

CANTON LAND CONSERVATION TRUST, INC.

Fall 2009
Newsletter

President's Letter: How Should We Use the Land?

The Mission of the Canton Land Conservation Trust is to acquire, preserve, and protect land of scenic, natural or historic value within the Town of Canton; to maintain this land and its plant and animal life using the best conservation, wildlife habitat, and forestry practices available; and to promote public awareness, understanding, and enjoyment of the land.

What uses are appropriate for the land that belongs to the Canton Land Conservation Trust? This is an important question as we have become one of the largest landowners in town, with over 1,800 acres under management. The uses we undertake or permit define an important part of the wild land in Canton.

In general, we have managed the land by building and maintaining hiking trails, and by keeping all our owned properties open to the public for passive recreation. We have considered hiking, cross-country skiing, dog walking and horseback riding to be acceptable activities, while we have discouraged wheeled traffic.

CLCT owns a few properties with special considerations: two have houses (which we maintain and rent to tenants), one has an old cabin that we use for overnight activities for scouts and similar groups by reservation. We grow Christmas trees on a property that was given to us many years ago with the provision that we maintain the trees, and we permit hunting on one property that was given to us with the provision that we permit the people who hunted there when it was privately held to continue to do so.

We have had two forestry operations where we sold timber under the supervision of a licensed forester. These were controversial. Some thought that the Land Trust should be a no-cut zone where wild processes could continue without our influence. Some thought forestry was an acceptable use, but questioned which parcels should be cut.

Others felt that proper forest management would yield greater diversity and more varied wildlife habitat, and would promote the health of the largest trees left behind. That debate is not settled, and any future forestry operations will be considered carefully from all sides.

Recently we were approached with a request that we permit hunting on another property. This is also controversial, and the board expressed a variety of opinions.

There are a number of arguments for hunting: It is a traditional activity enjoyed by many for generations. Because of development and because some open lands have passed from private hands to conservation organizations, opportunities for hunting have declined. Experienced, licensed hunters, particularly bow hunters who hunt at close range, present little safety risk to other users of the forest, and those hunters can be among our best property stewards.

Reduction in the deer herd would be beneficial in many ways. Deer browse desirable tree seedlings, provide habitat for the ticks that transmit Lyme and other diseases, damage gardens, and interact with motor vehicles.

On the other hand, there are Land Trust Board members and others in our community who believe that hunting is not appropriate for Land Trust properties. Others are concerned about the safety and the aesthetics of hikers encountering hunters in the forest. Some others believe that wildlife should be left undisturbed.

How should we balance these ideas? What other uses for the land should we contemplate? I invite the comments and opinions of the membership. If you have opinions on these questions, please send an email to presidingofficer@cantonlandtrust.org. I'll report on the feedback I get in a future newsletter.

**TO ALL OUR 2009 CANTON LAND CONSERVATION TRUST MEMBERS,
NAMED BELOW, THANK YOU FOR YOUR DEDICATION TO PRESERVING AND
MAINTAINING THE PRECIOUS LAND THAT WE HOLD IN TRUST
FOR OUR GENERATIONS TO COME.**

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SAVE THE DATE!

The Canton Land Conservation Trust's Annual Dinner will be held on
 Tuesday, March 23, 2010.

Join us for an evening of good food, good music and great information, as we are pleased
 to have Margery Winters as our featured guest speaker. More information will follow,
 but don't forget to reserve this date in your 2010 calendar.

The Canton Land Conservation Trust Christmas Tree Farm

The Canton Land Conservation Trust received the wonderful Christmas tree farm from the Smith Family in the 1980s. The Smith Tree Farm is located on Doyle Road, which is off Ratlum Mountain Road near the Barkhamsted town line. We continue to grow Christmas trees and have expanded the fields. However, with only a limited volunteer work force we have not done as well as Dr. Smith. We need help from our members or from any other interested parties, especially those who might have experience or interest in planting, growing and pruning trees and mowing fields. We need help improving the quality and quantity of our Christmas trees. We have a one day tree sale usually the first or second Saturday in December.

We have a tree planting day in the spring scheduled for the Saturday after Arbor Day (which is the last Friday in April). Each year we plant approximately 150 trees, and Trailblazers and their parents can plant their own Christmas trees. The children paint their names on wood stakes and mark their Christmas trees so they can care for the tree throughout the years checking on growth, watering it and, with supervision, pruning and shaping it. Five to seven years later they can cut the tree for Christmas or dig and ball it to plant in their yard.

