

Winchester Land Trust Secures Grant to Protect Highland Lake with 500-Acre Land Acquisition Winsted, CT, July 2024



The Winchester Land Trust (WLT) and the Highland Lake Watershed Association (HLWA) are thrilled to announce the State of Connecticut Grant with Governor Lamont and the Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition Program (OSWA), administered by the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection that will allow for the permanent protection of the 500 acres of land on the east side overlooking Highland Lake. The Winchester Land Trust and the Highland Lake Watershed Association have been working tirelessly for decades to preserve land and to protect Highland Lake and this grant award represents a significant step forward in protecting Highland Lake for generations to come, preserve vital wildlife habitat and provide new opportunities for outdoor recreation.

We would first like to thank all past and present members of the Highland Lake Watershed Association for their fierce protection and unwavering advocacy to protect Highland Lake over the past 65 years. We look forward to working to continuing our legacy on this project.

The property, to be known as Laurel Ridge, is core forest with varied terrain, abundant wildlife and plants. Streams of pure water flow from Laurel Ridge west to Highland Lake and east to the Still River. Preserving Laurel Ridge helps protect the waters of Highland Lake and the water that flows from the lake to the Mad River, then to the Still River, which flows along the Sue Grossman Greenway, and then into the National Wild & Scenic Farmington River.

Laurel Ridge will be preserved in perpetuity by the Winchester Land Trust (WLT) in its natural, scenic, and open condition, and available for public use. With the \$1,650,000 OSWA grant secured, WLT, with the support of HLWA, will apply for additional grants and seek private donations to secure full funding for the project and cover stewardship expenses. WLT plans to close on the property in 2025 at which point we will need volunteers to help clear paths and work to make Laurel Ridge available to the public.

"We are incredibly grateful for this grant," said Jennifer Perga, President of the Winchester Land Trust. HLWA President Candy Perez said "Residents of the Town of Winchester and Highland Lake will benefit from this grant as not only will Highland Lake be protected but residents will have access to numerous hiking trails and preservation of our historic past."

The HLWA Board of Directors will be looking for help in the future with this special opportunity through volunteering on trail building committees, donations for stewardship and acquisition, coordination of volunteers, etc. as we work towards 2025. We will keep you informed as this project develops. For now, join us in celebrating this wonderful opportunity.

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