

Representative Linda Orange
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September 19, 2005

Dear Representative Orange,

I understand that Lynda Ryder-Munet has apprised you of the situation involving Connecticut Audubon Society's (CAS) attempt to sell the Haagenson Sanctuary in East Haddam. I appreciate your interest and willingness to help influence a positive outcome. While the circumstances involve a relatively small sanctuary in a relatively small town, the implications are not small. Other CAS sanctuaries and the integrity of conservation in Connecticut have been put at risk.

As you consider how you might intervene, please consider the following review of the key problems, detrimental implications, and actions for resolution.

Key problems with the current plan to sell:

1. *Harlo Haagenson expected his house, if retained, to be used as a nature center – not replace by a private residence.* The parcel that is being sold lies in the center and highest point of the preserve, where the Haagenson house stood. It is the only field on the property, the most scenic area, and best for wildlife observation.
2. *The letter of agreement attached to the deed upon its conveyance specified sale of “one or two conforming lots’ solely for the purpose of raising money to steward the preserve in perpetuity– not for other fund-raising purposes.* Sale as open space would cover all acquisition and stewardship costs incurred to date by CAS. Alternatively sale of a lot on the outer perimeter of the preserve could accomplish this end.
3. *Declassification of the preserve as open space and failure to notify the community made it impossible for the preserve to be acquired by conservation.* Sale for conservation requires open space assessment and adequate time for public approval. The Town of East Haddam and local conservation groups learned of the sale *by accident two months before CAS found a private buyer and nine months after CAS had listed it on the residential market for \$775,000,*

which involved declassifying it as open space and transferring the deed to Owl Properties. A sale sign was never posted on the site.

Implications of the current plan to sell:

1. CAS will continue to use these means and methods to cover administrative costs.
 - Local conservation organizations, local officials, and residents will be disregarded in communities that are not protected by a CAS board member.
 - Donated land that does not have restrictions specified in the deed will be at risk, regardless of letters of agreement and clearly articulated intent.
2. Conservation practices in the state will be degraded.
 - This will open the floodgate for reinterpretations of donor agreements and intent that are not specified in a deed?
 - Local stakeholders, i.e., community officials, local conservation groups, local members of an organization, will be excluded from actions that involve the sale of preserved land.

Actions that could resolve this matter:

- 1) The Haagenson Sanctuary should be reclassified as open space and restrictions that were articulated in the letter of agreement should be placed in the deed.
- 2) The Haagenson Sanctuary should be acquired and stewarded by state and local conservation groups have expressed strong interest.
- 3) Robert Martinez, CAS President, and Barbara Strickland, Chair of the CAS Board should step down and new CAS management appointed who honor donor agreements and collaborate with local communities and conservation groups.
- 4) Conservation organizations should be required to place donor agreements in deeds.

Thank you for your consideration.

Best Regards,

Cynthia Matthew, Ph.D.

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