Trees that are dug and balled can be used as Christmas trees in the house and planted in your yard after Christmas. The tree should be dug a week or two before Christmas and be taken down the week between Christmas and New Years day. A hole should be dug in the yard before the ground freezes. The hole and dirt should be covered with leaves or hay to stop it from freezing. The tree can be planted during the New Year's holiday.

The Smith Christmas Tree Farm has two hiking trail heads on the property. The Charlotte Craig Trail is located in the North field behind the barn and is a beautiful loop to the top of the mountain with a lookout towards New Hartford Center. The round trip hike takes about 30 to 45 minutes. The Ted Wright trail starts about 1000 feet down Doyle Road from the Smith home and barn. It follows a very pretty brook and then climbs up a steep mountain face with another lookout near the top. The trail continues to the top of the mountain, then runs along the ridge and drops down into a valley and finally up a hillside to Breezy Hill Road. This hike has some steep climbs and takes about 1.5 to 2 hours round trip.

Anyone interested helping to manage the Tree Farm and improving our trees can contact John Pech at 693-2880 or Mike Gotaski at 693-8811.

November 1 Geology Hike and Talk

Come join us on Sunday, November 1 as we explore the beauties of the Swan Preserve on Case Street in North Canton. A hike of the area will be led by Dave Korzendorfer, President of the Bristol Gem and Mineral Club. Mr. Korzendorfer will inform hikers of the specific rocks in the North Canton area, and how they relate to the geological history of the state. Interested parties should meet at the Swan Preserve at 1:00 pm. Don't miss out on this informative and enjoyable walk through one of the Land Trust's loveliest properties.

Breezy Hill Forestry Report

The forestry operation on our Sun Wind & Woodland Preserve on Breezy Hill Road was completed this spring, and the trails are open once again. There are a few areas left to clean up that were deferred in the wet weather this spring and summer. That work will be done this fall. While many trees were removed, the remaining trees will have more room to grow. The appearance of the forest will recover from the disturbance quickly.

Trail building at Sweetheart Mountain

This past spring, I came to the Land Trust looking for an Eagle Project and, after looking at various projects, decided to build a third trail on the Sweetheart Mountain property.

In 2006, after the Land Trust received 40 acres of land stretching north of the existing property, a rough trail was outlined with ribbon, only to go unfinished for years. This trail is finally being finished, and it now includes two attached loops that branch off of the previously existing trails for hikers to use and enjoy.

So far, two work parties have met at the mountain to clear brush and define the trail, with one work party remaining to finish painting the trees and clearing any remaining brush on the trail. To date, a total of 81 man hours have been put into the project, with over 20 individuals, including many boy scouts and some land trust volunteers, assisting in various ways.

A part of the trail passes through a small area of wetland, so small split log bridges were built in some areas, along with many stone walkways.

The property was once a farm, and still contains the remnants of old farming roads, including a wide stone bridge. The path follows some of these roads.

The trail should be finished by the end of October and will open for hikers soon.

— James Solomon • Boy Scout Troop 177

Eagle Scout Project to Build Trail

Canton is a quintessential southern New England town, with a healthy combination of modern infrastructure and breathtaking natural scenery that can only be found in New England. I have been an active participant in scouting since the age of 7 and have loved every minute of it. When the time came for me to do my Eagle Scout Service Project nearly 10 years later, I wanted to do something that involved the beautiful forests in our community, and to help people enjoy the natural wonders that exist right here in town. After considering several projects, I chose to do a project involving two adjoining open space properties, one owned by the Town of Canton and one by the Canton Land Conservation Trust. In designing the project, I worked with Charlie DeWeese, who is active in both the Land Trust and the Town's Open Space Commission. My project will open up the Town's Cannon Property to the community and allow people to access and hike the pre-existing trails that are there. My project involves building a new trail on Land Trust property from Robin Drive to join a pre-existing trail on the Cannon Property. Along with providing the new access point, I will also repair of a natural spring in the north-western corner of the property along the trail to make the area more accessible and provide hikers with a viable source of drinking water, although it would be appropriate to treat the water before drinking it. My fellow scouts will help me make the trail and improve the spring. The area will provide an in-depth exposure to New England's natural habitat right here in our back yard.

— Shawn Pilares • Boy Scout Troop 177

COUGARS IN CANTON – FACT OR FICTION?

