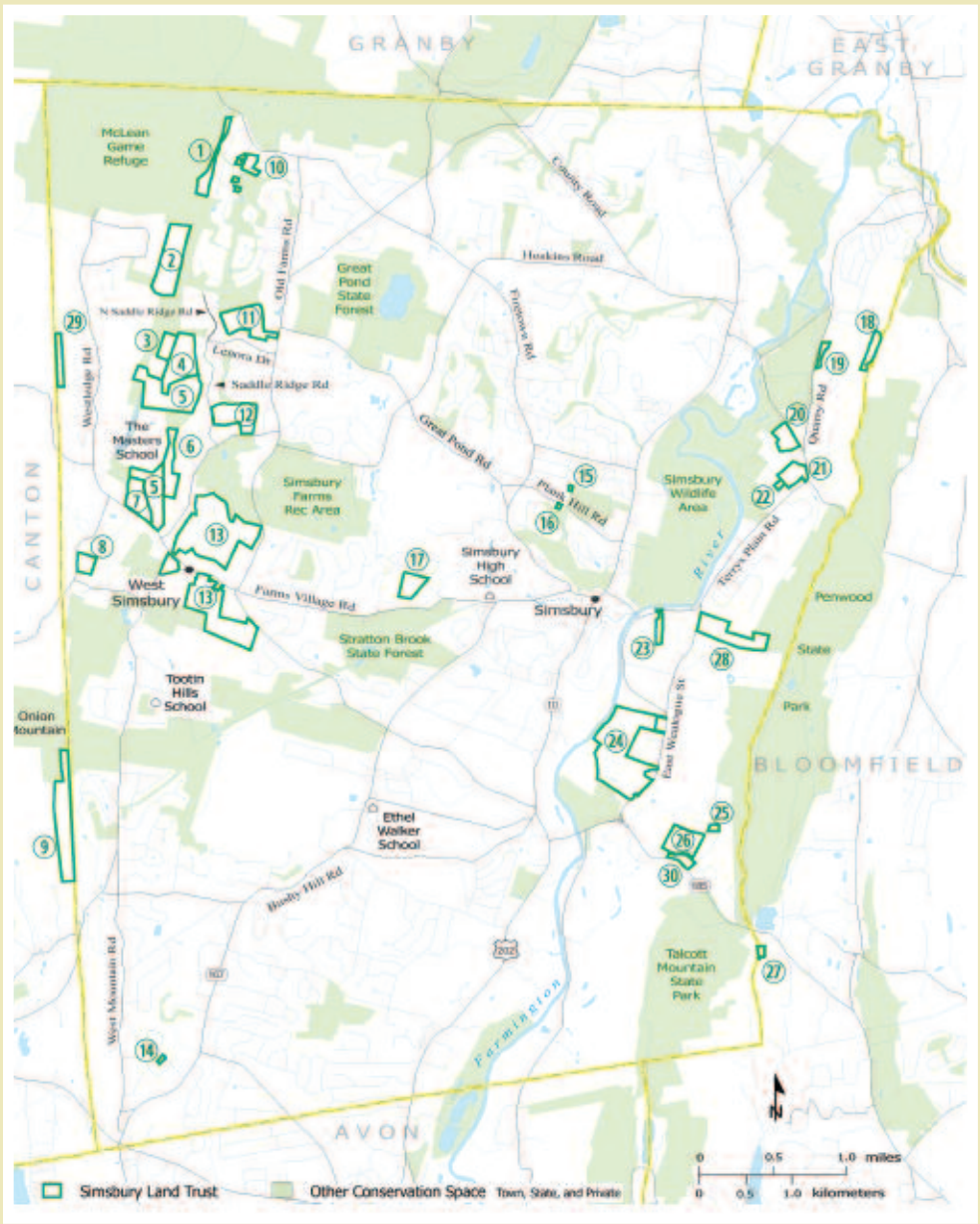
Simsbury Land Trust

2009 Annual Report

Simsbury Open Space



Simsbury Land Trust Properties

1 Cannon
2 Cathles
3 Friedman
4 Hendrick
5 The Master's School
6 Hedgehog
7 Westledge
8 Walker
9 Arnold
10 Leaska
11 Bog
12 Knapp
13 Tulmeadow Farm
14 Rose/Krasnoger
15 Carlson
16 Bergman
17 Welden
18 James
19 Ketchin Quarry
20 Wegner
21 Case
22 Landerman
23 Salster
24 Rosedale Farms
25 Fletcher
26 Holcomb
27 Cutler
28 Owen/Mortimer
29 Landerman #2
30 Glover

