

President's Report 6/7/2024

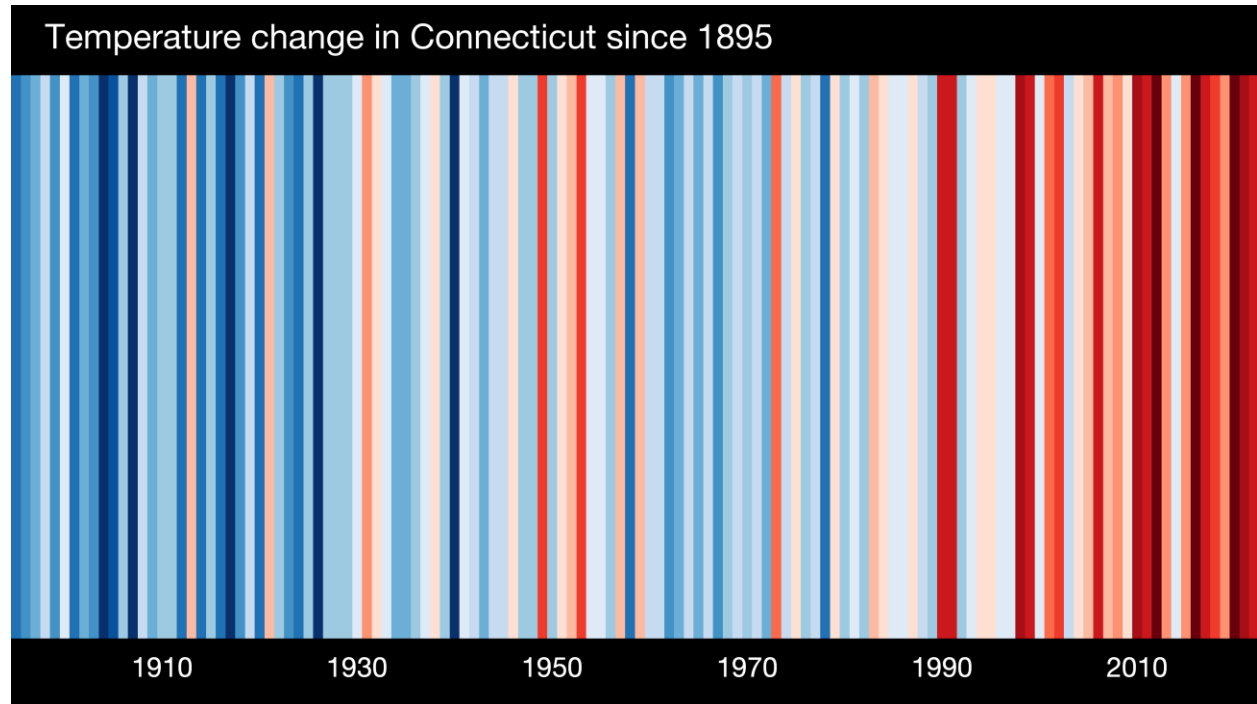
I start this report honoring Steve Gephard, another of our founding directors. Steve joins the well-respected company of Anita Ballek and Martha McLaud Tonucci as a forever Honorary Member of EHLT. Steve could not be here tonight. He is in Ireland representing the U.S. as a commissioner to the North Atlantic Salmon Conservation Organization's annual meeting.

True to our previous honorees, conservation is Steve's life-work. He was a CT DEEP fisheries biologist from 1978-2020 and currently consults on the planning and design of dam removals and fishways. He is a member of five land trusts - but claims EHLT is his favorite. He serves with multiple other conservation groups, and co-writes a quarterly column on fish and aquatic issues for *Estuary Magazine*.

To quote Steve, "Protecting land and habitat everywhere, but especially in the Lower Connecticut River valley, remains a key passion."

Let's hear it for Steve Gephard.

At our annual meeting a year ago I showed this chart indicating the warming trend in CT from 1895 to 2022.



(NORTH_AMERICA-USA-Connecticut-1895-2022-NO-withlabels; <https://showyourstripes.info/>)

Our 10 warmest years (the red stripes) all occurred since 1998. Things have not improved. 2023 was the hottest year in our state to date, and 2024 is predicted to be hotter.

Our warming climate goes hand in hand, or perhaps bucket in bucket, with extreme precipitation. Middlesex County averaged nearly 69" of rain in the last 12 months, 18" above what is considered normal. In May alone, Middlesex County averaged 5.7" of rain, an inch and a half above normal. Two individual measurements in my neighborhood showed 6.8" of rain this May.

