



Old Lyme Land Trust

## HELP RESTORE WATCH ROCK

***What is happening?*** With the help of a grant from the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), Old Lyme Land Trust has embarked on a multi-year effort to restore the natural habitats in this beautiful preserve, before they are destroyed by invasive plants. The result will make the preserve more attractive to diverse species of wildlife and a far healthier ecosystem.

Because of the variety of its ecosystems and its location along the Connecticut River estuarine system, Watch Rock has the potential to support an unusually high diversity of amphibians, insects, birds and small mammals, as well as less common native plants.

A “Forest Stewardship Plan” prepared in 2004 and a “Habitat-based Management Plan” prepared in 2009 provide blueprints for us to follow. The latter plan identifies seven habitats within the 25-acre preserve: coastal moist forest, coastal dry forest, conifer grove, open field, tidal marsh, vernal pool and brackish rocky shoreline--an amazing diversity for its size.

***The problem.*** Invasive plants (winged euonymus, non-native honeysuckles and privet, multiflora rose, Japanese barberry, and Asian bittersweet, in particular) have infested large portions of the preserve, driving out the native understory, and with it, sources of food and shelter for native insects, birds, mammals and other creatures. These invasive plants outcompete the native forest species and prevent their reproduction. In addition, portions of the forest stand required thinning to help the native forest recover.

**What we have done so far.** OLLT engaged professional contractors to:

(1) “mow” the heavy thicket of woody invasive underbrush in the sixteen acres that is identified in the management plan as the *coastal moist forest* and thin mature tree stands to improve regrowth;

(2) remove some trees to enable Norway Spruce regeneration in the area identified as the *conifer grove*; and

(3) expand what is identified as the *open field* by clearing and girdling invasive trees and mowing woody bushes and brush located at its periphery and in central portions.

That work is now complete.

**What happens next ?** This winter we will be creating **brush piles** with the coarse woody debris and logs from the mowing and tree-cutting work. These piles provide cover and dens for mammals and nesting sites for thicket bird species.

In the spring, we expect those native shrubs and trees that survived the invasives take-over to re-emerge in the coastal moist forest (northern arrow wood, mapleleaved viburnum, lowbush and highbush blueberries, winterberry, chokeberry, dogwood etc.) and perhaps some native grasses and wildflowers in the open field.

Invasives will re-sprout, too, and a limited, foliar herbicide application to some of them is planned. Once we see what emerges, we will develop a holistic plan to include, among other things, managing the re-growth of the invasive understory in the coastal moist forest and the dewberry and other invasives in the open field; repopulating those areas by encouraging native plants and by planting native bushes and sowing seed; and re-establishing buffers along the green trail by planting native bushes and trees.

**Our Long-term Vision.** At the moment, certain areas of Watch Rock may appear dramatically changed. But in the next few years, we hope that an understory in the moist coastal forest will establish itself--this time, a healthy and diverse understory that provides food and cover to wildlife. And we hope that the expanded open field will stay that way, populated only by

native grasses and wildflowers that attract non-woodland insects, birds and other creatures.

***How can you help?*** Please stay on the marked trails, and keep your dogs on them, as before. The native plants should not be trampled as they fight to re-establish themselves, and the wildlife, now more visible, should not be scared away. **And please volunteer to build brush piles and plant native shrubs and trees!** Call Ed Sopneski at 434-1893, Bobbie Padgett at 434-5474 or email [info@oldlymelandtrust.org](mailto:info@oldlymelandtrust.org).

**THANK YOU.**

