

### 3.4.4c: Improve Open Space Parcels Town of Old Lyme

The Town of Old Lyme’s Open Space Commission is committed to protecting and maintaining its conserved properties to ensure they are enjoyed by residents and visitors, and that they also serve as varied and supportive habitat for natural wildlife. The Commission strives to maintain an equitable balance between human use and protecting a relatively undisturbed natural environment.

As a main priority, the Open Space Commission is committed to user safety. This includes first and foremost a safe trail system. Three paid stewards are employed to actively monitor and maintain safe trails around the full calendar year. In addition, commission members themselves walk properties and the commission responds rapidly to citizen concerns communicated via phone or email.



Trail safety involves physical remediation of dangers, such as removing fallen or leaning trees and limbs. Safety is also proactively addressed via trail improvements, such as repairing or building bridges over streams and wet areas or re-routing trails.

Safety and enjoyable trail use is enhanced by regulation and communication. Trail safety rules are posted including, for example, a prohibition against fires and use of motorized vehicles on trails.

The commission strives to improve trail safety through responsive communication as needed. When dog/coyote conflicts occurred, signs were posted warning of the dangers of coyotes during breeding

season. “QR” codes were added to all trailhead maps so users might quickly download up-to-date maps (<https://www.oldlyme-ct.gov/open-space-commission/pages/hiking-maps-demand> ).

The commission also created an emergency responders’ book with trail maps, access points and other information for use in the event a rescue would be needed. Informal surveys were conducted to show that visitors have acceptable cell-phone range throughout open space lands.

Policies guiding specific projects below include the Open Space Commission’s environmentally responsible **Herbicide Use Policy**, including limiting the use of glyphosate. <https://www.oldlyme-ct.gov/open-space-commission/pages/use-herbicides-open-space-property>

The commission also adopted a **Beaver Policy on Open Space Property Policy** that allows beaver activity to continue undisturbed as long as it does not threaten critical infrastructure or private property. <https://www.oldlyme-ct.gov/open-space-commission/pages/beaver-policy-open-space-property>

### **SPECIFIC PROJECTS COMPLETED**

#### **Educational Amenities at the Ames Family Open Space Property:**

The Old Lyme Open Space Commission used Earth Day 2021 to launch a beavers and birds conservation/education program in the town’s Ames Family Open Space. The program is sponsored by grants from The Rockfall Foundation and the Hartford Audubon Society.

The Commission’s slogan and philosophy, “Let Nature Be,” ensures that wildlife activity on open space results in a host of beneficial impacts from which the public can learn.

In the case of beavers, one of only a few animals that create their own habitat, the Open Space Commission is protecting non-nuisance beaver activity on open space land and deterring illegal vandalism. To determine nuisance activity for nearby private property, drones aerially surveyed the Ames Open Space boundaries to determine if and where beaver activity was adverse to private property.

The Educational Program focuses on the features of beaver ponds and the amazing variety of birds, plants, and wildlife that depend on them -- an ecosystem vastly more complex than simply dams and lodges. Beaver ponds also improve aquifer quality through natural filtration and regulate flow so downstream areas do not run dry in summer months.

Visitors, bird watchers, and students have a wonderful opportunity to observe nature in action at two wildlife observational areas. Benches hewn from native wood harvested on open space land were installed, and aluminum interpretive



*Bench Installation at Ames*

signs outlining the ecology of beaver ponds and use thereof by birds and other species were designed and being installed in the late summer of 2021 (see below for interpretive sign content).

High-definition cameras with remote access are capturing wildlife activity for web-posting with help from Lyme-Old Lyme High School students. QR codes on the educational signage also link to the video footage, so visitors can watch beaver and bird activity that took place earlier at these locations and perhaps even see similar activity live.

Additional Documentation: April 2021 Open Space Commission Meeting Minutes, Benches invoice, “Open Space Property Updates:” <https://www.oldlyme-ct.gov/open-space-commission/minutes/open-space-commission-meeting-minutes-04092021>

July 2021 Open Space Commission Meeting Minutes, “Confirmation of Rockfall/Hartford Audubon Signs Purchase:” <https://www.oldlyme-ct.gov/open-space-commission/minutes/open-space-commission-meeting-minutes-07092021>

## Educational Signage at the Ames Family Open Space:

# THE BEAVER POND – A HOME FOR MANY SPECIES

When beavers set up “home” in locations like Ames Open Space, they build a habitat that becomes a true “wildlife community”

Dead trees in their pond become ideal nesting homes for great blue herons and wood ducks – shown at right. Woodpeckers hollow cavities in trees hunting insects, and those become nests for black-capped chickadees, nut-hatches, tree swallows and others.

