

WINTER 2025 Landlines

SIMSBURY LAND TRUST

Since 1976



A Good Winter for Red-tailed Hawks

By Margery Winters, SLT President

Driving around Simsbury this winter, you may have noticed a number of large hawks perched on tree branches, light posts, or telephone wires along roadways or at the edges of woods. It is a safe bet that these birds are Red-tailed hawks, our state's most common raptor. With fewer leaves to hide them, these hawks are much more noticeable in winter months. Additionally, there may be more Red-tailed hawks in the area because Red-tailed hawks are partial migrants. While a few flew south for winter, most are year-round residents. Their winter population increases with Red-tailed hawk migrants from more northern climes.

So far this winter, the lack of snow has been a great boon to these hawks whose winter diet consists primarily of small rodents such as mice and voles. These subnivean creatures benefit from the snow cover which provides a warm and safe microclimate beneath the snow and above the ground where they are hidden and difficult for the hawks to catch. However, without this snow cover, the rodents are exposed and vulnerable to the ever watchful and, as a result, well-fed hawks. In contrast, in winters with thick and long-lasting snow cover, their food is inaccessible and juvenile, less experienced Red-tailed hawks often starve. Such is the way Mother Nature keeps things in balance.

In late winter you may also notice two hawks sitting near, but not next to, each other. These may be a mated pair who are getting ready to construct a new nest or repair their nest from previous years in preparation for raising a new brood of eyasses, or hawk chicks. It is another sign that spring is not far off.

Signs of Spring?

By Margery Winters, SLT President

Sometime in early April, the first leaves of the most daring plants will start to unfurl with the first blushes of spring green, heralding the end of winter. In most cases, these plants are anticipating the end of winter in the lands from which these plants came, usually Asia or Europe, not Connecticut. Our stalwart native plants know that Mother Nature can have a few surprises in the form of late spring frosts and, on occasion, even snow in late April and early May. With millennia of genetic experience, our native plants have learned to play it safe, typically delaying their leaf out until May.

This early leaf out of non-native plants might be a welcomed sign of spring in our gardens but, for the notorious plants that have escaped cultivation only to run-amok in the wild, it is a dead giveaway that helps to identify these invasive plants lurking in our preserves. Left uncontrolled, invasives will increasingly dominate these wild areas, disrupting the local food chains that are necessary for the survival of our local wildlife. Last fall, SLT mailed out our new *Invasive Plant Guide Booklet* to every homeowner and business in town to help property owners identify and remove these plants from their landscapes. If you have misplaced your guide or need one to give to a neighbor, please drop by the SLT office to pick one up or download the PDF on the Simsbury Land Trust website under the tab "Publications."

This spring, the Simsbury Land Trust volunteers will be back in our preserves attempting to control the spread of these invasive plants. Last year, beginning in mid-April through late October, our invasive plant removal work groups were active in Wagner Woods, Tanager Hill, and Glover and even on town property at Onion Mountain.

(continued on page 2)



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Signs of Spring?

(continued from page 1)

While progress has been made, there is much more work to do, and **we need your help**. Many of the plants that we are combating in our preserves originated as garden plants in nearby properties. Control of these plants on our preserves will be futile unless these noxious plants are removed from these other properties as well.

Many, many thanks to the volunteers who contributed hundreds of hours last year to our invasive removal workdays. We hope you will join us again this year. **And we welcome new volunteers.** No prior knowledge of invasive plants is needed — we will provide all the necessary training. Our hope is that our volunteers will use this hands-on learning to control the invasive plants that may be present in their own yards, and that they will share this information with their neighbors to help control invasive plants, neighborhood by neighborhood, throughout the town.

This early leaf out of non-native plants might be welcomed sign of spring in our gardens but, for the notorious plants that have escaped cultivation only to run-amok in the wild, it is a dead giveaway that helps to identify these invasive plants lurking in our preserves.

Invasive Plant Removal Presentation and Workshop at Simsbury Apple Barn April 19, 2025 • 9:00 a.m. – 11:00 am

Join us on Saturday, April 19 to learn more about the threats posed by the most common invasive plants, and what you can do to eliminate them from your yard. A presentation at 9:00 a.m. will be followed by a one-hour hands-on workshop along the exercise trail near the Apple Barn. Bring loppers, pruners, garden gloves, eye protection, and bug spray.