Recent Simsbury Land Trust Property Acquisitions 2004 – 2009

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Staff

Letter from the President

Photo: T.J. Donohue

The Simsbury Land Trust continued to make progress on several fronts even as we spent most of the year in hopeful anticipation that our application for a Forest Legacy Grant would come through for the Tulmeadow Woodlot. The big news for 2009 was the $1.4 million grant that was approved in the late fall. This was accomplished with strong support from local and state officials, other preservation organizations, and particularly effective assistance by Senators Dodd and Lieberman and Congressmen Murphy and Larson. Our task in 2010 will now be to raise the additional funds necessary to complete this final phase of Tulmeadow.

Meanwhile, the Simsbury Land Trust and its volunteers have been quite busy. We continued to balance our land purchasing efforts with land donations through the gift of a half interest in approximately nine acres of land on the north side of Rt. 185 at the eastern gateway to Simsbury. This gift from Hank and Lynzy Glover will enable us to work with the remaining owners to develop a preservation plan for some or all of the property or develop a strategy that may yield an economic benefit to the SLT.

SLT's new office.

Property stewardship remained an emphasis for 2009. A work day was held to deal with invasive plants at our 60 Westledge property and we contracted for significant invasive plant removal work on the Owen Mortimer property on East Weatogue Street. More work remains to be done, but the results were very impressive. To assist with property stewardship efforts, we welcomed Kelley Weikel to the Board of Directors. Kelley took over from Steve Osborn as coordinator of our property stewards. Many thanks to Steve for his work in organizing the property steward effort and getting it going.

One of the most visible developments in 2009 was the relocation of our office to the center of Simsbury. We enjoyed our years in Tariffville, but we are thrilled to be back in downtown Simsbury in the Old Probate Court building on the east side of the Simsbury Historical Society complex. The building perfectly symbolizes our preservation efforts and gives us an identifiable presence in Town. To celebrate the move, we hosted an open house at the new office in October.

I am particularly proud of the broad range of recreational and educational programs hosted in 2009. Among these activities were a birding walk, a talk on wildlife, our annual supper and winter hike at Flamig Farm, hikes in the McLean Game Refuge, 60 Westledge and in the Tariffville Gorge, a farm bicycle tour through Simsbury and Granby, and a celebration of local farms with a BBQ at Tulmeadow. These events are free to the public and are an integral part of what we do. We ended the year with over 760 members, and we appreciate this strong support from the people of Simsbury. For many of us, the economic downturn has made us all the more aware of the simple joys of a hike or talk at the library. Take a few moments and visit our website (www.simsburylandtrust.org) and join us for one of our activities.

None of the great work of the Simsbury Land Trust would be possible without the strong support of our members and of the community. We have a great group of committed volunteers. But, we are always looking for additional people who are willing to lend a hand, particularly as we move forward to raise the remaining funds for the Tulmeadow Woodlot.

Please pause for a moment to consider the fine work of those who in the past had the foresight to preserve some of the best parts of Simsbury — whether as State Parks, Town land, or private properties — and then join us as we take our turn to continue this effort. I believe that with your help, we can complete the Tulmeadow Woodlot project in 2010.

Thank you,

Chuck Howard
President

Photo: Ray Padron

Photo: Rick Warters

Photo: Dick Clark

Why do we value

There is a place at Tulmeadow Farm where you step out of the woods. You are suddenly warmed by the sun. The smell is fresh and clear. The sky above is a magnificent bright blue and before you the rolling fields of grass and clover wave gently in the summer air. A distant pair of silos and an occasional roof top reminds you that at the far end of these fields, the Tuller family still tends to the business of a substantial farming operation. There, mostly hidden from your view, others live and work in a tiny cluster of buildings surrounding the barns, a village first settled in the wilds, west of Simsbury, over 200 years ago. The village, its homes and shops, its church, fire station, post office and grange, is there today, along with the barns, but what you see where you are standing and what provides the sense of wonder, is the expanse of 60 acres of uninterrupted field before you, the 73 acres of woods that you just stepped out of, and the splendid string of hills that creates a two mile visual backdrop between the fields and the sky. With the exception of the village rooftops, there is not another building within sight.

