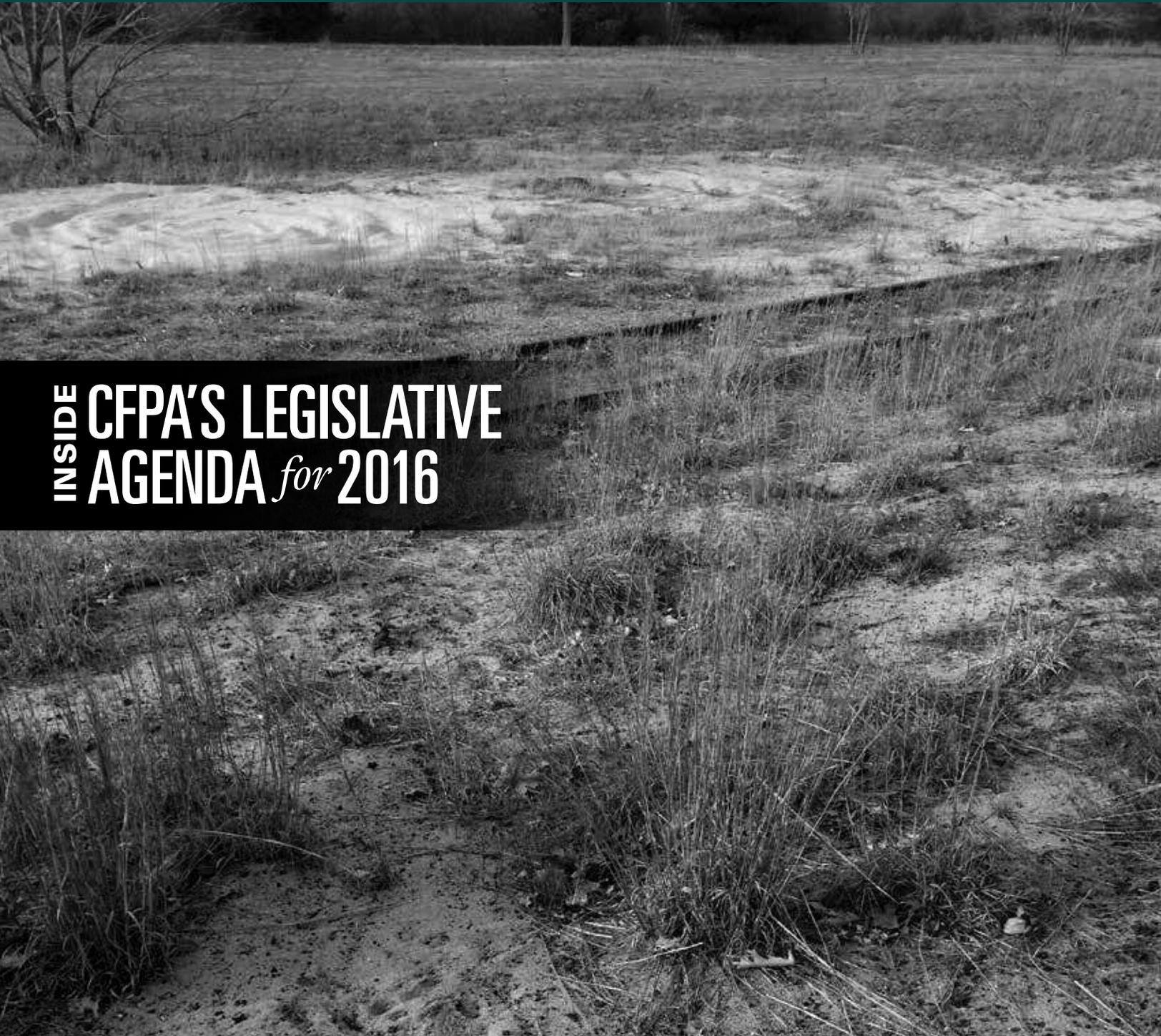


CONNECTICUT **Woodlands**



INSIDE **CFPA'S LEGISLATIVE**
AGENDA *for* **2016**

THE DISAPPEARED SANDPLAINS

A LAND TRUST CELEBRATES 50 YEARS • BEAR PROBLEMS

CONNECTICUT Woodlands

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A small sandplain in central Connecticut. The whiter section at the top is where an all-terrain vehicle did circles.

