



SPRING 2020 Landlines

SIMSBURY LAND TRUST

Since 1976

Saving Our Wild Areas, One Yard at a Time

Feed the Birds, Raise Caterpillars

Margery Winters, SLT President

Caterpillars! The baby bird food chosen by 96% of songbird parents. More nutritious than other insects, high in protein and fats and twice as much of the healthy carotenoids essential for bird development as berries.

And parent birds need a lot of caterpillars. To raise just one nest of chickadees, parent birds must find, within 50 yards of the nest, 350 to 570 caterpillars per day for 16 days. This amounts to a staggering 6,000 to 9,000 caterpillars to fledge one nest of birds. The figure is even higher as parents continue to feed their young for up to 21 days after they leave the nest.

And what is the best way to raise caterpillars for these birds? Plant native shrubs and trees. Parent birds forage for food 86% of the time on native plants. Native plants support our native caterpillars, introduced non-native plants don't. In studies conducted by researchers at the University of Delaware comparing hedgerows dominated by native plants and others dominated by introduced plants, it was found that the non-native hedgerows had 68% fewer caterpillar species, 91% fewer caterpillars, 96% less caterpillar biomass than in native hedgerows — so 96% less food available in the non-native sites. Suburban yards dominated by introduced plants from Europe or Asia have been found to have 75% less caterpillar biomass and were 60% less likely to have nests of chickadees. If chickadees did nest in the yard, they had 1.5 fewer eggs than in nests in yards dominated by native plants and their chicks were 29% less likely to survive.

To learn what to plant visit either www.audubon.org/plantsforbirds or www.nwf.org/nativeplantfinder to learn what might work in your yard.

If you are planting this spring, ask for native plants at your favorite local nursery.

A Bird in the Bush vs. a Dog on the Trail

Margery Winters, SLT President

Hiking the many trails in Simsbury is a great way to enjoy being out in nature and what better way than with your four-legged friend. In fact, dog-owners are more likely to hike the trails than non-owners. But biologists are beginning to study whether dogs on- and off-leash might be having an adverse impact on ground nesting birds and fledglings as well as the habitat adjacent to the trails. As Simsbury Land Trust is exploring the possibility of making the Tanager Hill property a bird sanctuary, we thought we should take a look at those impacts and possible solutions.

The most sensitive period for songbirds is the fledgling period when young songbirds leave the nest and spend several days on the ground. During this period, the fledglings are learning to fly and are still being fed by their parents. The eggs and chicks of ground nesting birds are also vulnerable to disturbance during the incubation and nestling phase. These critical periods occur for most songbirds in May and June — perhaps some of the best months to be out on the trails.

At some level, domestic dogs still maintain their instinct to hunt or chase prey and some dogs have can chase and even kill animals if not closely monitored and controlled. To many wildlife species, dogs are seen as predators. Authors of many wildlife disturbance studies concluded that dogs with people, dogs on-leash, or loose dogs provoked pronounced disturbance reactions from their study animals. Off-leash activity of dogs has been found to result in physical damage of habitat through the trampling of vegetation.

Studies looking at the impacts of dogs on ground nesting shore birds have repeatedly found that dogs, especially off-leash, greatly disturb these birds during this critical breeding period. Many beaches now close these areas to all dogs during the nesting season.

In a study conducted by researchers at the University of Western Ontario, the reproductive success of song sparrows was found to be reduced when the birds were simply exposed to the noises of predators, both vocal noises and the sound of predators approaching their breeding grounds. Both the number of offspring and their survival rate fell when calls and sounds of predators were broadcast in constant cycles. Female birds exposed to the sounds of predators spent more time watching for predators and less time collecting food, and produced fewer eggs. Once their eggs hatched, the parent birds provided less food to their nestlings and fewer babies survived. In all, the birds exposed to predator sounds produced 40% fewer fledglings than birds exposed to non-predator sounds.