Virtually all that you see as you leave the woods and step into the fields is protected conservation land. No matter how much the town grows in the future, the magic of this place will remain.

This place would be a treasure no matter where it was located, but if you could see it from above, like the hawk circling the farm on this warm summer day, you would see how truly remarkable it is. You would look down on a surrounding landscape heavily partitioned by decades of development. Moreover, just 15 miles across the ridge to the east you would see one of the largest cities in the state and

Photo: Ray Padron

open space?

within a similar distance to the northeast, a busy international airport. Here in the midst of this dense population and human activity is the 260 acre Tulmeadow Farm, and standing here, you could be a thousand miles away. By itself, it is a significant expanse of open space. But in addition, it is part of a larger open space corridor through the developed areas that includes the string of hills beyond the fields and a diverse mix of wetlands, woods and fields to the north and south. Virtually all that you see as you leave the woods and step into the fields is protected conservation land. No matter how much the town grows in the future, the magic of this place will remain.

Other towns in Connecticut, throughout New England and across the country have places as unique and in some cases even more spectacular. What makes this place special to us is that it is ours. It is here where we live, where we call home. With all the unparalleled advantages of a population center (nearby employment, education, healthcare and recreation), we, as a community, have managed to preserve and protect some of the finest natural features, landscapes and wildlife habitat, right here and down the street. Tulmeadow is one of the best. It is easily accessible for a morning jog, a mid-day walk or to simply pause, as you are doing now, to enjoy the vista, the warmth of the sun, the fresh air, and the distance where the noise of traffic is muffled and the sounds you hear are those of the grasshopper and the warbler. Every town and every neighborhood should have such a place.

Photo: Hunter Neal

Time and place and a quality of life

Photos courtesty of Tuller family

As important as it is to the scenic beauty and character of Simsbury, Tulmeadow Farm is also an historic treasure and the Town's oldest continuously operated small business. The Tuller family has a uniquely long association with this particular place on earth. It has worked and loved and cared for this land, generation after generation, until time and place and family have become one.

Arriving in 1686, John Tuller was among Simsbury's earliest settlers. Several decades later, in the mid 1700s, John's grandson, Elijah, inherited and purchased several parcels of land in an outlying area along Hop Brook at the base of the hills known first as Case's Farms then The Farms and later Farmer's Village and West Simsbury Center. In 1768, eight years prior to the Declaration of Independence, Elijah moved there and began to farm. Over the next 10 years he served in the Revolutionary War and returned to build a new home for himself and nearby homes for two sons. During the early years he raised beef, cut timber, at one point owned 11 head of cattle, three oxen, two swine and maintained 70 acres of cultivated field and pasture. In subsequent years, he divided portions of the farm among his sons. When he died in 1814, the farm was producing wool, corn, hay, tobacco, flax and lumber.*

Some years after Elijah, his son, Jeremiah, began operating the farm and continued to do so until his death in 1871. During this period, the farm expanded to include over 100 acres north and south of the road as well as timber land and pasture that extended up into the hills (past the present day The Master's School). Its prosperity included from time to time production of beef, pork and produce, dairy products, tobacco, timber, operation of a general store, a large cider mill and a distillery. Along the road through Farms Village at that time were a cooper's shop, gristmill, sawmill, the stone schoolhouse, cider mill, distillery and several homes still standing today.*

Three generations later, two brothers, Oliver and Robert Tuller continued to farm at Tulmeadow. In a wonderful interview in the Hartford Courant in 1976, Oliver Tuller talked about going to school across the road at the stone school house where his mother Theona had taught. She also, at one time, ran the general store in the village and from the store, the post office. At the time of the interview, the farm had 131 dairy cows, 60 acres of timber, a lumber mill, 2,000 chickens, a 150 tree apple orchard, 100 acres of hay and 40 acres of corn for the cows. Robert explained that the farm had had an active sawmill "for as long as I can remember" and that most of the houses and barns had been built from timber grown and milled on site.

Besides farming, running the mills and operating the stores, each generation also made the time to serve regularly in elected office, at both the state and local level. And over the years, the family sold, leased or donated land from the farm for such community uses as the stone school, the post office, the fire station, the reservoir, and the Westledge School (now The Master's School).

