



# WILTON LAND CONSERVATION TRUST

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2020 ANNUAL REPORT

Dedicated to Protecting Wilton's Open Spaces

Together, we're preserving land for open space, protecting biodiversity, promoting environmental education, and connecting people with nature.

# LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT:

PETER W. GABORIAULT

Peter W. Gaboriault  
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## PRIVATE LANDS FOR PUBLIC GOOD...

I think this phrase sums up the mission of the Wilton Land Conservation Trust. This year that mission was greatly advanced with our purchase of 183 Ridgefield Road. This prominent, gorgeous meadow is now forever preserved and will shortly be made available to the public. This acquisition was made possible by the Bauer Foundation which provided the large initial donation, the Fieber family which agreed to sell the property at a substantial discount and over 120 individual donors. It also marks the first time that a property in Wilton has received funding from the State of Connecticut Open Space Acquisition Fund and establishes a model for future acquisitions.

This year Donna Merrill stepped aside as our first-ever Executive Director and David McCarthy, having graduated from Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies, came aboard as our new Executive Director. Donna took us to a new level of professionalism and firmly established the Land Trust in the conservation community. David will build on what Donna put in place and will be working on connecting with the Wilton community in the coming year.

Our trails saw unprecedented use in 2020 as many people discovered our preserves for the first time. I hope everyone who hiked our trails will remember that the WLCT's operations are 100% funded by donations and receive no tax dollars from the Town of Wilton. All maintenance of our trails is done by volunteers. Many thanks to our dedicated members and volunteers!

Yours truly,

**Peter W. Gaboriault**  
President

## OUR MISSION

The Wilton Land Conservation Trust protects Wilton's unique natural, scenic, and historical landscapes through conservation and stewardship. The WLCT is a community-focused land trust dedicated to preserving land for open space, protecting biodiversity, and promoting environmental awareness and education.

# WLCT WELCOMES DAVID MCCARTHY:

NEW EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



On June 1, 2020, I realized my dream – conservation in Connecticut – became my job. A native Nutmegger, I've aspired to protect that which has enriched my life and inspired me to pursue a conservation career: Connecticut open space. Working to save the environment, protect biodiversity, and connect with the Wilton community through nature is more than I could ever have hoped for.

Growing up, I explored much of Connecticut with my father, the late Kevin D. McCarthy. We trekked the Appalachian Trail, explored our state parks, fished remote rivers, and when our feet grew tired, we camped. Together, we stood in awe of nature's beauty, power, and vulnerability.

During our expeditions, he imparted nuggets of wisdom and ignited sparks of curiosity in my mind. "Leave nothing behind but your footprints," he'd say as we hiked. "How do you think this boulder got here?" he'd ask while we rested on its back and ate lunch. Little did I know, he was fueling my interest in nature that would later blossom into a career in conservation. I am forever thankful for his guidance and to have spent so much time outdoors as a child. Because of him, I learned a priceless lesson as a kid: the true value of nature.

In the fall of 2015, I enrolled in the Masters of Environmental Management program at the Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies, and I took a deep dive into forestry, sustainability, and values-based communications. Across my three-year career at the renamed Yale School of the Environment, I studied forestry in the Black Forest, worked on climate change issues in Apia, Samoa, planted and pruned street trees in New Haven, CT, examined the intersectionality of environment and policy in Israel and the Palestinian territories, and wrote policy for the International Union for Conservation of Nature in Washington, DC.

My journey to the Wilton Land Conservation Trust was multinational, educational, and a lifetime of preparation. I'm thrilled to be here within such an environmentally-conscious community.

I'm excited to meet you, learn more about your interests with nature, and work hard to improve the health and vitality of the landscapes you call home. I recognize the connections between community and conservation, and I'm eager to enhance the two across Wilton. I am out on the trails often. If you see me with my wife Kelly and our two-year-old daughter Clara, please say hi!

Sincerely,

**David E. McCarthy**  
Executive Director

As partners in the Pollinator Pathway of Wilton, we're happy to share two beautiful butterflies along with the flowers to plant in your garden to feed and attract them.



Some of Connecticut's most beautiful butterflies are very picky eaters. While in the caterpillar stage of life, some only dine on one kind of plant. If that plant is missing from Wilton, so are they.

### Great Spangled Fritillary

An American butterfly species known for their characteristic orange and tan coloration, they can be seen mid-June through mid-September.



### Violet

Caterpillars of the Great Spangled Fritillary only eat violets. They hide all day under nearby dead leaves, crawling out at night to gorge on violet leaves.