More sunlight allows aquatic plants to thrive, benefitting crayfish, dragonflies, damselflies and other life. This attracts muskrats, mallards, geese, black ducks, least bitterns (a threatened species) and king rails (an endangered species).



On land, plants and shrubs flourish, attracting deer, American woodcock and other species. A “beaver meadow” may eventually sprout grass and wildflowers, habitat that draws American goldfinch, sparrows, monarch butterflies and others. Over time, the beavers will exhaust their food supply and move. The natural cycle will continue full circle as the land will become re-forested. It’s no wonder beavers are called “environmental champions.”

We can co-exist with beavers. Let nature be! If beaver activity affects private land, contact the Open Space Commission. Vandalism on town land is prohibited! Aim your phone’s camera at this QR code for more info and to watch video of wildlife taken where you stand!



This sign was purchased with grants from The Rockfall Foundation and the Hartford Audubon Society

# BEAVERS – NATURE’S ARCHITECTS



Beavers are the rare animal that creates its own habitat – and their “home” is shared by an amazing variety of birds, plants, and other wildlife. (A nearby sign illustrates life in a beaver “community”).

You may see a beaver dam in Ames Open Space.

Beavers build dams by cutting sticks and branches, shoving them into stream beds, adding mud and other debris.



The resulting pond protects them from predators and offers access to food. Ponds must be deep enough so unfrozen water remains below winter ice.



A mounded beaver lodge is similarly constructed out of sticks and mud – often upstream from the dam. Beaver lodges have several underwater entrances to dry chambers offering shelter and safe space to raise families.

Sometimes saplings may be seen growing on lodges. They will serve as winter food. Beavers can digest cellulose better than most animals, eating up to 2lbs. per day. Their teeth constantly grow, so they need to keep gnawing.

Beaver ponds improve aquifer quality by naturally filtering water and ration flow so downstream areas do not run dry in summers. It’s no wonder beavers are called “environmental champions.”

We can co-exist with beavers. Let nature be! If beaver activity affects private land, contact the Open Space Commission. Vandalism on town land is prohibited! Aim your phone’s camera at the QR code below for more info and to watch wildlife video taken where you stand!



This sign was purchased with grants from The Rockfall Foundation and the Hartford Audubon Society

## **Beaver Impact Management**

Members of the Open Space Commission and Old Lyme First Selectman Tim Griswold met in June 2021 with a representative of Beaver Solutions to assess beaver activity and propose remedies for property owners near Ames Family Open Space. During the site visit, it was discovered that a beaver blockage inside a culvert under Interstate 95, primarily affecting private land, may also be backing water up through a Whippoorwill Road culvert onto town land. The Connecticut Department of Transportation was contacted to inform the State about the blockage.

In June 2021, the Commission voted to install two flow regulation devices (“beaver deceivers”) along Whippoorwill Road and Buttonball Road, by the Ames and Bartholomew Open Space properties. The devices will help prevent flooding that impacts private property or threatens public roadways. The commission co-chair presented plans for their installation before the town Inland Wetlands Commission.

Documentation: June 2021 Meeting Minutes of the Open Space Commission, “Open Space Property Updates” and “Beaver Issues on Ames and Vicinity; Beaver Solutions LLC:” <https://www.oldlyme-ct.gov/open-space-commission/minutes/open-space-commission-meeting-minutes-06112021>

July 2021 Meeting Minutes of the Open Space Commission, “Confirmation of Beaver Solutions LLC Work:” <https://www.oldlyme-ct.gov/open-space-commission/minutes/open-space-commission-meeting-minutes-07092021>

## **Parking for Public Access to McCulloch Family Open Space**

A parking area was constructed in 2020 to allow access to the town’s McCulloch Family Open Space at the “Tree in the Gap” trailhead off Whippoorwill Road. This lovely trail leads to a picturesque meadow and pond and connects directly to the Old Lyme Land Trust’s Lay-Allen Preserve.

The Open Space Commission, with sensitivity to our town’s past history, worked with State Archaeologist Sarah Sportman and volunteers to complete an archaeological assessment of potential Native American habitation at the site of the new parking area.

The UConn-led team dug test holes and carefully inspected everything found within the soil to look for the presence of materials or artifacts used by early inhabitants. Nothing significant was found, and the Open Space Commission proceeded with the parking area construction free of the risk of damaging a culturally significant site.