Upcoming Invasive Removal Workdays

Ti 9:00 a.m. – 11:30 a.m.

Workdays are cancelled when there is inclement weather. Locations TBD.

Please email margerywinters@comcast.net to become an Invasives Plant Removal volunteer.

Wednesdays

April 16, 23, 30
 May 7, 14, 21, 28
 June 4, 11, 18, 25

Saturdays

April 26
 May 10, 17
 June 7, 14, 21, 28

Need Professional Assistance Removing Invasive Plants from Your Property?

Last fall a hard-working Swamp Yankee Earthcare employee donated several hours of invasive plant removal services to the effort of controlling the invasive burning bush at Onion Mountain Park. In appreciation of this help, SLT would like to promote their services.

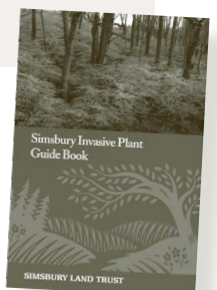
Swamp Yankee Earthcare specializes in invasive species management, ecosystem restoration and forest services, without the use of herbicides or pesticides

—protecting the planet is our priority *and* our passion!

www.SwampYankeeEarthcare.com 860.532.0344

SIMSBURY INVASIVE PLANT GUIDE BOOK SURVEY

We want your feedback! Please use the QR code or visit simsburylandtrust.org to take a quick 5 question survey about the usefulness of the guide book to improve future publications.





Stewardship Achieves Milestones in a Productive Year

By Tom Crawford, SLT Board of Trustees and Stewardship Chair

The Stewardship committee and property stewards have had a remarkably productive year, successfully completing over 50 projects. These efforts ranged from clearing fallen trees along pathways to constructing and repairing boardwalks. A significant focus has been improving signage across our properties. Upgraded kiosks now include updated maps and relevant information, striking a balance between offering helpful guidance and maintaining the natural aesthetics of the area. Additionally, all major properties now feature standard SLT entrance signs, clearly marking trailheads from the roadside.

Maintaining clear and well-marked trails remains a top priority, and this has been achieved through the dedication of our 25 Property Stewards. These volunteers take on a variety of tasks, from monitoring property conditions to performing hands-on work like tree clearing and construction. Collectively, their efforts represent over 600 hours of invaluable contributions. To supplement these efforts, we also partner with a professional

landscape company, Tim Ryan Family Flower Farm, for tasks such as mowing and maintaining open-field trails at properties like Tanager Hill, Case, Wagner Woods and Glover. Their annual brush-hogging helps prevent forest encroachment into fields while preserving the natural cycles of wildflowers.

On the wildlife front, the volunteers have adopted a more natural approach to bird conservation. With bears consistently damaging birdhouses, we have removed most of these structures and instead rely on the natural habitat to attract bird populations. A few birdhouses remain, but as they are discovered and destroyed, they will not be replaced.

The Stewardship Committee extends its heartfelt gratitude to all property stewards for their time and dedication and to our members for their financial contributions, which make these initiatives possible. Thanks to this collective support, the Stewardship program continues to thrive and protect our shared natural spaces.

WAYS TO DONATE:

Your Contributions Fund Our Mission

By Liz Cushman, Membership and Finance Director

Simsbury Land Trust (SLT) is a 501c (3) organization and operates primarily from the donations and membership dues of our members. There are many methods to support the SLT beyond cash contributions. Here's a look at some impactful ways to give that may offer financial benefits to you as well:

1. Donating Appreciated Stocks

When you donate stocks that have increased in value, you may avoid paying capital gains taxes on the appreciation. Additionally, you can claim a charitable deduction for the full market value of the stock at the time of donation, provided you have held the stock for more than a year. This method allows you to maximize your contribution while reducing your tax burden.

2. Endowment *(Hartford Foundation for Public Giving)*

The Simsbury Land Trust has established an endowment fund at the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving. Donations made directly to this fund remain permanently at the HFPG, but the income from the endowment fund will ensure a permanent source of funds to care for the properties we worked so hard to protect.