A study conducted by researchers at the University of New South Wales found that dog walking along forested trails led to a 41% decline in the number of birds as well as a 35% dip in species diversity in conservation areas and parkland when compared to control areas where dogs were prohibited. These impacts were present despite the breed, age or size of the dog and were present even when dogs were on-leash. Ground dwelling birds appeared most affected:

(continued on page 2)





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*Thanks to our wildlife photographer:
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Letter from the President

—Margery Winters

Rx: Vitamin N

In these particularly stressful times it is critically important to take care of yourself: eat right, get enough sleep, and be sure to take your Vitamin N (for Nature).

Nature is good for our health. Researchers are increasingly finding that the antidote to stress is, if not a walk in the park, then a walk in the woods. Natural settings appear to signal our brains that it is time to reduce the release of stress hormones to our sympathetic “fight-or-flight” nervous system and increase the activity of our parasympathetic nervous system, the so called “rest-and-digest” system that is responsible for healing and building our disease resistance. The calming effects of the natural environment are particularly beneficial for easing stress, anxiety and symptoms of depression. Exposure to nature has been scientifically shown to make one feel better emotionally, and contribute to physical wellbeing by reducing blood pressure, heart rate, muscle tension, and stress hormones. The added cognitive advantage of walking in nature is also increasingly supported by hard science. Researchers at the University of Michigan found that after just an hour in nature, memory performance and attention spans improved by 20%. Stanford University researchers found that creative output of their subjects rose by 60% while walking. When the physical benefits of exercise are combined with the mood-boosting effects of being in nature, a walk in the woods will address both emotional and physical needs.

How fortunate that we have an abundance of natural areas to explore and enjoy in Simsbury, from riverside walks, to meadows, and forests. No matter where you live, there is one near you. As the weather warms in the Spring days ahead, I hope you will take advantage of the health benefits provided by these properties preserved by the Simsbury Land Trust, the Town and the State.

Here's to your health.

Margery Winters



A Bird in the Bush *(continued from page 1)*

50% of species recorded in control sites were absent from dog-walked sites. Humans walking without dogs were also found to disturb birds but this disturbance was typically less than half that of dogs. Their results show that birds were seeking refuge away from the immediate vicinity of the perceived predatory threat posed by dogs and suggest that birds responded uniquely and additively when dogs accompany walkers. The effects on bird behavior occurred even on trails where dog walking was frequent, suggesting that local wildlife does not become habituated to continued disturbance.

Given the above findings, one possible and obvious solution the Simsbury Land Trust is exploring is the closing of the most critical habitat areas to dogs on- and off-leash for the nesting season. These practices have been adopted by other land trusts and State agencies and are considered best wildlife management practices in critical habitats. Fortunately, Simsbury has many other areas and trails on SLT, Town and State properties that can remain open to on-leash dog walkers during these critical months. We welcome your input to this discussion.

Hiking Etiquette

Sally Rieger, SLT Trustee

Simsbury Land Trust owns and maintains about 12 miles of paths and trails open to public use. We want you to get outside and use and enjoy our trails. If you are not already a Simsbury Land Trust member, we hope our trails and properties inspire you to join land conservation efforts that benefit wildlife and people.

When you're out on a trail, there are common rules of "trail etiquette" that make a happier and safer experience for all trail users. You'll find similar rules on many trails you hike, wherever your feet take you.



1. **Stay on the trail.** Many trails abut neighbors' yards, so wandering off the trail may cause you to trespass. Also, our trails are routed to avoid environmentally sensitive areas like steep slopes and amphibian breeding areas. Sometimes it would be quicker for you to cut off a switchback, but please don't, because you will contribute to soil erosion.
2. **Hikers going downhill should yield to hikers going uphill.**
3. **If you pack it in, pack it out!** Don't dispose of trash or food waste on or along the trail. Sometimes animals pick up and eat inedible objects, and they are better off eating natural food. Other hikers don't want to see your tissues, apple core or banana peels!
4. **Do not approach or feed wild animals,** both for their and your wellbeing.
5. **Hike quietly** and enjoy the natural sounds. Talk softly and don't talk on your cell phone except for emergencies, but you are welcome to use it as a camera.

