



Northeast Land Trust Advancement Initiative

Inclusive and Accessible Conservation for All

A presentation for the CT Trails Symposium
October 13, 2023



CONNECTICUT
Land Conservation Council

Connecticut Land Conservation Council

Who are we?

CLCC is the only
statewide service
provider and voice for
all (~ 120)
Connecticut land
trusts.



Mission

Elevate and Strengthen Land Conservation in Connecticut

Vision

A future where every CT community is supported and sustained by a diverse mix of conserved land, and land conservation is embraced as an essential community value.

How? We offer a range of programming and services...

Training & Education
Technical & Financial Assistance
Advocacy & Policy
Community Conservation & Engagement

From traditional capacity building, workshops and peer-to-peer learning, to new and creative opportunities for land trusts to better connect to one another and their communities for greater conservation, economic, and social impact.

Community Conservation Initiatives

Building partnerships...increasing community awareness and relevance...deepening engagement with new audiences and user groups.

- ❖ Help land trusts bring conservation to a wider audience
- ❖ Uniquely suited to a particular region
- ❖ Engaging with both conservation and non-conservation partners
- ❖ Regional roundtables - DEI, food insecurity, affordable housing
- ❖ Connecting - Bird & Hike with Land Trust Program
- ❖ Accessibility ...

2022 Northeast Advancement Initiative

- ❖ **The Focus:** Bringing resources, experts, and community organizations to the table to discuss accessibility barriers and solutions with land trusts.
- ❖ **The Goal:** Enhancing accessibility and inclusivity into land trust trail and program design.
- ❖ **The Project:** Bringing community organizations to Joshua's Trust properties to conduct accessibility assessments and share recommendations through group discussions.

The Partners

Connecticut Land Conservation Council
The Last Green Valley
Community Foundation of Eastern Connecticut
Joshua's Trust

Part I: Outreach, Decision-Making & Questions to Consider

- ❖ Initial outreach to five land trusts in the Northeast region. **Joshua's Trust expressed the strongest interest and readiness to host the accessibility assessments.**
- ❖ Structure of the project and selecting the user-group of interests
 - JT interested in **seniors and veterans**, but open to other suggestions.
- ❖ When knowing these outcomes, **what questions come to mind?**
 - Why did the other land trusts choose to not participate? What reasons may they have for waning interest? Is it based on organizational capacity? Or based on the goal of the project and the data (it is relevant to their organization)?
 - Why did you choose the group that you choose? How does it relate to your community and the goals of your organization? Why do you want to engage with that specific community?

Part II: Accessibility Assessments

Value of the Data Collected

❖ **Method: Informal group discussions**

- Limited presence of staff members during assessments and minimal interference
- No formal in-take form
- Attributed to the group and not to one individual

❖ **How well did this work?**

- Comfortability
- Framing
- **Success**

Participating Organizations: CT Black Women Hikers

- ❖ A voluntary group of African-American women in Connecticut, who are a group of outdoor hiking enthusiasts exploring the many trails and open spaces Connecticut has to offer. With various interests and levels of outdoor experience, they share knowledge of foraging, hiking, biking, birding, and more.



Participating Organizations: UConn League Walking for Exercise Group

- ❖ The UConn League was formed with the aim of fostering fellowship and philanthropy among UConn professors, administrators, and their spouses, then expanded to those interested in the university community. Their focus is on personal growth, intellectual and recreational activities that enhance the lives of our members and the community-at-large.
- ❖ Walking for Exercise is an interest group within the UConn League. The group of walkers hike on woodland trails, rails to trails, and neighborhood roads.



