

News

Riverfront Land in Sharon Saved

Thursday, February 9, 2012

SHARON—On Tuesday, The Sharon Land Trust (SLT) and the Housatonic Valley Association (HVA) closed on the purchase of a conservation easement on 20-acres of riverfront farm owned by Denny Frost, according to a release from HVA.

According to the release, the land conservation project was made possible through the cooperation of Mr. Frost, and the financial support of the Newman's Own Foundation; the Cornwall Conservation Trust; the Natural Resource Damages Trustees including the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection, the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration; and individual donors of the SLT and HVA. Funds from the Natural Resource Damages Trustees have also been set aside for both organizations to work together to conserve another nearby riverfront parcel.

"My wife would be supremely happy to see this land conserved," Mr. Frost said in the release. "We started talking about the possibility of preserving the riverfront meadows with Lynn many years ago."

HVA executive director Lynn Werner said, "The Frost property has 1,480 feet of river frontage and is extraordinarily beautiful."

According to SLT President Larry Power, however, the importance of the property goes far beyond aesthetics. "The 20-acre Frost farmland includes a very rare and environmentally important kettle pond, which was formed as glaciers retreated and resulted in a depression which exposed the water table to the surface," he said. "Kettle ponds have no defined inlet or outlet, and no fish. As a result, like vernal pools, they are host to a myriad of amphibians, including woodland frogs and salamanders."

The most celebrated kettle pond in the New England landscape is Walden Pond, made famous by naturalist Henry David Thoreau, the release said, adding that, sadly, Walden Pond has been degraded by development.

The kettle pond in Sharon is also environmentally important because it marks the presence of a defined stratified drift aquifer that is hydraulically connected to the Housatonic River. According to Star Childs of Ecological and Environmental Consultancy Services, the water found in stratified aquifers is naturally filtered and purified as it passes through sand and gravel, thus ensuring high quality discharge to the river.

The conservation easement purchased on the Frost property includes creation of a low impact footpath along the waterfront. This augments about five miles of nearby riverfront land already conserved by HVA, government agencies and others. It is part of a stretch of river corridor that attracts thousands of hikers, boaters, birders, fishermen and other visitors to the region each year, and provides a haven for wildlife and migrating birds.

This project was very ambitious and very complicated to execute, the release said. It began in late 2006 when the SLT and HVA jointly submitted a grant application for a Natural Resource Damage Fund grant. This fund was originally set

aside as part of the consent decree between the federal Environmental Protection Agency and GE outlining the terms of PCB contamination cleanup affecting the Housatonic River system. The SLT and the HVA were awarded \$705,000 in 2010 for both the Frost farm and another riverfront parcel.

Additional funds were pledged to cover the costs of the project and future stewardship of the property include \$100,000 from the Sharon Land Trust; \$50,000 from HVA donors including \$30,000 from an individual who wanted to preserve fox habitat—Denny has spotted many foxes on the property—and \$20,000 from the Newman's Own Foundation; and \$20,000 from the Cornwall Conservation Trust.

Ms. Werner said, "This is an environmentally important parcel in Sharon that is also beloved by residents of Cornwall Bridge. Now it is forever protected as a place for wildlife and a stop-over for migratory birds. It is a critical link in the growing greenway of conserved land along the Housatonic River from its source to Long Island Sound, and a place for people to enjoy for generations to come."

HVA, a tri-state nonprofit citizen's environmental group founded in 1941, works to conserve the natural character and environmental health of its communities by protecting and restoring the land and waters of the 2,000-square-mile Housatonic watershed from its source in the Pittsfield, Mass., area to Long Island Sound.

The Sharon Land Trust was formed in 1982 to protect and preserve lands of special scenic, natural, environmental, recreational, historic, or agricultural value to the rural atmosphere. Visit <http://sharonlandtrust.typepad.com> for more info on SLT.

URL: <http://www.countytimes.com/articles/2012/02/09/news/doc4f33dfc1c7c30909646286.prt>

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