6. **Leave plants and other natural features** for others to enjoy.
7. **If you are hiking with your dog,** follow any signs about leash requirements. Carry a plastic bag to clean up after your dog if necessary and carry it out with you. Even where permitted, it is best not to let your dog run loose. Dogs running in grassy meadows are a threat to grassland birds. Loose dogs are much more likely to cause dangerous encounters with predators like coyotes and bears. Also, many dogs like to chase and harass or catch wildlife.
8. **If you need to relieve yourself when hiking,** find a spot well off the trail, not near water. Many hiker websites recommend finding a spot 200 feet from the trail.

We wish you Happy Trails, and invite you to take part in the SLT 12-Hike Challenge to earn a Simsbury Land Trust hat. See article on page 5 for more information.



3

Spring Lawn Care Tips

Spring is just around the corner; remember these tips when it comes time to start working outside.

Inspect your lawnmower: Get the blade sharpened at your local nursery or garden center. Your mower will cut your grass more efficiently. An unsharpened blade rips the grass blades and invites disease.

Protect your soil: Prevent compaction of your soil by delaying walking on your turf until after the soil is dry. Do spring debris clean up on dry days only.

Prevent crabgrass: Mowing high and leaving the grass blades at 4 inches prevents the crabgrass seeds from germinating. Continue to keep your grass blades at 4 inches until after the forsythia bloom. Early spring is a great time to overseed bare spots.

Get a soil test: Testing your soil is an easy way to get customized recommendations from soil experts. Google "UConn Soil Test" to find the soil test application and instructions.

(Thank you to Aimee Petras and the Farmington River Watershed Association for this article.)



Mow your grass high (4 inches) during the forsythia bloom to prevent crab grass and other weed seeds from germinating.

Only You...

Margery Winters, SLT President

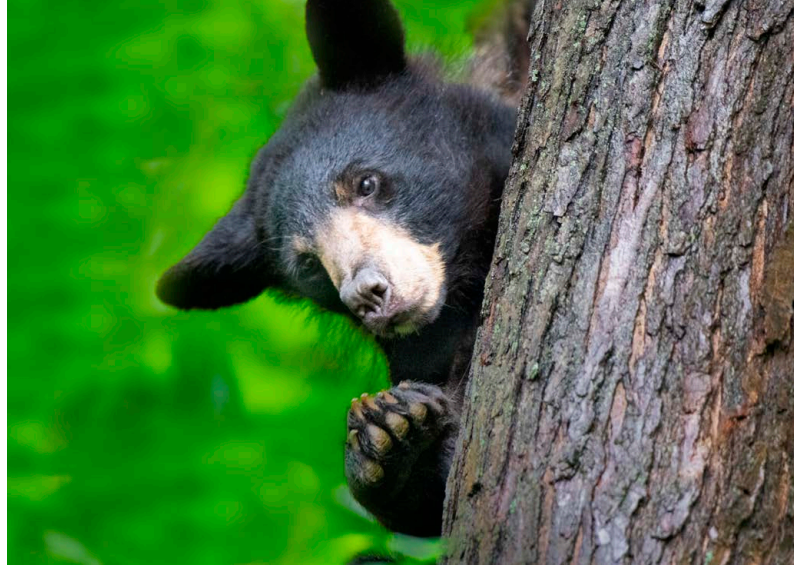
When suburban communities such as those in the Farmington Valley start experiencing conflicts with nuisance bears, state wildlife agencies often suggest instituting a bear hunt to demonstrate to the general public that action is being taken to address the problem. But first we need to ask a few questions. What role do bears play in our wild areas? Why are we seeing so many bears in our neighborhoods? Are all bears nuisance bears? Is a hunt the most effective method to reduce the number of bears in our neighborhoods? And what have other communities with high bear populations done to reduce conflicts between bears and people?