3. Memorial or In Honor of Donations

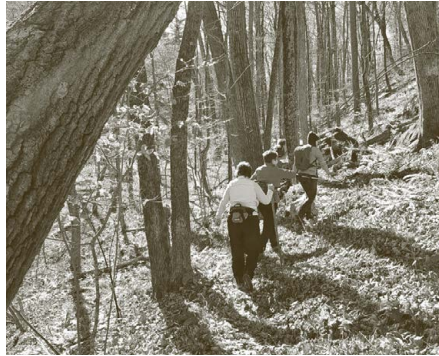
Memorial donations or donations in honor of an individual allow you to honor a loved one's memory or celebrate a special occasion while supporting the SLT.

4. IRA Qualified Charitable Distributions (QCDs)

Individuals aged 70½ or older can make tax-free donations directly from their Individual Retirement Accounts (IRAs) through Qualified Charitable Distributions (QCDs). These distributions count toward your required minimum distributions (RMDs) but are excluded from taxable income, making them a tax-efficient way to give to the SLT. QCDs are particularly advantageous for those who do not itemize deductions, as they provide a direct tax benefit without needing to claim a deduction.

5. Memberships

Each year approximately 800 individuals and families join the SLT as members. Membership contributions provide funding for stewardship of our properties, events and programs, maps and trail guides, our office and staff, and much more. Annual membership can be initiated or renewed through our website (via PayPal) or via check to the Simsbury Land Trust.





Hike with the Simsbury Land Trust

By Amanda Thompson, Executive Director

Simsbury Land Trust offers over 15 hikes a year. This year, in addition to Saturday and Sunday hikes, we are making an effort to offer some hikes on weekdays and youth hikes. We are fortunate to have many volunteers willing to prewalk trails and guide hikes on both Simsbury Land Trust trails as well as other local trails. Some benefits of hiking include physical, mental, social and environmental health.

Hiking can be an excellent boost of physical activity you need in your week.

If you hike or walk slowly you are mostly using your lower body, increasing your heart rate by moving faster. If you hike a trail with some elevation change it can be good for your cardiovascular system too. Hiking wooded areas, like Simsbury Land Trust trails, with uneven surfaces can benefit your balance and the simple act of wearing a backpack with a small amount of weight in it can transfer some of the weight during your hike to engage your core too.

Hiking is also good for your mental health.

We may think that it is good to spend time in nature for our mental health but is it true? The answer is yes! A Standord study showed that people who walked for 90 minutes in a natural area, as opposed to participants who walked in a high-traffic urban setting, showed decreased activity in a region of the brain associated with a key factor in depression and according to the National Library of Medicine benefits of hiking in a



natural area can be immediate and include decreased blood pressure, decreased stress levels, enhanced immune system functions, and restored attention. It also can help with weight loss over time and decrease in depression.

Hiking as a social benefit. .

First we must acknowledge that it is always safer to hike with a buddy and we can provide that on our hikes! If you don't have someone you know now that enjoys hiking or you and a friend want to join in the fun, think about joining a group hike. Hiking

allows you to talk with people in an age where we can spend a lot of time looking at screens. Finding pleasure in the forests and fields with face to face conversations is a great way to connect with other people in your community.

Hiking helps the environment in many ways.

Trails that connect different pieces of fragmented land can create corridors for animal and plant life. Simsbury Land Trust strives to acquire contiguous land for these reasons. It is a win win. Also, bringing people into nature can increase awareness of conservation efforts and raise awareness in the community.

Join Simsbury Land Trust hikes to learn more about the conservation areas in our area. Hikes can be found on our website or by becoming a member and joining our email list. Visit simsburylandtrust.org for details.

Preserving Local History through an Eagle Scout Project: Charcoal Hearths in West Simsbury

By Daniel Breton, Eagle Scout

When I set out to complete my Eagle Scout project, I wanted to create something that not only met the requirements but also left a lasting impact on the community. My project focused on uncovering and preserving a piece of our town's history that has long been hidden: the charcoal hearths that once played a significant role in shaping the local economy and landscape.

My Project

My project took place at a historic charcoal hearth site, located on land maintained by the Simsbury Land Trust. The area had become overgrown and obscured over the years, with its historical significance nearly forgotten. My project involved clearing the charcoal hearth site of overgrowth, creating a walking trail that connected the site to other key areas of interest, and installing interpretive signs to share the rich history of the site with the public.

