

Aspetuck Land Trust Announces 38 acre Weston Purchase In Drive to Protect ‘Last Frontier of Open Space’

WESTON, CT. NOV. 27, 2017--Aspetuck Land Trust, a conservation organization which preserves open space in Easton, Fairfield, Westport and Weston, announced today it completed purchase of 38 acres of forest land in Weston off of Wampum Hill Road that will now be protected from development forever.

Since the colonial era, the property has only been owned by two families, the Sturges and Belknap families, as it was land originally granted to the Sturges



family by the English monarchy. The property was purchased in 1927 from the Sturges family heirs by Chauncey Belknap, an attorney from New York City looking for a get-away home in Connecticut.

The \$367,000 acquisition from the Belknap family expands Aspetuck Land Trust’s existing 86-acre Honey Hill Preserve which spans the towns of Weston and Wilton. Since its start in 1966, Aspetuck Land Trust (ALT) has protected 149 properties on more than 1,800 acres.

“This block of land is a key component in our effort to conserve 410 acres in one of the last undeveloped interior forest blocks in Weston and Wilton. It is the last frontier of open space in our area,” said David Brant, executive director of ALT.

To purchase the land, ALT used its own funds in addition to a \$200,000 grant from Audubon Connecticut and \$50,000 from the William C. Bullitt Foundation. ALT also has a pending grant request with the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition Grant Program which might provide up to 60% of the value of the property. Under the state's recently approved budget, however, \$5 million was cut from Connecticut's open space grant program in each of the next two years.

"The reality is that in the present political environment, financial resources for land conservation from both state and federal government sources are getting extremely tight. ALT and its 1,000+ members, plus new supporters we hope to find in business and industry, will need to step up if we are to be able to save the diminishing open space beauty of Connecticut," said Don Hyman of Fairfield, newly elected president of ALT.

Yale University Environmental Law and Policy Professor Dan Esty, former Commissioner of the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection from 2011 to 2014, who spoke at a recent ALT sponsored lecture, underscored this point.

"In the past land trusts might not have been in the front seat but there's no one there driving this effort now. It is up to land trusts like Aspetuck to drive the bus and get where we need to go," said Professor Esty."

The Aspetuck Land Trust (ALT) is a local non-profit land conservation organization founded in 1966 to preserve open space in the towns of Westport, Weston, Fairfield and Easton. ALT preserves provide passive recreation and educational opportunities for people to learn about and enjoy nature, while preserving the flora and fauna and rural characteristics of local communities. ALT maintains 45 trailed nature preserves and other conservation-only properties on over 1,800 acres of land. More than 1,000 individual members support the organization through annual membership contributions. For more information visit www.aspetucklandtrust.org