*Photographs of archeological dig.*

Documentation of Completion: Open Space Commission Meeting Minutes: 10/9/20, "Existing Business: 1. Open Space Property Updates":

<https://www.oldlyme-ct.gov/open-space-commission/minutes/open-space-commission-meeting-minutes-10092020>

### **Bench added to Rook's Meadow (McCulloch Family Open Space)**

Prior to its public opening on National Trails Day 2020, a hand-hewn bench was installed at "Rook's Meadow," an open meadow overlooking the peaceful Jimmy's Pond within the McCulloch Family Open Space. This provides a wonderful spot for quiet contemplation, plein air painting, reading a book or just taking a relaxing lunch break.



At the same time, hundreds of feet of rubberized horse fencing was removed from the town's acquired McCulloch family property with assistance from the Connecticut Hiking Alliance.

Documentation of Completion: See "Rook's Meadow & Jimmy's Pond:"  
<https://www.oldlyme-ct.gov/home/news/mcculloch-family-open-space-open-national-trails-day>

### **Bluebird Houses built for Open Space Properties**

As part of their ongoing collaboration with the Open Space Commission, students in the high school's Environmental Club built bluebird houses this past winter for installation on Open Space properties, ensuring the task was completed and available in time for spring nesting activity.



*Lyme-Old Lyme High School Environmental Club Students in their school workshop with newly constructed bluebird boxes*

*(Near Right) Students on site for the installation of bluebird boxes at Champlain North*

*(Far Right) Open Space Co-Chair Evan Griswold installing a bluebird box at McCulloch Family Open Space.*



Open Space Meeting Minutes February 2021, “Community Outreach Report:”  
<https://www.oldlyme-ct.gov/open-space-commission/minutes/open-space-commission-meeting-minutes-02122021>

### **Historic Barbizon Oak Health Addressed at Champlain North**

An evaluation by two local arborist companies confirmed that a historic tree on the Champlain North property, the “Barbizon Oak,” was in poor health in the autumn of 2020.

The Barbizon Oak, thought to be at least 300 years old, was the subject of many artists’ paintings a century ago when the Lyme Art Colonists lived and painted across the street at the Florence Griswold House. The name given the tree by locals, “Barbizon Oak,” refers to the Barbizon School of French painters.

A tree service donated its services to inject fertilizer around the oak in an attempt to nurture a recovery. The tree service also provided a truckload of mulch that the LOLHS Environmental Club and volunteers spread around the tree base to mitigate summer drought periods and suppress weed growth. Seedlings of the Barbizon Oak have been marked for nurturing.

Documentation Minutes: November 2020 Open Space Commission Meeting Minutes, “Existing Business, 1. Open Space Property Update/Champlain North”  
<https://www.oldlyme-ct.gov/open-space-commission/minutes/open-space-commission-meeting-minutes-11132020>

### **Improved GPS Mapping and Signage at all Sites**

Following a Spring 2020 GPS review of various town open space properties to ensure town maps correctly outline boundaries, signs were installed at each of the six Open Space public properties to indicate boundaries and where trails enter or exit open space land.

The Open Space Commission continually improves the signage and maps available for its hikers.

In addition to new signage at two entry points for the Champlain North Open Space, the Commission repositioned its signage at the Library Lane entrance to the

Champlain South property, moving it closer to the entrance and increasing its height, thereby improving its visibility.

Documentation: Open Space Commission Meeting Minutes, June 12, 2020, “1. Budget Review& Invoice Payout” and ”2. Updated Kiosks & New Signage:” <https://www.oldlyme-ct.gov/open-space-commission/minutes/open-space-commission-meeting-minutes-02122021>

## **SPECIFIC PROJECTS UNDERWAY/CURRENTLY IN DEVELOPMENT**

### **Second Parking Area for McCulloch Family Open Space Visitors**

The Commission also worked with the state archaeologist, a surveyor, a traffic engineer, and others to plan the construction of a second parking area to access the McCulloch Family Open Space. This new parking area will be placed near the “yellow” trailhead off a different Whippoorwill Road entrance. Construction will commence in late 2021.

