



## STONINGTON LAND TRUST TO PURCHASE THE GRANDE PROPERTY

Stonington Land Trust saw an opportunity to buy a parcel of land that adjoins our Anguilla Brook Preserve property. It will be named "The Grande Tract of the Anguilla Brook Preserve."

SLT's land acquisition criteria is to protect streambelts, farms & woodlands, historic sites and stonewalls and iconic locations. The Anguilla Brook watershed has been a major focus for SLT land acquisition and The Grand Tract brings SLT's total acreage in this streambelt to 232 acres. Stonington's streambelts provide both drinking water and drainage. These streambelts are natural wildlife corridors and are logical greenbelts that divide the town roughly into quarters.

The 18 acre parcel with SLT's adjoining Anguilla Brook Preserve will now bring the total contiguous land to 50 acres. Most wildlife biologists consider 50 acres of woodland preserve to be a minimum size for the preservation of woodland bird species. With this property the preserve will now protect both sides of Anguilla Brook for nearly one thousand feet.



*Ed Haberek joins SLT to celebrate the Grande acquisition*



*SLT's North Anguilla Road clean up day*





Dear Friends,

The year 2011 has been very good for the Stonington Land Trust. We have added to our property holdings, improved our financial condition, established a vibrant membership base and strengthened our board of directors.

During the year the SLT was asked to join with local, state and federal organizations to finalized the purchase of the Crowley property on Palmer Neck Road. We reported on this potential acquisition last year and were honored to be part of such a collaborative effort.

The SLT has executed a contract to acquire the 18 acre Grande property on North Anguilla Road. This property abuts our 32 acre Anguilla Brook preserve property, giving us a total of 50 acres and adequate road frontage and space for parking. We hope to put trails on this property so that it can be open to the public. Together with other properties we hold, we are now preserving more than 230 acres in this important streambelt area.



Our financial condition continued to strengthen with our members' equity increasing by 25%. This is due to our careful management of resources and to the generous support of our members. We value our landholdings at cost, or in the case of donated property at a nominal value of \$1 per acre.

Our membership rolls continue to be very strong. More than 90% of our members renewed during the year and we were most gratified with the number of new members who joined during the year.

Our board of directors honored Dora Hill, who retired this year. Dora had been a director since our founding and she has been our treasurer for the last two years. We were fortunate to have Harry Martin volunteer to be our new treasurer and honored to have Anne Page become our secretary. We were extremely pleased that Bill Lyman joined our board. He has been an active member of the Land Trust since our founding and will help to steward our growing portfolio of properties.

Through the generosity of Nick and Happy Smith we were able to hold our annual meeting at the Stonington Vineyards. It was a delightful setting and Nick & Happy contributed free wine for all members who attended.

Our guest speaker for the event was Whit Davis, the dean of conservation in Stonington, who gave us a fascinating view of the history of conservation in town.

As we look to the 2012 year, we are filled with optimism. There are several more interesting properties that we have under consideration and we hope to close on some of them.

Please take a moment now to send in your membership renewal form, which is enclosed.

Sincerely,  
*Jim Smith*







## CROWLEY ACQUISITION

The Stonington Land Trust works in partnership with local, state and federal agencies to accomplish land acquisition goals. SLT was asked by The Connecticut Department of Energy & Environmental Protection (DEEP) to join with other organizations to acquire a 16-acre parcel of coastal grassland on Wequetequock Cove in Stonington.

The \$1,512,500 purchase price of the property was 50% funded by a grant through the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) Grassland Reserve Program. A key to obtaining the NRCS funds was a major commitment (\$100,000) from Stonington's Conservation Commission's Open Space Fund, the support of First Selectman, Ed Haberek and the commitment of funds from the two land trusts, Stonington Land Trust and Avalonia Land Trust.

The DEEP states "This acquisition permanently protects 16 acres of waterfront coastal grassland known to provide breeding habitat for grassland dependent birds including Bobolink, a State-designated species of special concern. The site's grassland field also includes the fringes of a 21-acre saltmarsh that is slowly migrating upland into the fields in response to sea-level rise in Fishers Island Sound. This marsh is part of a larger 350 acre tidal marsh complex extending from the Pawcatuck River to Wequetequock Cove. The marsh provides critical nesting habitat for the Saltmarsh sparrow, a species of special concern that has been targeted as a conservation priority due to the loss of its breeding habitat within the saltmarshes of the Northeastern United States."

