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NEWS ARTICLE

Bethlehem, Cornwall, Roxbury and Norfolk Get State Grants

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Landmark farms in Roxbury, Bethlehem and Cornwall are among properties the state is helping to preserve through the latest round of open space grants, announced last week. In all, the state Department of Environmental Protection's Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition Program is contributing \$1.6 million toward Litchfield County projects.

The Roxbury Land Trust secured a matching grant of \$546,000 to help purchase Good Hill Farm, which straddles the Roxbury-Woodbury border on Route 317. The grant, matching the highest total awarded by the DEP in this round, represents the second installation of a two-part grant that totals \$1.45 million, or less than half of the total purchase price of \$3.6 million that the Roxbury Land Trust has agreed to pay over the next four years to Good Hill Farm LLC, a holding company made up of the descendants of the original owners, Sebastian and Marguerite Pond.

Good Hill Farm, called "drop-dead gorgeous" by Julie Steers, executive director of the land trust, was designated for preservation in both Roxbury's and Woodbury's plans of development, currently serves as a hay farm and is partly leased by a nursery company. It contains important wildlife habitat and in the future may be connected to other nearby land trust preserves. It will remain a farm after the purchase, at which point it will also be open to the public for recreational use.

"We are very grateful that the state continues to support our farm preservation efforts," said David Knutson, president of the Roxbury Land Trust, in a press release. "It is extremely important for people to understand, however, that both of these grants are matching grants. That means we must raise more than \$2 million through private donations in order to complete the purchase ... the acquisition is far from a done deal. We will need the generous support of everyone in Roxbury ... to preserve this as an active farm."

Bethlehem received \$455,000 for the purpose of purchasing of the 123-acre Swendsen Farm on Route 132. The scenic farm connects several abutting open space parcels, and its acquisition would preserve 2,000 feet of frontage along East Spring Brook and provide access to fields and a 12-acre pond for potential recreational use. Gene Heidenreich, assistant to First Selectman Harry Traver, reported that the Board of Selectmen has entered into a purchase and sale agreement to buy the farm for \$1 million.

The selectmen pursued the farm when the property went on the market, based on a recommendation from the open space committee. Mr. Heidenreich noted the purchase is contingent on raising or borrowing the remaining \$545,000 necessary for closing, and on

approval in a town meeting. If the purchase goes through, the farm will be the first parcel bought by Bethlehem with the overt purpose of preserving it as open space.

The Cornwall Conservation Trust is to receive \$316,225 to defray the costs of purchasing 96 acres of the Hart Farm for preservation as open space. The grant covers about half of the total cost of the property, which has been offered by the Hart family for \$675,000, a 20 percent discount from the appraised value. The conservation trust will now begin fund-raising efforts to obtain the additional capital necessary.

The parcel, situated in a wide band of undeveloped land between the Housatonic River and Cream Hill that contains a large tract of Housatonic State Forest and a 77-acre parcel already owned by the land trust, is a mix of open pasture and forest land. It has been farmed for fruit, hay and other garden produce by the Hart family for seven generations since 1759.

The farm, where cheese has also been made, contains two distinct wetlands areas, seasonal streams and beaver ponds, and is home to a variety of wildlife, including deer, coyote, turkey, porcupine, fox, bobcat, bear, duck, geese, egret and several species of heron.

Members of the land trust have initiated discussions with other nearby owners in an effort to protect a major open space corridor. Continued...

The Appalachian Trail Conference Land Trust was awarded \$150,150 toward the cost of preserving as open space 175 acres of the Gillespie property on Herb Road in Sharon. The ATC hopes to match the grant to purchase a conservation easement, for roughly \$300,000, according to Elaine LaBella, director of land protection at Cornwall-based Housatonic Valley Association and a volunteer for the ATC land trust.

The easement will protect the headwaters of Stony Brook, protect the water quality in the Stony Brook Campsite on the Appalachian Trail and secure additional wildlife habitat, according to DEP officials. The Gillespie property is bordered on several sides by land protected by the National Park Service and the Sharon Land Trust.

The ATC is a nonprofit organization based in Harper's Ferry, W. Va., that was founded in the 1930s to coordinate the different volunteer activities that were taking place in the creation off the Appalachian Trail, which stretches from Georgia to Maine and slices through the Northwest Corner. The ATC now coordinates 31 volunteer clubs that manage and maintain the trail and the corridor of federal land that buffers it. The mission of the land trust is to look to protect land beyond the park service corridor.

The Norfolk Land Trust was awarded \$35,125 to help the group pay for the purchase of a 19-acre parcel that includes a 1.5-mile section of the old Central New England Railroad right of way.

According to Cay Fields, vice president of the land trust, the total purchase price of the property was roughly \$75,000.

"The land trust has been acquiring the connecting pieces [of the old railroad corridor] as we can so eventually we will have a greenway all the way through Norfolk for hiking and cross-country skiing," she said.

Via the greenway, it is now possible to walk from the old Norfolk train station in the center of town to the border with Canaan on land owned by the land trust and the state.

The Bristol Water Department received \$114,160 to acquire the Vernesoni property in Harwinton, an 18.9-acre parcel that is completely surrounded by land owned by the water department. The property's acquisition will secure frontage of the Poland River and protect over 18 acres of Class 1 watersupply watershed land.

The grants were announced Sept. 12 as part of roughly \$6.5 million the DEP awarded to secure more than 1,257 acres in 25 Connecticut municipalities, as part of Gov. John Rowland's Open Space Acquisition program. The size of preserved parcels ranges from less than a half-acre in New Haven to 204 acres in Old Lyme, and the dollar amount of the awards ranges from Norfolk's grant of \$34,125 to the \$546,000 awarded to several efforts, including the Roxbury Land Trust's.

In the first seven rounds of grants awarded from 1999 to earlier this year, the DEP gave approximately \$44.6 million for 178 open space projects totaling 12,095 acres. That preserved land is in addition to 13,343 acres purchased directly by the state during that period. Continued...

Grant applicants submit projects that add to their community's open space, enhance recreation, protect unique geographical features or conserve habitat for living creatures. The DEP evaluates projects using natural resource and outdoor recreation criteria and its choices are then reviewed by the Natural Heritage, Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition Review Board.

The state's overall goal is to preserve 21 percent of Connecticut land as open space by 2023, a total of 673,210 acres.