
THE NEWSLETTER

“In Land We Trust”

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NEW LAND

Open Space Helps Colebrook Taxpayers

PEOPLE OFTEN DEBATE the value of open space to local tax rolls. Some say unused land should be developed in order to generate added revenue and, thereby, lower property taxes, especially in tough economic times when municipal budgets come under closer scrutiny. Studies have consistently shown, however, that undeveloped land actually has a fiscally positive effect because it doesn't require services such as schools, road maintenance, trash pickup, and the costs associated with running a government.

These “cost-of-services” studies reveal that open space, forest, and farm land cost less in services than the income they bring to a town. On the other hand, these studies demonstrate that the revenue raised from residential land and buildings do not cover the cost of residential services. To see how Colebrook compares to other towns, the Colebrook Land Conservancy recently conducted a local cost-of-services study.

No Surprises

Our findings are similar to those for other towns studied. Colebrook's open space, forest, and farm land cost only 31 cents in services for every dollar of revenue they bring in. This leaves 69 cents to offset other municipal expenses. Commercial/industrial land also generates more revenue than it uses in services—32 cents in expenses for every dollar of revenue produced, leaving 68 cents to cover other town costs. Residential land, however, does not generate enough revenue to cover the services it requires. Rather, it costs \$1.12 for every dollar it brings in.

Bottom line? Open space, forest, and farm land are financially helpful to Colebrook, contrary to the often-expressed view that open space hurts the tax base.

Getting the Word Out

The Colebrook Land Conservancy plans to communicate our findings throughout Colebrook. We'll address questions like:

- Do open space, forest, and farm land hurt the tax base?
- Do land conservation easements take money from Colebrook's tax rolls?
- Does land protected by tax-exempt organizations detract from the tax base?

Our intent is not to knock residential land use, but to educate the public about the fiscal value of open space. Perhaps some skeptics will look more favorably on land conservation when they realize how it benefits our tax base.

A Few Words on the Methodology

For our cost-of-services study, the CLC used the methodology developed by the American Farmland Trust that was employed in a well-known Southern New England Forest Consortium report in 1995 and has been used often in the years since. In this approach, all town revenues and expenditures are allocated to one of three land uses: residential, open space/farm/forest, and commercial/industrial. For the many items

that don't easily fall into the above categories, a fallback ratio is used that reflects a prorated share of assessed value for each land use. Assessed land use values for 2007 were used, which are the closest to the revenue and expense numbers employed. These are from the Town's Annual Report for the year ending June 30, 2007, which was the most recently published at the time of this study. Special thanks to First Selectman Tom McKeon, Assessor Michele Sloane, and Assessor Assistant Joan Durant for their help in collecting data for this report. For more information on the methodology, please contact the Colebrook Land Conservancy.

“...open space, forest, and farm land cost less in services than they bring to a town.”

LAND USES

The Value of Conservation

LAND AND NATURE CONSERVATION has value beyond just the important aesthetic and recreational qualities. While the Colebrook Land Conservancy is committed to protecting the rural, natural beauty of Colebrook, this publication will also bring information about conservation efforts and related benefits from other areas.

An article written by Richard Black, and published by the BBC, argues that money invested in protecting nature can bring huge financial returns. The article highlights an Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity study (Teeb) that finds the ongoing loss of forest cover across the globe comes with an annual price tag of at least \$2 trillion. The article points out "...as forests decline, nature stops providing services which it used to provide essentially for free.

So the human economy either has to provide them instead, perhaps through building reservoirs, building facilities to sequester carbon dioxide, or farming foods that were once naturally available.

Or we have to do without them; either way, there is a financial cost."

Examples highlighted in the Teeb report include the following.

- A Costa Rican study showing areas of intact forest increase the yield of coffee farms by 20% because the shelter pollinating species.
- A grassland conservation area in New Zealand supplies the Otago region with free water that would cost \$100 million to bring in from somewhere else.
- In Vietnam, planting and protecting 12,000 hectares of mangroves cost the government \$1.1 million, but saved annual expenditures on dyke maintenance of \$7.3 million.

The study reminds us that undisturbed nature doesn't just look good - it also works hard. And its services are often invaluable. The full article is available at: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/science/nature/7662565.stm>



CLC board member Joyce Hemingson led a walk in the Phelps Research Area on November 8th. Participants pose in front of Colebrook's "Colonial Pine" on the right. As announced in our previous newsletter, ownership of the approximately 400 acre property, originally donated to the Nature Conservancy by John and Nancy Blum and Dr. Frank Egler, was recently transferred to the CLC. The CLC is committed to protecting this valuable natural legacy for future generations.

New Roof for Hale Barn

The Colebrook Land Conservancy replaced the Hale Barn roof this past summer with red cedar shingles. The Land Conservancy received a \$5,000 2009 Barns Grant from the Connecticut Trust for Historical Preservation with funding by the Connecticut General Assembly. The CLC funded the approximately \$12,000 balance for this necessary maintenance.

The Colebrook Land Conservancy also received a 2009 Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program grant in connection with an effort to eradicate and control invasive plant species at Hale Corner along Route 182. This grant, totaling \$6,755, which will be disbursed in declining amounts over a three year period, will pay for approximately half the estimated cost to eradicate principally multiflora roses. The Land Conservancy has made progress in eradicating invasives on the southeast corner parcel of the intersection between Routes 182 and 183, and efforts will continue to quell invasives at Hale Corner.

The Hale Barn, located at the intersection between Routes 183 and 182, is a welcome and visible monument for everyone heading north into Colebrook Center. It is the last remaining image of a Connecticut upland dairy barn along the approaches into the town center. Hale Barn was built by Martin North in 1797. The Land Conservancy acquired Hale Barn and the approximately 42 acre parcel on which it sits in 2001 to preserve the land and the barn for future generations, and to preserve and perpetuate the atmosphere and aesthetics of this rural intersection. Thanks to generous donations, the Land Conservancy was able to undertake major structural restoration work on Hale Barn in 2003.

To celebrate these grants and the resulting improvements to this important historical property, the Land Conservancy hosted a Hale Barn Open House on October 11th. Over 30 people enjoyed a talk on the barn's history by CLC board member Mike Hurd and a presentation about its construction by George Bodycoat. Over 20 people then participated in a guided walk on the Hale Trail, led by Mike.



We had a beautiful Autumn day and a big turn out for our Hale Barn open house in October. Highlights included talks by Mike Hurd and Geroge Bodycoat and a walk on the Hale trail led by Mike Hurd.

