

Connecticut Audubon needs New Leaders

I wonder what Mabel Osgood Wright, naturalist and founder of Connecticut Audubon Society (CAS), would have said about the society's attempt to sell the most scenic, highland portion of the Haagenson Sanctuary in East Haddam. Would she have approved of this leadership decision? CAS members were not informed. It was not mentioned in their newsletters. The East Haddam community learned about it by sheer accident after the sanctuary had been listed for nine months at an exorbitant price (\$775,000) in the name of an LLC. A sign was never posted on the site. I think, like me, Wright would have been alarmed and moved to take action.

CAS leaders are trying to capitalize on a legal loophole. The agreement articulated in a letter *attached* to the Haagenson deed was not articulated *in* the deed. This agreement gave them the right to sell a parcel of land, if needed, to maintain the preserve in perpetuity – not cover administrative costs, which is what they are trying to do. It makes me wonder about the other 18 CAS sanctuaries. How many of them are protected by restricted deeds?

The dogged attempt by CAS leaders to sell the Haagenson Sanctuary, despite strong community opposition, emphasizes the critical role of leadership in conservation today. Where will the line be drawn in reinterpretations of donor intent? Will donated land with unrestricted deeds be sold regardless of letters of agreement and clearly articulated donor intent? Will local communities be excluded from decisions to sell preserved land?

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