**From Mary Nason's "Tulmeadow Farm — The First Two Hundred Years"*

Photos from top to bottom:
A typical harvest from the woodlot; High yield from the south fields; Oliver and Robert Tuller farming in the 1970s; Several generations of the Tuller family gathered at a Simsbury Land Trust Membership Celebration on the farm.

A Decision for the Future

Farms Village or West Simsbury Center is still there consisting of several 18th, 19th and early 20th century homes, shops and small businesses. The old school house, now a Tuller home, the Grange building, still in use, a modern church, a small convenience center, several small offices, a post office and a new fire station line the street. It remains as a reminder of a distant past and a place to enjoy, if only briefly, the slower pace of a more natural world. At the center of this small cluster of buildings are the barns, store, and the homes of Tulmeadow Farm.

Today, the farm consists of 260 acres north, south and west of Farms Village Road. It is operated by cousins Oliver "Buzz" Tuller, Jr and Don Tuller, the ninth generation since 1768 to farm at this location. In 2003, Buzz sold the 150 cow herd (75 milking cows) and replaced it with what is currently a 60 head herd of grass fed beef cattle. The forage that was raised on the farm and in fields around town to feed the milking herd is now fed to the beef cows and the surplus is sold to other farmers. For the past 15 years Don has expanded the farm store and developed a successful ice cream business. On pleasant evenings throughout the summer, the store's ice cream window is a popular community gathering spot. The store also sells a range of seasonal produce as well as gardening supplies, plants, Christmas trees and pumpkins. The Tullers also continue to manage the 73 acre woodlot, south of the fields, for timber production.

Photo: Hunter Neal

Photo: T. J. Donohue

We as a community are enormously lucky that the Tuller family has had the vision and the desire to see Tulmeadow Farm continue for generations to come.

As with every family business, farm owners have to periodically make decisions regarding estate planning and asset distribution. This can be challenging when there is a desire both to distribute assets and to continue the business, particularly when the family is large and the assets are not liquid. The Tullers have been making these decisions for nearly 250 years and recently they have had to make them again.

One obvious option for a farm in today's world is to sell all or a significant portion of the land to a residential developer. Over the years there have been numerous attractive offers. However, Buzz, Don and several other family members hoped to find an alternative that would enable the farm to continue. Fortunately, and remarkably, all eight separate families, a number of whom no longer live in Connecticut, were willing to consider alternatives.

In 2003 the Tuller family entered into an agreement with the Simsbury Land Trust to sell agricultural conservation easements. The agreement provided for a transaction that would take place in several phases, each dependent on the prior one being completed. In 2006, the SLT purchased an easement on 167 acres, the primary fields to the north and south of Farms Village Road. In 2008, it purchased an easement on an additional 20 acres, the Triangle Field just west of Farms Village and the nearby Pasture. The SLT is now raising the money to purchase an easement on the remaining 73 acres consisting of the Woodlot.

We as a community are enormously lucky that the Tuller family has had the vision and the desire to see Tulmeadow Farm continue for generations to come.

How does the transaction work?

In a transaction like the one between the Tuller families and the Simsbury Land Trust, the seller permanently transfers to the SLT certain rights they have as owners of the land. In exchange, the Simsbury Land Trust makes a cash payment to the seller. Primary among the rights the Tullers give up is the right to develop (except for farm related building in a small defined area). They also agree that the fields will be cut on an annual basis and that a professional forest management plan (for on-going harvests) will be maintained for the woods. And they provide a public walking path through portions of the farm during certain hours of the day.

The Tullers retain most other rights of ownership. They continue to have the right to sell, lease or bequest the property (subject to the SLT easement that remains in place regardless of who may own the farm in the future). They continue to make all decisions regarding the operation of the farm.

The Simsbury Land Trust owns land or interests in land at 30 locations totaling 832 acres. Most of these properties are owned in fee and were donated by individuals. In the case of a farm, however, most owners cannot give away their primary business asset and continue to stay in business. Therefore, the SLT generally purchases interests in farmland at a negotiated price, typically at or close to market.