While the presence of bears in our yards may be disconcerting, it is also possible to see their presence as a sign of an ecosystem on the mend. Bear populations have recovered in Connecticut as our forests have recovered from widespread deforestation of the past few hundred years. Bears are a keystone species; they affect the presence and population of other species, and promote forest growth. As predators, bears capture animals that are weak, injured, sick or old, helping to maintain the health of certain animal populations. As a predator of young fawns, bears help to reduce deer populations. Typically, a bear's diet includes small animals, insects, nuts and berries. They consume large numbers of colonial insects such as yellow jackets and moth larvae. They are important seed dispersers and nutrient providers. In ripping apart logs or snags to find insects, they speed up the process of decay and nutrient return to the soil. And after awakening from hibernation, bears scavenge winter-killed animal carcasses, helping to clean up the forest.

A dramatic increase in local bear populations over the past few years has raised concerns of ever increasing numbers of bears. Bear populations have been found to be highest in areas with natural forest cover, extra food sources, but not too many people — exactly the conditions present in Simsbury. Simsbury has an abundance of reported black bear sightings and nuisance bears primarily because of an abundance of easy food sources for bears in the form of bird feeders, barbeque grills, garbage cans, compost piles, and, sadly, pets.

Nuisance bears are trained, not born. Bears are intelligent and non-aggressive toward humans by nature and their sense of smell is seven times keener than a bloodhound's. Once they detect a food source, they remember where it is. While normally wary of people, if a bear finds food in a neighborhood without getting frightened away, he returns for more, becoming less fearful, and more habituated to finding food in our back yards, and in the process, becomes a nuisance bear. Some "wildlife lovers" further habituate bears by intentionally feeding the bears or other wildlife, such as birds, deer, turkey, raccoon. Nuisance bears are most often young male bears that are still learning how to obtain food after leaving the care of their mothers or mother bears with young cubs. Human-bear

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conflicts can also increase during their feeding frenzy in late summer and fall when bears fatten up for hibernation. It is especially necessary to be vigilant about inadvertently feeding bears at that time.

Capturing and relocating nuisance bears is problematic. The State lacks the budget for such activities, and it is difficult to find new locations to release nuisance bears where they will not become a problem for other people. Meanwhile, due to intentional or unintentional feeding in town, more bears are also being "trained" each year to be nuisance bears.

Which brings us to the desire to reduce bear populations through hunting programs. However, the results of hunting programs are mixed. Some studies show that hunting does nothing to resolve human-bear conflicts. They find that such hunts target bears in the woods where bears are easier and safer to hunt and may drive bears into neighborhoods where they cannot be hunted easily. These hunts have also been found to have had several serious unintended consequences such as creating orphaned bears that are likely to become nuisance bears without their mother teaching them to forage and build a den. Other studies have found that selective hunting of nuisance bears is possible in wooded areas adjacent to residential areas but such hunting raises concerns over hunting accidents in our woodlands where dog-walking and hiking are common activities. Yet other studies have found that bear populations rebound after such hunts due to the continued availability of food, essentially creating the need for future hunts.

There are many towns in Connecticut and large regions of New York State with far higher black bear populations than the Farmington Valley and they have fewer problems with nuisance bears. These towns, however, have instituted comprehensive public awareness and education, and some have a substantial well-advertised fine for attracting or feeding wildlife. Neighborhoods with a high bear-sighting call volume are notified because people in that neighborhood are, wittingly or not, attracting bears and educational programs can be targeted to help eliminate the food source that is attracting bears to that area.

If Smokey the Bear could weigh in on this issues, I think he would say, **"Only YOU can prevent nuisance bears."**

Tips for Bear-Proofing Your Home & Neighborhood

Do Not Feed ANY Wildlife Keep Them ALL Alive and Wild

Eliminate Enticing Odors

Bears have an exceedingly keen sense of smell. Make sure they're not attracted to your property because you left foodstuffs outside.

