



Naromi Land Trust: Stepping Up to Land Stewardship

Summary: An all-volunteer land trust for over 30 years with responsibility for nearly 1,700 acres, hired a part-time land manager and part-time office assistant and transformed its lands as well as the land trust.

Regional Setting: The gently rolling Berkshire-Taconic Hills, bordering Connecticut, Massachusetts and New York, are underlain by limestone and marble bedrock, giving rise to unique calcium-loving plant communities such as calcareous ledges and fens. This rural landscape is still dominated by small-scale agricultural operations but faces increasing development pressure.

Land Trust Mission: To serve the people of Sherman, Connecticut, by fostering preservation of its natural resources, protecting open spaces, farmlands, ridges and scenic vistas, and maintaining its preserves as wildlife habitat and for educational and passive recreational activities.

Service Area: Sherman, Connecticut.

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Biodiversity Values

Unlike the more typical acidic wetlands of New England, this region harbors a number of alkaline or calcium-rich wetlands due to the underlying limestone bedrock. These wetlands are home to unusual flora and fauna, including a number of rare and endangered species. Natural resource inventories of the land trust's preserves are underway to document the biological diversity and develop effective management approaches. Naromi Land Trust is protecting working farms, which are important economic and cultural components of the landscape, while restoring and maintaining wildlife habitats for declining species, such as upland grassland nesting birds.

Conservation Strategy

Naromi Land Trust recently completed a conservation analysis of the Town of Sherman using geographic information systems (GIS) software. The analysis ranked potential conservation lands and will help the land trust and its conservation partners identify and set priorities for conservation and land stewardship opportunities. The study was conducted by a graduate student at University of Pennsylvania and funded by the land trust.

High priorities for conservation include:

- Wetlands, vernal pools and drinking water;
- Imperiled species and rare natural communities; and
- Working farms and working forests.

Threats facing the region include habitat fragmentation and destruction due to residential development and non-native invasive species. Conservation strategies under consideration by the land trust and its partners include additional land protection, habitat restoration and land stewardship, research and monitoring, and outreach and education.



Projects and Funding

Wetland Restoration

Naromi Land Trust's Wimisink Preserve is a 53-acre area including calcareous wetlands, floodplain, upland meadow and a mixed-hardwood forested hillside. The land trust undertook extensive restoration of early successional habitat by controlling invasive species with funding from the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program. Staff and volunteers spent five months manually removing invasive plant species (roses, *Rosa spp.*, honeysuckle, *Lonicera spp.*) from the wetland perimeter during the winter. Land trust staff are now tackling the difficult herbaceous non-native invasive species, purple loosestrife (*Lythrum salicaria*) and common reed grass (*Phragmites australis*).

One of the unusual restoration partnerships in the project involves the local Boy Scout troop, which has captured and reared *Galerucella*, a beetle used for biological control of non-native purple loosestrife. For *Phragmites*, a licensed contractor applies glyphosate, a systemic herbicide. The Iroquois Gas Company, which has a nearby natural gas pipeline, will manually remove the *Phragmites* when it reemerges.

Project funding was received from the Iroquois Gas Company, Landowner Incentive Program and Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program. A landowner abutting Wimisink Preserve also recently received a WHIP grant to maintain and enhance grassland bird habitat, adding to habitat diversity in the project area.

Managing Agricultural Lands for Grassland Birds

Agricultural lands have provided habitat for grassland birds, including nesting bobolinks and eastern meadowlarks, for hundreds of years in New England. Naromi Land Trust is restoring old fields on portions of several preserves to enhance habitat for grassland birds and other wildlife. The land trust has used state and federal funds for grassland habitat restoration on lands they manage, including a grant from the Landowner Incentive Program.

Land Stewardship: Revitalizing Land and Land Trust

In 2004, Naromi Land Trust transitioned from an all-volunteer land trust to one with two part-time staff: a land manager and an office assistant. The changes included getting an office in town. Now the land trust is thriving and has connected with a variety of partners to assist with strategic land conservation planning and management activities, which has inspired expanded interest in the land trust and increased volunteering. Staff has energized volunteers to maintain and improve the preserves and the extensive trail system for the benefit of the wildlife and community. The land trust's first major fundraising

event, attended by over 300 people, helped ensure existing and new projects are funded.

Tips for Growing Land Trusts

1. Full support and engagement by the Board of Directors is essential.
2. Start with land stewardship! Naromi Land Trust, in its 38th year, has responsibility for nearly 1,700 acres. Naromi Land Trust reinvigorated its constituency with land stewardship investments.
3. Engage the community leadership, volunteers and educational institutions. Municipal, state and federal officials, Boy Scouts and graduate students generously assisted in the transition despite a modest budget.

Looking Ahead

Naromi Land Trust is currently working to acquire two additional properties: a 90-acre historic farm and an 85-acre forested ridgeline with a large, intact vernal pool (with Jefferson and Blue-spotted salamanders). A long-standing goal of the land trust is to develop a town-wide trail system. The new acquisitions will launch the first six miles of the trail system, connecting parts of five land trust properties, one trust easement and another private property, while providing access to the perimeter of several working farms. The trails are being developed by the land manager along with local volunteers.

For More Information

- **Landowner Incentive Program (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service / Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection):**
www.dep.state.ct.us/burnatr/Wildlife/geninfo/fedaid/lip/lip.htm
- **Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program (Natural Resource and Conservation Service):**
www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/whip
- **Biological Control of Purple Loosestrife:**
www.hort.uconn.edu/ipm/ipmbio.htm



Photo right: Wimisink Preserve