For the easements to date on 187 acres of Tulmeadow, the SLT has paid approximately $3.4 million. Of that, approximately $1,700,000 was obtained from grants from the USDA-NRCS Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program which seeks to preserve prime or important agricultural soils. $500,000 was obtained from the CT-DEP Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition Program which seeks to provide public access. $200,000 was provided by the Town of Simsbury. Approximately $300,000 came from private foundations (primarily the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving and the Ensign-Bickford Foundation). And $700,000 was donated by individuals (members and friends of the SLT).

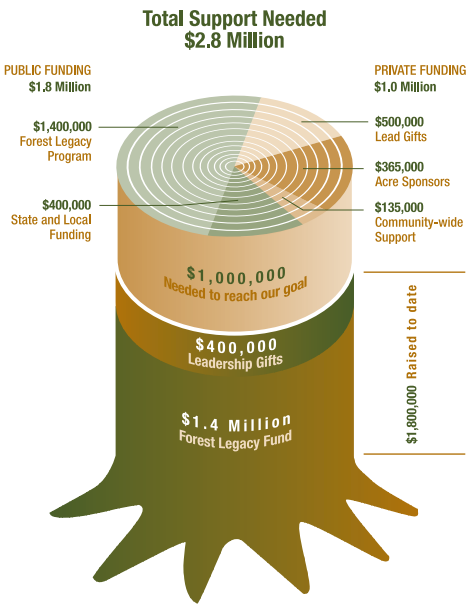
People sometimes ask why we spend so much for just an easement. Why not spend a little more and own the land outright? First of all, farm owners generally do not want to give up the ownership. More importantly, we do not want to replace a long standing small business owner. A primary objective of the easement is to allow the farm owner to maximize the long term economic viability of the farm. Third, the SLT does not have the skill and knowledge, the time nor the resources to operate a farm. Fourth, there is often a noticeable difference between an owner and a renter in the level of care and attention they give to a property and the community. Finally, one of the reasons there are so many older farmers today and so few younger ones is that a young farmer starting out today has almost no opportunity to obtain the capital needed to buy a farm. By removing the development rights but allowing the continued opportunity to own, the SLT creates a situation in which a farm is much more affordable for a young farmer trying to get started.

Photo: Hunter Neal

Photo: Dick Clark

Please help to ensure that the quality of life we enjoy today is preserved for present and future generations.

The Tulmeadow Farm Woodlot



How You Can Be Part of this Historic Project

The 73 acre Tulmeadow Woodlot, the last unprotected portion of the farm, is the highest priority for the Simsbury Land Trust. It is an important part of the farm that provides a regular source of needed capital, it is a strategic location connecting two existing protected sites, its active management creates one of the only continuous succession habitats in Simsbury supporting a broader range of plants and animals, it is part of the Stratton Brook watershed and is atop an aquifer rated Primary by the Town and a Level B Aquifer Protection Area by the State, and its logging roads provide opportunities for hay rides, walks and jogging, longer walks from Ethel Walker to the Western Ridge and the venue for the Flamig Farm's popular Halloween Hayrides.

The successful purchase of this 73 acre easement will 1) complete the protection of the 260 acre Tulmeadow Farm and 2) close an important "missing link" in an unbroken natural corridor from The Ethel Walker School to the McLean Game Refuge. The purchase of this conservation easement will be the tenth acquisition by the Simsbury Land Trust to preserve a continuous natural corridor along the west side of town. If we do not complete this final connecting purchase, the Woodlot will be developed and the corridor will permanently partitioned.

In order to accomplish this, the SLT has to assemble the approximately $1,000,000 remaining to fund the purchase price.

We are unbelievably fortunate that the Tuller families have had the desire to preserve Tulmeadow Farm, that they have been willing to work with the SLT for seven long years, that public funding sources have been available and that our membership and the Simsbury community have remained committed to this project.

The Simsbury Land Trust is currently focused on completing the permanent protection of Tulmeadow Farm with the purchase of a conservation easement including the purchase of development rights at the 73 acre Woodlot. The price is $2,830,000.

This is a great opportunity. Please help to ensure that the quality of life we enjoy today is preserved for present and future generations. You can help us finish the farm:

- Commit to a major gift for the Tulmeadow Woodlot
- "Preserve an Acre" for $5,000
- "Preserve a Tree" for $1,000

You can also support the Simsbury Land Trust in other ways.