# STEWARDSHIP:

ENHANCING TRAILS, IMPROVING THE ENVIRONMENT, AND ENRICHING THE WILTON COMMUNITY

The WLCT cares deeply about the condition of Wilton's environment, and we are doing everything we can to enhance our protected natural, historical, and cultural resources. Every year, we work toward a conservation and land management strategy that protects, maintains, and improves the lands we love. However, the WLCT depends on its volunteers to keep its preserves healthy and accessible. Through our Stewardship Sundays Series, we've been able to rebuild our trails and fight back against invasive species. Together, we are building a community around nature and improving the quality of Wilton's protected open spaces.

## PRESERVING BIODIVERSITY AT THE WALTER PRESERVE ON RIDGEFIELD ROAD

As part of a long-term ecological restoration project at the Walter Preserve, we're removing invasive species and planting native shrub thickets for nesting birds and trees loved by caterpillars. Our plan includes a pollinator meadow, walking paths, and benches carved from fallen trees. There will be plenty of opportunities to help during this ongoing project. Stay tuned!

## FIELD RANGER AND OPEN SPACE STEWARD

To enrich our community and increase stewardship, we created a new, seasonal position. This professional opportunity is in line with our dedication to providing educational and professional opportunities for Wilton's youth. Brett Gilman is WLCT's first Field Ranger and Open Space Steward, and Brett has worked diligently to survey and improve the trails, meadows, and forests that we all cherish.



# PARTNERING FOR A GREENER WILTON:

THE WLCT CONTINUES TO PARTNER FOR THE ENVIRONMENT



## FALL GUIDED HIKE

The WLCT always encourages people to hike and explore its properties. This year, we teamed up with the Woodcock Nature Center to create something new and unique: A 90-minute guided tour along the Nick Pariset Memorial Trail to illuminate wildlife in our region and the role in their protection.



## STEWARDSHIP AND PATRIOTISM

In honor of Independence Day 2020 and the 246th anniversary of the American Revolutionary War, the WLCT partnered with the Drum Hill Chapter of the NSDAR to put together a community stewardship workday to improve the trail and resting grounds of Revolutionary War patriots at the Comstock Hill Cemetery.

## POLLINATOR PATHWAY

Until recently, local nurseries sold native plants typically sourced from the Midwest, not true Northeast natives. Over the past few years, seeds have been collected from local land trust meadows for propagation of plants that are hyper-local to our region. By planting these native plants for pollinators, we are helping the Wilton Pollinator Pathway to link backyards, open spaces, and entire communities.

## BOY AND GIRL SCOUTS

The WLCT proudly partners with our local Girl and Boy Scouts to steward open spaces and complete projects that benefit the greater Wilton community. Thanks to the power of partnerships and our Scouts' leadership, two WLCT preserves have received new structures for visitors to enjoy.



## BIRD BLIND AT SLAUGHTER FIELD

Everett Lee, of Troop 20, designed and installed a bird blind at Slaughter Field that overlooks the meadow and pond with his troop's help. To ensure optimal placement for bird watching, we enlisted the help of Milan Bull, Senior Director of Science and Conservation at the Connecticut Audubon Society.



## BENCH AT SCHENCK'S ISLAND

Under Ashleigh Masterson's leadership, Avery Pettit, and Kate Bendett, Girl Scout Cadets 50471, successfully funded, designed, built, and mounted a bench for the visitors of Schenck's Island to sit and gaze across the Norwalk River.

## PROTECTING OUR NATIVE BROOK TROUT

A town-wide discussion about protecting and restoring the Comstock Brook has commenced. The WLCT, with the Wilton Library, Trout Unlimited, and the Norwalk River Watershed Association, have initiated an ongoing effort to inform the community about the history of this unique stream, its importance, and the threats it faces. You can expect more to come and opportunities to join this community effort.

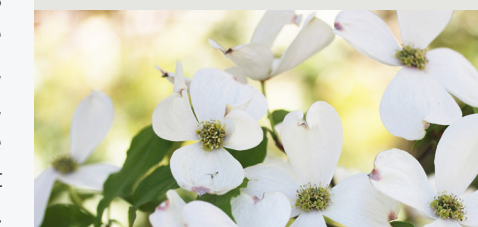
### Spring Azure butterfly

These butterflies are beautiful, quite small, and live only a few days.



### Flowering Dogwood

The Spring Azure butterfly lays its eggs on its caterpillar's number-one food – our flowering dogwood – and they use ants for protection! These caterpillars excrete a honeydew that ants love; the ants guard them in exchange for a honeydew payment.