PHOTO BY CHRISTINE WOODSIDE

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JOSHUA'S TRUST

*Northeastern Connecticut's steward of 4,500 acres
prepares for the next 50 years*

BY TERESE KARMEL

Agnes Fuller's cow pasture on a remote piece of farmland in Chaplin is a perfect example of the conservation and history mission of Joshua's Trust, a prominent organization that celebrates its 50th anniversary this year.

Each day, Mrs. Fuller, who managed her farm until well into her 90s, dragged her painful knees up a steep wooded hill to feed her cows. So when she neared the end of her life, she wanted to make sure her 12-acre pasture would remain in its natural state, even though its former bovine inhabitants had long since moved on.

"I want to do what Mollie Hubbard did," she said often, referring to her deceased neighbor, a science illustrator at the University of Connecticut, who donated 31 acres of hay fields, hardwood forests, and two ponds, now called the Hubbard Sanctuary, to the trust. At the top of a hill adjacent

to Hubbard's land, through an iconic stone wall, a wood sign announces "Agnes' Pasture," preserved in perpetuity as the strong Yankee woman had requested.

Joshua's Trust, which manages or owns 4,500 acres in 14 eastern Connecticut towns and holds assets of more than \$12 million (from its original \$1,400), was formed in April 1966 through mutual cooperation between the Mansfield Historical Society and the town Conservation Commission.

It is a unique organization, staffed by a full-time executive director, Michael Hveem, an experienced lawyer and native of the region. More than 200 volunteers dedicate their time to protect prime undeveloped land in eastern Connecticut.

The name—officially, Joshua's Tract Conservation and Historic Trust—refers to February 1675, when a Mohegan chief, Joshua Attawanhood, in his last will and testament bequeathed a large portion of his hunting

Above, Agnes Fuller's field in Chaplin, preserved and marked.

TERESE KARMEL

ground to “sixteen men of Norwich” in the following language:

I Joshua Sachim Son of Uncas Sachim, Liveing nigh Eight mile Island on the River of Connectticot and within ye Bounds of Lime being Sick of body but of good and perfect memory and not knowing how Soon I may depart this Life doe make this my Last Will and testament. . . .

This was followed by a detailed description of each tract, which encompassed what became the towns of Windham, Mansfield, Chaplin, Hampton, and Scotland. Joshua’s seal, the so-called “critter,” is the trust’s logo.

The history of the trust is recorded in a newly published book, *Fifty Years of Trust: The Story of Joshua’s Tract Conservation and Historic Trust* (Elm Grove Press, Mystic) by Rudy Favretti, a landscape architect, whose energy and research skills have given this community several histories of area landmarks.

The evolution of Joshua’s Trust can be measured by its change in venues, from a tiny office in a local Willimantic bank to its newest home in Mansfield, a 19th-century family farmhouse donated by the late Isabelle Atwood. The house and a host of outbuildings, including a working weaver’s cottage, carriage shed, blacksmith shop (all of which Ms. Atwood specified should be developed into a museum), and a large black-and-white cat named Mouse, can be found at the intersection of Wormwood Hill and Gurleyville roads in Mansfield, just a few miles from the historic Gurleyville Gristmill, one of the trust’s first purchases in the 1970s. The stone gristmill, originally built in 1750, is open to visitors and was once operated by the family of Wilbur Lucius Cross, governor of Connecticut from 1931 to 1939.

Another early purchase, the Ashford Oak, a nearly 375-year-old red oak once considered the largest and oldest in the state, is carefully maintained by trust stewards.

Other early properties include Bradley-Buchanan Woods, a 25-acre parcel with a 10-acre pond in Mansfield Center. It was in the Buchanan family for three generations. Proposal Rock, 30 acres in Mansfield Center,

was sold to the trust at a bargain price by a woman whose father had proposed to her mother standing near one of the boulders. More recently, the trust received a unique 102-acre forested area and pond in Windham called the Allanach-Wolf Woodlands along with funds to maintain the land and purchase adjacent property to create greenways.