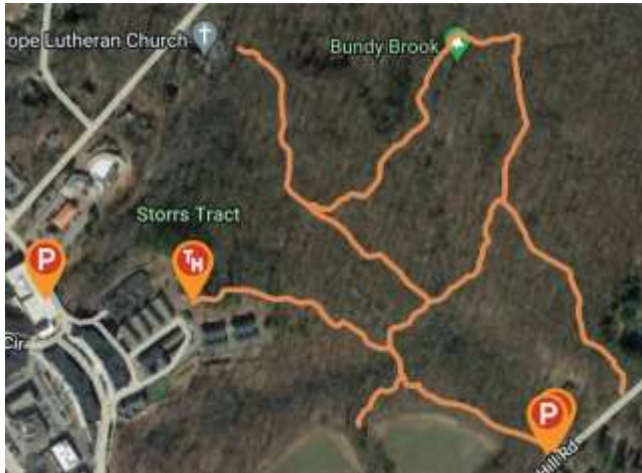
Participating Organizations: Latino Outdoors- CT

- ❖ Latino Outdoors is a Latinx-led organization working in support of a national community of leaders in outdoor recreation, conservation and environmental education. As part of this work, they focus on expanding and amplifying the Latinx experience in the outdoors. They provide leadership, mentorship, and professional opportunities and serve as a platform for sharing oft-overlooked cultural connections and narratives that will bolster the collective outdoor movement.



Properties

Whetten Woods
Mansfield, CT
Distance: ~0.88 miles



Hubbard Sanctuary & Agnes' Pasture
Chaplin, CT
Distance: ~ 1.55 mi



Friedman Memorial Forest
Ashford, CT
Distance: ~ 1.55 mi



Part III: Sharing Recommendations
Group Discussion at Joshua's Trust

The Results: Whetten Woods

Recommendation: Install trail signs/sidewalk stickers/arrows/etc. closer to the Downtown Storrs Parking garage to navigate to the trailhead on Sherwood Street.

Reasoning: There is no sign at the parking garage entrance nor on the signs established on the sidewalks. There are signs created by the Town of Mansfield directing to the Joshua's Trust property, but not close to where people would be walking around (i.e. shopping area). They are near houses that most people would avoid going towards. This trailhead is both accessible for parking, and group size, and increases time on the property.

❖ LO, ULWG

Recommendation: Improve the natural landscape of the woods. Fill in empty space left behind by cut-down/fallen trees to create a fuller feeling in the environment with native plants and trees.

Reasoning: During the colder seasons, foliage is minimum, making the visual appeal decrease. Gaps in the tree line expose streets and buildings beyond the property line and cut into the immersive experience. Enhance the nature that is already there and create a memorable vision throughout the year and have people come back.

❖ ULWG



The Results: Hubbard Sanctuary & Agnes' Pasture

Recommendation: Place a yellow sign with wording that points to where the Yellow Trail continues. An orange sign to emphasize and point to the direction of the Orange Trail at the intersection.

Reasoning: At the intersection there are multiple yellow arrows nailed to the trees to direct hikers in either direction of the trails. Participants found the yellow arrows confusing and lacking in specificity. There is currently one blaze that signals the orange trail.

- ❖ LO, ULWG, CTBWH

Recommendation: Place a QR on the main trail map kiosk that would lead to a Spanish-language blurb of need to know information about the property and what is allowed.

Reasoning: Rules and trail information (historical, what to look forward to, spots of interest) should be accessible to those who do not speak English. The website does not need to be fully translated, but major information should be accessible for people to be able to enjoy and respect the space they are in.

- ❖ LO



The Results: Friedman Memorial Forest

Recommendation: Increase parking space available for the property. Place a parking sign or JT property sign at the roadside so it is visible from either direction of the road.

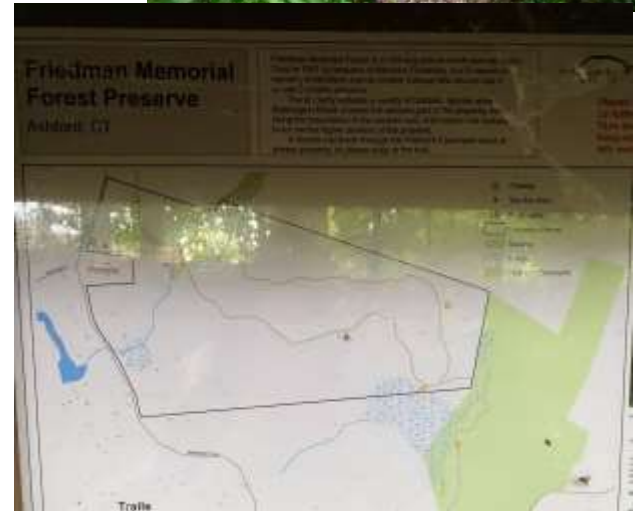
Reasoning: Site visits to this property was done via carpooling from the Ashford Memorial Park. During the visit with the UConn Walking Group we saw that there was one parking space left for the group to park to start the assessment. The parking area fills quickly as it only accommodates three cars. The property is easy to miss.