This fall, there were several reports of mountain lions seen in the vicinity of Ratlum Mountain in the northwest corner of Canton. Several of the Land Trust's larger parcels are located in this part of Town, and it seems reasonable to discuss the possibility of this large cat's presence in the area. It should be noted that, in spite of the numerous reports received annually by the State of Connecticut's Department of Environmental Protection, to date there have been no confirmed sightings of mountain lion in Connecticut. Confirmation means there have been photographs taken, or there has been concrete evidence in the form of tracks, hair or fecal samples. Alas, at this time there are no pictures, or any other documentation of mountain lions anywhere within Connecticut.

In spite of this lack of proof, the number of sightings, some from perfectly coherent individuals, some of whom claim to have seen these animals crossing roads or running through yards in broad daylight, is substantial. So, the question remains....is it possible to see mountain lions in Canton?

Let us begin with a short history of mountain lions here in the Nutmeg State. The mountain lion, eastern cougar or, as it was known here, the panther or catamount, was definitely encountered by early Connecticut settlers although it never was considered common. In 1694, Connecticut paid a bounty of twenty shillings for every individual, and by 1769, the bounty had risen to four pounds. As a result of such unregulated hunting combined with the loss of Connecticut's forest before the plow, mountain lions probably had disappeared from the state by the mid-nineteenth century according to most historians.

Yet, there are those who discount the idea that the panther ever vanished from our woodlands, and others believe that lions, like bear and moose, have gradually returned to southern New England over the past few decades. A quick perusal of various internet postings will find numerous references to recent lion sightings in Connecticut, including several video clips on YouTube. In each case, however, there is no proof and the videos turn out to be bobcat, a smaller (although impressive in its own right) relative of the catamount. Digging deeper, one can uncover web sites that espouse ownership of large cats, including mountain lions. While this may be legal in some states, it is illegal to possess mountain lions here in Connecticut. Nevertheless, in past years these animals have been confiscated by the State. Three mountain lions have been housed at The Children's Museum in West Hartford over the years, and all were taken from residents who had brought these animals into the State in spite of regulations that prohibit ownership. Excluding Florida, where an endangered population of a subspecies of mountain lion called the Florida Panther clings to survival, the mountain lion's range has been restricted to states west of the Rockies since the early 1900's. However, since 2000, more than two dozen mountain lions have been documented outside the animals' normal range including three killed in Iowa, the first animals confirmed in that state since 1867. A male killed by a train in Illinois in 2000 was the first documented specimen in that state in 135 years. Closer to home, a report of a large cat in Massachusetts's Quabbin Reservoir in 1997 reportedly included hair samples that were proven to be mountain lion through DNA analysis. Of course, there is no way to know whether this was a wild individual or one that was released from captivity. In the final analysis, is it possible that one or more cougars have frequented our Connecticut woodlands? Of course! If indeed they were cougars, where these animals may have come from is another story. At this time, the vast majority of wildlife biologists do not believe that a wild population of mountain lions exists within many hundreds of miles of Connecticut.

While cougars certainly seem to be moving eastward from their western mountains, as a breeding species they are still a long way from our borders. And yet, many biologists believe it is only a matter of time before mountain lions are definitively documented here in the northeast. While I agree with this assessment, others will disagree. There is one thing I am sure of.... that I'd like to see a cougar here in Canton....and if any Canton resident can provide proof of these animals in our area, I will be the first to congratulate them and to reconsider my opinion.

— Jay Kaplan, Director
Roaring Brook Nature Center



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FALL/WINTER 2009 CALENDAR

November 1 (Sunday)	1:00 pm	Geology talk and hike by David Korzendorfer at the Swan Preserve, Case Street
November 8 (Sunday)	1:00-3:00pm	Trailblazers event: Letterboxing at the Winsor Preserve West Simsbury Road
December 5 (Saturday)	9:00-3:00 pm	Christmas Tree Sale at Smith Tree Farm, Doyle Road
	10:00-12:00	Hike at Smith Tree Farm
January 5 (Tuesday)	6:00-9:00 pm	CLCT Fundraiser at Flatbread Pizza, The Shoppes, Canton
February 6 (Saturday)	6:00-9:00 pm	Trailblazers Full Moon Hike, Mary Conklin Preserve, Indian Hill Road
March 14 (Sunday)	1:00-3:00 pm	Trailblazers event: TBD
March 23 (Tuesday)	6:00-9:00 pm	Members Dinner, with guest speaker Margery Winters