

P.O. Box 435
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East Haddam, CT 06423-0435
June 13, 2005

Ben Williams, Chairman Emeritus
Connecticut Audubon Society Board of Directors
119 Day Road - P.O. Box 211
Pomfret Center, CT 06259

Dear Mr. Williams,

Thank you for taking the time to reconsider the fate of the Harlo Haagenon Preserve. Your board voted to sell this gift on the open market with unspecified, or undefined, conservation easements. You have touched a nerve - have you been so informed?

For those who have never been to the site, let me assure you that your attorney and fellow Board member, Mr. Morehouse, described it very well in his July 18, 1989, letter to Harlo Haagenon's lawyer, John Larson: "We (CAS) are also mindful of the special ecological value of this lovely site". Yes, it is a spectacular place. Overlooking the Connecticut River in the background, walking trails traverse a varied habitat of wooded slopes, open fields, a stream, and wetlands - all undeveloped. 57 acres saved for the enjoyment and education of the people. And, we have learned that the Connecticut DEP has identified two species of special concern, making the Preserve even more significant.

May I respectfully suggest that now is the time for you, as a member of CAS' Board, to rethink the decision to sell. First, the Preserve was a gift for CT Audubon to manage, *not to sell*. Again, it is your letter which alludes to the problem that Mr. Haagenon had no funds to give for "carrying" the property. Your 1989 letter suggests "...creating an endowment through sales..." to raise the funds. He continues, "...the balance of the property would be devoted to sanctuary purposes". There is no indication that CAS would ever think of selling *all* of this "lovely site".

Mr. Haagenon and his attorney have been betrayed by your reversal of position. You have lost the moral high ground. People cannot believe a mainline conservation organization would do this. You have damaged your image, and, in turn, the image of all conservation organizations.

Secondly, your staff has not done a careful and thoughtful job of evaluating the educational potential of the Preserve. This is not junk land. We have sought the advice of two active organizations who operate nature centers. Both have no reservations about developing the Preserve into an active nature center, though modest, and with low impact facilities. One organization wishes to move in! As an architect, I have studied the feasibility of such an undertaking, and see no reason such facilities would not thrive here. This conclusion was respectfully forwarded to Mr. Martinez in my letter of May 15, which has never been answered. In other words, CAS' position that "...because of its location, terrain, access issues, and habitat potential...the Haagenon Preserve does not meet our criterion for a nature center or sanctuary" (from the May 19, 2005, letter from Mr. Martinez) is, at the very least, questionable, if not flat out wrong. If you were to visit the site, I can assure you, there would be questions in your mind, as well. Please come and see.

June 13 Letter to CAS Board of Directors, p. 2

You may wonder what consequences you can expect if you sell this Preserve to raise funds. If you pass up the existing opportunity to work out a more conservation-minded solution, the answer is that you can expect more publicity, industrial strength, to the point where selling will cause permanent image damage. You depend on your membership for your bread & butter support. This will be a moment of truth for them - why should they give funds to support an organization that sells off its conservation land? Your membership is trying to save such significant places.

So, specifically, what can be done to put things back in order? That is easy: *TAKE THE PROPERTY OFF THE MARKET! SHOW SOME GOOD FAITH!* Give the Friends of Harlo Haagenson Preserve the time and opportunity to find a mutually acceptable solution; a solution that does not include building a McMansion on the highest promontory, surrounded by a public walking trail. This "oil and water" design is not realistic.

Consider, perhaps, that funds can be found to cover your "carrying" costs, which Atty. Morehouse's sixteen year old letter identified as the issue. I do not believe that you should put the East Haddam coalition in the position of having to buy their gift back from the CT Audubon Society. As the Deputy Commissioner of the Connecticut State DEP expressed it in a recent conversation, there is no justification for using public funds to buy back conservation land from a conservation organization that received it as a gift. Do you comprehend how awkward, *if not unethical*, your present position of selling is to those of us observing such a cold-blooded attempt?

As I said to Mr. Martinez in my first letter reacting to this controversy, and I will say again to the Board of Directors of Connecticut Audubon: *For your own good, for the good of the conservation movement at large, now is the time to back off.* Save yourselves from prolonging a mistaken decision. Your board is directly responsible for hiring a businessman/financial professional to turn around your sagging finances. You have strayed from your conservation roots. You alone can set things straight.

Sincerely,

Gustaf B. Carlson

cc: The Hartford Courant
Jane Gordon, reporter
Senator Christopher Dodd
Members of the Connecticut Audubon Society Board of Directors
Members of the Friends of Harlo Haagenson Preserve