❖ CTBWH, ULWG

Recommendation: Install a Yellow sign that says “Yellow Trail Continues from Here,” alongside the blue arrow trail post, and on the other side of the trail.

Reasoning: The Hyde Loop connects to where the Yellow Trail’s peak at the end of the property. There is a sign that says “Hyde Trail Loop” but there is only one Yellow trail sign pointing in one direction. It can be confusing for some people to know where they are spatially or when the trail becomes overgrown.

❖ ULWG, CTBWH



Small Group Discussion

1. What interested you the most from the results?
2. What have you heard from your own community regarding your land trust's properties?
 - a. Is there overlap with what you heard today?
3. Do you have programs or events in place to broaden accessibility?
 - a. If not, what do you envision them to be like?

Large Group Discussion

- ❖ What are some barriers you've come across with your own properties when it comes to accessibility?
- ❖ Do you know the demographic of who visits your properties? If so, how do you incorporate them into your decision making?
 - How would your LT make room for different groups of people?
- ❖ How are trail designs decided on on your land trust; who do you seek insight from?

To participants:

- ❖ What feedback do you have as a participant on the project?
- ❖ How do you see yourself engaging with land trust properties after the project? Or, with land trusts in general

Commonalities in Discussion

- ❖ Language: implementation of multi-language signs and webpages
 - Whetten Woods is near UConn, are the signs accommodating to the diverse community there?
 - In CT English, Spanish, and Portuguese are the top three languages spoken.
 - Key Translation points: Rules, a blurb of what to expect, a brief history, etc.
- ❖ Parking and Maintenance: Most common feedback regarding trails. An easy trail can become difficult from fallen debris
 - Whetten Woods would be considered Easy for those who are abled-bodied, but can become Moderate to Advanced depending on the person. Clear and flat trails are key to access.
 - Lack of parking make certain properties less popular or lower willingness to come back with others of for an event, even if the trail is well liked.
- ❖ Welcomeness
 - Is the property entrance welcoming? Where is the entrance located (on a busy road, residential area, a back road, etc).

Looking to the Future and the World at Large

- ❖ The Covid-19 pandemic
 - Capacity to host large groups/increased use of trails, *#BlackWhileBirding*, representation of People of Color in outdoor recreation is significantly lower than their white counterparts.
- ❖ Community engagement
 - How do you reach different communities outside the borders of your town or service area?
 - Urban v Suburban v Rural: who has access to these spaces? In what ways do these regions differ in access; what communities are disproportionately affected by the lack of access to green spaces?
 - Marketing: Youth, Social media, consistent outreach, inviting others to visit your land trust
- ❖ World at Large
 - Land conservation and inclusion: think of who is missing from the table when creating trail designs, plaques, maps, how many people you want to visit at a time.
 - Engaging with tribal communities, creating ADA certified trails, expanding the use of land under conservation.

Part IV: Implementation Grant

Joshua's Trust Seeks to Walk the Walk

Improving accessibility, equitable access, and diversity of users on JT preserve trails by:

- ❖ Increasing the quantity and visibility of trail signs and boundary markers on 6 properties
- ❖ Ensuring that preserve signs are perpendicular to roads making them more visible
- ❖ Adding QR codes to kiosks that provide trail information in Spanish and Mandarin
- ❖ Expanding parking

Questions? Comments? Interested?

Contact us!

abpaterson@ctconservation.org

ericci@nvcogct.gov

michelle.poudrette@joshuastrust.org