Today, the operation of Joshua’s Trust is far more complicated, with many volunteers and much administrative work, than it was in the early years. Mr. Hveem said a number of challenges lie ahead, starting with renewal of the trust’s accreditation by the national Land Trust Alliance. The renewal process requires careful research and property inspection. Joshua’s Trust is one of only 15 accredited land trusts in Connecticut. This recognition is seen as a seal of approval, which foundations that might donate funds will notice, according to Mr. Hveem, an attorney and professional librarian with experience at directing a number of organizations.

The trust is currently engaged in securing foundation donations, which Mr. Hveem said the organization has not been particularly active with in the past.

One concern, he said, is that the trust’s members and volunteers are aging, and many of the early active members have died—a

A GREAT REASON BEHIND JOSHUA’S TRUST SUCCESS AND GROWTH IS THAT IT HAS NEVER VEERED FROM ITS ORIGINAL MISSION OF LAND CONSERVATION AND RESPECT FOR HISTORY. THE EXACT LANGUAGE THAT APPEARS IN THE ORIGINAL APRIL 1966 BYLAWS APPEARS IN ITS LATEST TAX FORMS, THAT IS TO “PRESERVE THE RURAL CHARACTER OF THE AREA” AND “TO ACQUIRE AND ASSURE THE PRESERVATION AND MAINTENANCE” OF OPEN SPACE AND NATURAL RESOURCES AND LAND WITH HISTORIC SIGNIFICANCE TO THE AREA.



COURTESY OF JOSHUA’S TRUST

Joshua’s Trust helped this cow named Sweetheart find a new home last year, after her owner had died and donated her farm to the trust.

situation other conservation organizations also face. “We started with passionate young people in the 1960s and 1970s.” Mr. Hveem said. “We’re always looking to engage people in their 20s, 30s, and 40s. We have an issue, we’re working on it and we have hope.”

A great reason behind Joshua’s Trust success and growth is that it has never veered from its original mission of land conservation and respect for history. The exact language that appears in the original April 1966 bylaws appears in its latest tax forms, that is to “preserve the rural character of the area” and “to acquire and assure the preservation and maintenance” of open space and natural resources and land with historic significance to the area.

Mr. Favretti pointed out that the diligent core of volunteers are professional planners, engineers, and historians associated with the University of Connecticut. Although afternoon teas to raise funds may have been replaced by concerts by local bands, eco-forums by

professionals, and wine tastings, the volunteers are the heart and soul of the organization.

SINCE 1966, VOLUNTEERS HAVE BEEN THE HEART AND SOUL OF THE ORGANIZATION.

One such individual is Warren Church, an Eastern Connecticut native, who has been among the leaders of the trust for decades. Mr. Church is a retired engineer who returned from Massachusetts to his native Chaplin, where five genera-

tions of his family have lived since 1834 when his great grandfather settled there.

As a kid, Mr. Church wondered what was so special about the place. He said he called it “Hicksville.” But between his junior and senior years at the University of Connecticut, he took a summer job with the California park service. It was a life changing experience.

“I saw the wide-open West and then we drove back and I couldn’t believe my eyes coming into the Quiet Corner. I didn’t realize until I went away the beauty of the area, how unique it is and how it must be preserved.”

His family donated the 37-acre Bernard Church Woods, named for the late Chaplin town clerk, to Joshua’s Trust in 1993.

Are there more conservation-minded people hidden in the forests and on the windswept fields of Eastern Connecticut, so that the next 50 years are as enriching for this organization as the first half-century?

Mr. Hveem feels the region is “poised for exponential growth” for land trusts but stressed that with growth will come a greater need for volunteers and donors to continue the mission.

Since we began this written journey about Joshua’s Trust with a cow story, why not end it that way? A year ago, with snow still on the ground, Mr. Hveem was faced with an unusual task. A woman had died suddenly, leaving her Mansfield farmland to the trust. She had wanted her pet rust-colored cow, Sweetheart, to be found a home. Mr. Hveem and Mr. Church made the search, relocating Sweetie as her owner had wanted. The new owners even agreed to let a family friend visit the cow.

It’s not just land that is left to the Trust. A cow? Why not? It’s history and it’s part of the land.

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