All the data I've read and presentations I've listened to predict an upward trend in both temperatures and precipitation for our region.

Climate change contributes to our costs and is a driving force behind much of what we do. Many of our 16+ miles of trails have been rutted from runoff, our trails now need more footbridges over wet areas, and many existing footbridges need extensions. Adding tree decline and spreading invasive species to these needs can be overwhelming.

But we don't and we won't give up.

Our core mission - to preserve and protect land in perpetuity - is the single most effective means we have to help mitigate the effects of climate change.

Since last June, we have opened our 69-acre Saunders Preserve, continued to work toward closing on the 123-acre Honey Hill Farm project, and received the extremely generous donation of 14.2 acres from Dave and Alice Walls, now known as Walls Way. Thank you.

We also have a contract to purchase the future R. Smith Connection, the twin parcel to Walls Way. Walls Way enabled us to connect our Miller Farm Preserve with the Town's Lena Reserve. The R. Smith Connection will add another 14.2 acres to this connection. Thank you to our former director and former president, Rob Smith, for making this connection possible.

As you might expect ... we seek donations to cover the remaining costs of conserving the R. Smith Connection and the Honey Hill Farm acquisition. We combined these projects into our Conservation Connections Campaign because making connections is key to smart land conservation (I love this message and thank our director Kyn Tolson for coining this phrase). The Conservation Connections Campaign details are on the info table in the back of the room and on our website.

We appreciate any donation you can make to this campaign.

We work hard to stretch the dollars you donate to us by accessing grant opportunities. Thanks to the extensive work of our Executive Director, Pete Govert, and the rest of our grantwriting team, we have, since last June, either been awarded or already received grants totaling \$451,307.

Let this figure sink in ...

This \$451,307 for land and acquisition costs, stewardship projects, and administrative expenses is in addition to the \$321,100 Open Space and Watershed grant we will receive for the Honey Hill Farm acquisition.

Together this totals \$772,407 in grants to EHLT.

This is the list of our grantors:

- The Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection's Open Space & Watershed Acquisition program,
- the Eightmile Wild & Scenic River Watershed Coordinating Committee,
- the Bafflin Foundation,
- the Connecticut Land Conservation Council's Transaction Assistance Grant program,
- The Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection's CIRCLA (128 a) Brownfield grant program,
- The Connecticut Department of Agriculture and the Connecticut Land Conservation Council's Climate Smart Grant program,
- the Community Foundation of Middlesex County,
- the USDA/National Resource Conservation Service,
- and the Lower Connecticut River Land Trust and Guilford Savings Bank Stewardship grant program.

So, you may be thinking, "why are we still asking for donations with this amount of grant dollars coming in?" A valid question.

The answer is: we would not be able to access these grants without the member support we receive from you. These organizations always ask how much we have in matching funds from local support.

One more update. From our last annual meeting's brainstorming session we took down a list of 24 suggestions on how to better engage people in our activities and mission. We have implemented about half of these and included others in our 5-year strategic plan which we updated in January 2024.

Some of those implemented include:

- Engage high school and college students:
We started building a close working relationship with the agriculture and outdoor studies teacher and students at the high school, and we have three college interns working with us this summer.
- Create a Digital Advertising/PR budget:
We have had this for many years but we call it our Communication & Outreach budget, which we increased in 2024. Among other things, this increase helped us advocate for the Town's Kronberg acquisition, and funds our collaboration with *Estuary Magazine* which lists our events in their Let's Go section. *Estuary* prints 1,500 copies of each issue, about half of which are distributed in the lower CT River valley region. Our listings in *Estuary* stretches our reach beyond the borders of East Haddam. If you are not an *Estuary* subscriber, we have a few complimentary copies available on the information table. The publication's quality speaks for itself.
- Publish more articles in EH News:
For the last 12 months, we have had at least one, frequently more, articles published each month, and we list our events in their Calendar.
- We listed on our website how to figure the # of steps per mile during hikes.
- We implemented post-hike snacks and socializing, we have increased our members-only and public themed hikes engaging in foraging, geology, tree and wildflower IDs, and we added our monthly stargazing events at Burnham Brook Preserve which is a great dark-sky site.
- Also, we included other suggestions you shared in our 5-year strategic plan.

We evaluate every suggestion you offer for its feasibility based on our current and future needs and workload, and are continuously grateful for you, our donors and supporters for caring about land conservation.

Without you there would be no East Haddam Land Trust.