FOR A PASSING MEMBER

Chuck Bernstein, long time member of the Land Trust passed away in August of this year. He and his wife Dorothy kindly asked that folks wishing to honor his life do so by donating to the Middlesex Land Trust.

We have received several donations in his name and would like to thank the Bernstein family for their generosity. Chuck was a longtime supporter and lover of the environment. As a member of the Meshomasic Hiking Club he attended over 300 hikes. He often participated in work parties building and maintaining trails on land trust preserves.

As my closest personal friend, I know how committed he was to the land trust mission. He will be sorely missed by the environmental community.

*by John LeShane*

## FRIENDS OF SALMON RIVER

In conjunction with the arrival of The Silvio Conte National Fish & Wildlife Refuge as a land owner in the Salmon River Watershed, and the establishment of the Salmon River Division of the Conte Refuge a group called Friends of the Salmon River Division has been formed.

Friends groups provide an official channel for communication between local residents and the USFWS Refuges throughout the country. Four Years ago Shelley Green of the Nature Conservancy had already formed the Salmon River Watershed Partnership among the ten towns and other stakeholders and now they wear a second hat as the nucleus of the Friends of the Salmon River Division.

MLT Vice-Chairman Stuart Winquist and long-time MLT supporter and collaborator Jim McHutchison are both members of the Salmon River Partnership Steering Committee. Jim will represent the Friends of Salmon River Division to the Friends of Conte Executive Committee. This will provide the local stakeholders in the Salmon River watershed a direct, official channel for input into the Silvio O. Conte planning processes and to tap resources available through US Fish and Wildlife.

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