# 183 RIDGEFIELD ROAD:

TOGETHER, WE CONSERVED ONE OF THE LAST FAMILY FARMS IN WILTON



Photography by Doug Bogan

## OUR STORY

In 2016, the WLCT Board of Trustees and the Fieber family came together with a shared vision to save the fields and forested wetlands on one of the last family farms in Wilton. They understood that preserving 183 Ridgefield Road would advance conservation in southwestern Connecticut, where natural landscapes and pristine ecosystems have been significantly compromised.

In March 2020, "183" was forever preserved as open space thanks to WLCT's friends' and members' financial support and the award of a \$707,000 Open

Space Acquisition Grant from the State of Connecticut. This newly protected 13-acre property is a place of scenic beauty, fascinating geology, and wildlife habitat, which will become home to hiking trails, educational programs for our youth, and a place for present and future generations to explore and experience.

The preserve's biodiverse 11-acre meadow is a rich resource that meets the needs of a wide range of seed consumers, foragers, insectivores, and predators. It serves as critical habitat for neotropical migratory grassland birds, butterflies, small mammals,

and birds of prey. It provides sanctuary for migrating songbirds, pollinators, and migratory species that stop over from the Atlantic Flyway. Its two-acre forested wetland protects the headwaters of a stream flowing north to Comstock Brook.

## OUR VISION

The restoration needed to make the property accessible to the public has only just begun, held back by the year's challenging events. We are in the planning phases and ready to move ahead with widening the driveway for safe entry and exit on Route 33, constructing adequate onsite

parking, and working on the sitework and approvals required to reconstruct a small antique barn on the property. Meanwhile, we are mowing, controlling invasive species, and optimizing the conditions for our native grasses and wildflowers to thrive.

## OUR PARTNERSHIPS

A firm believer in the power of partnerships, the WLCT is working with local organizations to create and enhance educational opportunities at the 183 Preserve:

### NATURE-BASED EDUCATION

Woodcock Nature Center and the WLCT have partnered to expand

and complement Woodcock's educational programming through site-specific field trip curricula for elementary school students, teaching about meadow habitat, plant anatomy, and insects.

### AGRARIAN CULTURE REVIVAL

The Wilton Historical Society and the WLCT will partner to teach students about Wilton's agricultural heritage. Together, we will launch a program centered around a significant colonial life component: the flax cycle from plant to linen. The students will plant, tend, harvest, de-seed, dry, rett, process flax, and ultimately weave their own colonial textiles.

“ Having lived in Wilton for the last 12 years and appreciating the open spaces, we are delighted to support the Wilton Land Conservation Trust. The diligence of the Wilton Land Conservation Trust in going after available properties is noteworthy. Their support of educational opportunities on WLCT properties is especially appealing. The Town of Wilton will benefit for decades due to their foresight and actions. ”

~ Carol and George Bauer

## RESTORATION OF THE AMERICAN CHESTNUT TREE

Finally, The American Chestnut Foundation and the WLCT have partnered to help bring back the American chestnut tree from the brink of extinction. We will plant a grove of chestnut trees in an effort to cultivate a blight-resistant tree that may eventually reforest its original habitat from Maine to the southern Appalachians. A dedicated area of the preserve with a deer fence enclosure will be managed as an experimental chestnut tree farm.

## 2020 ANNUAL MEETING:

Wilton turned out for the Wilton Land Conservation Trust's Annual Meeting on February 26, 2020. With the WLCT finishing 2019 by adding the Nick Parisot Memorial Trail and finalizing its future acquisition of 183 Ridgefield Road, it delivered two valuable resources to the town, making Wilton a leader in the protection and enjoyment of Connecticut's open spaces.

The WLCT 2020 Annual Meeting included two guest speakers: Pennington Marchael and Bill Adamsen. With ten years of experience in fine gardening, project management, and ecological restoration, Pennington Marchael presented on the value of converting lawns into meadows,

and the creation and management of sustainable meadows.

Bill Adamsen is a 13-year Wilton resident who has served on the Board of the American Chestnut Foundation and as President of the CT Chapter from 2005 to 2013, where he continues to serve as a Director. The good news from Adamsen was that the American Chestnut is being restored with blight-resistant strains. The Wilton Land Conservation Trust will participate in the program and dedicate land at the 183 Ridgefield Road Preserve to help develop an American Chestnut tree that may eventually reforest its original habitat from Maine south along the Appalachians.



## BUILDING COMMUNITY AROUND NATURE:

MADE POSSIBLE BY YOUR MEMBERSHIP

### 2020 INTERNSHIP PROGRAM

The WLCT continues to view conservation through the lens of community and collaboration. As part of the 2020 Wilton High School Senior Interest Project, we had two interns, Brett Gilman and Sara Schneidman. Together, they installed three biodiversity experimental stations and planted 1,000 hyper-local native flowers.



