

Press release

Chebeague & Cumberland Land Trust Celebrates the Protection of Two Historic Properties on Chebeague Island—Littlefield Woods and Sanford’s Pond.

CHEBEAGUE ISLAND—March was a banner month for the Chebeague & Cumberland Land Trust. CCLT protected two properties that have significant value to the Chebeague Island community.

On March 3rd, CCLT purchased a 24.3-acre forest in the center of the island known as “Littlefield Woods”, and on March 15th, CCLT accepted the donation of Chebeague’s treasured skating pond and land surrounding it.

Protecting Littlefield Woods was a top priority for CCLT, because it is a portion of the largest remaining block of forest on the island and features critical wildlife habitat, a popular and well-established system of trails, and essential wetlands. Perhaps, most importantly, the intact forest plays a critical role in sustaining the island’s sole source aquifer. The parcel’s historic cart trails and the remnants of a thriving neighborhood date back to the 18th century.

“Knowing that Littlefield Woods will be protected for future generations is so exciting to me,” said Beverly Johnson, a Chebeague resident who has spent countless hours in Littlefield Woods personally and with students from the Chebeague Island School studying the ecology of the woods. “It is a true treasure that will benefit the island in more ways than we can even imagine right now.”

Littlefield Woods connects to the Durgin Trail, which was protected by a trail easement acquired by CCLT in 2017 by a generous gift from Marianne Durgin.

“CCLT’s long-term strategic vision is to develop a system of connected properties and trails for the island that are protected forever,” said Chris Cabot, CCLT’s executive director. “The preservation of Littlefield Woods and all that it provides for the island is of historic importance.”

CCLT embarked on the campaign to purchase Littlefield Woods in March 2020. Thanks to the amazing support of 174 households and 7 grant funders CCLT was able to complete the purchase on March 3, 2021.

“Everyone pulled together to make this possible, and thanks must be paid to Penny Asherman, the Board President, and Diane Lukac, co-chair of Acquisitions, who led the fundraising on this project -- the largest ever undertaken on the island by CCLT,” said Cabot.

“The entire community of Chebeague came out to support this project,” said Ms. Lukac. “The support was overwhelming and demonstrates how important this parcel is to the heart and soul of the island.”

The property was owned by Leila and Suhail Bisharat, who generously sold the property to CCLT for a price well below market. Leila served on CCLT's Board of Directors for many years and her father, Blanchard Bates, was one of the original founders of CCLT. The family's wish to see the land protected was granted with CCLT’s purchase of the property.

“It means a great deal to Leila and myself to have the Woods protected in perpetuity as a tribute to Blanchard Bates,” said Suhail Bisharat. “I come from a region that suffers water shortages and lack of tress. I was blessed to come here and make Chebeague my home.”

Less than two weeks later, on March 15, CCLT accepted the donation of Sanford’s Pond, Chebeague’s historic skating pond, from Jackie Trask. Jackie’s parents, Sanford and Mabel Doughty, were legendary figures on Chebeague Island. Among many other pursuits, Mabel helped to found CCLT, and Sanford created and maintained the pond.

Jackie wanted to ensure that the Pond remained preserved in perpetuity for the community and approached CCLT about a gift.

“My parents would be very excited to know that this property is protected,” said Trask. “This donation of a part of my property reflects the spirit of generosity that they instilled in me. I am happy to work with CCLT to ensure that this pond will be accessible for years to come.”

Along with the pond, Jackie gave CCLT 0.5 acres of land and a strip of land to provide access to the shore at Bennett’s Cove. The protection of the pond means more than just skating for CCLT. In the summer months, the pond and its interior island and shoreline has the potential to serve as an environmental education site where amphibians come alive and birds flock to breed.

“Both Sanford’s Pond and Littlefield Woods are engrained in the fabric of the island community and needed to be protected,” said Cabot. “Land trusts are increasingly turning their attention to community-driven projects like these that provide ecological value, essential resource protection, and invaluable access to outdoor spaces.”

Generations of Chebeague’s children learned to skate at the Pond. It was and is an island institution.

“There’s no winter on Chebeague without skating at Sanford’s Pond,” said Julia Maine, a young woman now living in Portland who grew up on the island and returns to skate when she can. “It feels like we lived there as kids, playing multigenerational pickup hockey and making forts on the ‘island.’ As a kid I couldn’t imagine the pond without Sanford and Mabel. I’m so glad that island kids will be able to enjoy the pond for generations even though Sanford and Mabel are no longer with us.”

The pond in Chebeague’s West End was created and kept operational as an ice-skating destination for islanders by Sanford Doughty, a fisherman who was well-known along the coast.

When he sold his boat in retirement, Mr. Doughty dedicated himself to creating the pond, and then keeping it in excellent shape for skating, including dredging it when necessary. With the help of many volunteers, Sanford and Mabel built a warming hut and established an island-wide bottle redemption system to both clean up the island and fund the purchase of a skate sharpener and skating equipment to ensure that enough skates were available at the pond for anyone who needed them.

CCLT received generous support for the Littlefield Woods project from the Casco Bay Estuary Partnership, Davis Conservation Foundation, Maine Community Foundation, Maine Natural Resource Conservation Program, Maine Outdoor Heritage Fund, Margaret Burnham Charitable Trust, and The Recompense Fund.

About the Chebeague & Cumberland Land Trust

The Chebeague & Cumberland Land Trust (CCLT) works to preserve the land and water in the towns of Chebeague Island & Cumberland and to be responsible stewards of the resources in our trust. Since our founding in 1987, CCLT has completed a total of 30 conservation projects comprising approximately 1,050 acres. For more information, visit www.ccltmaine.org