- **NEVER FEED THE BEARS! Feeding habituates bears to people. A fed bear is a dead bear.**
- Use bear-proof trash cans. Put garbage out shortly before pickup time. Regularly clean and deodorize cans with bleach or original scent PineSol.
- Don't leave pets or pet food outside and don't feed pets outside.
- Don't leave food (even gum, mints, chapstick or empty wrappers) in cars. Roll up car windows and lock doors.
- Make bird feeders inaccessible to bears or take them down. If you must feed the birds, feed only between December and mid-March when bears are more likely to be hibernating.
- After barbecuing outside, clean the grill thoroughly, including the grease can and drip tray. Clean up spills on your deck or patio. Store the grill in a garage or shed when not in use.
- Pick fruit up off ground from around fruit trees.
- Don't add meat, melon rinds, or sweet-smelling foods to your compost pile.
- Take scented items (suntan lotion, insect repellent, soap, or candles) indoors when not in use.

Prevent Home Invasions

During spring and fall, when bears are roaming around seeking food, scents wafting from your home can lure bears inside. When a bear is reported in your area, close and lock windows and doors.

Here are other ways to prevent bears from entering your yard, home, and garage.

- If a bear comes onto your property, be dominant, not submissive. Be loud, yell, or blow an air horn to let the bear know he's not welcome in your yard.
- Liberally apply pine-scented cleaner around doors, window frames, and porch steps.
- Securely block access to potential hibernation sites such as crawl spaces under decks and buildings.

Take a Hike in Simsbury and Join the SLT 12-Hike Challenge!

Spring is here, a perfect time to get out on the trails. Our community is full of beautiful trails and paths, with scenic vistas, forest views and lovely open fields. There are over 28 trails in the Simsbury Walkbook, ranging from very easy, short and flat to several miles with tougher terrain. So many places to explore right in your own backyard!

The rules for the SLT 12-Hike Challenge are simple.

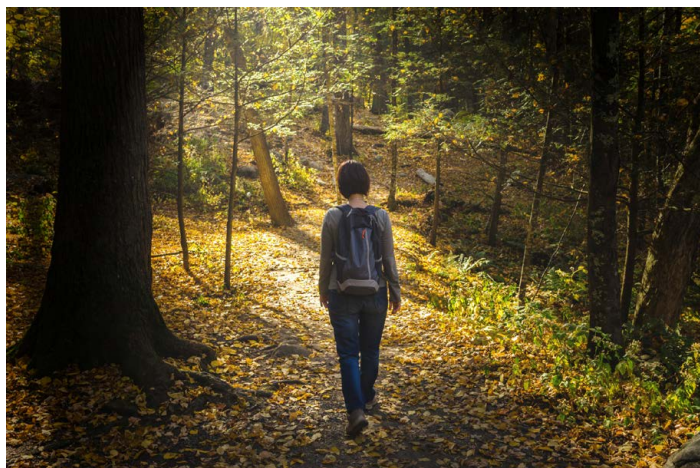
- Sign up for the 12-Hike Challenge on our website. (www.simsburylandtrust.org)
- Join if you are not already a member — memberships range from \$40 and up, but any amount is welcome. Membership is not required but strongly encouraged as membership donations fund our trail work and Walkbook!
- Take at least 12 of the hikes found in the Simsbury Walkbook or SLT-sponsored hikes.
- Keep track of your hikes — date and location. Any distance hike or walk counts toward your 12-hike goal. SLT-sponsored hikes, regardless of the location, also count toward the challenge.
- When you are finished, complete the SLT 12-Hike Challenge Completion Form on our website and you'll get a free SLT baseball cap!
- Please respect the trail rules, stay on the marked trail, take out any trash you bring in (bonus if you bring out any trash you may find on the trails), and be courteous of our neighbors when you park for your hike.