These signs provide visitors with information about the history of charcoal production in the area, the importance of the charcoal hearth industry to the local economy, and

how this industry shaped the landscape we see today. These signs help connect our community to its roots, enhancing the significance of the Simsbury Land Trust's efforts to preserve and protect these sites.

I learned how the charcoal hearths supported not only the iron industry but also the local economy by providing jobs and a market for timber. This project was an opportunity to bring these stories to light, encouraging residents to see the connections between our history, our land, and our future.

The History of Charcoal Hearths

In the 18th and 19th centuries, charcoal production was a critical industry across Western Connecticut. Charcoal hearths, like the one my project focused on, were used to produce charcoal by slowly burning wood under controlled conditions. The resulting charcoal was essential for fueling ironworks, blacksmiths, and other industries that required high heat.

The industry's demand for wood had a profound impact on the landscape. Forests were clear-cut to provide timber for the hearths, leaving the land barren. The fact that charcoal production often took place far from where it was used—such as in urban areas or industrial centers—speaks to the vast scale of deforestation in this region. By the late 19th century, much of Connecticut's

land had been stripped bare, with farms and industrial production replacing the once-dense forests.

Today, these charcoal hearth sites serve as reminders of the area's industrial past and its resilience. Over time, forests have regrown, but the remnants of these hearths—circular clearings, blackened soil, and sometimes stone retaining walls—offer tangible connections to a bygone era.

Why This Project Matters

I chose this project because I have always been fascinated by history and the stories embedded in the land around us. When I learned about the charcoal hearth site through Simsbury, Canton, and New Hartford Historical Societies as well as Simsbury Land Trust Steward, Mel Wolpert, I was struck by how significant this industry had been to our town's development and how little-known it was to many residents today.

Working with the Historical Societies and Simsbury Land Trust, I conducted research to ensure the signs were accurate and engaging. I learned how the charcoal hearths supported not only the iron industry but also the local economy by providing jobs and a market for timber. This project was an opportunity to bring these stories to light, encouraging residents to see the connections between our history, our land, and our future.





Acknowledgments and Reflections

I'd like to thank the Simsbury Land Trust for granting me access to the site and the Simsbury, Canton, and New Hartford Historical Societies for providing invaluable historical resources. I'm also grateful to Simsbury Land Trust Steward, Mel Wolpert, my fellow scouts, family, and friends who helped with the clearing, trail construction, and sign installation.

Looking back, I'm proud of what we accomplished and excited about the role this project will play in preserving our community's heritage. I hope that visitors to the site will gain a greater appreciation for the history beneath their feet and a renewed commitment to protecting our shared natural and cultural resources.

By highlighting the charcoal hearth's story, we not only honor the past but also remind ourselves of the resilience and adaptability of our community. It's a legacy worth preserving, and I'm grateful to have contributed to that effort.

To view the charcoal hearth interpretive site park at the Cathles Preserve entrance at the roundabout on North Saddle Drive. The charcoal hearth interpretive site is marked with green blazes on white trail between the first and second bridge. If you cannot visit the site in person you can view Daniel's signs on the Simsbury Land Trust website under Cathles Preserve on the Properties tab at the top of the website. www.simsburylandtrust.org

Amphibians Spring Migration

By Amanda Thompson, Executive Director

Spring is slowly happening all around us and we may see or hear amphibians migrating from the woods to the vernal pools to mate in March. We often hear the spring peepers peep loudly at night or see the quieter amphibians like the salamanders crossing trails or roads. Amphibians prefer to migrate in the spring, usually early March on warmer wet evenings. One way you can assist amphibians is to avoid driving on roads near wetlands on those warm rainy evenings after dusk in March.

Amphibians are amazing masterpieces of nature! The word amphibian comes from the Greek word amphi meaning "both", and bios meaning "life" which were combined to amphibios meaning "living on both land and water".



The eastern newt is an amphibian many of you are familiar with because of its striking red/orange color in its red eft phase. Eastern newts start out as an egg, turn into an aquatic larva with gills, then turn into the red eft stage many recognize. The red eft stage is when it develops lungs and lives in leaf litter and wooded areas for several years only returning to the water to mate early spring each year.

