



The Community Foundation  
for Greater New Haven

QUINNIPIAC RIVER FUND FINAL REPORT- 2015

Please complete and submit completed form via e-mail to [dcanning@cfgnh.org](mailto:dcanning@cfgnh.org) at The Community Foundation for Greater New Haven by March 31, 2016.

Date: 3/30/16

Group/Organization Name: New Haven Land Trust

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Project Name: Quinnipiac Meadows Educational Program

Grant Number: 20150080

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Please respond to the following statements:

1. List the specific objectives/outcomes of the project and tell how they were met during the grant period. Also, provide an update on any special conditions of the grant (if applicable).

In the Grant Proposal, the New Haven Land Trust outlined four objectives: bring new visitors and increase knowledge and understanding of the preserve through educational events, host volunteer events for preserve maintenance and to encourage community involvement, create a preliminary assessment of parcels for acquisition, and design and install educational signage about the preserve. We successfully accomplished the first three objectives and thanks to additional funding that has been granted from the Quinnipiac River Fund for 2016, the educational signage for the preserve will be completed and installed this year.

**A. Educational events highlighting the importance of this preserve for preserving wildlife and ecological diversity**

The New Haven Land Trust held numerous events in the Quinnipiac Meadows Nature Preserve during the summer of 2015 in an effort to attract a variety of people to get to know the preserve. These events also increased knowledge and understanding of the preserve by adults and children and highlighted the importance of the preserve for preserving wildlife and ecological diversity. Some

examples of events included multiple bird watching walks, an insect walk, a bat box installation event, and a canoeing event. On average, ten to twenty five people attended each event. Each of the educational events hosted a different guest speaker with a different background including a representative from The Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection, a representative from the Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station, a birdwatcher from the New Haven Parks Department and the former president of the New Haven Bird Club. Each guest speaker drew people to the preserve and helped us engage with a new audience. The guest speakers also represent connections with academic and governmental organizations; as we foster these relationships they could help us in our efforts to get more people out to the preserve and assist us as we host more events.

The bird walk, insect walk, and bat walk taught New Haven residents about much of the wildlife that relies on the Quinnipiac Meadows Preserve for a home, or as a resting place during migration. The bird walk focused on the importance of the salt marsh as a food source and resting place for migration birds. The insect walk focused on the great diversity of insects in the preserve and stressed the importance of preserving native plants as a food source for native insects which are in turn a vital food source for native wildlife. The bat box installation event focused on the ecology of bats and the important role they play for people and for ecosystems. All of the events discussed the importance of the salt marsh and underscored the importance of preserving native plants and keeping out invasive plants in order to preserve this habitat. Since each educational event featured a guest speaker on the given topic, event participants were also able to engage with experts in the field and have their questions answered.

The canoe trip was highly successful. We brought 25 people to the preserve. We paddled through small channels taking us through the preserve's salt marsh and allowing participants to see the preserve from a new perspective. A few of the participants on this trip had never been in a canoe and learned a new skill. We also were joined by many people who remarked that they had not seen the preserve from this angle and who were amazed at the vast amount of salt marsh that was protected by the New Haven Land Trust. The participants all expressed an interest in coming back to the preserve to further explore. From the vantage point of the canoes, participants enjoyed views of the osprey who nest on several platforms designed specifically for these birds. Participants also had the opportunity to view egrets, double-crested cormorants and other birds who live right at the edge of the preserve.

#### **B. Volunteer events to maintain the preserve including invasive removal, tree planting, or trail maintenance**

The New Haven Land Trust also hosted volunteer days at the preserve to attract more residents to the preserve, assist with preserve maintenance, and educate the public on the values of maintaining the ecosystem. These events focused on expanding and improving the trail system at the preserve. Additionally, building on our tree plantings that were completed in 2014, volunteers continue to visit the preserve on a regular basis to water the trees and keep them thriving.

#### **C. Professionally designed and printed educational signs about Quinnipiac Meadows' bird population and the Preserve's ecosystem**

In addition to the multiple educational and volunteer events we hosted this summer, we continue to move forward with our educational sign designs for the preserve. This project has been more costly than expected but thanks to additional funding that has been granted from the Quinnipiac River Fund for 2016, we expect to finish production and installation of signs by the end of this summer.

Locations for signs have been established and we are coordinating with volunteer groups to prepare the sites once the signs have been produced. Draft content has been completed and final photos have been acquired thanks to funding from the Quinnipiac River Fund. We are working to finalize the content for submission to the Peabody Museum.