Join the fun! Please post pictures of your hikes on the Simsbury Land Trust FaceBook page or our Instagram page. #SLT12hikechallenge #hikesimsbury #simsburylandtrust

Need a copy of the Simsbury Walkbook? The Simsbury Walkbook can now be found on our website. Want a hard copy? Any questions? Contact amyzeiner@aol.com.

See you on the trails!



Wildlife Photography

Danielle D'Ermo, SLT Trustee

Wildlife photography is one of the most challenging yet rewarding types of photography. It can be an impetus to travel to some of the most beautiful and pristine parts of the world and it can provide an education in the beauty and the complexities of the animals that you observe. It also reinforces the important role that organizations like the Simsbury Land Trust have in protecting wildlife habitat and land preservation.

Here are a few wildlife photography tips:

Do advance research on wildlife behavior and go to a location where the wildlife is abundant.

- Time of year and location is key to successful wildlife photography. Take the time to do some research. For example if you are interested in photographing birds, research nesting season, habitat and migration patterns.
- During the rut season animals are in their prime. Spring and fall are active times for food gathering. Knowing about animal behavior is essential prior to embarking on a photography trip. National parks are beautiful but the “bear jams” and crowds are not conducive to the type of photography that I like.
- Positioning yourself near wildlife food sources also will increase your chances of finding wildlife. The bears in Alaska fish for salmon in late summer, the moose in Maine love to eat lily pads in early summer. Birds are most active when looking for food for their young. So there are a lot of variables. For example, traveling to a rookery in Florida where shore birds are ubiquitous or an island in Canada where puffins are nesting in abundance will help to give you more opportunity for success and creativity in your photography. However, some of my favorite wildlife photographs have been taken in my backyard.



Have the right equipment and have it ready to shoot.

- There have been tremendous strides in camera technology over the years and knowing how to use your camera equipment is key. Keep your equipment accessible and set properly. Many shots have been lost because a camera was in a camera bag or the battery was depleted. Traveling with a spare is also helpful in case your equipment is stolen or malfunctions.
- Having a long lens is now affordable. I find that a 150-to-600 mm zoom lens is suitable for most wildlife photography situations. Having a camera capable of focusing and producing quality images in low light situations is also key. Flash can be used selectively if you are able to make it look natural.
- Features such as the burst mode are also helpful. By using an 8-frame-per-second burst as a bird flies from a branch, you are more likely to get the wing position that you like and the extra shots can be deleted.
- High speed cards are important in order to avoid buffer overload when shooting in this mode. Polarizers are important when shooting near water to minimize glare and a quality tripod with gimbal head will help set you up for success. Although, I have to admit I find tripods cumbersome when photographing wildlife and most of my photography is hand held. Post processing software tools are also very valuable in terms of enhancing your photographs. I always shoot in the RAW format to preserve detail for post processing.



Composition and storytelling.

- As with any photograph, you have to be cognizant of the composition. Photographs with a storytelling component have the most impact. It is important to avoid distracting elements by assessing the background and borders around the frame.
- Getting down at eye level or down low is generally the most effective way to add impact to a photo. Only when it is safe to do so!
- Although I have a preference for animal close ups because of the character that is apparent in the animal's eyes, taking photos that include the animal's environment is also recommended. Just remember not to stand in one place. Move and recompose often.
- Along with composition is the importance of good lighting. Sunrise, sunset or light that is used as backlight or to highlight your subject is very important. Harsh light will leave unwanted shadows and will wash out the subject. Most photographers prefer overcast days.
- Related to overcast days, plan for appropriate clothing. It is key for your safety. Changes in weather happen frequently. Dress in warm layers, use photography gloves and liners and have your rain protection handy for your equipment and yourself.