- Become a member of or renew your membership to the Simsbury Land Trust
- Ask how the Simsbury Land Trust Endowment Fund at the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving can be a part of your planned giving plans.

Remember: Without farms there are no fields and without fields there are no scenic vistas.

Photo: T. J. Donohue

Financial Highlights – 2009

Statement of Revenues and Expenses

January 1 – December 31, 2009

	CAMPAIGN	OPERATIONS	TOTAL 2009	TOTAL 2008
Revenues				
Campaign Donations	$157,802		$157,802	$ 329,605
Grants		$ 27,762	27,762	1,142,168
Land Donations			0	1,375,000
Annual Appeal Income		199	199	1,298
Membership Contributions		91,709	91,709	91,188
Miscellaneous Income		5,444	5,444	12,584
Total Revenues	$157,802	$125,114	$282,916	$2,951,843
Expenses				
Administrative	22,654	21,877	44,531	46,093
Salaries and Benefits	20,811	20,811	41,622	42,694
Membership		33,138	33,138	30,916
Acquisition Expenses			221	6,782
Stewardship		15,782	15,782	16,501
Depreciation		1,208	1,208	1,367
Total Expenses	43,686	92,816	136,502	144,353
Excess of Revenues Over Expenses	$114,116	$ 32,298	$146,414	$2,807,490

Balance Sheet

	DECMEBER 31, 2009	DECEMBER 31, 2008
Assets		
CURRENT ASSETS		
Cash	$ 506,520	$ 419,191
Pledges Receivable – net	299,193	320,061
Prepaid Expenses	5,349	
Deposits	533	3,491
TOTAL CURRENT ASSETS	811,595	742,743
FIXED ASSETS		
Land	9,504,441	9,427,219
Office Equipment – net	3,194	2,652
TOTAL FIXED ASSETS	9,507,635	9,429,871
TOTAL ASSETS	$10,319,230	$10,172,614
Liabilities and Fund Balance		
CURRENT LIABILITIES		
Accrued Liabilities	$ 2,162	$ 1,960
TOTAL CURRENT LIABILITIES	2,162	1,960
FUND BALANCE		
Beginning Fund Balance	9,818,298	7,010,808
Board Designated Stewardship Fund	30,000	30,000
Restricted Stewardship Fund	2,295	2,295
Temporarily Restricted Net Assets	320,061	320,061
Excess of Revenues over Expenses	146,414	2,807,490
ENDING FUND BALANCE	10,317,068	10,170,654
Total Liabilities and Fund Balance	$10,319,230	$10,172,614

Donor Recognition

We want to thank the community for its generous support this past year. None of the Simsbury Land Trust's accomplishments in 2009 would have been possible without our membership and its many remarkable volunteers and donors.

Membership Donations

Star

The Gryphon Fund
The Oak Foundation
Odyssey America Reinsurance Corporation
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Mr. and Mrs. Steve Ballentine
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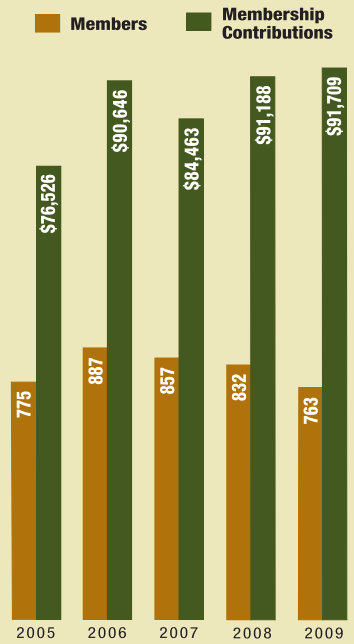

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The Simsbury Land Trust is a not-for-profit organization whose mission is to protect scenic vistas, geological features and farmland that visually define Simsbury's character and provide healthy habitats for local wildlife and plants. Our goal is to consistently craft, support and implement creative land conservation solutions for the benefit of present and future generations.

The Simsbury Land Trust seeks to accomplish its mission through:

Acquisitions: Soliciting and accepting gifts of land and interests in land from individuals and businesses.

Partnerships: Partnering with individuals, organizations, and governmental entities to accomplish our goals.

Advocacy: Participating in public policy dialogue at the local and state levels, in public and private forums.