### THE BIODIVERSITY EXPERIMENTAL STATIONS

Deer browse and invasive species have left much of Wilton's forest understory a vast dead zone. To help, our WHS interns have installed three biodiversity experimental stations. Inside new deer exclosures, they removed "the bad" and planted "the good." They planted 1,000 native plants to provide food and nectar for our forest denizens. If you're a regular on the NRVT, the loop at Schenck's, or the Walter Preserve on Ridgefield Road, you will notice a lot more buzz next spring as more life returns to Wilton.

### NEW INTERNSHIP PROGRAM

The WLCT has expanded its internship opportunities from summer to include a spring and fall internship. This 13-week program provides a Wilton High School student with a professional opportunity to broaden their understanding of conservation science, assist with the administrative processes involved in land management, lead engaging workshops for the greater Wilton community, and more.

Our first fall intern is none other than Eli Grass, a Wilton High School senior and stewardship rockstar.



### WILTON HIGH SCHOOL ACADEMIC AWARDS

On June 8, 2020, the Wilton Land Conservation Trust honored two exceptional students as part of the Wilton High School Academic Awards Program. This year, as an adaptation to the COVID-19 pandemic, the WHS assembly was held online. To create a more tangible experience for its award recipients, the WLCT held a small ceremony to commemorate its awardees and celebrate with their families.



### E. DAN CAPPEL AWARD

The 2020 E. Dan Cappel Senior Scholarship Award commemorates Dan Cappel, an incredible and memorable Wilton High School science teacher who was instrumental in protecting the environment in the face of the Route 7 proposed reroute through Wilton. Peter Gaboriault, WLCT President, presented Brett Gilman with the E. Dan Cappel Senior Scholarship Award of \$1,500 for his efforts in preserving Wilton's biodiversity.



### JUNIOR BOOK AWARD

The 2020 WLCT Junior Book Award was awarded to Eli Grass, a rising senior who demonstrated outstanding environmental leadership and a commitment to the Wilton community. This year's book was a signed edition of Bill McKibben's new book: *Falter: Has the Human Game Begun to Play Itself Out?*



## BECOME A MEMBER:

SUPPORT WILTON'S OPEN SPACES

WLCT members play a significant role in safeguarding and enhancing Wilton's natural, scenic, cultural, and historical landscapes. We're only able to do what we do because of you. Our members contribute to a collective vision of protecting, preserving, and improving Wilton's open space. Members receive news updates, invitations to events and become informed about conservation and nature in Wilton. Join us as we embark on a new and exciting 2021 by renewing your membership or becoming a new member today!

### LEAVE A LEGACY

Everyone can create a lasting conservation legacy by naming the Wilton Land Conservation Trust as a beneficiary in their will or living trust, life insurance, or retirement accounts. Including the WLCT in your estate planning is an honorable way to preserve Wilton's rural character and ensure that open space exists for generations to come. Please contact us to receive a bequest form and to learn more.

“ One of our favorite things about Wilton is the walks we can take through nature. It's the Wilton Land Conservation Trust, through their dedication and foresight, that make these varied areas accessible. We appreciate that they are looking to the future and are still acquiring land to protect and to create new paths to explore. Thank you to all the dedicated members. ”

~ Clare and Robert Rainone



## MEMBERSHIP 2019-2020:

### Leaders \$5,000 +

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Ginny and Roger Valkenburgh

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## MEMBERS THAT SAVED 183 RIDGEFIELD ROAD:

A donor recognition wall will be erected on site.

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In Memory of Harry Jr, Nancy & Harold Wilcox  
Kevin DeShanty  
Christopher Foster  
Gladys Fowler  
Noelle King  
Mr. & Mrs. Peter Taylor  
Helen Whitten

“ A big reason folks are moving to our state right now is our open space. Could there be a more important time or better way to preserve this quintessential Connecticut asset than supporting the Wilton Land Conservation Trust? ”  
~ Peter Denious

“ One of our favorite things about Wilton is the walks we can take through nature. It's the Wilton Land Conservation Trust, through their dedication and foresight, that make these varied areas accessible. We appreciate that they are looking to the future and are still acquiring land to protect and to create new paths to explore. Thank you to all the dedicated members. ”  
~ Clare and Robert Rainone

“ One thing I appreciate about the Wilton Land Conservation Trust is that significant pieces of property are the same today as I remember them as a child, growing up in Wilton 50 and 60 years ago. Having known several of the former owners makes them even more special. A real connection to both history and nature. ”  
~ Karl Dolnier