The acquisition expands what is now a 2.4-mile corridor of contiguous protected open space extending from the Pawcatuck River on the Rhode Island border to Wequetequock Cove including the State of Connecticut's Barn Island Wildlife Management Area, Connecticut's largest and most ecologically significant coastal wildlife management area.

"The acquisition borders Wequetequock Cove, which is the least developed cove on Long Island Sound still largely in private ownership and within one of the most rapidly developing segments of Long Island Sound's coastline," said Daniel Esty, Commissioner of the DEEP. "The Barn Island area is unique in the southern New England bird conservation area because it is part of a large area of un-fragmented coastal forest much of which is in conservation ownership."

"Connecticut's coastal municipalities are about 50% more developed than the state's average," said Jay T. Mar, State Conservationist for the USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service. "The opportunities for coastal grassland conservation along a rapidly developing segment of our state's coastline are rare. Protection of lands along this estuary requires complex working partnerships involving stakeholders at all levels of government, as well as the conservation interests of private landowners," he said.

*(Portions excerpted from DEEP Press Release)*



## OFFICERS

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## Resident Farmer: Whit Davis, A Conservationist

*Excerpted story & photos by Alexis Ann, The Resident*

On a chilly December 8th, 2010 John "Whit" Davis, a local farmer and long time conservationist, was honored by numerous state and local dignitaries for a lifetime of dedication to land and resource conservation in a ceremony held outdoors at his farm, the Stanton-Davis Farm, Pawcatuck, Connecticut. Sponsored by the Stonington Conservation Commission and the Stonington Land Trust, the ceremony included the dedication of a native white oak tree, the presentation of a proclamation from the CT General Assembly, reminiscences from attendees and spirited comments from Whit with his wife, Velora, at his side.

Whit's waterfront farmland tract of more than 400 acres is one of the last and oldest working farms in the state. It was founded in 1652 by Thomas Stanton, one of the founders of Stonington. For almost 370 years since then, the farm has been actively worked by 12 generations. Whit, a descendant of the Stantons, is the current overseer and devoted protector of this remarkable natural resource. A modest man, Whit didn't understand what all the fuss was about. "I still don't see what all the hullabaloo is about... I'm just a country boy, just a farmer."

Stanton Simm, Conservation Commission Chairman, quickly set the record straight by outlining Whit's amazing lifetime achievements dedicated to conservation efforts. Whit then regaled those assembled with tales related to his farm and his life journey to protect precious natural resources. He showed off an ear of his farm's Johnny Cake corn, making it clear that it is the same strain of corn given to Thomas Stanton by the Native Americans and it has been continuously on the land for 1,000 years. Whit stated that "It's not a newfangled, genetically modified corn."



### ***A Sturdy White Oak for a Sturdy Yankee***

*Whit and his wife, Velora, touch the newly-planted white oak with dignitaries gathered in his honor.*

*(l-r) Stanton Simm, Chairman, Stonington Conservation Commission and Stonington Land Trust, Whit Davis, Rep. Diana Urban, Jim Spellman, Sr., former Stonington First Selectman, Stonington Selectman George Crouse, Velora Davis and Stonington First Selectman Ed Haberek*

Then Whit fired a parting shot. "We lost 9,000 acres of farmland in Connecticut last year. If that continues for the next ten years, it's 90,000 acres. You people with computers, figure it out. How many tons of potatoes, sweet corn, apples, and vegetables can you grow on 90,000 acres? Somebody's got to do some thinking about that and do something. Somebody's got to have a little foresight around here."

Whit served for 25 years on the inland wetlands and conservation commission; he preserved his waterfront farm with a 258 acre conservation easement so it can never be developed; he donated 10-acres of the farm's Continental Marsh to the Avalonia Land Conservancy, Inc. Stanton explained why this ceremony was happening so late in the year. "We wanted to have this ceremony earlier, but we looked everywhere for a Connecticut White Oak. They're only dug in spring, not the fall. It was important to Locate a white oak because it's Whit's favorite tree and it's a sturdy old Yankee, like Whit."

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