

## EAST HADDAM

## Land trust holds "work party"

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For nearly thirty years, members of the East Haddam Land Trust have dedicated themselves to the organization's goal of conserving and protecting unique and irreplaceable open space in East Haddam. The trusts 13 preserves and easements range in size from the half-acre Moodus River site to the 116 acre Sheepskin Hollow preserve. In total, the trust maintains about 300 acres of open space, most of which are open to the public for hiking, birding and a number of other passive recreational activities.

So how does a volunteer organization with a limited budget maintain all of this property? In the case of the East Haddam Land Trust, it's mostly through the hard work of its members.

On the second Saturday of every month, the land trust hosts a "work party," where members gather at one of the trusts sites and work, clearing brush and trees, removing invasive plants, and doing whatever else they need to do to keep the site clean and safe for public use.

"We can get a lot of work done quite rapidly with just a little elbow grease," said land trust President Rob Smith at the group's latest work party at Hammond Mill Preserve.

"This is our very first preserve," said Smith of the 12-acre site along the Eight Mile River.

The foundation of an old mill located at the site since the late 1700's is visible, as are the remains of an old dam and the sluiceways made to direct the water. The land trust is currently seeking more information on the site's history, said Smith, but now the area is used for hiking and is a popular Boy Scout campsite, particularly at the opening of fishing season.

"These properties take a lot of work to preserve in their natural state," said Smith.

The Hammond Mill site was attractive to the group because of its location along the pristine Eight Mile River. There is also an easement on the other side of the river, effectively protecting both sides from further development.

"And it had this additional historic component. It was a great first pickup," said Smith.

The half-dozen members at the work party used everything from chain saws



Doug DeCarli (left), Rob Smith and Lauren Calles watch as Land Trust Treasurer George Geisey takes down a tree. Photos by Kevin Hotary.

to brute force to clean the site.

"When we have these events, people work their butts off," said Smith. Trees were cut down with chain saws or hand saws, cut into smaller pieces and piled up around the work area. Large logs, said Smith, would be used to make posts for signs at the preserve, while smaller logs and branches were to be used as fire wood for the scout troops using the area.

"We recycle everything," said Smith.

"It's amazing how fast nature takes over," said Stephanie Williams as she cleared some small trees. She was there with her husband David and their dog Lucky.

Even though the work party "sounded like something we would like to do," said Williams, Hammond Mill was their first, a fact that Williams said she felt guilty about because she likes the goals of the organization.

Lauren Calles, on the other hand, is a work party veteran.

"I want to preserve our open space. I've been on all the trails, and I thought that if I was using them....," she said. Stopping mid sentence, Calles looked around the preserve.

"I'd rather see this than another building," she said.

Doug DeCarli is a land trust member who moved to East Haddam from Portland because he likes the open space.

"I do what I can. I appreciate what



Stephanie and David Williams team up to remove a small tree.

East Haddam's doing as far as preserving the land," he said.

When asked why people would spend their Saturday mornings working so hard to clear land, Smith, a 34 year veteran of the state park system just smiled.

"There's never a bad day when you're walking in the woods," he said.

Further information about the East Haddam Land Trust and future events can be found at [www.ehlt.org](http://www.ehlt.org).