



Wilton Land Conservation Trust

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Anthony P. Grassi
Trustee Emeritus

2006 Annual Report

The Wilton Land Conservation Trust has been working to protect open space in the Town of Wilton for 42 years. Its mission remains to promote the preservation of the natural resources of the Town. We are a private, nonprofit trust whose members support its efforts through charitable donations and field work. The Land Trust now owns or holds conservation easements on 100 properties totaling more than 700 acres. We are pleased to report the following highlights of our activities in the past year.

Protection: The Land Trust celebrated two major preservation accomplishments this year, one a conservation easement on a highly visible property in south Wilton, the other reaffirmation of the Trust's plans to restore meadows in a Town park.

The Annual Town Meeting on May 2 voted convincingly in favor of the Town spending \$2 million for a conservation easement on the 15.7-acre Offinger Farm on Chestnut Hill. The Land Trust and Town are co-owners of the easement. The Offinger family continues to own the property, will maintain its farming operation, which has produced vegetables, flower and honey since 1929, and will retain its familiar farm stand at 250 Chestnut Hill Road. Additional farming structures may be built by the family on a small part of the parcel abutting the family's home that is not part of the easement. The property is of cultural significance to Wilton, as it is one of the last three private operating farms. It affords drivers and pedestrians unique vistas on a particularly busy thoroughfare, and walkers will have access to a loop trail on the southern part of the property. The Land Trust and the Town have recognized the generosity of the family in selling the development rights at a much-below market price. Land Trust Trustees Bob Russell and Nancy Faesy, following up on work initiated by former Trust President Tony Grassi, worked closely with the family and the Town to negotiate the agreement.

Schenck's Island Park, in the center of town, has been the subject of some controversy over the last two years. The Trust understood that it had a long-term agreement with the Town to restore a savannah-like meadow in the 14-acre park, and, accordingly, had invested heavily in labor and money to begin the project. Potential competing uses of part of the park emerged, stalling the restoration, but the Trust and the Town have now come to an agreement approved by unanimous vote of the Board of Selectmen at its meeting on October 3. The agreement allows the Trust to continue its restoration and maintenance project, jointly funded by the Town and the Trust, until 2017 with the proviso that any change in land use must be approved by the Board, the Conservation Commission, the Planning and Zoning Commission and the Trust. Trustee Charlie Flynn has led a number of work parties at Schenck's Island, removing and burning slash, and some 40 employees of Deloitte & Touche spent a Friday in June cutting vines, removing invasives and rebuilding a stone wall. The fields have been mowed twice this year, and the Trustees anxiously await what new growth emerges to continue the restoration.

The Trust and the Town continue to work on a proposed conservation restriction on Town-owned land located between Whipple Road and Erdmann Lane in south Wilton.

Working with the Conservation Commission, the Trust continues to identify and negotiate new open space parcels for purchase and/or easement protection. This job should be easier now that the President has signed new legislation that, for donations of conservation easements made during 2006 and 2007, increases the tax deduction a landowner may take from 30 percent of income to 50 percent in a year and lengthens the carry-forward period for such deduction from five years to 15 years. The law may be extended. Landowners considering conservation easements will want to study the law.

Stewardship: Our activities include posting and monitoring boundaries, maintaining open fields, restoring meadows, clearing and maintaining trails, and removing invasive species and dangerous trees. Volunteers from the local DAR chapter cleaned up the Comstock Cemetery on Ridgefield Road, and we cooperate with abutting property owners on various issues. Clean-up has continued on the former Stephenson property on Honey Hill Road and on the former Walter property on Ridgefield Road.

Trustee George Ongley led the revival of the Trust's \$1,000 Wilton High School Senior Scholarship Award. The winner is Hadley Scher, who has entered the veterinary technician program at Mt. Ida College. The award goes to a senior who has committed to the environment through academics, extracurricular activities and community service.

Eagle Scout candidate Mike Stimola of Redding led his troop's building of a footbridge over a stream and trail clearing this fall on the former Rimer property on Deer Run Road. The Norwalk River Watershed Association and Conservation Commission lent a hand.

Management: We are in our sixth year as a membership organization with almost 500 members. If you would like to become a member and volunteer in our activities, please visit our Web site (www.wiltonlandtrust.org) and let us know via e-mail at inquiry@wiltonlandtrust.org or regular mail at WLCT, P. O. Box 77, Wilton, CT 06897.

The following trustees were re-elected to three-year terms at the February annual meeting: Bruce Beebe, Charles Flynn, Nancy Faesy, Jeffry Golterman and Frank Mabley.

We are pleased to enclose a map and description of our larger parcels that are readily accessible to the public and that readers are encouraged to visit. The Conservation Commission's *A Walker's Guide to Wilton* provides detailed trail maps of Trust and Town open space. If during your walks you note work needing to be done, please let us know at the addresses above.

Trustees 2006

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