



ASPETUCK LAND TRUST ANNOUNCES NEW POLICIES AT TROUT BROOK VALLEY CONSERVATION AREA

FOLLOWING CONSERVATION STUDY BY CONNECTICUT AUDUBON SOCIETY

WESTON, CT. Jan 2, 2013 --- After a 12-month conservation and management study of its popular 1,009 acre Trout Brook Valley Conservation Area, Aspetuck Land Trust today announced new trail use policies that carefully balance the protection of one of the region's most important ecological areas with the use of the preserve for hiking, dog-walking and other passive recreation.

The year-long study by Connecticut Audubon Society's conservation services staff working under contract for the Aspetuck Land Trust was designed to better identify the wildlife and ecologically fragile areas within the preserve. This will enable the Land Trust to make more informed decisions about managing the property for both conservation and public use purposes.

Trout Brook Valley is one of the most important ecological features of Fairfield County. It forms the core of a 6,400-acre expanse that serves as the "green heart" of the region, according to the Connecticut Audubon Society report.

Trout Brook Valley was destined to become a private golf and country club enclave dotted with 103 luxury homes. In 1999, Aspetuck Land Trust led a coalition of local groups including the state of Connecticut and the Nature Conservancy to acquire the land and incorporate it into two preserves it owned to the north and south. This created what is now called the Trout Brook Valley Conservation Area, one of the largest blocks of undeveloped land in Fairfield County.

"It's our responsibility to manage and preserve Trout Brook Valley for future generations, and we now have a plan to do this based upon the scientific findings in this report. Our next step is to better educate the public about this unique and important natural resource," said David Brant, Executive Director of Aspetuck Land Trust.

The study, which concluded in November and required an interim ban on all off leash dog walking during its duration, identified a remarkable inventory of species and their habitats in the Trout Brook Valley Conservation Area. Connecticut Audubon Society's conservation biologists spent hundreds of hours over four seasons performing fieldwork at the preserve and analyzing data. They conducted surveys of birds and amphibians, which both are indicators of ecological health, and assessed the habitat quality and ecological functions of the preserve. The report also recommended strategies to help protect the flora and fauna that make the environment so rich and beautiful.

“First-rate conservation science is the foundation of any good conservation management plan,” said Robert Martinez, president of Connecticut Audubon Society. “We’re confident that we provided Aspetuck Land Trust with the information and analysis they needed, and their decision reflects a good balance between ecological protection and passive recreation.”

The preserve encompasses mixed hardwood forest, forested wetlands and scrub-shrub wetlands, seasonal pools, early successional fields, grasslands and orchard, numerous brooks and streams, and talus slopes.

Native Brook Trout and American Eel live in the preserve’s streams. Its wetlands support an array of reptiles and amphibians, including Spotted Salamanders, Marbled Salamanders and the state-listed Jefferson’s Salamander. The bird populations are abundant and diverse, and include 156 species and numerous species of conservation concern including 21 state-listed species.

The new policies will go into effect April 1, 2013, affecting the existing 21-mile trail system at Trout Brook Valley used by hikers, mountain bikers, equestrians, dog walkers, birders, and others who enjoy the preserve. Until that time, dogs must be leashed at all times throughout the preserve to allow Aspetuck Land Trust time to make trail and signage modifications and to better protect the environment and preserve the abundant but fragile wildlife diversity that exists. Aspetuck Land Trust allows off leash dog walking on all of its other forty-one nature preserves with the exception of the Newman Poses preserve in Westport where dogs must be leashed.

Beginning April 1, dogs will be required to be leashed throughout the property under their owners control and to remain on designated trails at all times to better protect the environment and preserve the abundant but fragile wildlife diversity that exists. Off-leash dog walking will be allowed, however, on a two mile trail loop in the Crow Hill section of Trout Brook Valley on what is now the Blue/White and Teal trails and will be accessible by four public parking areas.

Hundreds of dogs can visit Trout Brook Valley on a busy weekend. The cumulative impact when dogs go off trail can be harmful, according to the Connecticut Audubon Society’s research. The Crow Hill section of Trout Brook Valley was designated for off leash dog walking partly because it has no vernal pools which are particularly delicate environments.

Other measures approved by ALT’s board of directors included:

- Posting signs prohibiting horses and mountain bikes (except for July, August and September) at both ends of the Red/Black trail in order to protect local habitats
- Closing the yellow trail to all uses except foot traffic, posting no dogs, horses or mountain bikes at both ends of the trail
- Closing small section of orange trail that bisects a tributary stream and a vernal pool

For more information on the Trout Brook Valley Conservation and Management Plan, including links to the plan itself, visit www.aspetucklandtrust.org or www.ctaudubon.org.

###

Aspetuck Land Trust (ALT) is a local non-profit land conservation organization founded in 1966

to preserve open space in the towns of Westport, Weston, Fairfield and Easton. ALT preserves provide passive recreation and educational opportunities for people to learn about and enjoy nature, while preserving the flora and fauna and rural characteristics of local communities. ALT maintains 44 trailed nature preserves and other conservation-only properties on over 1,700 acres of land. ALT has over 1,000 local members who support us through annual membership contributions. For more information visit www.aspetucklandtrust.org

Connecticut Audubon Society conserves Connecticut's environment through science-based education and advocacy focused on the state's bird populations and habitats. Founded in 1898, Connecticut Audubon Society (CAS) operates nature facilities in Fairfield, Milford, Glastonbury and Pomfret, an EcoTravel office in Essex and an Environmental Advocacy program in Hartford. Connecticut Audubon Society manages 19 wildlife sanctuaries around the state, preserves over 2,600 acres of open space in Connecticut and educates over 200,000 children and adults annually. Working exclusively in the state of Connecticut for over 100 years, CAS is an independent organization, not affiliated with any national or governmental group. For more information, visit www.Ctaudubon.org.

Contacts:

David Brant
Aspetuck Land Trust Executive Director
dbrant@aspetucklandtrust.org
612-730-1990 mobile

Tom Andersen
Connecticut Audubon Society, Director of Communications
tandersen@ctaudubon.org
(914) 409-6470 mobile