

GIFTS EXPAND LAND TRUST'S HOLDINGS IN STONINGTON

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STONINGTON - Two parts of an ancient Native American ceremonial ground are on their way to a reunion after a 100-year separation.

The Stonington Land Trust acquired a 3.25-acre property on Osbrook Point Road in December that was once part of the adjacent Stanton-Davis Farm. The trust also recently acquired an option to buy a conservation easement on a 168-acre piece of the farm for \$2 million. Both pieces of land were once part of a Native American ceremonial ground.

The smaller site, formerly part of the Stanton-Davis Farm, was sold in 1903 by the grandfather of John "Whit" Davis, who resides on the farm today. Owner Martha Gilbert, who could not be reached for comment, donated the property to the land trust.

"As soon as she heard about the Davis Farm," said land trust President James S. Smith, "she wanted to complement the purchase with a gift."

"It was a very, very generous gift," said Smith.

The acquisition is one of two donations received by the five-year-old land trust in December. The other was property, also in Pawcatuck, at the intersection of Mary Hall and Greenhaven roads. That 18-acre property was donated to the land trust by Cherenzia Excavation, which is building a 64-unit condominium project on the 46-acre property, after giving 18 acres to the land trust and 10 acres to the town as dedicated open space.

Stanton Simm, the land trust's vice president of land acquisition, said he expects the land trust will receive the 10 acres as well, bringing the total donation to 28 acres. The property includes a six-acre vegetable farm that is expected to remain active. It has interesting geology, Simm said, as well as existing trails that will be open to the public.

Assuming the purchase of the Stanton-Davis Farm easement goes through — Smith said the land trust has three years to raise the \$2 million — the land trust will own outright or have easements for 500 acres in various parts of Stonington.

Several of the properties are being prepared for limited public access, mostly for guided walks. In the spring, Simm said there will be a walk on the 30-acre Grandview Road parcel, and another on a 50-acre lot on North Anguilla Road, just north of the Little League field. The latter property has half an acre of Anguilla Brook frontage, he said.

There will also be a Jan. 6 walk on the Thomas Minor Wildlife Preserve, an 82-acre property on Taugwonk Road that the land trust bought in October. The walk, led by naturalist and ornithologist Bob DeWire, will begin at 1 p.m. As part of a search for signs of wildlife in winter, walkers will enter woodlands that have been undisturbed for 50 years, and are slowly reverting to forest.

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