Stewardship: Managing and using acquired properties in a manner consistent with our mission.

Legacy Building: Soliciting donations from individuals, organizations, foundations and businesses.

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Visit our website and sign up to receive our monthly email updates and reminders about upcoming events.

In addition, new information and maps are posted to our website on a regular basis. You can also join or renew your membership online by credit card and RSVP to Simsbury Land Trust events.

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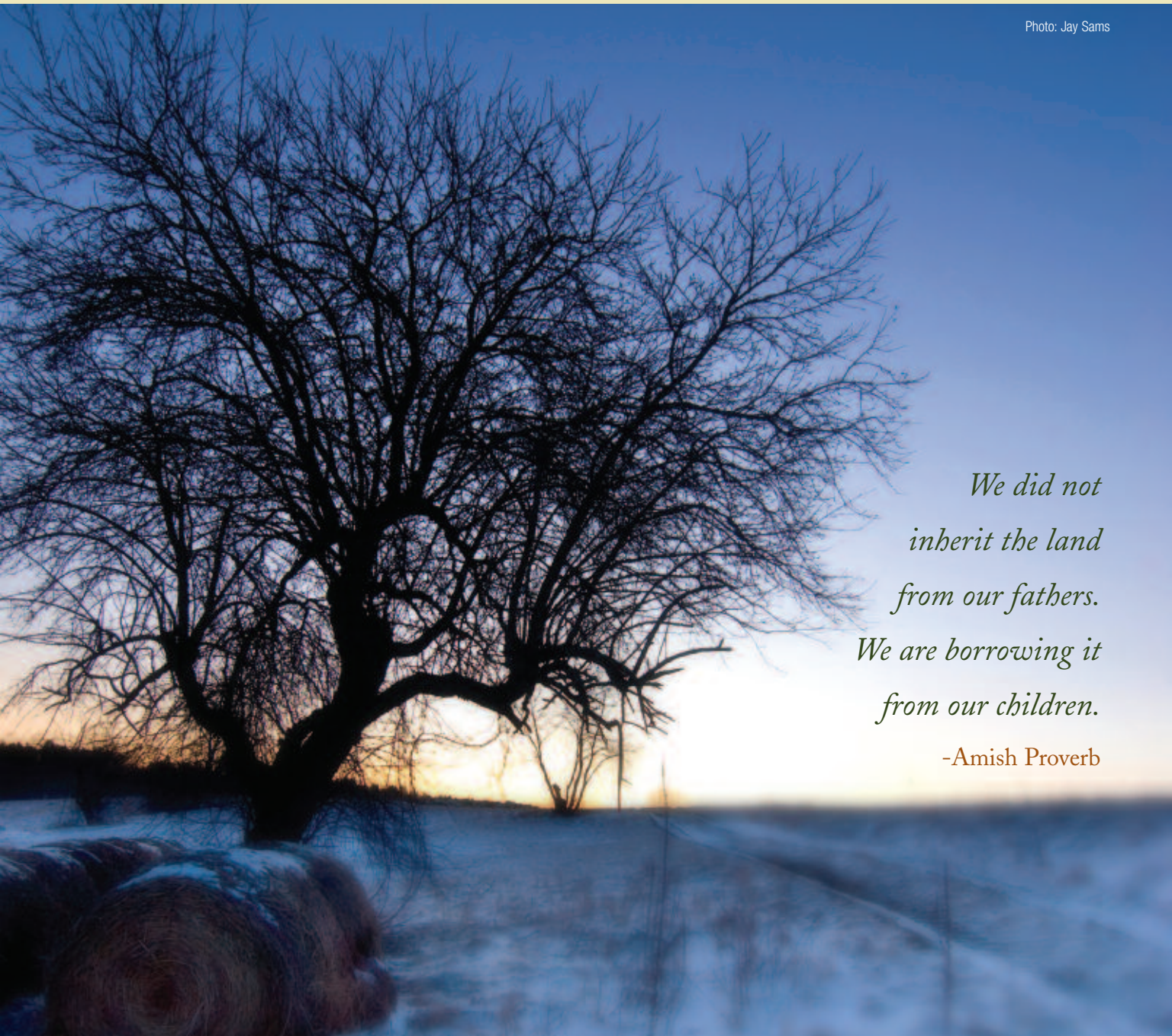
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