#### **D. A preliminary assessment of potential parcels for New Haven Land Trust acquisition**

Finally, in order to increase the value proposition of the preserve, we are working to increase the size of the preserve through land acquisition. During the summer of 2015 the Land Trust engaged a Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies intern to research land ownership and potential acquisition sites in Quinnipiac Meadows. The resulting research has helped guide the Land Trust in understanding the history and ownership of certain parcels that we are interested in acquiring. In some ways, the individual's research raised more questions than answers – such as uncovering a property that the Land Trust previously thought we owned. In the long-run this research will help us permanently secure our properties and we have already begun initial conversations on property acquisition for some adjacent properties.

Our work during the summer of 2015 was successful thanks to the Quinnipiac River Fund. We introduced many new people to the preserve, highlighted the unique qualities of the property, and provided education about the valuable wildlife that lives on this land. Thanks to this grant, we will be able to build on this foundation to continue to provide educational programming and opportunities for the future to the New Haven residents who became excited about and eager to continue to learn about, the Quinnipiac Meadows Preserve, through our work this summer.

2. Please share your successes, challenges and any lessons learned through the implementation of your project. Were there any unintended consequences or lessons learned that may affect how you operate your program moving forward?

The New Haven Land Trust was very successful in planning and hosting educational and workday events during the summer of 2015. We learned the value of connecting with experts that can bring new expertise and experiences for participants in events. A constant challenge for the Land Trust is to encourage engagement in the preserve from a variety of New Haven residents. We are still seeking ways to reach new and diverse audiences and bring new participants to the preserve through various event advertising strategies and through keeping up a presence in community events and volunteer fairs. We will continue these efforts and continue to reach out to encourage residents to get to know the preserve and its importance.

The results of the initial parcel assessment revealed some surprising challenges. For one, our own documentation of the parcels we own was inadequate. We have sought to remedy this through help from a consultant. We have also found that conversations about acquisition of additional parcels are complicated to navigate and the Land Trust will have to continue exploring a variety of options in the coming years. Moving forward, the Land Trust will be better equipped to handle any property disputes related to the preserve and will be better equipped to continue conversations about acquisition with surrounding landowners.

The Land Trust is continuing to work on new educational signage for the preserve. We found that this project was more costly than originally anticipated. We are taking great care with the language

on the signs and we want to be sure the signs are able to inform visitors about all of the most important aspects of the preserve. Specific challenges have included contacting photographers to gain permission for using their photos, finding or creating diagrams that adequately represent important concepts such as tides and climate change, and making decisions about every detail of wording and design. We expect these signs to stay in place for at least ten years and want them to reflect how important environmental education is for the Land Trust. We expect content and design to be completed within a few weeks and for signs to be installed by the end of the summer.

3. What are the opportunities and needs of your organization as it continues to move forward with its work to positively impact the Quinnipiac River?

One of the main objectives of the New Haven Land Trust is to provide education about the environment. The Quinnipiac Meadows Preserve provides a unique opportunity for the residents of New Haven to learn about the Quinnipiac River. Moving forward, the Land Trust will continue to build on our educational programming at the preserve by continuing to foster relationships with field experts and other organizations with whom we have been able to collaborate. We will also continue offering a variety of activities at the preserve appropriate for all ages. The education we provide through these events helps visitors understand how important the preserve is as a coastal and ecological resource and what they can do to contribute to the well-being of the river as a whole.

We will also continue conversations with surrounding landowners about the potential for future acquisitions. There are opportunities to acquire new land and expand the preserve, which will have direct impacts on the Quinnipiac River. We foresee a need for additional funding in the future that will help us acquire these lands.

We strongly believe that our preserve's proximity to a dense urban center provides an excellent opportunity to engage residents of all different backgrounds in the exploration and deeper understanding of the environment, our relationships to it and how we should steward it. We will continue to strive to increase the number and diversity of people attending our events and enjoying this beautiful outdoor space.



Bird Walk, Quinnipiac Meadows, July 2015



Bat Box Installation, Quinnipiac Meadows, July 2015



Bug Safari, Quinnipiac Meadows, August 2015



Canoe Trip, Quinnipiac Meadows, August 2015



Canoe Trip, Quinnipiac Meadows, August 2015



Trail Maintenance, Quinnipiac Meadows, June 2015