Later in life the newt will return to the water to live and turn a green color with red and black spots on its back also developing a thicker tail to use as a rudder. It will keep its lungs but can also breathe through its skin. There are many more complexities to this newt like the fact that it is 20 times more poisonous to predators in its red eft stage. Eastern Newts and other amphibians are a great reason for us to protect our wetlands.



Preserving Simsbury Open Space Since 1976

SIMSBURY LAND TRUST

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UPCOMING EVENTS

Check the website for updates to events

simsburylandtrust.org

VERNAL EQUINOX HIKE WITH MARGERY WINTERS

March 20, 2025 • 11:00 a.m.

McLean Game Refuge. Park at the corner of Simsbury Road and Barn Door Hills Road

Join us at 11:00 a.m. for a hike at McLeans Game Refuge. We will hike the Esker trail to Spring Pond and then head on to Kettle Pond where, depending on the weather, we might hear the wood frogs quack their spring mating calls. The hike will include a stop at Julian's Farm Store for refreshments/lunch. This moderate hike will be about 4 miles and includes a few small hills.

SIMSBURY LAND TRUST HIKE

April 6, 2025 • 10:00 a.m.

McLean Loop Hike. Park at the corner of Simsbury Road and Barn Door Hills Road

We will access McLean Game Refuge on the North Trail across the street from this lot. This hike is about 3.6 miles and will take about 1.5 to 2 hours depending on our pace. Our hike will take us on an easy loop providing a nice sampling of the McLean trails through woods and passing by streams and a pond. This trail has varied terrain with one short narrow path along the edge of a pond. Trails have lots of roots. If you like walking with

hiking poles, this trail lends itself to that but is also very doable without. Dress for the weather and bring water.

ANNUAL MEMBER DINNER

SAVE THE DATE! April 10, 2025 • 6:00 p.m.

The Riverview, 10 Winslow Place

Join us for a presentation by special guest speaker Will Price, Senior Fellow Pinchot Institute for Conservation

Will Price will speak about Gifford Pinchot, the first head of the United States Forest Service who was born in Simsbury and the ways Pinchot's philosophies shaped our forest service and how it runs today. Will is currently working in public policy and market-based solutions that improve forest management and advance conservation. Prior to the Pinchot Institute, he consulted with the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation and worked as a research technician with NASA and the Forest Service PNW Research Station.

INVASIVE PLANT WORKSHOP

April 19, 2025 • 9:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m.

Simsbury Farms, Apple Barn, 60 Old Farms Rd.

Join Simsbury Land Trust President, Margery Winters to learn about some of the top invasive plants that impact Simsbury. You will learn how to identify the plants and best methods of removal.

WEEKDAY HIKE

April 22, 2025 • 10:00 a.m.

Auer Farm out and back trail to MDC Reservoir 6

The hike will start at the parking area adjacent to the Auer Farm Scenic Reserve sign at 35 Auer Farm Rd. Bloomfield. Join SLT Land Steward David Kozak as we explore the Auer Farm State Scenic Reserve (Bloomfield), MDC Reservoir 6 (West Hartford) on a recently created trail connecting these properties through the 4-H Center at Auerfarm. We'll spend 2 hours walking approximately 2.5 miles along mostly level terrain discussing the history of the protection of these properties and area geology. Expect the trails to be wet at this time of year, so be sure to wear appropriate footwear.

FILM: RETURN OF THE OLD GROWTH FOREST

April 23, 2025 • 6:30 p.m.

Featuring Simsbury Land Trust President, Margery Winters
Simsbury Public Library, Friends Room

Return of the Old Growth Forest, describes the characteristics and the importance of old-growth northeastern forests. Director Ray Asslin and Margery Winters will both be available for questions after the film.

SIMSBURY LAND TRUST HIKE

May 4, 2025 • noon

Great Pond Loop. Park in the parking lot on Great Pond State Forest Access Rd

Join SLT Board member, Katie Piccirillo for a 2-mile hike through Great Pond State Forest. These trails are relatively flat and provide views of the lovely Great Pond. The hike should take about one hour and will require sturdy boots, appropriate outerwear depending on the weather.

