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# THE The Colebrook Land Conservancy NEWSLETTER



“Keeping the Country in Colebrook”

Summer 2019



Among its diverse habitats the Deer Hill property has a rocky, sloping woodland with mixed hardwood and some streams.

## The Colebrook Conservancy's New Deer Hill Property

**T**he Colebrook Land Conservancy is delighted to announce that it has completed the purchase of 74 acres of forestland at the lower end of Deer Hill Road, formerly owned by Richard Chase and his family. In order to help cover the cost of the purchase, the Conservancy wrote successful grant proposals that were awarded funding from the CT Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition Program and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Highlands Conservation Act. The rest of the money was raised from donations from Board trustees and from other members of the community. Linda Raciborski, president of the Colebrook Land Conservancy,

spearheaded and guided the project; Ecologist Harry White prepared a detailed report on the ecology of the property for the grant application, and provided invaluable advice and assistance throughout; Amy Bernstein was responsible for the remaining work on the grant application; Ed Lord negotiated the purchase; and Dan Strickler and Sukey Wagner raised the private money to complete the purchase. Other trustees, including Greg Millard, Robbie Lawton, Jerry Rathbun, Kerry Jassen and John Fernandez, contributed valuable insight and advice. Many organizations and elected officials wrote letters in support of the grant application, and the Conservancy remains indebted to them and grateful for their support.



The Conservancy would also like to particularly thank the neighbors who warmly supported the project, including Jake Thompson and Tim Hitchcock, and the members of the Brookside Farm Association, whose land abuts the Deer Hill property to the west, and Priscilla Morse, whose land is to the south, across Deer Hill Road.

Preservation of the Deer Hill land was particularly important because of its very high conservation values. It is located at one end of the heavily forested escarpment that extends from Sandy Brook Road to Deer Hill Road; ensuring that it will remain undeveloped will secure a permanent wildlife corridor for animals. Ecologist Harry White has described the tract as an “outstanding preserve because of its landscape context, connectivity, terrain complexity, and the quality of its forest habitats.” Its diverse and varied terrain, he adds, has afforded many types of habitats for an abundance of wildlife: “ridgeline, a summit escarpment, talus [a slope formed by rock debris], productive upslope and bottomland forests and headwaters stream habitats in an exceptional landscape anchored by Algonquin State Forest and the Farmington River Wild and Scenic River Corridor.” The Housatonic Valley Association’s Litchfield Hills Greenprint Collaborative had earlier recognized the Deer Hill tract as a Priority Threatened Parcel as well as containing Potentially Fragmentable Habitat. Tim Abbott, director of the Greenprint Collaborative, and Connie Manes, its manager, were very helpful in advising the Conservancy during the grant application process.

A trail of approximately one mile will be created on the property for the use of the public. It will be designed and created over the next few months, and when completed, it will include a small parking area and trailhead on Deer Hill Road. As landowner, the Conservancy will be responsible for the maintenance of the trail and the oversight of the property.

The new trail will afford Colebrook residents and others an opportunity to experience nature in all of its variety. Because of its terrain, including rocky ledges, lots of rock crevices and a rich soil with ample woody debris and leaf cover, as well as fallen trees and wetlands, it offers a wealth of habitats for birds, animals and invertebrates. Some of the animals that have been observed there are bobcat, deer, birds of prey, woodpeckers, wild turkey, and other small animals, such as foxes, coyotes, chipmunks and squirrels, to name a few.

From the ridgeline above the escarpment, where one can find ancient stone walls and charcoal pits dating back to Colebrook’s farming and iron-making past, the land drops steeply across bedrock outcrops before descending on gradual slopes toward a mosaic of wetlands and streams that drain into Sandy Brook. The trail will take advantage of the land’s unusually varied topographical features, allowing hikers a view of breathtaking ridgeline views, woodland vistas, wetlands, and bottomlands intersected by streams. This new property is a welcome addition to the expanding number of Conservancy properties with trails, and should help enhance everyone’s understanding of the value of preserving beautiful and valuable natural places.

—By Amy Bernstein

Views of the property showing its varied topography, clockwise from top left: a stand of mixed hardwood and pine at the bottom of the property; bedrock outcropping in the steeper eastern reach; a view over the Colebrook River valley; one of the stream tributaries feeding into the Sandy Brook river.





## Anatomy of a Land Acquisition

Richard Chase and his family had long dreamed about creating a preserve—with a trail on it—so, after some discussion, a price was agreed upon with a delay in closing while the Conservancy raised the money to pay for the land. With the unanimous support of its Board, the Conservancy signed a contract of sale with Chase, and began the grant application process for state and federal grants. The application was lengthy, requiring among other things, two “yellow book” (i.e. state approved) appraisals of the property, a detailed description of the land, and a statement of need for its preservation.

A Phase I Environmental Hazard Report was completed and numerous letters of support from various organizations were solicited, both in Colebrook and Northwest Connecticut, and attestations from neighboring land conservancies and landowners. Once the State of Connecticut agreed to provide grant money, then an additional grant request was made to the Federal government.

When the grants were approved, some additional paperwork had to be provided, including a survey of the land. After the Board made its pledges, a community-based effort was launched to raise funds to cover the remaining cost of the land and its upkeep. Now that is done, all that remains is to build a trail.





## Bluebird Boxes at the Colebrook Fair

In July, the Colebrook Land Conservancy received a generous gift of rough sawn pine planks from Jody Bronson, Forest Manager at Great Mountain Forest. Their intended use? To make more bluebird boxes! Last year, at the Colebrook Fair, boxes built and donated by Colebrook resident Les Bluestone were a popular item, so trustee members have worked overtime to build new boxes to meet the demand at this year's fair on Labor Day weekend. The rough surface of the planks is ideal for harboring small bugs, so the bluebirds will have a food supply right outside their door! These small shelters with entry holes sized to prevent larger birds from entering, help keep bluebirds safe and thriving in Colebrook. They are priced at \$25 and proceeds benefit the Colebrook Land Conservancy.

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The Colebrook Land Conservancy  
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