Documentation: July 2021 Open Space Commission Meeting Minutes, “Authorization of Expenses Relating to Construction of a McCulloch Family Open Space Parking Area”: <https://www.oldlyme-ct.gov/open-space-commission/minutes/open-space-commission-meeting-minutes-07092021>

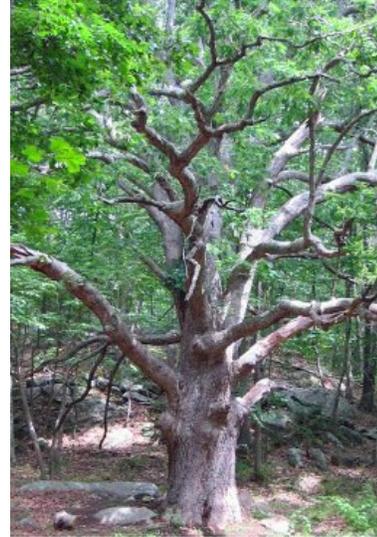
### **Art Trail at Champlain North**

The Open Space Commission is actively engaged with the Florence Griswold Museum and the Roger Tory Peterson Estuary Center of the CT Audubon Society, both across the roadway from the entrance to the Champlain North Open Space, to promote the town’s “arts corner” and associated walking trails. The commission will also seek to work with the Lyme Art Association and the Lyme Academy of Fine Art to encourage activity such as plein air painting on Open Spaces.

The Commission plans to improve the Diana Atwood Johnson Red Trail with amenities such as a hand-hewn bench to overlook the Barbizon Oak, an interpretive display sign with information on the historic (both culturally and ecologically) tree and the artists who painted its likeness, and other amenities such as a sign explaining the unusual Formica anthills along the trail.



Henry Ward Ranger, "Connecticut Woods," 1899.  
Smithsonian American Art Museum



The Barbizon Oak in 2019

Documentation: Open Space Commission Minutes of July 2021, "Champlain North Artists' Trail" and "Authorization of Expenses Relating to Purchase of a Visitors' Bench and Display Signs:" <https://www.oldlyme-ct.gov/open-space-commission/minutes/open-space-commission-meeting-minutes-07092021>

### **Accessible Trail Study for Champlain North:**

A Compliant Trails Committee has been established by the Open Space Commission to assess the feasibility of an all-abilities accessible trail upgrade on certain open space. It was determined that the trail most conducive to such an improvement would be the Diana Atwood Johnson Red Trail at Champlain North.

The Commission now has a preliminary cost estimate to construct an accessible trail and is pursuing an overall plan perspective prior to fundraising efforts which would allow trail construction. This particular trail seems suitable because of parking access, land topography, the absence of wetlands and the scenic/historic viewpoint overlooking the Barbizon Oak, outfitted with seating and signs.

Documentation: Meeting Minutes, December 2020, "Compliant Trails Committee Report:" <https://www.oldlyme-ct.gov/open-space-commission/minutes/open-space-commission-meeting-minutes-12102020>

## **Wildlife Refuge at Eklund Pond**

The Open Space Commission has established a committee to explore the establishment of a wildlife refuge at its Eklund Pond property (a property without hiking trails). The first step is controlling extensive invasives in the pond and surrounding land.

Documentation: September 2020 Open Space Commission Meeting Minutes reference, “Eklund Pond as Wildlife Sanctuary: Overview & Update”

<https://www.oldlyme-ct.gov/open-space-commission/minutes/open-space-commission-meeting-minutes-9112020>

July 2021 Open Space Commission Meeting Minutes, “Establishment of an Eklund Refuge Exploratory Committee:” <https://www.oldlyme-ct.gov/open-space-commission/minutes/open-space-commission-meeting-minutes-07092021>

## **Re-routing the Yellow Trail at Champlain North**

The Open Space Commission completing its work with the Old Lyme Inn (once known as the Barbizon Oak Inn) to re-route the Champlain North yellow trail path. The former trail crossed wetlands, making it largely impassable for significant stretches of time. The new trail leads from the Inn parking area (beginning on their private property) to the Diana Atwood Johnson Red Trail near the Barbizon Oak. In addition, the re-routed trail now runs near historic farm foundations and ruins that will be emphasized in future education. The greatly improved trail also provides direct, paved parking access to the open space for inn guests and for the public to be utilized via events such as town “Hikers’ Happy Hours” sponsored by the Open Space Commission, the Old Lyme Land Trust and the Old Lyme Inn.

Documentation: Open Space Commission Meeting Minutes of March 2021 “Community Outreach and Grant Updates:” <https://www.oldlyme-ct.gov/open-space-commission/minutes/open-space-commission-meeting-minutes-03122021>

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