“ The Wilton Land Conservation Trust works to preserve significant Wilton properties for future generations by owner donation or by direct purchase or by easements or by supporting Town purchase with restrictions on future development. All of these ways have been used successfully to save our open spaces that we value so much. ”  
~ Carol and Bob Russell

## Wilton Land Conservation Trust

Protecting Wilton's  
Natural, Scenic, and  
Historical Landscapes

“ Solving the problems of global warming, disappearing natural habitats, and everything else that concerns so many of us today begins *locally*. The Wilton Land Conservation Trust has at its core the protection of “open space” in a town where we must maintain the balance between reasonable development and the preservation of the natural order. ”

~ Dr. Mark & Linda  
Rubinstein



### STAY CONNECTED

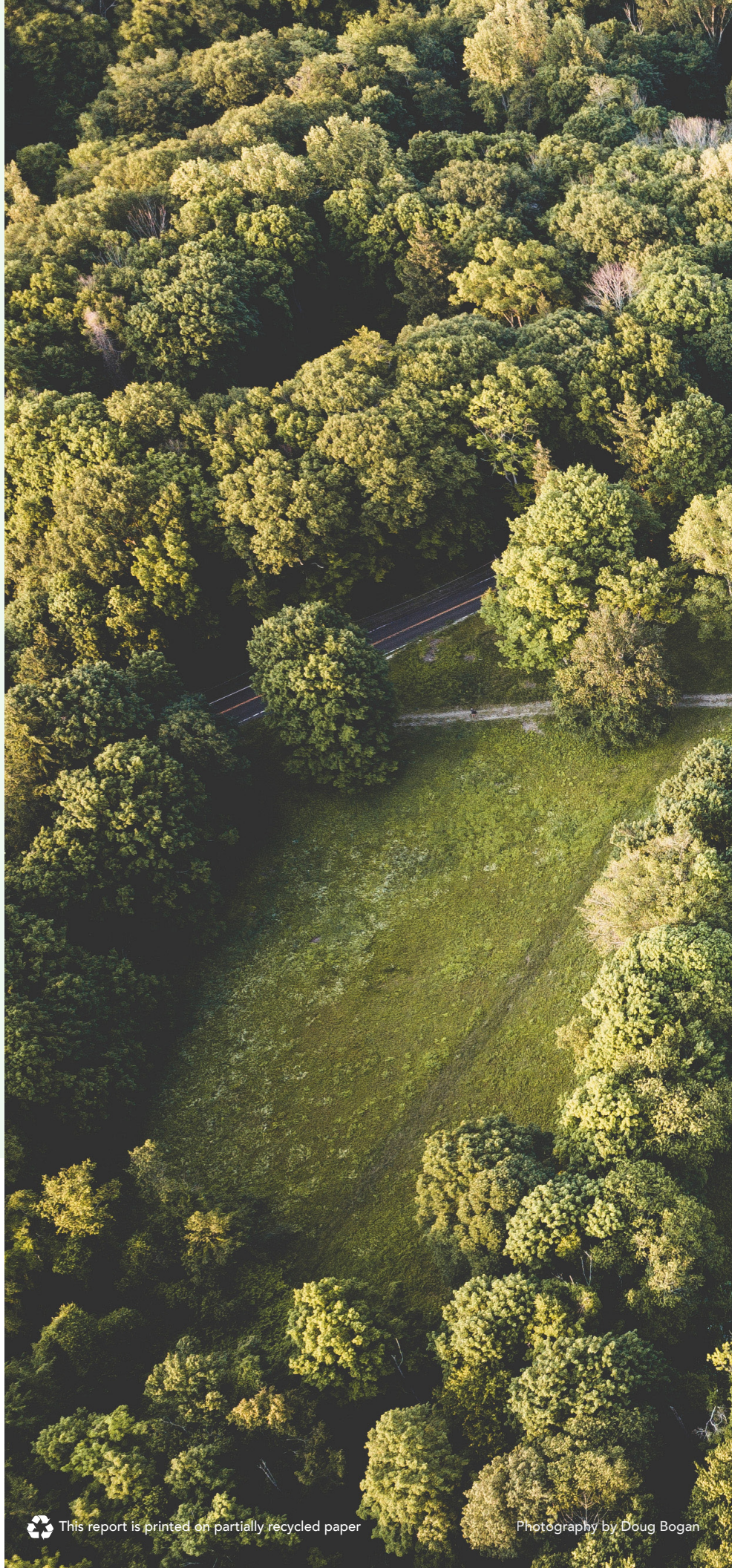
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