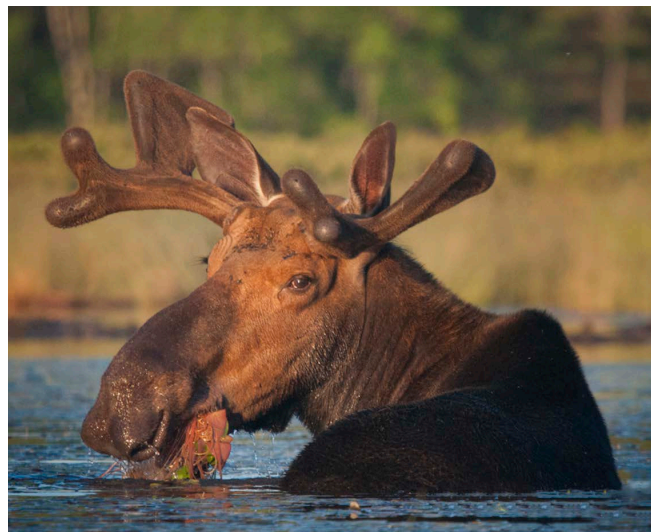
Respect wildlife and observe from a safe distance.

- Many animals like moose and bison appear docile but if they feel threatened they can outrun you and can kill or severely injure you. Many photographers have lost their lives by putting themselves and the animal in a dangerous situation, at times without even realizing it. So safety has to be paramount.
- It is your responsibility to insure you are not disrupting an animal's movements, ability to feed or get fed or any of its patterns. It can be a matter of survival for the animal.
- Take the time to learn and watch for warning signs from animals to insure you are not disrupting them. A bison will raise its tail, a bear will huff and fake charge, a moose will pull its ears back. These behaviors and many others mean you are being intrusive and you need to immediately back off.
- Bring your cellphone and be sure someone knows where you are.

7

Have fun!

- I have had many memorable photography adventures and have made some wonderful lifelong friends along the way. Mostly, I am grateful to photography for elevating my awareness of the beauty and intelligence of our wildlife and the important role they have in the world we share.





Preserving Simsbury Open Space Since 1976

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All SLT events are postponed until further notice.

For up-to-date information on events and programs sign up for our email news at www.simsburylandtrust.org.

Looking for a place to hike?

The Simsbury Walkbook and Dirty Boots Kids Club Activity Guide are now available on our website!

Thank you!



SLT Salutes Simsbury's 350th Anniversary

Diana Moody, SLT Trustee

May 12, 2020 will mark the 350th Anniversary of the incorporation and naming of the Town of Simsbury. Many special activities are being planned to mark this sesquicentennial anniversary, and the Simsbury Land Trust will be participating in the Town's celebratory events. There will be multiple opportunities throughout 2020 for the public to join the celebration as our community honors Simsbury's past and imagines its future possibilities. Please join us along with the Town in marking and commemorating this historic occasion.



Join the Celebration

The signature events of the 350th Anniversary celebration include the Opening Ceremony on May 17 at the First Church of Christ, the River Day Celebration on June 27 (rain date June 28) along the Farmington River, and Simsbury Day during Septemberfest at the Meadows. A Gala to be held at The Riverview will mark the closing of the events.

Planned Activities

On River Day, SLT will be hosting a scavenger hunt. We invite you to join us for this engaging and entertaining activity where we can teach our youth a few things about the outdoors as they seek and find native flowers, different

varieties of trees, leaves, birds, frogs, wetlands and more. Children will receive an SLT drawstring bag and activity guide for participating. In addition, there will be children's activities at our table and informational materials about our organization.

- This is an opportunity to learn more about Simsbury Land Trust, our mission and our accomplishments.
- By joining the SLT we can work together to preserve Simsbury's natural beauty and healthy environment.
- New members will receive a copy of SLT's Walkbook.

Preserving our Rural Charm

Simsbury Land Trust has worked to preserve the land that in many ways defines our community. With the generous support of individuals, private organizations, and governmental entities, we've been successful in protecting and preserving numerous farms and historic landmarks, including Rosedale Farms, Tulmeadow Farm and George Hall/Pharos Farm.

We thank everyone who has helped us over the years and look forward to joining you to celebrate Simsbury's 350th Anniversary. For more information about the 350th celebration go to www.simsbury350.com.